



George V. Voinovich

United States Senator • Ohio



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**OPENING STATEMENT OF
SENATOR GEORGE V. VOINOVICH
RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL
WORKFORCE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
SENATE HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

SECURITY CLEARANCE REFORM: SETTING A COURSE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Before I begin, I would like to first thank Senator Akaka for traveling to Akron, Ohio, yesterday to participate in a field hearing on Social Security Disability Insurance Claims Processing. This is a critical issue, especially for Ohio, and I just want to say, senator, that you being there, along with your staff – Lisa Powell and Christine Khim – really meant a lot to me. We have one more hearing together after this one, so I will save my goodbyes until then. But I just wanted to take this opportunity to extend my appreciation.

I am also grateful that you called today's hearing so that we may continue our review of the federal government's efforts to reform the security clearance process. You and I have worked a long time on a bipartisan basis to address some real problems with the clearance process. I am glad we are meeting today for our seventh — and what will be my last — hearing on this topic so that we can determine what progress has been made, and what work remains, to reform the security clearance process. My hope was that enough progress would have been made so that this issue would have been removed from GAO's high-risk list prior to my retirement. Since that did not occur, I hope I will hear how DOD's security clearance process is on track for being removed from the high-risk list that will be issued in January.

We started these hearings in 2005 to examine efforts in furtherance of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) mandates as well as efforts to remove the Department of Defense personnel security clearance process from GAO's high risk list. But soon thereafter, we recognized that this problem was not exclusive to DOD, but was, instead, a government-wide issue, and must be addressed collaboratively, such as through the Joint Suitability and Security Reform Team — or Joint Reform Team, for short.

I would like to congratulate the Joint Reform Team on the significant strides it has made in streamlining and improving timeliness of the security clearance process. According to data the Joint Reform Team provided to Sen. Akaka and me earlier this month, in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2010, executive branch agencies investigated and adjudicated 90 percent of all initial security clearances in an average of 53 days, and 90 percent of initial secret and confidential clearances in 45 days, thus exceeding the 60-day IRTPA benchmark. What an impressive change from 2007 — just 3 years ago — when it took the Department of Defense an average of 208 days to process secret clearance requests for contractors.

While improvements in timeliness of the security clearance process should be acknowledged, we must also recognize that timeliness is just one aspect of security clearance reform that Congress called for in the IRTPA. The law also necessitates a number of other actions, including uniform policies regarding the security clearance process, reciprocal recognition of security clearances among agencies, and an evaluation of the use of technology to expedite security clearance processes.

I am particularly concerned about the lack of progress being made regarding reciprocity as I still consistently hear from individuals who have problems with one agency accepting another agency's clearance.

Another issue that gives me some concern is the Joint Reform Team's information technology approach, which is to update existing technologies, despite the fact that these technologies are old and outdated, as opposed to purchasing new technologies that would likely better sustain efficiency in the security clearance process. Furthermore, lack of timelines and budget estimates for technology relating to the clearance process is also a concern for me.

And as GAO has pointed out for several years now, quality, particularly completeness, of investigative and adjudicative files has been a problem.

Fortunately, the Joint Reform Team recognized that more work regarding the security clearance process was needed when, in December 2008, it issued a report identifying its seven-step approach for reform, including, but not limited to, validating the need for investigation requests, using automated records checks to better target investigations, allowing for electronic adjudication of less complex cases, and continuously reevaluating individuals who have already been granted clearances.

As requested, the Joint Reform Team has provided monthly updates to Senator Akaka and me on incremental progress in implementing these steps, and I look forward to hearing about the cumulative progress that has been made during today's discussion. I am also interested in learning what additional efforts remain before the goal of security clearance reform can be achieved.

I want to thank our witnesses for their participation in our hearing today. I am particularly glad to have the Government Accountability Office here today. As I have mentioned at each of these hearings, getting DoD's security clearance process off the high risk list is a priority for me. I look forward to hearing today from GAO about the likelihood that DOD's security clearance process will be removed from the high-risk list that will be issued in January.

Finally, I am especially appreciative of the presence of senior leadership for the other agencies represented on the panel. Your presence here today, and your personal involvement in this issue, is a true testament to your commitment to improving the security clearance process. I am confident that if this level of commitment is sustained and you continue to work together, security clearance reform can be achieved in a way that saves the federal government time and money, and ensures that our nation's most sensitive information remains in trusted hands.

Thank you, Senator Akaka.