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Remarks of OPM Director John Berry
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We're here today to talk about change. We've seen the statistics. We know that Hispanics have long been underrepresented in the Federal workforce, and likewise, people with disabilities aren't hired as often. We know that we have proportionally more Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders working as frontline workers than in management roles.

To me these statistics indicate a missed opportunity. If we aren't hiring people with disabilities, if not everyone at our agencies gets the same chances to advance their career, we're missing out on some great talent. We're leaving smart minds out of our discussions.

But the question is how to make change.

Getting to the point where we are today - where African Americans lead teams, and women write policy, and gay and lesbian soldiers and civil servants can serve their country openly â€" all that has taken years of effort. Because change is hard.

But change is possible. If we engage the energy of our agencies, our industries, and our universities.

For example, back in 2009, President Obama's Executive Order directed OPM to take the lead in increasing Veterans employment in the Federal government. Many Veterans were coming home from overseas to find an unemployment rate over 12% among Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans even just a year ago.

Working across Federal government, we made the case that we should not only hire Veterans because they've earned it, we should hire them because it makes smart business sense. Hiring Veterans keeps their training and their skills working for our country.

We've seen the impact from our efforts in government. In 2009, 24% of Federal new hires were Veterans. In 2011, 28.3% were Veterans. Combine that with efforts in the private sector, and the unemployment rate for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, 12.1% in 2011, shows signs of coming down - down to 7.6% in February. We still have work to do, but that trajectory shows the impact we can have, when we focus our efforts, and work together.

In August, President Obama charged my agency, OPM, with the responsibility of overseeing and coordinating government-wide efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in our Federal workforce.

Let me pause for a moment because I want to make sure we all mean the same thing by Diversity, and by Inclusion.

I do not mean, by Diversity, an office where everyone who works on the policy looks one way, and everyone who looks different works for the EEO. I do not mean an office where everyone who has responsibility is male, and all the secretaries are female, or vice-versa. Though offices that resemble these are often well-meaning and may seem more diverse on paper, they fail to reap the benefits of that diversity, because participation is skewed in one direction.

I also do not mean diversity centered only on racial categories. I mean people from different religions, and with different sexual orientations, and who went to different schools. I mean people from different parts of the country and the world - from Texas and from Michigan. From Crown Heights and from Corona. As one of my colleagues says, "This is not your grandmomma's diversity."

A diverse office recruits from every segment of society, for all roles, and all levels of responsibility. And an inclusive workplace provides opportunity for all to achieve their maximum potential. It sets aside preconceived notions about what people can and can't do.

People with disabilities too often are labeled by what they can't do. Yet they're the only group that we could all potentially join. And they're a huge group - over 54 million Americans. Among those 54 million, how many amazing managers, how many brilliant engineers, how many incredible analysts are we missing because we won't accommodate them?

I say won't accommodate, not can't, because in the Federal government we have excellent programs that provide technical assistance to disabled employees. We have disability hiring authorities that mean you can hire a qualified person on the spot. We even have a database filled with resumes of qualified applicants ready to hire today.

Yet people with disabilities are the only group where we see the statistics headed in the wrong direction - we're seeing smaller percentages in our workforce. At OPM we've made some progress. 11% of our new hires are people with disabilities. And we've increased hiring of targeted disabilities - severe disabilities - to 2%, with a goal of reaching 3%. One of the steps we've taken to nudge managers in the right direction is to establish a central pool of funding for things like sign language interpreters - eliminating the budgetary excuses I'm sure you've all heard.

What we seek is a workplace that works for everyone, whether you're from any kind of minority or every kind of majority. We all know what it can feel like to be an outsider. Maybe you've shown up for a first day of work in an office or a town where you knew no one. Maybe you remember feeling like the shortest or fattest or pimpest kid on the playground. Maybe you just find yourself eating lunch with nothing but your smartphone to keep you company. You know how it can feel to be isolated, and unsure, and alone.

We can't afford to have employees feel that way.

One, because they'll leave. They'll walk out the door and take their talents with them, and we'll start over hiring someone new.

Two, because they won't speak up. They won't put forward their good ideas on how we can save money, reach new people, or improve our programs. We may never even know the opportunities we've missed, because we can't see the ruts we're stuck in. Because the only people speaking all think alike already.

That's why we need to cultivate and foster and develop a workplace that is both diverse and inclusive - a workplace that sustains that diverse and inclusive culture over time.

That's the challenge we're looking at, in every agency.

The agency-specific plans collected by OPM vary somewhat in their details, but almost all are based on four main pillars.

First pillar: An active and robust diversity and inclusion council. For any plan to work, it will require the attention and focus of an active group. Human resources officers and Equal Employment Opportunity specialists and Diversity and Inclusion officers will need to communicate with one another, collaborate, and integrate their work. They'll look at the needs and the situations that are particular to their agencies. And they'll need to keep at it.

Second pillar: Mentorship. I've learned a lot from mentors over the years. Mentors are key supports to any career. They help answer questions that are daunting to even ask. How do I earn a promotion? How do I give helpful feedback to colleagues? Where can I find job opportunities that match my skill level and my ambition? These are questions that can make and break careers, no matter who you are.

Third pillar: Diversified leadership. Diverse leadership not only serves as an example to ambitious employees that they too can rise, it also is essential to the goals we want to achieve - doing the work of the American people to the best of anyone's abilities.

Let me give a concrete example. Back in October, we overhauled the Federal government's main job posting website, USAJOBS. Our relaunch was somewhat rocky, and many users started posting complaints on this place called "Facebook."

Fortunately, our leadership team at OPM spans more than just my generation. Several bright young people had heard of Facebook before and several of our experienced hands knew how to sort through our technical problems rapidly. It took both sets of talents to respond appropriately to the questions we were getting. While we reached into the older end of the career continuum and brought in one of our excellent retired managers to help fix the root causes of the problems, our younger team manned the front lines on social media to make sure every single Facebook comment got a personal response from OPM.

With the talents of the whole team, we helped our users address their issues and use USAJOBS successfully. Since October 2.8 million users have posted 3.3 million resumes and filed 7.4 million job applications.

Fourth pillar: Metrics and accountability, so that we can measure the impact of our plans, across agencies. This builds transparency and accountability into each Diversity and Inclusion plan, since we'll know and you'll know if it's working. And it helps us look at agencies where we see success, where we are building strong teams and getting the innovations we need to meet the challenges America faces.

We often think of diversity as a concept born in the 1960s. But spin the clocks back to the **1860's**, and examples of the profound power of diversity abound.

In 1862, Walt Whitman, a gay New Yorker and published poet, walked south toward the battle fronts searching for his wounded brother in hospitals. There he volunteered as a nurse, and wrote heart-wrenchingly about "The Great Army of the Sick."

In 1863, the first Federal celebrations of Thanksgiving took place - marking an American festival that finds roots in both European and Native American traditions, and is steeped in the story of how cultures learn from each other.

That same year, Corporal Joseph H. De Castro carried the Massachusetts flag into battle at Gettysburg. With only the flagpole as his weapon, he struck down the opposing standard-bearer amidst the onslaught of Pickett's charge, and became the first Hispanic-American awarded the Medal of Honor.

Throughout the war, Elizabeth Van Lew - a woman who mumbled and stuttered - ran a network of Union spies in the Confederate capital. Among these was Mary Elizabeth Bowser, a former slave who fed information to the Union from inside Jefferson Davis's own house.

In 1865, Ulysses S. Grant's aides-de-camp wrote the surrender papers that Robert E. Lee would sign at Appomatox. One of the drafters was Ely Samuel Parker, an engineer, and a man who had served as one of the negotiators between the Federal government and his Iroquois tribe since age 18.

And in 1869, a young man named Thomas Edison gained the first of many patents. Edison went on to build America's first true research lab - the place where the electric light was born - a place meant to systematically foster innovation through collaborative teams. And there, Edison - inventor of recorded sound - also went slowly deaf.

So make no mistake. Every kind of diversity touches our nation's great moments - not only the Civil War, but back to front through American History, from the Revolution to the modern era.

The Revolution: Paul Revere's engravings depict the death of Crispus Attucks, a black man with Wampanoag ancestry, as the first American killed at the Boston Massacre in 1770.

The Brooklyn Bridge: Debilitating injuries prevented first the designer - a German immigrant - and then his son from completing construction, so for the final 11 years of construction, Emily Roebling handled day-to-day supervision with the help of her housebound husband.

The Manhattan Project: It began when a President in a wheelchair took the advice of two Hungarians and a German Jew about research done by an Italian-American.

The Moon Shot: The average age in Neil Armstrong's control room was 26.

And all this - all these innovations and these triumphs - happened because of the deep and diverse talents of our nation. They happened even in times that actively suppressed those who were different.

Imagine what will happen when we embrace our differences. When we expand the examples of Edison and the Manhattan project and we bring together great minds from diverse backgrounds to tackle challenges no one has faced before.

Imagine what will happen when any American, of any background, can pursue their dreams to the limits of their creativity and their ideas and their ambition. When Americans work together as colleagues and collaborators.

In that future, I see no limits. I see a new American century, marked by innovation and resulting in prosperity.

That future begins now. It begins here. It begins with us.

Thank you, God Bless you, and God Bless America.

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