

OPENING STATEMENT OF
SENATOR GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING THE FEDERAL ACQUISITION WORKFORCE
FEBRUARY 14, 2008

Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this oversight hearing.

Senator Akaka, you and I have focused the work of this Subcommittee on understanding the challenges our government faces in recruiting and retaining the highly skilled workforce necessary to meet the 21st Century challenges. Today we are focused on a critical segment of that workforce: the acquisition professionals.

The federal government spends a staggering \$400 billion annually to procure goods and services. That amount continues to rise annually, but the number of individuals responsible for spending and managing those contracts does not. According to the Federal Acquisition Institute's latest annual report, by 2016, half of the government's contracting specialist will be retirement eligible. That is only eight short years away, and the risk of such institutional knowledge and experience walking out of the door is of grave concern.

The federal acquisition workforce has a tremendous responsibility in being stewards of the taxpayer dollars. They are the individuals who determine whether the government needs the assistance of the private sector to help meet its mission. They determine who will provide the good or service. They oversee the work of the contract partner. We see challenges in every department and agency of the federal government in every stage of the acquisition process. This includes award protests, cost overruns, late delivery, and disputes over claims and payments. When their job is not done well, the acquisition workforce sees the impact through countless media reports and Congressional hearings. They end up on GAO's High-Risk list, such as DoD weapon systems acquisition, DoD contract management, DoE contract management, NASA contract management, and management of interagency contracting.

I would venture to say; however, the acquisition workforce is not at fault. After all, it was Congress that mandated the Department of Defense in 1996 cut 15,000 positions from its acquisition workforce and develop a plan to further reduce the workforce by 25 percent. For fiscal year 1997, Congress further mandated the Department cut another 15,000. Mr. Chairman, I think you would agree such arbitrary quotas do not equal strategic human capital management! All too often in Congress, we direct the executive branch to do something, but we do not appropriate the money to fund those activities. Then, the executive branch gets called before Congress to explain why they have not accomplished their mission!

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As another example, every day we hear the tragic stories of disabled Americans who are not able to have their disability claims approved in a reasonable timeframe. The average processing time easily can exceed a year. However, if we compare the budget request and the appropriated funds for the personnel to do this work, Congress continually has not given the Social Security Administration what they need.

Mr. Chairman, the acquisition workforce is overworked and does not have the appropriate training to do the job they have been asked to do. We in Congress must recognize the important work of these individuals and provide them with the resources they need to do their jobs. That is the right people with the right skills. It is significantly more costly for us not to act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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