

**Testimony**

**Testimony by Bob J. Nash before the United States Senate Governmental Affairs Committee on the State of the Presidential Appointment Process**

Dirksen Senate Office Building  
2:00 p.m.

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Lieberman and members of the Committee,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to provide brief comments and recommendations on the Presidential Appointment Process.

There is no doubt that future presidential nominees and appointees will some day gain an appreciation for the time and effort you are spending on this issue.

Given my roles as former Director of Presidential Personnel, and as undersecretary of Agriculture – a position for which I was confirmed by the U.S. Senate - I think I have a unique perspective on the presidential appointment process.

I first want to say it was an honor and a privilege to serve President Clinton, and my country. In spite of the selection process, the background check, the nomination and confirmation obstacles, I went through – I would go through the process again, if

the opportunity to make a difference, as I feel we did, was offered me.

I might add that a survey of appointees and nominees, conducted by the Brookings Institute and other non-partisan groups, indicate that a majority of those surveyed felt the same as I do. They would go through this process, again, as well.

Given the volumes of information published on this subject and the collaborative efforts of the individuals on your panels today, I will not make a lengthy presentation because it would largely duplicate some of your other presentations.

I do want to make the following comments and recommendations, however.

1. The process takes too long. In the last twenty to twenty-four years, the length of time for confirmations have averaged between six and eight months. This is too long for a potential appointee to put their lives on hold. It is also too long for an important position to be left vacant as we scrutinize the nominee's background.
2. The lengthy process also reduces the number of qualified applicants willing to go through the process. No matter how much they would like to serve their country, these people also have livelihoods to maintain, as well.
3. The new President assumes office on January 20<sup>th</sup>. The former President and hundreds of top-level senate-confirmed appointees leave on January 20<sup>th</sup>, as well.

There are hundreds of decisions affecting individuals, families and communities that need to be made after that important date, by appointees in those senate-confirmed positions.

While some short period without a decision-maker at the helm is understandable and workable, six to eight months is not.

My recommendations are as follows:

1. Shorten the average appointment process to no more than four months – and there has been a number of ideas batted around as to how to do this, I won't bore you with redundancy.
2. Eliminate the full field investigation for most senate-confirmed positions that do not deal with defense, national security or Justice issues.
3. Reduce the Financial Disclosure Form, by fifty percent. For most nominees, the truncated Form 278, could be used, rather than the much lengthier Form 450.
4. Reduce the number of senate-confirmed positions, on part-time boards and commissions. This will give the white house and the Senate more time to work on more important full-time nominees.
5. Limit the use of a senate "holds" on nominees, when the issue being debated between congress and the white house has little or nothing to do with the nominee.

Thank you very much for this opportunity, and, now, I would be happy to entertain any questions you might have.

[Committee Members](#) | [Subcommittees](#) | [Hearings](#) | [Key Legislation](#) | [Jurisdiction](#)  
[Press Statements](#) | [Current Issues](#) | [1997 Special Investigation](#) | [Video of Select Hearings](#) | [Sites of Interest](#)