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**Testimony of
Patricia McGinnis, President and CEO
Council for Excellence in Government
Before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia
U.S. Senate**

September 18, 2008

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Senator Voinovich and members of the subcommittee, for inviting me to participate in this important discussion about keeping the nation safe through the presidential transition. As we have seen in Spain and the U.K., national elections and transitions present opportunities for terrorists to exploit potential gaps in leadership continuity. A devastating natural disaster could also test the continuity of our nation's emergency response enterprise during this period.

As you know, the Council for Excellence in Government is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to improve the performance of government and accountability to its owners and customers, the American people.

The Council has played a significant role in presidential transitions. Both the Clinton and Bush Administrations called upon the Council to help organize leadership and orientation programs for senior presidential appointees and White House staff. We have also worked extensively with career government leaders to develop their management skills and to help them navigate the changing of the political guard during presidential transitions. Attached to my statement is a description of the Council's presidential transition resources.

In addition, the Council's extensive work to help improve the performance of the nation's homeland security enterprise – including the Department of Homeland Security, other federal agencies, states, localities and the private sector, gives us not only a broad perspective but also an active network of homeland security leaders across the country, from the front lines to federal decision makers. Attached to my statement is a description of our homeland security initiatives.

The Council's Role in the Homeland Security Transition

In the fall of 2007, the Council was asked by the Department of Homeland Security, in consultation with the House and Senate Appropriations

Committees, to help ensure that the critical roles, responsibilities and protocols for emergency response are well understood, coordinated and executed, if necessary, during the changing of the political guard, which has already begun and will continue through the election, the inauguration of a new president and the appointment of top leaders in DHS and other agencies with homeland security responsibilities.

The Council's role is to prepare career interim officials at DHS and incoming appointees with operational or decision support responsibilities to carry out their roles and to follow the protocols required by a variety of emergency scenarios, in collaboration with:

- Leaders with homeland security related responsibilities in other federal agencies (Defense, Justice, Health and Human Services, Transportation, State, the Intelligence Community and other agencies, as appropriate),
- State and local government officials,
- Appropriate private sector leaders.

To guide this work, the Council established a bi-partisan panel of homeland and national security practitioners and experts. The panel is co-chaired by **Admiral James Loy** and **New York City Police Commissioner, Ray Kelly** and includes experienced practitioners from all levels of government and the private sector:

- ***The Honorable Prudence Bushnell**, Former Ambassador and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs; CEO, Sage Associates*
- ***Michael Byrne**, Former Senior Director, The White House Office of Homeland Security; Senior Vice President for Emergency Management and Homeland Security, ICF International*
- ***Darrell Darnell**, Director, District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency*
- ***The Honorable Glenda E. Hood**, Former Secretary of State, State of Florida; President & CEO, Hood Partners, LLC*
- ***Major General Timothy K. Lowenberg**, Adjutant General of Washington State, United States Air Force*
- ***Henry Renteria**, Director, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services*
- ***Michael Wallace**, President, Constellation Generation Group*

Our first step in this effort was to review the National Response Framework, National Preparedness Guidelines, the National Incident Management System, Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP), Continuity of Government (COG), and other documentation of interagency and intergovernmental roles, responsibilities, and protocols in order to create a visual map of the various roles and responsibilities of key actors in both an advance notice and no-notice event.

We have interviewed key officials from DHS and related federal agencies, selected state and local officials, private sector leaders and other key stakeholders to validate the mapping of roles and responsibilities and obtain their input on the critical elements of coordination and communication before, during and after a major emergency. The mapping shows who is responsible for what, when and under what circumstances, with operational instructions in the event of a major emergency. The map and associated information - to be provided electronically - will incorporate roles and responsibilities in a logical and understandable flow so that acting or new DHS leaders will have the information they need to respond to a threat or an incident, even if on Inauguration Day. Other federal as well as state, local and private sector roles and responsibilities are identified in the mapping.

The Council is also organizing training workshops, initially for acting career leaders in critical positions and later for new presidential appointees. Our bipartisan panel urged that initial priority be to prepare career leaders who will play a critical role before and after the new appointees arrive. The workshops to be conducted over a period of months, will include first, the Fundamentals of Crisis Management, which focuses on the basic roles and responsibilities of each position and office in the National Response Framework, and second, scenario based training workshops to be conducted in conjunction with National Exercise Program led by FEMA. Scenarios with no-notice or advance notice will be covered for acting career officials and incoming appointees.

The goals of these workshops are:

- For career leaders and incoming presidential appointees to understand the operational roles and responsibilities set out in the NRF as well as the key support functions necessary for an effective response to an emergency,
- Have them practice their roles and interact with other decision makers in both advance notice and no-notice emergency scenarios, and
- Build relationships and camaraderie among key decision makers and responders.

We held the first scenario based training workshop on Monday, September 15, as a prelude to the National Exercise Program's Senior Officials Exercise involving a Man-Portable Air Defense System (MANPADS). Both the workshop and the exercise took place at the Transportation Security Administration's Freedom Center. Over fifty senior career officials from across the department with critical roles and responsibilities in the event of such a major incident participated in the workshop. They heard from representatives from federal, state, local government and the private sector about incident management at all levels, with a particular focus on a MANPADS scenario. Participants were encouraged to step up as leaders in their agencies during the transition time period as vacancies in critical appointed positions increase.

Observations about Progress of DHS Transition and Associated Risk Areas

Mr. Chairman and Senator Voinovich, in your invitation letter, you asked for observations about DHS's progress in preparing for the transition and the risks associated with the transition.

This is the first presidential transition for the Department, and there is no question that preparing for a smooth transition is a very high priority for both the appointed and career leaders in the department. The Undersecretary for Management, Elaine Duke, is testifying today on the transition work they have underway and progress to date, which is substantial. We are particularly pleased with their focus on enabling career leaders in their succession plan to manage the transition, both of outgoing and incoming appointees. The Senior Career Transition Coordinator, Admiral John Acton, is experienced, organized and very focused on assembling what he calls "Tiger Teams" of career staff and experts for the tasks outlined in the four transition planning fronts, with clear accountability for specific products, milestones and results. DHS seems much further along in its transition planning than most other federal agencies. Both appointed and career leaders clearly recognize the vulnerability of this period and value the continuity necessary to achieve their mission

There are significant risks in this period of heightened alert. I would like to focus on two areas of risk that require leadership beyond the scope of DHS.

First, from my vantage point, the training and exercises to prepare acting career officials and incoming appointees to assume their collaborative homeland security responsibilities across federal agencies do not seem to be as well coordinated as they should be. For the overall transition, each department and agency has named a senior career transition coordinator and the Deputy Director for Management at OMB is bringing them together to facilitate collaboration. Also, the national security professionals training initiative is well underway and is convening leaders from security related agencies to focus on transition. And, the National Exercise Program, led by FEMA conducts scenario based exercises involving those with operational responsibilities from across the federal government (depending on the scenario). Nevertheless, there are many exercises and training programs that are not coordinated and as far as I know there is not a clearinghouse or repository of such activities and resources, to encourage coordination or "not reinventing the wheel" many times over. Also, very seldom do federal officials train or exercise with state and local leaders and first responders or private sector leaders.

In our view, training and exercising together is the best way to ensure seamless, effective enterprise wide response to a major emergency. As our friends on the front lines at the local level often say, "you don't want to be exchanging business cards during an

emergency”. This is work to be done, related both to the transition period and our ongoing security

The second risk is the potentially lengthy gap between the inauguration of the next president and the confirmation of key appointed leaders in key national and homeland security positions. The Secretaries of Homeland Security, Defense, State and a few others, if not the whole cabinet, should be confirmed on Inauguration Day. Then, they should not be “home alone”, with few if any confirmed deputies, undersecretaries and other critical appointees on board. The Executive Branch is working to expedite the security clearance process and according to the initial plan submitted to the President on April 30, 2008 by the Joint Security and Suitability Reform Team, the time for security clearance determinations is down, on average, from 162 days in 2005 to 112 days currently. The goal is to reduce the time to 60 days, after reforms have been implemented and the investigative capacity is expanded.

In my view, it is imperative to expand that capacity in order to have key appointees in place days or weeks, not months after the new president is sworn in.

It is also imperative for the Senate leaders to expedite the confirmation process to consider and vote on key nominees as soon as possible to assure continuity in our national and homeland security leadership. The establishment of timeframes for confirmation hearings and votes, limits on “holds”, and other process agreements should be worked out before the election—before we have a winner and a loser.

Broader reform of the presidential appointments process is long overdue but we urge you and your colleagues to do as much as possible before the changing of the political guard to expedite these critical votes on key nominees during this vulnerable transition period.

Thanks you very much. I look forward to discussing these issues further.

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THE COUNCIL FOR EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT'S 2008-09 PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION INITIATIVE

I. The Council's Role in Presidential Transitions

The eyes of the world will be firmly focused on America on the first Tuesday in November when millions of citizens head to neighborhood polling places to select the 44th President of the United States. Six blocks from the White House, the eyes and energy of everyone at the non-partisan **Council for Excellence in Government** already are fixed on the critical dimensions of the transition, which officially spans eleven weeks, from election day until the new Chief Executive takes the oath of office at noon on January 20, 2009. The planning and management of this historic changing of the guard in the federal government is of vital importance not only to the new President and his team, but also to the American public and the world.

Transitions by their nature are times of great hope and anticipation, when citizens look to newly elected leaders to deliver on the promises of their campaigns and to bring people together. This transition is the first in more than half a century without an incumbent president or vice president on the ballot. It will unfold with economic, energy, environmental, health care and national security challenges certain to test the mettle of the new President and the 111th Congress. This will be only the third transition taking place with the country at war (Nixon succeeded Johnson in 1969 at the height of the Vietnam conflict; Eisenhower became President during the Korean War), and the first post 9/11 transition.

The Council for Excellence in Government offers a variety of resources to the new Administration to help navigate a smooth transition and get its programs, personnel and policies off to a strong start. Founded a quarter-century ago by business leaders who had held high government posts and believed passionately in public service, the Council serves as an independent, trusted and valued source of information and assistance for the White House and those the President appoints to run the executive branch. The Council is not an advocacy group, think tank or association with a point of view to pitch to the new Administration; it is a pragmatic, results-oriented, non-partisan organization that works to facilitate excellence in government performance and accountability to the public for progress and results.

The Council has played an active role in past transitions and already is engaged in preparations for the 2008-09 transition—to provide valuable information and assistance for the candidates' transition planners; the official

transition team of the President-elect; the Senators and Senate Committees that will consider the new President's nominees; the nominees themselves; the career public servants who will keep the government running through the 77-day transition and beyond; the news media that even in quieter times covers transitions with a special intensity; and every citizen with a stake in excellence in government.

- **Orientation for the President's Team.** Both the Clinton and Bush Administrations called on the Council to organize leadership and orientation programs for hundreds of senior appointees and White House staff. These workshops and briefings were first offered in the second Clinton term from 1997 until 2000 and, with new authority under the Transition Act of 2000, for the Bush Administration from 2001 until 2004. They were designed with the guidance of White House steering groups to help new managers prepare to run major government enterprises, drawing on best practices and lessons learned and with a special focus on collaboration, accountability for measurable results, ethical principles of public service, and the strategic use of resources, including people, technology and partnerships, in the context of the process requirements, oversight and media coverage that are often intense and unique to government and politics.
- **Profiling the top Prune Jobs.** Since 1988 the Council has published the invaluable [Prune Book](#) series profiling the toughest management jobs in government. Beyond mere title and job descriptions, these books give the White House and nominees a hands-on view of the challenges ahead, drawn principally from those who once occupied these top appointed positions. The title is a play on the [Plum Book](#) that Congress publishes every four years listing the thousands of jobs and board seats subject to political appointment. "Prunes," in Council lexicon, are "Plums," seasoned by experience and with a much thicker skin. The *2009 Prune Job Profiles* will appear in an expanded online transition resource with links to a wealth of information from the Office of Personnel Management, the Office of Government Ethics, Senate committees and other sources. In this new, electronic format, the *Prune Job Profiles* will be fully searchable and kept up to date beyond 2009. The Council this fall also will update its *Survivor's Guide for Presidential Nominees*, a lively compendium of practical advice for nominees to posts that require Senate confirmation. The Council published the [original Survivor's Guide](#) in 2000 in conjunction with The Brookings Institution.

II. 2008-09 Transition Resources Web 2.0

The Council is taking its transition assistance online by creating a dynamic new web resource which, along with a variety of meetings, workshops and other gatherings, will provide transition leaders, prospective nominees, and others the following resources:

- ***Appointing the President's Team: Prune Job Profiles***

Appointing the right people to a select group of top leadership and management posts in the federal government is critical to the success of a new President and Administration. Beyond the Cabinet appointments and White House Staff, sub-cabinet appointments to lead critical government agencies and functions – such as emergency management, social security, Medicare and Medicaid require seasoned experience and savvy management skills.

For nearly two decades, the **Council for Excellence in Government** has produced the *Prune Books*, comprehensive guides written specifically to equip the incoming presidential administration with insights into one of its most difficult tasks: staffing the key appointed positions that carry out the new President's agenda throughout the Executive Branch of government.

Since the first *Prune Book* was released in 1988, nearly a dozen additional editions have been published in book form, and have explored a range of issues: from the toughest management and policy making jobs to the toughest science and technology jobs.

As we approach a new administration in 2009, the Council is taking the *Prune* series from book form to a major web presence (*Prunes 2.0*) and expanding its value and reach as an ongoing resource for top government managers. This initiative is taking the concept of Prune Jobs to another level. Not only are we profiling the jobs, but we are explicitly pointing Page 8 of 11 to the management qualifications and attributes that the President and Senate should consider for these appointments. What are the qualifications and skills required for excellent performance in these jobs? What are the qualities and perspectives a successful candidate should have? We are selecting and highlighting **top Prune Jobs**, and we will also list and provide information about other appointed positions, using the *Plum Book* and other sources.

A Steering Committee has been formed to select the key appointed positions and to guide the development of the job profiles and qualifications. Members of the Steering Committee include selected Council Principals and others who have served in Prune Jobs, in Presidential Personnel or have experience in executive search. Their perspectives and insights are informing our analysis of recruiting best practices along with the skills and qualifications it takes to excel in these positions.

We are also conducting extensive outreach to past leaders of Presidential transitions, White House Chiefs of Staff, Senators and Committee staff, key career employees, and selected experts and stakeholders.

This year, as in the past, the *Prune* profiles will concentrate on a selection of Executive Schedule jobs, filled by presidential appointment and confirmed by the Senate. The Steering Committee has culled these jobs from the more than 1,100 in the PAS category. Key criteria for making these choices included:

- Budget and staff size and scope of management duties
- Congressional and public visibility
- Consequences of failure to perform effectively
- Missions that address priorities of the public and the candidates

The Council is also reaching out to past leaders of Presidential transitions, White House Chiefs of Staff, Senators and Committee staff, key career employees, and other experts and will share their wisdom and advice online.

- ***Dynamic Online Communities***

We will organize dynamic online communities to share insights and information about how to succeed, best practices, and lessons learned. Utilizing the same tools that have drawn millions to Facebook and other social networking sites, the Council will manage the sharing of information, blogs, case studies, and other resources online and at workshops and briefings for new appointees and career managers as well as overseers, stakeholders, and the news media -- all designed with the singular purpose of improving government performance. Among the interactive communities envisioned are ones for:

- Chief Operating Officers
- Chief Information Officers
- Chief Financial Officers
- Chief Acquisition Officers
- Chief Human Capital Officers

We will also pursue cross-agency communities that manage programs in key areas of public priority such as:

- Health Care
- Homeland Security
- Jobs and the Economy

These online communities can and will be tailored, expanded and clustered around what new appointees and their teams decide are the categories and topics that interest them most.

- ***Selecting the Cabinet and White House Staff.*** Past Transition and Administration leaders will offer advice on strategy, timing, roles and responsibilities, what worked well, and lessons learned, with attention to history, context and effectiveness in the public interest.
- ***Inventory of Appointed Positions.*** In addition to the profiles in the *Prune Book*, the Council will provide a full inventory of appointed positions, drawing on the

Plum Book, compiled by the House Committee on Government Reform, and other resources.

- ***New Survivor’s Guide for Presidential Nominees.*** The Council also will publish online a new edition of its 178-page *A Survivor’s Guide for Presidential Nominees*, which former OPM Director Constance Horner described on its release in November 2000 as “a classic on how Washington works.” This electronic *Survivor’s Guide* will explain how to navigate the often perplexing nomination and confirmation process, offer a ***Confirmation Roadmap*** with steps, mileposts, barriers and a path to the finish line, and furnish clear instructions and links to all the ***Government Forms Online*** that nominees must fill out, including the financial disclosure and other Executive Branch forms and as many of the Senate Committee questionnaires as available.
- ***Special Events.*** The Council will hold forums and workshops where appointees and other government managers can brainstorm and exchange best practices with each other, learn from the experiences of former officials and engage informally with stakeholders, the media and other transition watchers.
- ***Blogs.*** The Council’s Transition Web site will include interactive blogs for senior managers and appointees to exchange experiences, information, and ideas on bringing out the best in managing government programs. Some features may be password protected.
- ***Transition News.*** Links to key media sites that track transition news.
- ***Other Key Links.*** We will also provide links to a full array of Transition-related Web sites, inside and outside the government, including:
 - ✓ White House
 - ✓ Office of Government Ethics
 - ✓ Congressional sites
 - ✓ Partner Web sites
- ***Timing and Beta Web site.*** While the public launch is scheduled for November, the Council will make a beta Web site available for testing and use by the candidates’ transition planners in September. The beta site will contain extensive information about appointments, navigating the nomination and confirmation process, and gearing up to meet the challenges that will confront the new Administration.



Attachment #2: The Council for Excellence in Government Summary of Homeland Security Initiatives

Our work over the past five years has created invaluable enterprise-wide resources to bring to this assignment. Through town hall meetings across the country and polling, expert working groups and symposia with federal, state and local government leaders, corporate partners and civic groups, we developed a bottom-up assessment and recommendations for action, contained in our 2004 report, “*We the People: Homeland Security from the Citizens’ Perspective*” (<http://www.excelgov.org/wethepeople>).

The Council also worked with the American Red Cross, George Washington University and DHS to identify barriers and strategies for emergency preparedness, contained in “*Public Preparedness: A National Imperative*” (<http://www.excelgov.org/publicpreparedness>). Other key initiatives include:

- **Survey-based Readiness Quotient (RQ)** to measure preparedness of the public. With support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Council worked with the American Red Cross, public and private sector leaders and survey experts to design a survey-based tool to measure and track progress and gaps in the preparedness of individuals in any community – workplaces, schools, cities or the nation as a whole. Go to the Council website or www.whatsyourRQ.org to answer 10 questions, get your score and links to resources to improve your preparedness.
- **Big City Emergency Managers’ Learning and Exchange Forum.** The Council convenes a “Learning and Exchange Forum” of the directors of emergency management in eleven large, high-risk cities – from Boston, New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Houston, San Francisco, San Diego County and Miami-Dade County.
- **U.S. Department of Homeland Security Fellows Program.** In January 2007, the Council, in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security, launched the DHS Fellows Program to develop a core of future senior career leaders from across the department, who will lead their areas of responsibility with a strategic, collaborative approach that builds ownership of a complex and challenging mission and increases accountability for results.