

Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

**“Domestic Partner Benefits for Federal Employees: Fair
Policy and Good Business”**

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
October 15, 2009

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your leadership on this important issue. I am pleased that Representative Baldwin is able to join us today. Her advocacy on this topic is well known.

The title of this hearing is: “Domestic Partner Benefits for Federal Employees: Fair Policy and Good Business.” It aptly describes why we have introduced this bill to extend employment benefits to domestic partners of federal employees. It is both fair policy and good business practice.

When it comes to employment, the federal government must compete with the private sector in attracting the most qualified, skilled, and dedicated employees. Today, health, medical, and other benefits are a major component of any competitive employment package.

As the Chairman has explained, the Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act, which we have introduced, would give a federal employee and his or her domestic partner the same benefits available to married federal employees.

The federal government already faces a two-pronged challenge in attracting and retaining talented and dedicated employees.

The first challenge comes from private sector employers, who are increasingly offering these kinds of

benefits as standard fare. Among Fortune 500 companies, domestic partner benefits are becoming commonplace. According to the Office of Personnel Management, nearly 60 percent of Fortune 500 companies, including some of our top federal contractors, extend employment benefits to domestic partners.

The second challenge comes from the potential wave of federal employee retirements in the next few years. Approximately 60 percent of the federal workforce will be eligible for retirement over the next decade. If the federal government fails to attract or retain employees because of a lack of competitive benefits, then the impact of these retirements will be magnified.

As we learned at our hearing on this bill during the last Congress, the private sector offers domestic partner benefits as part of its strategy for building a stronger

workforce. These benefits help foster a sense of loyalty between the employees and the organization, creating a more stable and productive work environment.

Many state and local governments also have extended employee benefits to domestic partners in committed relationships. For example, Maine's state government offers benefits to its employees who are in committed domestic partnerships.

If the federal government is to compete with the private sector for the most talented members of our workforce, and if our goal is to create a loyal, dynamic federal workforce for the future, then we need to be able to offer competitive benefits.

I look forward to hearing OPM's views on how this legislation will help draw talented applicants to serve in the government and help retain them.

Again, I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this hearing today. Our legislation will help promote a strong federal workforce. It will also serve as an important measure of fairness and equality for our dedicated employees.

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