

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Government Operations**

The Best and Worst Places to Work in the Federal Government

April 6, 2017, 10:00 A.M.—2154 Rayburn

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this Subcommittee's third annual hearing to examine the Partnership for Public Service's *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* 2016 rankings and the results of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey upon which the rankings are based.

These hearings demonstrate our commitment to monitoring the pulse of the federal workforce and ensuring that agencies do all they can to keep employees engaged, because an engaged workforce performs with excellence and accomplishes the mission of the enterprise.

I am encouraged to see that the 2016 rankings show that government-wide employee satisfaction increased for a second consecutive year. More than 72% of agencies improved their satisfaction and commitment scores, compared to 43% in 2014.

I am also pleased to see that employee satisfaction increased in all ten workplace categories for the second straight year, with the biggest increases in effective leadership, pay, and support for diversity.

Despite the increase in effective leadership, the data shows that federal government agencies still perform poorly in this area. I hope to learn from our witnesses today the efforts they have undertaken to improve their leadership scores.

The data also confirms that federal employees are highly committed to their work and agency mission. Nearly 90% of federal employees believe that the work they do is important and nearly all are willing to put in extra effort to get the job done for the American people. A passion for mission is an essential component of any effective organization.

The Federal Employee Survey results showed a continuing trend of increases, from 2012 through 2016, in the number of respondents who telework at least one or more days per week and who are satisfied or very satisfied with their agency's telework program. As a cosponsor of the Telework Enhancement Act of

2010, expanding the use of telework in the federal government has been a priority for me and will continue to be in the future.

I congratulate the Department of Agriculture for being the most improved large agency, moving from 16th in the rankings in 2013 to 9th in 2016.

I would like to point out two strategies that USDA focused on for improving employee engagement. First, the Department established Employee Advisory Councils, which enabled greater management and employee collaboration on workplace improvements. Second, USDA emphasized telework and other work-life flexibilities.

The Department of Homeland Security is the second most improved large agency. Although DHS remains last in the rankings, this is the first time the agency has improved its Best Places score since 2010, with increases in all workplace categories. DHS has established an Employee Engagement Steering Committee focused on addressing engagement issues. The Secretary of DHS John F. Kelly and Chief Human Capital Officer Angela Bailey, who is testifying today, have visited DHS offices in an effort to establish greater communication with agency employees.

The Securities and Exchange Commission is the most improved midsize agency with a 7.5 point increase and a score of 76.1, the highest since 2005. The SEC also raised its scores for all ten workplace categories. The agency's scores can be attributed to work begun in 2012 when the agency's score fell to 56. One of the strategies the SEC used to improve employee engagement was partnering with the National Treasury Employees Union to form local labor-management committees to target areas for improvement.

Unlike the three aforementioned agencies, the Surface Transportation Board experienced the largest decline of any federal agency, dropping 14.9 points to 64.9. Except for pay, nine out of ten of its workplace scores also decreased. The Board experienced steep declines in the categories of effective leadership, strategic management, training, and diversity.

The Board attributes its decline to uncertainties created by the office's pending relocation, changes in leadership, budget resources, and staff reductions. I look forward to discussing these challenges experienced by the Board.

Despite the continued improvements government-wide, the Administration's plans for the civil service constitute a significant threat. Less than half of federal employees feel they have sufficient resources to do their jobs, and to the President's FY2018 Budget Request would cut those resources significantly. The President's budget proposes a 20.7% cut to USDA and will reduce DHS programs for state and local grant funding, such as the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program, by \$667 million. Budget experts have cautioned that an \$18 billion budget cut for fiscal year 2017 and a \$54 billion budget cut for fiscal year 2018 for non-defense agencies as proposed by President Trump would trigger agency furloughs and reductions in force.

Just two months in, the Administration and the Majority in the 115th Congress already have a shameful record of attacking our federal workforce. The President's hiring freeze, the latest in a series of assaults on federal employees, poses a serious threat to the criticality of the federal mission. An across-the-board federal hiring freeze is a mindless way to manage. It lacks any flexibility to quickly react and adapt to future challenges we may not be able to anticipate today, something I thought was critical to running a large enterprise. A hiring freeze will place further strain on the employees at the agencies represented here today and be

detrimental to the improvements in employee satisfaction made by USDA, DHS and the SEC.

President Trump has appointed a “Cabinet of Horrors” made up of the very people who wish to dismantle the agencies they are now tasked to lead. In January, the Republican majority reinstated the Holman Rule to reduce any federal employee’s salary down to \$1 at will, which only escalates the all-out attack on the federal employee. And, recent gag orders issued by the Trump Administration threaten the ability of federal employees to communicate with Members of Congress and act as effective whistleblowers against waste, fraud, and abuse.

Rather than denigrating public service and our federal workforce, let’s commit to engaging and rewarding our dedicated public servants so that the federal government can continue to provide vital programs and services to the American people.

I thank the Partnership and the Office of Personnel Management for their work to provide powerful tools for measuring and improving employee engagement. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.