

OPENING STATEMENT



**Prepared Statement by Chairman Fred Thompson (R-TN)
Committee on Governmental Affairs**

Hearing on the State of the Presidential Appointments Process

Thursday, April 5, 2001

Good morning. I welcome everyone to the Committee on Governmental Affairs' second day of hearings on the state of the Presidential Appointment process.

I can't imagine anything more important than getting the right people into public service. But unfortunately, the process of recruiting and confirming them has become even more difficult, more complicated, more intrusive, and more expensive than it even needs to be. And this is a system that no one thought up, and no one constructed, and that's what concerns us.

It's clear we're going to have to look at things differently. The White House can improve the way it addresses the issue. The Senate needs to take a different look, particularly at timing, the holds process, and the many different forms that seem to be duplicative. The Office of Government Ethics and the Transitions Act will provide us with a different look. I hope that these hearings, and the cumulative suggestions of previous years, will help us come up with ideas that will work.

Yesterday we heard from two panels. They described the problems associated with the nomination and confirmation process. The process has been characterized as "nasty, brutish, and not necessarily short;" as 'hanging people out to dry,' 'a hazing process,' and a 'national disgrace'." We have been told that delays in vetting the nominee, the numerous and burdensome forms asking often duplicative questions, the invasion of privacy and resulting confusion and embarrassment, and the financial divestiture required on the part of some nominees all add up to barriers to public service. The Council for Excellence in Government drew a link between the continuing lengthening of the appointment process and the continuing erosion in people's trust in government.

Results from two recent surveys of past and potential appointees offer mixed news about the likelihood that the nation's most talented citizens will be drawn to serve. The surveys, which were conducted in

1999-2000 on behalf of the Presidential Appointee Initiative, provide an extended look backward at the actual experiences of past appointees as they moved through the process and a unique look forward at whether some of the nation's most talented citizens would accept a president's invitation to serve.

On the one hand, the surveys suggest that both past and potential appointees see great honor in serving their country. The vast majority of past appointees would recommend a presidential post to their friends and family, and the vast majority of potential appointees believe that service would generate a host of long-term benefits. On the other hand, past and potential presidential appointees alike view the process of entering office with distaste, describing it as embarrassing, confusing and unfair. They see the process as far more cumbersome and lengthy than it needs to be, and place the blame at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

For the past year, this Committee has been involved in addressing the federal government's human capital crisis. As we can see from yesterday's hearing, the crisis starts at the top.

Unless we address these fundamental problems, the federal government will be unable to do the people's business. The Committee was told that of 485 top political appointments the President needs to fill, only 134 have been named so far with only 25 individuals actually confirmed.

As Paul Light wrote for the *Brookings Review*, "the most significant selling point for service is that it is a post of honor in which individual citizens can make a difference for their country." Today, we have several witnesses who can remind us of the nobility of public service and the difference one can make. They are Amy Comstock, Director of the Office of Government Ethics, former Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker and former Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Franklin Raines.

Ms. Comstock will present the report of the Office of Government Ethics in response to this Committee's request that OGE review the current financial disclosure requirements and make recommendations on streamlining the process. The Presidential Transition Act of 2000 included specific provisions designed to address the growing concerns regarding the barriers to service embedded in the current presidential appointment process. I appreciate the work that the OGE has put into this report, under a very tight time schedule.

I also commend Senator Kassebaum Baker and Mr. Raines, and the Presidential Appointee Initiative, for their dedicated efforts to improve

the public service. I look forward to receiving their recommendations,
which they are releasing today.

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