

OPENING STATEMENT OF
SENATOR GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

STRENGTHENING THE FEDERAL ACQUISITION WORKFORCE: GOVERNMENT-WIDE LEADERSHIP AND
INITIATIVES

AUGUST 5, 2009

Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing so that our Subcommittee can continue its efforts to understand and address the wide range of challenges our government faces in recruiting and retaining a highly skilled acquisition workforce.

The federal government spent more than 500 billion dollars in fiscal year 2008 to procure goods and services. That amount continues to rise annually and has more than doubled since fiscal year 2002, when 259 billion dollars was spent on procurements. These rapid increases are due in large part to the war on terror and our nation's new homeland security mission.

But despite this significant increase in procurement spending, adequate attention is not being given to the needs of those responsible for overseeing and managing procurement contracts.

As the Government Accountability Office, or GAO, noted in its 2009 High Risk List report, the federal acquisition workforce "has been experiencing an increasing workload and complexity of responsibilities without adequate attention to its size, skills and knowledge, and succession planning."

GAO's concerns are valid. Despite the doubling of procurement spending in this decade, the number of individuals managing that spending has not increased. The Services Acquisition Reform Act panel and GAO have both noted the need for proper training regarding the complex and frequently changing federal contracting environment. Further, according to the Federal Acquisition Institute, more than half of the federal acquisition workforce will be eligible to retire by fiscal year 2018.

Mr. Chairman, these are all serious issues that need the attention of Congress and the Executive Branch because the acquisition workforce is a steward of significant taxpayer dollars.

When their job is not done well, their acquisition programs end up on GAO's High-Risk list, like the Department of Energy and NASA contract management programs have, or their programs are areas of concern for their Departments' Inspectors General, like the Department of Homeland Security's acquisition management is. Outside of the Department of Defense, these three agencies spend the most federal procurement dollars, so it is alarming that there are so many concerns with their acquisition programs.

We need to determine the number of acquisition personnel that are necessary to

adequately manage and oversee the federal procurement process. We must ensure that those personnel are getting the training they need to get the job done. And we must ensure that agencies have the authorities to recruit and retain the best and the brightest employees.

In 2004, I led efforts to provide NASA with new workforce authorities so that it could hire the best and the brightest for its missions. Among other things, those authorities included recruitment, relocation, and retention bonuses; term appointments; scholarships; annual leave enhancements; and qualifications pay. According to a NASA report from April of this year, those authorities “have been, and continue to be, important to building and sustaining a high-quality workforce to accomplish the Agency’s mission.”

I am curious as to whether similar authorities are needed across the federal government to recruit and retain a sufficient acquisition workforce.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to discussing all of these matters with them.

I hope to hear from the Office of Management and Budget and the General Services Administration about government-wide collaboration on plans to improve the training of the acquisition workforce.

Similarly, I am eager to discuss hiring authorities and recruiting efforts with the Office of Personnel Management to determine if agencies across the government have the tools they need to hire acquisition experts. I anticipate the Professional Services Council will have some thoughts about that as well.

Finally, I hope to hear today from witnesses for the Departments of Energy and Homeland Security, as well as NASA, about their acquisition workforce needs, what they are doing to address concerns that have been raised about their acquisition programs, and what Congress can do to help them address those problems.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to take a moment today to thank the DHS Under Secretary for Management for her work on this and so many other important issues. Ms. Duke, we handed you significant responsibilities when you were confirmed last June, and I think that you have made progress in addressing those issues over the past year. I wish that my legislation, the *Effective Homeland Security Management Act*, was already enacted so that you could have a five year term as Under Secretary for Management. I think that, if you had that opportunity, we might see implementing and transforming DHS come off of GAO’s high risk list.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.