

September 29, 2016

Opening Statement of Senator James Lankford

**Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Regulatory
Affairs and Federal Management Hearing titled:**

**“Understanding the Millennial Perspective
in Deciding to Pursue and Remain in Federal Employment”**

Good morning and welcome to today’s Subcommittee hearing, “Connecting with Millennials: Strategies for the Federal Government to Attract and Utilize Younger Workers.” The federal government currently employs more than 2.5 million executive branch civilians; however, according to GAO - 600,000 federal employees will be eligible to retire by September of 2017 - that is a staggering 31 percent of the current workforce. Unfortunately, those under 35 years of age make up only 16 percent of government employees, meaning that in order to make up for anticipated retirements we must recruit and hire a new generation of federal employees

While the need for effective government recruitment is apparent, especially with the amount of anticipated retirements - it is particularly important to show younger applicants that a government career can be fulfilling and a worthwhile endeavor. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles we must overcome in order to attract the key demographic, millennials, into the federal workforce. When it comes to obstacles in hiring millennials into the federal workforce, the two problems I hear about most often are the lengthy and cumbersome hiring process, and the fact that many millennials believe government service is not a rewarding or fulfilling job.

According to some studies, the millennial generation is leery of federal service because of the rigidity of the General Schedule system, which often treats everyone the same regardless of skill level. They feel that job assignments and awards for achievement are arbitrary, and that incentives to excel are rare and recognition for exceeding expectations is non-existent. Whether or not this is true, it is perception that federal agencies must overcome or address in order to attract millennials into the workforce.

The federal hiring process is another obstacle we must address. The new generations of federal workers have grown up in a world where decisions are made quickly and efficiently. Recruiting and hiring in the private sector is accomplished in days and weeks and not months. On average it takes 100 days to fill an open position in the federal government. OPM’s Acting Director has testified that she wants to bring that down to 60 days. We will never attract first rate workers that we seek if the current rate of hire continues to be 100 days, or of 60 days. We have to get to a faster process. Whether they are fork lift drivers at military facilities or analysts at the NSA, the brightest and the skilled will not wait 100 or 60 days. We need a faster process.

I frequently hear from Oklahomans about their attempts to work for the government, which they too often abandon when it takes three months or more to hear back about their *USAJobs* application. Workers should not be torn between providing for themselves and their families during a season-long application process, or taking a job in the private sector that hires more quickly. To recruit the best employees and attract the millennial generation to civil service, we must make the government a viable competitor with the private sector. This begins with seeking out and hiring the best employees in a timely fashion. And providing them with an atmosphere that maximizes their skills and rewards them based on expectations.

I look forward to talking with our witnesses today about ways to make the hiring process faster, to reward employees based on merit, and to engage the next generation in the fulfilling work of civil service. With that, I now recognize Ranking Member Heitkamp for her opening statement.