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Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce

Hearing on “Oversight of Federal Agencies’ Post-Pandemic Telework Policies: Part II”

November 29, 2023

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to set the tone for this hearing by focusing on two words: “efficiency and effectiveness.”

I believe that Members of this Subcommittee work together to execute that mission to the best of our abilities on behalf of the people we serve, and you will hear me reiterate the words “efficient and effective” throughout this hearing. To that extent, I expect each agency to execute their unique mission efficiently and effectively—whether their employees are working entirely remotely, working a hybrid telework schedule, or working in-person.

During the coronavirus pandemic, government agencies increased their dependence on telework and remote work agreements, finding ways to serve the nation in the midst of a deadly public health crisis. Earlier this year, we hosted part one of this hearing series, and our agency witnesses made it clear to me that prioritizing data collection to gauge and improve their performance is absolutely critical to ensure that agency workforce policies drive exceptional service.

The American people deserve the best performance agencies can provide, and this Subcommittee will not tolerate inexcusable absenteeism and poor productivity. I was pleased to learn that those agencies possess tracking systems and employ metrics to gauge employee performance. The last thing I want to do is force agencies to adopt policies that are not conducive to their mission or that fail to attract and retain top talent. As I’ve said before, I encourage agencies that can increase in-person work as necessary for the successful delivery of their agency’s mission to do so.

Finally getting the House floor moving again and passing a continuing resolution was only half the battle. We have roughly 8 weeks before we face yet another possible government shutdown. We are now in a permanent state of lurching from one near government shutdown to another looming shutdown on the horizon. And we know that short-term temporary spending bills create unnecessary work and uncertainty for federal agencies and for our constituents who rely on those agencies for lifesaving programs.

I would like to insert into the record a recent Washington Post article about the massive headaches that successive shutdown threats cause to federal agencies, workers, and contractors. If Congress cannot pass an appropriations package, agency employees will be rendered hopelessly unproductive because you can’t work when the government is shutdown and you’re furloughed. I truly hope, for the sake of our military and civilian workforce and our nation, that we don’t get to that point.

Today we examine whether four federal agencies, including the Social Security Administration (SSA), have the right workforce policies in place to serve our communities. SSA has long suffered from underinvestment. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities reports that despite a 21% increase in SSA beneficiaries, the SSA's operating budget fell 13% in inflation-adjusted terms from 2010 to 2021. That's an increased workload with fewer resources. I encourage my colleagues to keep in mind as we hopefully move forward with a funding agreement, that cuts hamper agencies like the SSA and prevent agencies from performing essential services in an efficient and effective manner.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, the Members here today have an essential mission to carry out during this hearing to ensure that we continue operating as a voice for the people who rely on us—particularly during times of strife at home or abroad.

Thank you to our witnesses for providing this Subcommittee with further information on their workforce postures and for testifying today. I believe the work you do on behalf of the public is admirable, and I'm looking forward to speaking with you all today.

The federal workforce keeps our government alive, and I'd like to continue this conversation on how we move forward in this unique, post-pandemic work environment to secure efficient and effective service delivery to all.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

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