

Opening Statement of Senator Ted Kaufman (D-DE)
*Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia Hearing: “After the Dust Settles: Examining Challenges and
Lessons Learned in Transitioning the Federal Government”*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your foresight and leadership in holding this hearing and allowing me time to offer some opening remarks.

Before I begin my statement, I want to take a moment to thank the Subcommittee’s Ranking Member, Senator Voinovich, as well. He and I have joined together to introduce legislation that would offer certain government services and resources to major candidates before Election Day for the purpose of early transition planning. I look forward to working with him and our cosponsors – which include you yourself, Mr. Chairman, as well as Chairman Lieberman of the full Committee.

I also want to thank the Partnership for Public Service for its input. Their recent report, *Ready to Govern: Improving the Presidential Transition*, provides an important analysis, and I am pleased that Max Stier will be able to share some of the Partnership’s findings and recommendations with us.

I am glad that we are joined today by these four distinguished witnesses who will share their expertise on transition activities and how we can make transitions more secure and more efficient.

The peaceful transfer of power between administrations is often a time of great pride for Americans. However, it also presents us with a moment of potential vulnerability. As the newly elected leaders prepare to assume control of our political and security institutions, we need to be vigilant against any systemic weaknesses that could be exploited by those who would do our nation harm.

As someone who served as a member of the Obama-Biden transition team, I can attest that transitioning the government is very challenging. It is a complex dance involving two partners who need to move in step with each other. The President-Elect only has a short amount of time between Election Day and the inauguration to fill dozens of critical positions and prepare for the first weeks in office. The outgoing President has a responsibility to transmit critical institutional knowledge about policy issues and ongoing security situations.

We know from recent studies that Bush Administration officials and incoming Obama staff met on the morning of the inauguration to coordinate plans in the event of a terrorist attack that day, which intelligence sources had suggested was possible. The kind of close coordination between the outgoing and incoming officials that morning must be the norm in any transition in our post-September 11 security environment.

The Bush Administration deserves great credit for making transition activities a priority and for assigning staff and resources to the task. The “Presidential Transition Coordinating Council”

established by President Bush's Executive Order of October 9, 2008, brought together key officials from leading departments and agencies, and it liaised with senior staff from both campaigns and, eventually, President-Elect Obama's transition team. Also crucial to the success of that transition was that the Obama campaign had begun to plan for it many months in advance.

The *Pre-Election Presidential Transition Act*, the bill I have introduced with my colleagues, Senators Voinovich, Akaka, and Lieberman, aims to formalize this process of pre-election transition planning. It will help make transitions smoother on both sides.

For incoming administrations, early planning is vital. That is why my bill extends certain government-provided services and resources to major party nominees and eligible third party candidates to begin transition planning before Election Day. For the outgoing administration, the bill lays out a successful model – based on that used by the Bush Administration – for transferring power responsibly.

Most importantly, we need to remove the stigma that making early plans for a transition is somehow presumptuous. Twelve weeks is just too short a timeframe for a thorough transition. If we normalize the act of early transition planning, we will be all the better for it. That is the aim of the Pre-Election Presidential Transition Act.

In closing, it is very appropriate that we are here today to address this issue. We cannot afford to think about transitioning the federal government only every four years. In 2010, when we are not engaged in a presidential election, having had time to process lessons learned from the previous transition, it is important that we look carefully at how to improve upon this process. That way, a stronger transition process will be in place before the next election.

I hope the witnesses will speak to both the types of actions, organization, and structures that proved helpful, as well as any impediments they encountered in the process. I am also interested to learn of whatever additional measures they think useful to encourage an earlier start to transition planning on the part of presidential candidates.

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