

STATEMENT OF PAUL A. DENETT  
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BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,  
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
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Chairman Akaka, Senator Voinovich, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the federal acquisition workforce. This topic is of high importance to the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) and continues to receive our full attention. As agencies increasingly turn to contractors for their expertise and innovation, the skills and good judgment of our acquisition workforce become more closely tied to our government's ability to buy needed goods and services and deliver effective results. I am grateful to Congress for its recent actions to support our workforce by making the acquisition workforce training fund permanent and extending direct hiring authorities. This morning, I will describe a number of key steps the Administration has taken for its part to ensure the acquisition workforce is well equipped to meet our agencies' needs.

During my confirmation to become Administrator, I pledged to Congress and our taxpayers that I would make strengthening the acquisition workforce a top priority. I am pleased to report that in the 18 months I have served as Administrator, OFPP has taken unprecedented actions to improve the caliber, agility, and professionalism of the workforce. In close

partnership with the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI), and with the support of the Defense Acquisition University, we have:

- developed certification programs that, for the first time, standardize training and experience requirements for contracting officers, contracting officer technical representatives, and program managers across all civilian agencies;
- completed the first-ever contracting workforce competency survey, the results of which are being used by agencies to develop comprehensive plans for closing skills gaps;
- launched the Federal Acquisition Intern Coalition to improve recruitment and retention strategies among agencies and increase the number and caliber of new hires who enter the government into a structured development program; and
- established the “SHINE” initiative, the first coordinated government-wide effort dedicated exclusively to recognizing individual employee achievements of acquisition excellence within our workforce.

I believe these important steps address the acquisition workforce recommendations made by the Acquisition Advisory Panel established under the Services Acquisition Reform Act. Let me now briefly elaborate on each of these efforts so you can better understand how they are laying the foundation for meaningful and ongoing improvements.

### **Certifying the acquisition workforce**

The three certification programs that are currently being implemented – for contracting officers, contracting officer technical representatives, and program managers -- will benefit our workforce in many ways. First, structured programs will help strengthen our employees’ capabilities and professionalism. Second, common training, education, and development standards will facilitate career mobility across agencies so that resources may be more easily applied where they are needed the most. Third, focusing on the entire acquisition community, as opposed to just contract specialists, will significantly improve our stewardship of taxpayer

dollars. Program and project managers have critical knowledge about the government's requirements. Helping them gain a better understanding of the acquisition process will enable them to partner more effectively with contracting personnel in the development of clear contract requirements and the oversight of resulting contracts. Structured training for contracting officer technical representatives and other individuals performing these functions will further reinforce the government's ability to manage contracts effectively.

### **Planning for the future**

Recognizing that each agency's acquisition workforce differs in terms of size, capability and skill mix, FAI, in coordination with OFPP, conducted a survey last Spring, to help civilian agencies assess their proficiency in core contracting competencies. Each agency, in consultation with the Office of Personnel Management, is using the results of this survey to develop a tailored plan for closing its own skills gaps that is being incorporated into the agency's human capital plan. Plans include a range of strategies, including, but not limited to, training, certification, and hiring. Agencies are also using the survey data to conduct acquisition workforce succession planning.

### **Recruitment and retention**

As I mentioned earlier, we launched the Federal Acquisition Intern Coalition, a government-wide recruitment, development, and retention campaign that promotes acquisition as a career of choice, and serves as a "one stop shop" for job seekers to find internship and career development opportunities. I believe this coalition will make a significant contribution to

recruiting talented, business-skilled candidates and developing them into effective buyers. Those interested in careers in the contracting field can now search internship opportunities, find job announcements, research agencies, and learn about job fairs. The coalition will help ensure that federal acquisition organizations are successful in attracting their share of new talent.

In addition, we recently issued guidance on statutory authority which allows agencies to hire retired annuitants to fill critical vacancies in the acquisition field. Use of this authority will enable agencies to manage the loss of experience and corporate knowledge as the baby boomer generation retires over the next few years.

### **Recognizing acquisition excellence: the SHINE Initiative**

Shortly after my arrival at OFPP, I created the SHINE initiative to ensure best practices are shared and the value of our federal employees is appropriately recognized. It is my hope that this recognition and appreciation will encourage our workforce to strive for excellence in their daily endeavors on behalf of our taxpayers.

To date, the SHINE initiative has recognized more than a dozen examples of individual and team accomplishments that have helped agencies excel in meeting their mission goals while ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. These achievements have touched on all aspects of the acquisition process – from distinguished contracting to support the reconstruction of Iraq and New Orleans, to outstanding policymaking to strengthen our acquisition rules and metrics, to the effective and responsible use of procurement innovations to create more productive partnerships with our contractors.

Today, I would like to briefly acknowledge the exceptional achievements of three SHINE award winners.

- Ms. Jean Todd of the Army Corps of Engineers set up an on-site, full service contracting office in New Orleans to provide critical reconstruction support in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including the award of contracts for more than 81,000 temporary roofs. Nearly \$1 billion in subcontracts were awarded to small disadvantaged businesses and significant opportunities were also created for local small businesses.
- The late Commander Philip Murphy-Sweet volunteered to be the onsite contracting officer in central Baghdad to help support establishment of a Criminal Investigative Court at Rusafa in direct support for the Baghdad Security Plan. His critical dedication as part of the Joint Contracting Command for Iraq and Afghanistan helped to ensure milestones for this important project stayed on track.
- The acquisition team at the Department of Justice's Bureau of Prisons and its private sector contract partner employed an innovative alternative dispute resolution (ADR) partnering approach in constructing a new environmentally friendly "green" federal correctional facility on time and on budget. Both parties recognize the project, which was completed without any formal claims or contract appeals, as a model project and the Bureau now is utilizing similar partnering ADR approaches on its other construction projects.

### **Congressional actions**

Your letter of invitation requested that I comment on the workforce provisions in the recently enacted National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2008 and the Accountability in Government Contracting Act of 2007 (S. 680), which passed the Senate on November 7, 2007.

*The NDAA.* As I noted at the beginning of my statement, the Administration appreciates your actions to make the acquisition workforce training fund permanent. The continued resources made available through this permanent fund will help agencies have well-trained and highly competent acquisition professionals. These resources will also support efforts by the

Chief Acquisition Officers to identify hiring, training, and developmental needs for incorporation into their agencies' human capital strategic plans. We also appreciate the extension of the direct hire authority, which gives agencies additional flexibility in hiring at all levels and allows the government to be more competitive in its hiring practices.

*S. 680.* The Administration shares many of the same workforce priorities as are identified in *S. 680*, including a contingency contracting corps and a coordinated intern program. However, we have concerns with how these programs are codified. In the case of the contingency contracting corps, we do not believe statutory authority is necessary. In a December 6, 2007 letter to the Committee, we explained that the Department of Homeland Security, with the support of the General Services Administration, has already established a contingency contracting corps to provide a ready reserve of contracting officials for emergency situations. Moreover, several provisions associated with how the corps would be implemented are highly problematic, such as assignment of operational responsibility to OFPP, whose mission is to oversee government acquisition policy. OFPP is not equipped to take on operational responsibilities. Moreover, it is inappropriate to authorize payment for clothing and equipment from the acquisition workforce training fund, whose resources should be focused on vital training and development to improve the collective competency of the current and future acquisition workforce.

With respect to the proposed codification of the intern program, we are concerned that a mandate for a four year commitment will limit agencies' ability to attract good participants into the program and urge that the language provide greater flexibility. We further recommend that interns be treated the same as any other employee in terms of probationary status and civil

service protections. Automatically subjecting an intern to probationary status, as S. 680 would provide, could hamper the government's ability to attract the best qualified individuals to the intern program.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you and other members of Congress should Congress decide to move forward with S. 680.

### **Conclusion**

Getting good results from our acquisitions ultimately depends on the capabilities of the workforce. Our workforce must be equipped with the skills and competencies required to meet agency missions. I am confident that the initiatives I have described for you today will have a lasting and positive effect on the workforce and the performance of the government. I appreciate the steps Congress has taken to strengthen the workforce and look forward to working with you as we build on this progress.

This concludes my prepared remarks. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.