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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT
MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
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Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the General Services Administration (GSA). My name is Gail Lovelace and I serve as GSA's Chief Human Capital Officer. I am especially honored to be here with you today to discuss recruitment and retention of a talented Federal workforce during Public Service Recognition week.

GSA provides a centralized delivery system of products and services to the Federal Government, leveraging its enormous buying power to get the best value for taxpayers. Established in 1949, GSA manages more than one-fourth of the Government's total procurement dollars and influences the management of \$500 billion in Federal assets, including 8,600 Government-owned or leased buildings and 213,000 vehicles. GSA helps preserve our past and define our future, as a steward of more than 480 historic properties, and as manager of USA.gov, the official portal to Federal Government information and services. GSA's mission to provide superior workplaces, expert technology solutions, acquisition services, purchasing and E-Gov travel solutions and management policies, at best value, allows Federal agencies to focus on their core missions.

During the 1970's, over 40,000 employees worked at GSA. Today, we are an organization of 12,000 that relies on a highly competent workforce to accomplish its mission. Our continued ranking as one of the "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" shows that we have placed high emphasis on workforce engagement and this has contributed to GSA's ability to be in a better position not only to attract but to retain talent. The Best Places to Work rankings are produced by the Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation based on agency results from the Federal Human Capital Survey.

Recently, there has been a good deal of concern about hiring in the Federal Government. Why does the hiring process take so long? Why do applicants rarely hear from agencies where they have applied? From the perspective of managers and applicants the process is too slow. When the process is slow – the reasons can come from multiple sources. For example, managers who may not devote the time to developing selection criteria or interviewing, or the selectee may delay filling out security paperwork, or the Human Resources (HR) organizations are handling an enormous volume of applications with fewer resources and with information technology (IT) systems that are not fully supporting their business. Whatever the reason -- we need to break this cycle and improve the hiring process across the Government. It will take improvements on the part of HR professionals, managers, and those interested in working in the Federal Government.

Even in this environment, GSA has been able to attract top talent. We have taken a number of steps to enhance recruitment efforts so that we are positioned to bring the best and the brightest to work at our agency. While we have made

progress in some areas, we continue to face challenges in others and we need to do more. I would like to outline for you some of the steps we have already taken and actions we propose for the future to improve the hiring process for HR professionals, our managers, and job applicants.

At the core of GSA's human capital efforts is its Human Capital Strategic Plan ("Plan"). Linked directly to the agency's Strategic Plan, our Plan provides the roadmap to guide our recruitment efforts. One of the seven human capital goals outlined in the Plan focuses our attention on competing for and retaining a talented and engaged workforce. To compliment our Human Capital Strategic Plan, we conduct workforce planning and analysis to assess hiring and attrition trends. This analysis helps to identify: occupational series which pose recruitment challenges, separation trends among core occupational series, reasons why we lose talent, as well as forecasting likely voluntary retirements. From this data, GSA is able to anticipate where strategies are needed for recruiting and retaining talent and devising customized strategies for various occupations.

To help recruit and retain talent, GSA has employed a number of pay and other incentives. Use of these incentives has enabled GSA to hire and retain the most talented, highly qualified candidates and a current workforce in geographical areas where it is difficult to identify and attract employees with the specific skills, knowledge and experience required to fulfill the agency's mission.

GSA's attrition rates stands around 8%, in line with the overall government-wide rate, for the last several years. This means that we must continuously attract new talent to fill the vacated positions. GSA has been able to effectively attract talent by employing a variety of strategies. One key to maintaining our steady staffing levels within GSA is that we have capitalized on our status as one of the top ten "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" and promote this achievement in our vacancy announcements. We are using a "You Can Do That Here!" marketing strategy that helps applicants understand the range of work offered at GSA. We use a wide range of workplace flexibilities as part of our recruitment efforts: student loan repayment, telework, relocation incentives, alternate work schedules, transit subsidies, flexible work hours, child-care subsidy program and more.

Our workforce statistics show that our workforce is stable. However, we recognize that in today's global market it is imperative that we take action to set us apart as an employer of choice and to do what we must to improve our hiring process with regard to how long it takes to fill a position. We need to improve the manager and the applicant experience. To achieve these goals, we launched a "Lean Hiring" initiative that focuses on specific actions that can be taken to improve the timeliness and quality of our hiring process. Through "Lean Hiring" we are taking a critical look at HR service delivery in five key areas including: policy, planning, systems, structure and processes.

Through this initiative, we are reviewing all of our employment policies related to staffing and recruitment to determine if they meet our needs. We are prepared to abolish those that impede our hiring goals and develop ones that can expedite the process. “Lean Hiring” will also help us develop a more systematic workforce planning process. The focus is on defining the current state, the ideal state and the gaps. The review and analysis will provide a clear understanding of workforce planning at GSA from the perspective of the GSA senior management from across the country.

Another important aspect of “Lean Hiring” is increased collaboration between HR professionals and managers. Active engagement in our customer’s strategic planning sessions will result in HR solutions that meet their business requirements. We are identifying key touch points in the process where HR professionals will engage with managers so that the hiring plan is executed as planned and adjustments can be made as quickly as possible.

GSA is working to improve the management consideration and selection phase of the hiring process by providing managers with the advice, guidance and assistance necessary to make appropriate and timely selections. Our HR professionals will assist selecting officials with their panel member composition while the vacancy announcement is open, and they will provide selecting officials with suggested interview questions and a standardized reference check questionnaire. We have also created an electronic Job Analysis Library, which reduces the time needed to prepare the vacancy announcement by providing managers with standardized language they can use to create the announcement.

To improve a job applicant’s experience, we are improving the integration between the USAjobs website and our hiring system to make it easier to apply for a job at GSA. Job applicants will be able to electronically access and upload their resume and other documentation they have built into USAjobs to apply for GSA positions. This eliminates the current requirement to create the information in two different systems, USAjobs and GSAjobs. The GSAjobs system will have a clearly defined process by which applicants can extend their eligibility on standing registers. GSA will be able to send an advance notice to applicants prior to the eligibility expiration date on standing registers. Applicants will be able to view and extend their eligibility on-line. GSAjobs will also be improved to allow applicants to submit documents electronically with attached files rather than submitting them via fax. Documents will be stored electronically eliminating the need to resubmit them for future vacancies.

We have already been able to make headway in improving our processes through “Lean Hiring.” We have streamlined our vacancy announcements to be more efficient and to improve the applicant experience when applying for jobs. We have expanded the use of the standing register for mission critical occupations nationwide. Additionally, we also created several geographically-

specific standing registers aligned to address the agency's urgent human capital needs associated with the provisions of the Recovery Act and have a centralized point of contact to maintain all registers. These additional registers were established to develop the highly skilled and talented applicant pools needed to meet this specific mission. We have also engaged the support of a group from GSA's Advanced Leadership Development program, one of GSA's developmental programs under our Leadership Institute, which will conduct a survey of selecting officials and employees. This recently released survey will help us get feedback on the hiring process associated with our standing registers.

Other actions that we are taking to expedite the hiring process include a GSA sponsored "Hire Fair" in mid-July. Vacancy announcements will be posted 60 days in advance of the "Hire Fair" and all qualified candidates will be invited to the event. The "Hire Fair" brings together these pre-screened, highly qualified applicants and hiring officials. Applicants invited to the "Hire Fair" are given an opportunity to interview with the management officials who will be able to make selections the day of the event. This event will expedite the hiring process and provide on-the-spot job offers.

In addition, GSA will participate in a number of other events sponsored by Government groups, associations, and universities over the months ahead. Some of these events include: Public Service Recognition Week, GSA Expo, Federally Employed Women conference, Blacks in Government conference, Diversity Job Fair, Military Officers Association of America conference, National Contract Management Association World Congress, James Madison University's Job Fair, and more.

Despite the successes we have enjoyed, one area that remains a concern and a recruitment and retention challenge to GSA is in the acquisition field. Our acquisition workforce is critical to GSA's mission of leveraging the buying power of the Federal Government to acquire best value for taxpayers and our Federal customers. Although the percentage of hires has shown an increase, there remains a significant shortage of skilled acquisition professionals. Workforce data also indicates that approximately 33% of GSA acquisition employees will be eligible to retire within the next 5 years and approximately 40% will be eligible to retire within the next 7 years. We also lose staff to other agencies that are able to offer higher grades or increased pay through pay banding. We know this because we track data on which agencies we tend to lose employees to and we know when our employees are being offered higher grades.

To increase focus on this area we developed a succession plan that outlines strategies to address recruitment, retention and development of the acquisition workforce. The plan outlines a clear and achievable strategy for employees to obtain the necessary skills to successfully advance to higher levels of authority in the acquisition field. This will benefit GSA by ensuring that we have a highly

skilled cadre of acquisition professionals who can successfully function in a variety of acquisition positions. The plan supports the expanded and cohesive use of a variety of hiring options including the Presidential Management Fellows Program, Federal Career Intern Program, Peace Corps Staff, Veteran's Recruitment Appointment, the Student Career Experience Program, as well as the continued use of hiring and retention incentives.

GSA has authority to use dual compensation waivers to hire retired federal employees who have served as Contracting Officers. This will provide GSA with essential skills at the higher grade levels to fill skills gaps in its acquisition workforce. We also have direct hire authority which enables us to expedite the hiring process for acquisition professionals. We are using standing registers or open continuous announcements that provide us with a ready inventory of qualified applicants. These registers also make it easier for job applicants and eliminate the need for them to continuously apply for positions. We are also implementing a notification process so that applicants will know when their standing on a register will end and how they can extend it on-line.

GSA will continue to look at ways that we can make the overall hiring experience more productive for managers and "user friendly" for applicants. This includes expanded marketing of GSA to help promote jobs at our agency. We need to look at ways to provide more timely feedback to job applicants; focus on improvements to our IT systems to work more efficiently and effectively for our HR professionals; continue to improve our succession process; give careers at GSA higher prominence on our GSA.gov web site; and ensure that our managers are even more engaged in the hiring process.

I am confident that as we implement the improvements I have outlined, GSA will achieve our goal of having skilled and engaged talent, in the right jobs, at the right time to carry out the core mission of our agency. Additionally, I look forward to working with the new Director of the Office of Personnel Management and my fellow members of the Chief Human Capital Officers' Council to develop Government-wide solutions to address issues with the hiring process. Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and Members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you again for the opportunity to address you this afternoon. Thanks for all you do to support the Federal workforce and happy Public Service Recognition Week! I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.