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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement of Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)
Subcommittee on Government Operations
"The Worst Places to Work in the Federal Government"
April 16, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing to examine how well federal agencies have been doing in keeping employees engaged and satisfied with their work.

According to the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey administered by the Office of Personnel Management and the Partnership for Public Service, employee morale and job satisfaction in the Federal Government have dramatically declined over the years.

The Partnership's 2014 'Best Places to Work' analysis concluded that Federal employee morale fell to its lowest point ever since the organization first started its analysis in 2003.

The dismal results of 2014 continued a troubling pattern of decreasing employee satisfaction scores for the fourth year in a row, dropping from a high of 65 out of 100 in 2010 to 57.

The Federal Government is clearly going in the wrong direction with respect to supporting its people, particularly when contrasted with private sector worker satisfaction.

Private sector workers increased their job satisfaction from 70.6 in 2010 to 72 in 2014. In fact, the gap between federal and private sector job satisfaction has nearly tripled since 2010. This is cause for concern.

Looking at the data and the dates, certain events have likely contributed to the decline. After the Great Recession from 2007-2009, private sector job satisfaction started to bounce back in 2010.

Conversely, since 2010, Federal employees have endured a 3-year pay freeze, \$140 billion in pay and benefit cuts, sequestration, budget cuts, hiring freezes, reductions in performance awards and training budgets, and a 16-day government shutdown.

It is not surprising that these events along with political attacks by some Members of Congress have taken a heavy toll on Federal employees, and led to a sharp decline in morale and job satisfaction.

What is even more worrisome is that the Republican majorities in both the House and Senate recently passed budget resolutions for fiscal year 2016 that would **further slash agency spending below sequestration levels by \$760 billion and \$236 billion over 10 years, respectively.**

These measures call for **additional Federal workforce-related cuts – more than \$280 billion over 10 years in the House proposal and \$170 billion in the Senate proposal.**

I am worried about the negative impact of low employee engagement and satisfaction on employee productivity, agency mission, retention of valuable employees, and recruitment of our next generation of public servants and leaders.

We especially need to be mindful of the long-term negative effects on the service the Federal Government provides to the American people.

Last March, I joined Ranking Members Cummings and Lynch in requesting that the Government Accountability Office conduct a study of federal engagement trends, as well as potential root causes.

We also asked GAO to provide recommendations for improving workforce morale. GAO is nearing completion of its study and is here to testify about its preliminary findings. I welcome Mr. Goldenkoff's testimony on behalf of GAO.

I understand that the National Archives and Records Administration, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board have ranked poorly in the FEVS and PPS rankings.

This hearing offers these agencies the opportunity to discuss their particular challenges and the steps that they are taking to address these challenges.

It is also important to note that there are many Federal agencies that are performing better than the ones before us today, including entities that boast higher satisfaction and commitment scores than the average private sector score of 72.

For example, NASA, ranked number 1 of the large agencies scored at 74.6.

The top 6 midsize agencies – FDIC, GAO, Smithsonian Institution, Federal Trade Commission, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and Nuclear Regulatory Commission – all scored higher than the private sector.

I am encouraged that despite the decline in the indices of employee engagement and work satisfaction, 2014 Federal Employment Viewpoint Survey data demonstrate that Federal employees have persevered through much adversity and remain dedicated and overwhelmingly positive about their service to our country:

90% believe that the work they do is important;
96% are willing to put in the extra effort at work to get the job done; and
90% are constantly looking for ways to do their jobs better.

This gives me great hope in the resilience and strength of our public servants, and should inspire all of us to do everything in our power to effectively support the dedicated men and women of our Federal workforce.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses.

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