Testimony of

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"After the Dust Settles: Examining Challenges and Lessons
Learned in Transitioning the Federal Government"

United States Committee on Homeland Security and
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Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal
Workforce, and the District of Columbia

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman
The Honorable George V. Voinovich, Ranking Member

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Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Voinovich, I congratulate you for you work to ensure new administrations are adequately and expeditiously staffed and briefed to implement their initiatives and deal with the international, financial, health and other critical matters facing our nation. I am honored to be included in this hearing today.

I believe more good work was done than ever before by the Bush and Obama administrations during this past transition to prepare the Obama administration to govern. (Others have summarized the specific work done to make this happen.) But I agree with the *Ready To Govern* report on this transition by the Partnership For Public Service, which said this recent "best ever" effort is not "good enough,"

that much more can and must be done to better ensure new administrations have a well led, well briefed team "on the field" much faster than ever before.

To help ensure future transitions are "good enough," I believe the Executive Branch and Senate should agree on approximate dates by which the most time-sensitive positions are filled by nominees who have been well vetted by the new administration and the Senate for qualifications and potential conflicts of interest. These "desired outcomes" then would be used to determine the preparation, security clearance and vetting capacity, infrastructure and funding necessary to have a successful transition. For instance, I believe that incoming administrations and the Senate should aspire to fill the 125 or so most time-sensitive positions, mutually agreed to by the new administration and Senate, by the August recess of a new administration's first year (versus 70 to 100 of these positions currently), and 90% of these by April 1. They should subsequently aspire to fill the 400 or so most time-sensitive positions by the time Congress adjourns in the fall (versus 260 currently). It is important to help put a new administration's entire new team on the field faster than ever before, but it is critically important to our country to have well vetted people in the most time-sensitive positions most expeditiously. We need to go beyond adopting reforms that allow the transition work to be done faster. We need to have desired outcomes that drive the magnitude of the reforms we consider, to make sure we are transitioning "good enough."

Secondly, I believe the Executive Branch and Senate should significantly expand the "capacity" they need, by when, to accomplish the desired outcomes referred to above. Regarding the Executive Branch I believe it is merely customary for administrations to have 5 or 6 Special Assistants to the President helping select and vet nominees for Senate confirmed positions. Who said 5 or 6 is the right number

of people to do the work? If the goal is for new administrations to do this work 2 or 3 times faster than ever before, the answer is not just for new administrations to begin to do the work sooner, and/or with more IT support. The answer must also include a significant increase in the number of people assigned to do the work, especially during before and during the transition and during the first 6 months or so of a new administration's first year. This increase in Executive Branch vetting capacity mandates additional Presidential Personnel funding for the transition and first months of the first year, and coincident increases in Senate vetting and security clearance processing capacity.

Thirdly, I believe a lot of the background data gathering associated with vetting, selecting and confirming nominees is redundant and unnecessarily time-consuming and burdensome. Currently it is estimated that one-third of the information asked for is a different form of information already provided. I believe the Executive Branch and Senate could develop a computer-based "smart form" and/or other ways to share background data, to make it possible to gather the same amount and quality of data faster, with less burden on the applicant.

I suspect we all agree there is the need, will and ability to reform the means by which we transition from one administration to another. I recommend the three categories of reform summarized above be added to the list of reforms to be considered. Of the three I believe it is most important to have a clear, mutually agreeable definition of what a new administration and the Senate should try to accomplish, by when. With a clear definition of success we can most purposefully focus on transition work that is "good enough." Without a clear definition of success, we can only "work at" transitioning better than before.