

United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of
Federal Programs and the Federal Workforce
A More Efficient and Effective Government: Cultivating the Federal Workforce
May 6, 2014

Opening Statement of Carol Waller Pope
Chairman, Federal Labor Relations Authority

Good afternoon. I want to thank the Committee and, in particular, Senators Tester and Portman, for conducting this hearing on a subject that is near and dear to my heart – attracting, engaging, and retaining a first-class, diverse workforce for the Federal Government.

I have been in public service as a part of the Federal workforce my entire professional career – starting as a career employee and later as a Presidential appointee. From 2009 until the end of 2012 and then again beginning last November, I have served as the Chairman of the Federal Labor Relations Authority. When I began working as a staff attorney at the Department of Labor, Office of the Solicitor in 1979, the idea of being the FLRA's Chairman wasn't even a dream. Serving as Chairman is an honor beyond measure. And I believe that my story speaks to employee engagement, succession planning, and a commitment to mission performance.

Before addressing our efforts to cultivate the FLRA's internal workforce, I would like to talk about the FLRA's mission. The FLRA exists to promote stable, constructive, labor-management relationships throughout the Federal Government and to resolve disputes in a manner that contributes to an effective and efficient government. That is, our customers are the management and labor components of the Federal workforce. This means that day in and day out, our employees are working to assist other Federal employees – whether management or labor – to accomplish the work of the government in a way that enhances mission performance and, we hope, employee engagement and satisfaction.

While the FLRA's "business" is assisting other Federal agencies and unions regarding workforce issues, I'm here to address our efforts to engage the FLRA's workforce in order to improve our mission performance and our employee satisfaction.

With the collaborative efforts of the FLRA's senior leadership and career employees at all levels, we have achieved nearly unprecedented improvements in employee morale over the last 5 years. To set the stage, in 2008 the FLRA was not only at the bottom of the employee-satisfaction rankings for small agencies, it was *below the bottom*. That's right, in 2008, the Partnership for Public Service excluded the FLRA's scores on the Employee Viewpoint Survey from the small-agency calculations because the FLRA's scores were so low they skewed the ranking of other small agencies. We busted the curve in the wrong direction!

The next time the survey was conducted – 2010 – the FLRA showed a 250 percent improvement in employee satisfaction. I am told the statisticians assumed there was a mistake and triple-checked their calculations. But there was no mistake. The FLRA moved from last place to 20th in the small-agency rankings, with a still-unbeaten 250 percent increase in overall employee satisfaction. Again, the FLRA busted the curve – but this time in the right direction. And 2010 wasn't our only good year. In 2011, we moved to number 7 in overall, small-agency rankings, and to number 8 in both 2012 and 2013.

So what exactly did we do to achieve these increases? The key, I think, is that FLRA employees and leadership undertook sincere, sustained efforts to focus on the core values of transparency and accountability. And we focused on mission accomplishment. These were not pro forma efforts. They were real and substantive. And they began with the recognition that from top to bottom and side to side, FLRA employees are deeply committed to the mission of the agency and the work they perform. FLRA's senior leadership clearly communicated its belief that its employees did important work and did it well. This resonated with employees. It probably contributed to that difficult-to-describe synergy that occurs when employees start to feel valued.

And there were more tangible things. As an example, in 2009, I held the first all-employee, town-hall meeting. The FLRA embraced the ideas of revitalization, reinvention, and reengagement – both as to our customers and our employees. We committed scarce resources to employee training and development in order to enhance mission-related skills and develop future leaders. We started a weekly newsletter for all employees. We made the FLRA's budget and case statistics available to all employees and began to discuss with employees how we might improve our performance. We began to fill key positions where possible. We celebrated Employee Recognition Week. And we celebrated cultural diversity through homegrown celebrations of Black History, Hispanic Heritage, and Women's History. We also celebrated our incremental improvements in mission performance. In combination, I believe that these efforts may explain our increases in employee satisfaction. And, in my opinion, these tangible efforts are easily and economically replicable in other agencies.

What did we learn? A lot of things. Stated simply, we learned that successful efforts are multi-year and multi-pronged. Long-term support of and engagement with our employees resulted in improved efficiencies and mission performance. Indeed, given the pace of change, the efforts probably are never-ending.

I began, and would like to finish, with a focus on the FLRA's mission and our main goal, which continues to be improving labor-management relations outside the FLRA. We have improved our mission performance as well as our employee-satisfaction scores. But there is more work to be done. I would like to continue to work with our employees to improve the quality and timeliness of our services. And I would like to develop our technology and our workforce to be nimble and responsive to ever-changing needs. I

would like to be able to offer more training and facilitation services both to prevent and resolve disputes before they deplete resources and sour relationships. I would like the American public to be proud of the FLRA and the services it provides.

In the end, I believe that the most powerful inspiration to our employees in providing exemplary service is seeing the results of their work in improved labor-management relations in the government. And this correlation between improved mission performance and improved employee satisfaction would surely be the same for all agencies.

I would be happy to answer any questions.