

Statement of Senator George V. Voinovich
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the
District of Columbia

Developing Federal Employees and Supervisors: Mentoring, Internships, and Training in
the Federal Government

April 29, 2010

Good afternoon, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to join Senator Akaka in welcoming today's witnesses to the Subcommittee.

As my friend Senator Akaka knows, I have long been an advocate of robust and focused training programs for supervisors and employees.

This interest of mine stretches back more than three decades to my first months as Mayor of the City of Cleveland. At that time, the Cleveland Police Department employed a written exam to select officers for promotion to the supervisory ranks.

However, this test measured a candidate's knowledge of Departmental procedures while ignoring any assessment of skill-sets important for successfully managing employees. My administration worked to establish a more valid selection process tied to the desired outcome, namely, to identify and promote officers with strong interpersonal and leadership abilities.

Unfortunately, we see similar patterns in our Federal workforce. As agency missions become more complex, the ranks of the Federal workforce are increasingly filled by subject matter experts. Agencies can unnecessarily limit their focus when selecting future agency leaders.

Federal employees often advance to the supervisory ranks because they are experts in cyber security or are fluent in Arabic, not because they effectively communicate performance goals to their employees or have outstanding mentoring skills.

Preparing Federal agencies for future management challenges will require a shift in how agencies identify and train Federal managers. Today we will hear from two important Federal agencies on efforts to do just that.

I am eager to hear from the Office of Personnel Management on its efforts to implement provisions of legislation I authored in 2003, the Federal Workforce Flexibility Act.

For the first time, all Federal agencies will be required to develop management succession plans and educate their supervisory ranks on important topics like managing poorly performing employees. Agencies with existing training programs that meet these requirements

will be supported, while those that lag in developing their current and future leaders will be required to take additional action.

The Department of Defense (DOD) is also undertaking an extensive training program mandated by Congress. I regret the decision by the Administration and Congress to phase out use of the National Security Personnel System, or NSPS. But I applaud a provision included in the Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Act requiring the Department to prepare civilian supervisors for this transition.

Many DOD supervisors and employees have likely lost familiarity with the NSPS's predecessors. This transition promises to be a difficult and confusing time for these Federal workers. I look forward to hearing from Ms. Fitzgerald on this program.

Today's discussion will include other important components in developing Federal workers, including student internship and mentoring programs. The Subcommittee is also fortunate to be joined by a representative from Procter & Gamble, a recognized leader in developing future private sector managers.

But I'd like to share some thoughts on a topic that I expect will draw much attention during the second panel: the Federal Career Intern Program, or FCIP. Today, we will hear that the FCIP is either a well-designed, legitimate hiring authority, or a tool used by Federal agencies to improperly circumvent the competitive hiring process, frustrate the application of veterans' preference, and discriminate against certain categories of applicants.

I would argue, however, that we in Congress cannot yet determine which characterization of the FCIP is proper. When it established the FCIP as a permanent hiring authority in September 2005, OPM granted agencies much flexibility in tailoring the selection, training, and conversion components of the program to their own specific needs.

Moreover, reporting requirements for agency use of the FCIP are limited at best, and few Congressional hearings have touched on this topic since the FCIP's establishment. Finally, the last comprehensive examination of the FCIP was included in a report issued by the Merit Systems Protection Board in September 2005, the same month OPM's final rule went into effect. Much activity has since taken place.

In the absence of detailed information on how agencies employ the FCIP, we are left with anecdotal instances of potential agency abuse of this tool. While such potential abuses are important and, if true, need addressing, we cannot establish policy informed solely by such anecdotes.

I would further argue that the increased use of the FCIP does not necessarily mean this authority is being abused; we in Congress need to drill down further on this issue before deciding to modify or terminate this hiring authority.

For example, when one looks at a large cadre of Federal employees assembled using the FCIP, we see some of the very outcomes that opponents of the program claim are denied by its use.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection has used this tool to hire thousands of additional Border Patrol Officers. Together, this collection of current and former Career Interns represents one of the most ethnically diverse components of the civilian Federal workforce, and features one of the highest concentrations of veterans among civilian agencies.

Getting a firmer grasp on the use of the FCIP will require close examination by Members of Congress, and I am glad today's hearing will provide one forum for such an exploration.

However, I must emphatically reject the premise that Congress must first resolve potential problems with the FCIP before working to provide Federal agencies with increased flexibilities and talent pipelines for filling the mission-critical positions of the future.

I am confident that the Members of this Committee and its staff can examine both issues at once. And I worry that each day that passes with Congress and the broader stakeholder community deadlocked on this issue brings us one day closer to the largest demographic shift the Federal workforce has ever faced. We are losing valuable time in working to provide agencies with the human capital tools to get the job done.

As I told OPM Director Berry recently, the recession presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Federal government to recruit and retain outstanding individuals who may not be able to find work in the private sector, and whose talents will lead them back to higher-paying positions in the private sector once the economy rebounds.

We must not let this opportunity escape us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.