

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Heidi Heitkamp

Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management

Agency Approaches to Reorganization: Examining OMB's Memorandum on the Federal Workforce

Thursday, June 15, 2017

As Prepared

Thank you Chairman Lankford.

As Ranking Member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee that oversees the federal workforce, I could not think of a more appropriate topic for today's hearing.

When the Administration implemented their hiring freeze across the federal government in January of this year, I had grave concerns about the local impact that unfilled vacancies would have on communities across North Dakota.

My concerns only deepened after hearing rhetoric from the Administration about reducing the workforce through attrition. Across the board cuts and a shrinking of the overall federal workforce are not the answer to making the federal government more efficient or effective.

When I hear of proposed budget cuts as high as nearly 21 percent at the USDA, I get worried about local farmers and ranchers in North Dakota losing the critical support they need from USDA in local FSA field offices.

Bill Hejl (HAIL), who grows sugar beets, spring wheat, corn and soybeans near Amenia, North Dakota, is one of those farmers that I worry about when I hear about drastic cuts like these.

Bill drives 30 miles or more to get to an FSA field office now—a distance that he cannot afford to see increase in the future due to potential staffing cuts.

Bill is someone who plans to hand down his farm to his son one day, and it is important for us to think about the impact that cuts like these will have on the next generation of farmers and all of those in rural communities.

While the hiring freeze has technically been lifted, I want you all to know that I am paying the utmost attention to how agencies are implementing the guidance that was given to them by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on April 12th, and stand ready and willing to question any cuts that come at the expense of the talent, morale, and mission of our federal workforce.

It is essential that agencies are not putting the cart before the horse when it comes to reorganization. They must carefully think through the long term impact any potential reductions will have on their agency.

With nearly a third of the federal workforce eligible to retire in 2019, it is crucial that the federal government connect with the millennial generation in a way that speaks to their needs and their desire to pursue mission-oriented careers and demonstrates all that a career in the federal government has to offer.

We will not be able to achieve that if we undermine the very mission that drives younger generations of workers into careers in public service because we are unwisely cutting important agency operations and making it tougher for federal employees to do their jobs.

I will be doing all that I can to protect federal workers, and I plan to be very engaged throughout this entire agency reorganization process.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses, and greatly appreciate you all taking the time to be here today.

Thank you.

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