Prepared Statement of

Ginger Groeber

Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Civilian Personnel Policy)

before the
Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services
Committee on Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
on
S. 1800, The Homeland Security Federal Workforce Act
March 12, 2002

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. Good afternoon. I am Ginger Groeber. I serve as Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Civilian Personnel Policy. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss S. 1800, the Homeland Security Federal Workforce Act.

We share the subcommittee's interest in encouraging Government service in support of the nation's security and look forward to working with the subcommittee on this legislation. We support the intent of this legislation to take a strategic approach to ensure that agencies with national security responsibilities are prepared to meet the challenges of this challenging security environment. To that end, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Dr. David S. C. Chu, in cooperation with the Defense Components, is developing a Civilian Human Resources Strategic Plan to guide efforts in managing the human capital of the Department.

At the outset, I would like to offer some general observations that are important to the Department in considering statutory changes in workforce management. First, we support a collaborative approach with other agencies in addressing critical national concerns that does not erode the essential authority and responsibility of the Secretary of Defense to manage our national security workforce or complicate execution of programs already addressing these concerns within the Department. In addition, we urge consideration of workforce management strategies that do not fragment or complicate the ability of the Secretary to manage that workforce as the result of disparate personnel programs or policies.

In taking the strategic approach that the subcommittee has in this matter, we would also urge the subcommittee to consider the merits of the Administration's Managerial Flexibility Act in increasing essential flexibilities in recruiting and retaining not only national security positions but other critical positions as well. We urge the Congress to give favorable consideration to the expanded and streamlined improvements in the Managerial Flexibility Act. In considering a more comprehensive approach, the subcommittee may wish to consider expanding the reach of the legislation to other government organizations with national security responsibilities. In short, we want to ensure that a collaborative approach neither reduces necessary flexibility in managing national security human resources assets nor fragments the Department's ability to manage those assets. We support a strategic, flexible, and balanced approach to the critical human resources challenges that this legislation addresses.

We support increases in the annual loan repayment amount, and in the overall cap on repayment of student loans. We believe that the proposals for loan payment and graduate fellowships are very useful incentives in recruiting and retaining a highly qualified workforce. However, we believe that the bill, in its present form, would complicate the Department's ability to manage its national security workforce. We are concerned that the approach taken by this bill – a centralized program of loan payment and a single authority for determining positions eligible for graduate fellowships limited largely to the disciplines of foreign languages, science, mathematics, engineering – does not permit the necessary flexibility in implementation we would like to see. In this regard, we would like to work with the subcommittee in striking a better balance in these matters.

I would like to address the specific questions that the subcommittee asked us to consider.

What is the significance of strong math, science and foreign language expertise in the Department of Defense? Their significance will be increasingly important to the Department in future years. Technology will become even more complex. We will need this expertise to ensure the quality of our own laboratories as well as in our interactions with an industrial base where jobs requiring technical skills could likely grow as much as fifty percent in the next decade. Turning to foreign language expertise, we believe it is critical in supporting every foreign intelligence discipline and is an essential factor in national security readiness, information superiority, and coalition peacekeeping or warfighting missions.

What specific skills will the Department of Defense need over the next few decades? We believe that there will be an increasing demand in the areas of electrical engineering and computer science. All key service platforms (planes, ships, tanks) are using more complex electrical and electronic systems. The area of macromolecular science, which is a merger of polymer science and molecular biology, is expanding rapidly. There will likely need to be some shifts in the way scientists and engineers are trained with more training in building support hardware and upkeep of more reliable, affordable, easily operable, and maintainable software. There could be reduced demands in some traditional areas, such aeronautical engineering as it is presently constituted. This will likely be partially offset by the need for engineers who have specialty training in various hypersonics-related areas. Systems engineering will be an increasingly important skill for both technical and non-technical endeavors. With respect to foreign language skills, translation and interpretation skills and knowledge are increasingly important combat force multipliers and mission enhancers in the context of force protection, counter-terrorism, and coalition operations as well as critical to information operations and foreign intelligence collection and production.

How can the student loan repayment provisions in S. 1800 be used by the Department of Defense to increase math, science and foreign language expertise? There are some questions as to whether financial incentives can fully ensure the quality of science and engineering that we seek. Often, the truly innovative scientists and engineers are driven by strong intellectual curiosity rather than economics. However, financial assistance is always helpful when competing for the best and brightest. In addition, we have found that flexibility to hire these scientists expeditiously is equally important. With respect to foreign language positions, we believe they can greatly assist the Department in attracting needed personnel with the language skills we require. One of the goals of the Department's foreign language strategic plan is to provide policy and program guidance leading to targeted and coordinated recruiting programs across Departmental Components.

How has the Department of Defense's need for math, science and foreign language skills changed over the last several years? With respect to math and science skills, some of the needs discussed in response to the second question have already manifested themselves over the last several years. With respect to foreign language skills, prior to 2000, the Military Departments generated their requirements for language and area skills based on the two Major Theater Wars and illustrative planning scenarios with little regard to language and area tasks outside the intelligence services. Requirements in Special Operations, Foreign Affairs, and field units will now be incorporated.

The Defense Foreign Language Program strategy 2000-2020 is transforming the way we recruit, the list of languages we train in, the language tasks to be performed, and our management of these valuable and costly assets. We are seeking to mitigate our language shortfalls with a strategy that provides for realistic requirements determination based on our projected international engagement at all levels, career management for active, reserve military and civilian language and area specialists, modernized language and foreign area education, and improved productivity in using emerging technologies.

As I mentioned earlier, the Department has a number of ongoing initiatives to improve the management of our human capital. We already have statutory authority to provide student loan repayment and to provide fellowships for undergraduate and graduate students. The Department has or participates in several established career development rotational assignment programs, including the Defense Leadership and Management Program, the Intelligence Community Assignment Program, and various Component-specific career development programs. In the Defense Civilian Intelligence Personnel System, the Department already has a flexible personnel system that couples the freedom to manage the Department's national security human resources assets that perform intelligence functions with the authorities already available in current law to provide scholarships and fellowships as well as targeted career development opportunities, such

as training and rotational assignments. In view of these efforts, we should do nothing to reduce or diminish the flexibilities we have today.

We appreciate the Chairman's and the subcommittee's interest in improving the management of our national security workforce and look forward to working with you on this legislation. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. This concludes my remarks. I will be happy to answer your questions.