

**Statement of Senator George V. Voinovich**  
**Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,**  
**and the District of Columbia**  
**“Protecting Our Employees: Pandemic Influenza Preparedness and the Federal**  
**Workforce”**  
**June 16, 2009**

Good morning. As you know, Mr. Chairman, preparedness and response in the event of pandemic influenza has been a focus of this Subcommittee for several years. In 2007, this Subcommittee sought ways to improve the federal government’s awareness and preparedness for a pandemic, and how the Federal Executive Boards could offer their leadership. Now we are back to understand whether the federal government is prepared to protect its most critical asset – its people.

As highlighted by the Government Accountability Office’s report, the task will not be easy. Our current level of preparedness is uneven. While some agencies have shown a continued commitment to planning, testing, and communication in the event of disaster – others have just begun the planning process, despite guidance issued three years ago.

I am troubled that pandemic preparedness efforts at many agencies has been limited at best – agencies such as the Small Business Administration or Department of Housing and Urban Development. Agencies should not be scrambling to define how work will be accomplished and inform employees of their rights and benefits during a disaster. Preparedness cannot be done “on-the-fly”.

You can imagine our frustration that no agency has stepped-forward as the orchestra leader – to coordinate federal employee preparedness. The recent H1N1 outbreak, saw agencies issuing varied guidance, and led to confusion within the federal workforce. In an event such as pandemic flu, where the determination on using personal protective equipment is strictly medical, guidance must be uniform and well-communicated. Employees should not have to rely on water cooler conversations to understand how a pandemic will impact their jobs. Silence on the subject will only lead to confusion.

It is my hope that GAO’s report will encourage agencies to renew their efforts to complete their pandemic response plans. The failures identified by GAO should provide a warning; while the accomplishments and best practices should help pave the way for others. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how to move past these challenges and offer greater security for our federal employees.