

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Robin Kelly
Hearing on “Reviewing Federal IT Workforce Challenges and Possible Solutions”
April 4, 2017

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling today’s hearing concerning the challenges to hiring IT professionals in the federal government.

In 2016, GAO said that the persistent cyber threat presented a risk to our national security. We should understand that the inability to attract and retain qualified cyber professionals throughout the government threatens our ability to address cyber threats. So the workforce issue this hearing is concerned with has the potential to impact the safety of each and every American and the stability of our country.

America’s leading companies are facing a similar situation. (ISC)² projects a shortage of 1.8 million cyber professionals across both the public and private sector by 2022. We obviously face similar challenges in hiring.

Both the public and private sectors face sophisticated cyber threats. Last month, the Justice Department charged two Russian intelligence officers with orchestrating a hack that stole data from 500 million Yahoo users.

I shouldn’t have to remind anyone that in January of this year our intelligence agencies also found that the Russian government orchestrated a sustained campaign against our elections – using various weapons including cyberattacks on political parties.

While we view the public and private sector as separate, cyber criminals and nefarious state actors do not care about those distinctions. For instance, the data stolen from the Yahoo attack was used to spy on both bank executives and White House employees.

Addressing the threat requires that government and the private sector both succeed in finding qualified individuals.

For one thing, we desperately need to expand the pool of talent that we are both drawing from and keep the professionals that are so critical to protecting the security of our nation.

Talented women and minorities that are just not being hired. Currently, women hold 28% of science and engineering jobs. Hispanics and African Americans hold 6% and 5% of

those jobs respectively. We need to improve these numbers as we grow the number of available IT professionals.

Another problem was created by President Trump himself. The President's hiring freeze is obviously a barrier to recruiting and hiring the IT professionals the government needs. Nextgov points out that the hiring freeze sends a message that IT professionals are not valued in the federal government. These highly desired candidates could instead choose to go to the private sector where they are heavily recruited.

Also, constant calls to cut the federal workforce and strip them of protections will not help attract needed talent. Who would want to work for an employer that publicly criticizes them and constantly questions the need for them? Candidates with numerous options certainly would not.

I look forward to hearing the witnesses' ideas to address these issues and expand the pipeline of diverse, qualified and valued candidates. It is important that the candidates we recruit to address the next generation of challenges are representative of our population at large.

Thank you.

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