

Statement of Senator Daniel K. Akaka

**Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia**

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

“Security Clearance Reform: The Way Forward”

May 22, 2008

Good afternoon. This hearing is called to order. That this is our fifth hearing on security clearance reform testifies to the difficulty of solving this important problem.

Three years ago, Senator Voinovich and I began this series of after the Department of Defense's personnel security clearance program was placed on the Government Accountability Office's High Risk List. Since that time, we have uncovered several systemic problems which demonstrate that the current security clearance process is outdated and needs fundamental reform.

After last year's hearing, the Administration took steps to begin that reform. All of the federal government's stakeholders in security clearances, from the military, intelligence, and civilian communities, came together forming what we now know as the Joint Security and Suitability Reform Team, which is represented here today by many members of our panel. The team crafted a plan to finally bring the security clearance process into the twenty-first century. I look forward to hearing more about this plan and how these reforms will move forward.

I want to applaud the hard work that has been put in over the past year to reduce the clearance backlogs and speed up processing. The Office of Personnel Management, which is in charge of most investigations, has made a huge investment in manpower to attack the backlog. The backlog finally seems to be under control and waiting times have come down. However, I still think that the processes and technology now in use do not allow for very much more improvement.

There is far too much manual activity going on in the clearance process today. Literally caves full of hundreds of thousands of file folders, along with a dozen computer programs bolted together make up the backbone of the investigation process at O-P-M. Though some may consider this system the Cadillac of I-T solutions, unfortunately it is a twenty five year old model, probably suited for a car museum.

More of the security clearance process should be automated and electronic. That data must then be portable so that it can efficiently be sent to agencies for adjudication. The current process of shipping or printing off investigation files to adjudicators, rather than sending data to agencies is very burdensome. The information must also be easily accessible for re-investigations and re-adjudications.

Reforming clearances is a national security issue and increasingly a fiscal issue. Delays in the

clearance process, especially for top secret clearances, cost taxpayers millions of dollars. Cleared individuals are in such high demand that they are paid inflated signing bonuses or given expensive cars just to work for a contracting firm hired to support federal agencies. Those costs are eventually borne by the federal government in the form of more expensive contracts.

More importantly, however, getting people cleared is essential for our national security. Rightly or not, it is a fact that the government relies on contractors to support critical national security functions, from the tanker drivers in Iraq to the intelligence analysts here at home. Whether an individual works for the federal government or works as a contractor, it is essential that we can fill positions that support our national security.

I have great hope that what has been outlined by the Joint Security and Suitability Reform Team are all steps in the right direction. Their recommendations go to what we have been pushing for over the course of these hearings. I will be interested in what G-A-O has to say about the report, as they are the ones that initially placed this issue on the High Risk List.

However, I note that the report is still short on much detail. I will be asking for some of those details today, and, as the recommendations are implemented over time, I will continue to ask those questions.

I am pleased that in looking at our panel, who will all play a role in implementing these reforms, that most are career civil servants who will still be here after January twentieth. I can assure you that this Subcommittee will still be here after January, and that we will make sure that the progress made does not get lost in the shuffle of transitioning to a new administration.