

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR AKAKA

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing.

I have made it a point over the past year to take a close look at government contracting for goods and services. At several hearings with both in this committee, and in the Armed Services Committee, a pattern of insufficient contract oversight and poor execution has emerged. In too many cases, contracts are awarded hastily with not enough federal employees overseeing them, putting the government at risk of waste, fraud, or abuse.

In particular, I have been concerned about hiring contract workers to fill gaps in the federal workforce. Agencies across the federal government rely on contractors to fulfill critical government functions. Alarming, many agencies don't even know how many contractors are working for them, side by side with federal employees, at any one time.

The federal government has all too often passed off the job of managing contractors to the contracting firms themselves. There are currently no consistent standards across agencies that say who can be a private security contractor or how they should be managed. Different contract security firms conduct different levels of background checks and have different hiring standards.

The legal status of many contractors operating outside of the United States needs to be clarified. The law is ambiguous at best as to how private security contractors are treated when they break the law in foreign countries.

For the foreseeable future, private security contractors will need to be used abroad. Our dependence on them can not be ended quickly, but we can do more to ensure better oversight and management. Reforms are needed to make sure that the federal government is using private security contractors appropriately and that they are well suited to work for the federal government.

I am a cosponsor of the Security Contractor Accountability Act which would clarify the legal status of security contractors overseas to ensure that they are accountable for their actions. However, the legal status of contractors is only part of the problem. Perhaps even more importantly we must institute standards for private security contractors to ensure that they behave appropriately in the field.

This committee has an important role in reforming contracting rules conducting oversight. Contractors should be held to the same high standards as our outstanding federal workforce. Even though contractors overseas are not government employees, it is essential that their actions reflect well on the United States.