

Opening Statement of Senator George V. Voinovich

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia

Security Clearance Reform: Moving Forward on Modernization

September 15, 2009

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling today's hearing to continue our review of the federal government's efforts to reform the security clearance process. You and I have worked on 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 sixth hearing on this topic so that we can determine what progress has been made to reform the security clearance process since our last hearing.

We started these hearings in 2005 to examine efforts in furtherance of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act's (IRTPA) mandates as well as efforts to remove the Department of Defense personnel security clearance process from GAO's high risk list.

More than four years after our first hearing, DoD's security clearance process remains on GAO's high risk list, and I see little evidence of progress by the current Administration in furtherance of IRTPA's security clearance reform mandates.

Now, reforming the security clearance process and removing DoD's Personnel Security Clearance Process from GAO's high risk list are priorities for me in my final Congress. I have always believed that the Executive Branch could get DoD's clearance process off of the high risk list, and I want to see that happen. I intend to closely monitor efforts in this regard and have told my staff I want weekly updates on progress made to get DoD's personnel security clearance process off of the high risk list before I leave.

There are many reasons this is important, perhaps most notably because of the cost of the security clearance process.

Mr. Chairman, I have cited this statistic before, but I think it bears repeating: an August 2007 Department of Defense report on security clearance investigations estimated it took an average of 208 days to process secret clearance requests for industry. For every day a contract employee is on the job without the appropriate clearance, it costs the taxpayer approximately \$684 in lost salary and benefits because the contractor is not able to do the job he is being paid to do. Over 208 days, a secret clearance for one person costs more than \$140,000 – almost three times the 2007 median U.S. household income of \$50,233.

Now, some real headway has been made to reduce the security clearance timeline and cost. As the Government Accountability Office noted in a May 2008 report, “executive branch agencies responsible for investigating or adjudicating clearances . . . have made significant progress in improving timeliness . . . in clearance processing.”

Specifically, in 2004, initial Top Secret clearance investigations took almost 400 days, and today they take less than 80 days.

Similarly, initial Secret clearance investigations took about 200 days in 2004, and today they take less than 50 days. This is significant progress that I recognize and appreciate.

But it remains to be seen whether the IRTPA December 2009 timeliness benchmark of processing clearance requests in 60 days will be met.

Additionally, even if that benchmark is met, timeliness is just one aspect of the security clearance reform that Congress called for in IRTPA.

The law also calls for 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 because I still consistently hear from individuals who have problems having one agency accept another agency's clearance.

I am also concerned about the lack of progress in implementing technology to expedite the clearance process because the Enterprise Information Technology Strategy released in March includes few timelines and no budget estimates for technology relating to the clearance process.

I believe the Executive Branch needs to do more to address these statutory requirements. As GAO also noted in May, "problems related to the quality of security clearance investigations and adjudication determinations, reciprocity of clearance determinations, and information technology persist."

The Joint Security and Suitability Reform Team recognized that more work regarding the security clearance process is needed when, in December 2008, it issued a report with tasks to be achieved during 2009, including:

- implementing a revised Electronic Questionnaire (e-QIP);
- deploying an Automated Records Check (ARC) capability to the Department of the Army and developing a strategy for further ARC use;
- developing a curriculum for training national security clearance professionals; and
- revising the Questionnaire for National Security Positions.

OMB tells me it is coordinating an interagency review of these and other proposals, and I am anxious to hear the results of that review.

I also want to know when that review will be complete and when all of the called-for reforms will be implemented. To that end, I expect OMB to report to us in writing about any changes that are made to the December 2008 Joint Reform Team plan, including a specific implementation timeline for each of the initiatives called for in that plan.

I want to thank our witnesses for their participation in our hearing today. I am confident that if we work together, we can achieve security clearance reform that saves the federal government time and money.

I am particularly glad to have the Government Accountability Office here today because last year, I expressed concern that the Department of Defense security clearance process, which was added to GAO's high risk list in 2005, would remain on the list in 2009. My prediction proved true, and in January, GAO continued its designation of the Department of Defense's Personnel Security Clearance Process as high risk.

As I mentioned earlier, 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 what progress has been made to move the process off of the high risk list and what further actions need to be taken in that regard.

Thank you, Senator Akaka.