

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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Opening Statement

Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

Subcommittee on Government Operations

Hearing on the Best and Worst Places to Work in the Federal Government

April 27, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, employee engagement plays an important role in an agency's mission success. The more employees are engaged, the more invested in the operation and productive they become. As the Subcommittee charged with oversight of government operations, we should be encouraging such engagement to ensure the federal workforce is motivated to deliver quality services for our constituents.

Today's hearing brings together a range of agencies, those with the highest and lowest scores as well as the most improved. The 2015 rankings show signs of improvement with 70% of agencies improving their satisfaction and commitment scores. This is a welcome turnaround from 43% in 2014 and a mere 24% in 2013. However, there will always be room for improvement, and this hearing will look at best practices agencies should consider adopting for their own workforce.

I am encouraged by the 2015 government-wide results showing a 1.2 point increase from 2014. This is the first increase following four straight years of decline since 2010. It's about time that we see some positive signs, and I am hopeful that the tide is turning. Not only did employee satisfaction improve, but so did scores in all ten workplace categories, such as effective leadership, the match between employee skills and agency mission, pay, teamwork, training and development, and work-life balance.

I congratulate NASA, which again ranks number one among large agencies for the fourth year in a row. Its successful record of fostering employee engagement is credited to matching employee skills with agency mission, fostering teamwork and innovation, and satisfaction with pay.

The Department of Labor is once again the most improved large agency. This can be attributed in part to new workplace flexibility and telework initiatives implemented last year. Expanding use of telework has long been a priority for me, going back to my days in local government, and I was pleased to collaborate on the Telework Enhancement Act, which requires all agencies to incorporate telework into their Continuity of Operations Plans. For example, when Metro shut down for 24-hours beginning on March 16 for emergency inspections and repairs, thousands of federal workers utilized their telework capabilities.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development is the most improved mid-size agency, and I am pleased to see Secretary Castro utilizing innovative online communication tools and town hall meetings to solicit employee feedback.

Unfortunately, the Department of Homeland Security continues to struggle with employee morale and satisfaction, but I want to make clear that the purpose of this hearing (and I hope that the Chairman and my colleagues agree) is not to chastise DHS.

We must remember that DHS was created under the most intense pressures following 9/11. It combined all or part of 22 federal agencies under one roof with the incredibly difficult mission of protecting the American people from the variety of threats we face. As the newest cabinet level agency, DHS continues to experience growing pains. I want to learn more today about its recently created Employee Engagement Steering Committee and how it will help improve guidance and leadership.

It is my hope that we use today's hearing to better understand the challenges agencies face and to identify best practices that could be helpful to improve employee engagement.

I thank the Partnership for its work. These rankings and the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, upon which they are based, are powerful tools.

Mr. Chairman, employee engagement is not an issue about which only agencies need to be concerned. Congress also has a vested interest in the satisfaction of federal employees as we are their employer – and I want to commend the Chairman for his efforts to visit federal agencies to hear employee concerns firsthand. We need an engaged and motivated workforce because as Mr. Stier states, "Our government is only as good as its people."

Although I am heartened by the progress made, we must not forget the tremendous difficulties that federal employees have faced over the last few years. The sequestration cuts imposed by Congress caused nearly a million federal employees to be furloughed for some time. A budget standoff led by Congressional Republicans forced a 16-day government shutdown in 2013, the first in 17 years.

Federal employee pay was frozen for three years, retirement benefits were reduced for new employees, and training budgets were slashed. In all, federal employees were hit with more than \$180 billion in pay and benefit cuts, the only group of Americans, targeted by Congress to contribute to deficit reduction. So it should come as little surprise that federal employees were feeling unappreciated and demoralized.

As Congress prepares for the annual appropriations process to fund the government, let's learn from the painful experience of recent history. I would like to remind our colleagues that next week is Public Service Recognition Week. I feel that Congress does not give federal employees enough credit or recognition for the incredible work that they do day in and day out in serving the American people. Therefore, as we approach Public Service Recognition week, let's commit to engaging and fairly compensating our dedicated public servants to ensure that the

federal government continues to provide the critical programs and services upon which the American people depend and deserve on a daily basis in every community.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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