

**Statement for the Record
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
before the
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,
Subcommittee on Government Operations
2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and Related Activities**

April 16, 2015

Good morning, Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Connolly, and members of the subcommittee. I am Karl Brooks, Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Administration and Resources Management at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Thank you for inviting me to submit a statement for the record that discusses how the United States Environmental Protection Agency is using its 2014 Employee Viewpoint Survey (EVS) results to enrich employee engagement, a key element of Administrator McCarthy's strategic commitment to strengthening our high-performing organization. We look forward to working with this Committee, the Executive Office of the President, and our Executive Branch partners as we move forward.

The EVS results help the legislative and executive branches work in a dynamic partnership to develop and sustain the world's finest national workforce. The EPA is using the results of the survey to identify management priorities and focus on rewarding excellence, promoting problem-solving, fostering continuous innovation, securing public transparency, and sustaining this agency's tradition of highly motivated public service.

A Nationally Complex and Locally Vibrant Agency

At the EPA, we have learned that best practices can emerge from diverse organizations across our vibrant agency. Over two-thirds of the EPA's permanent employees work outside of headquarters. As a result, opportunities and the responsibility to improve the EPA's workplace and employee engagement are shared among the program and regional offices, multiple laboratories and in other EPA offices throughout the country.

The 2014 EVS results confirmed that the EPA's managers and staff retain the tradition of high expectations for work products and work performance and remain dedicated to offering their best efforts to protect public health and the environment. However, after a careful and thoughtful analysis of the results of the survey, the Agency, program and regional offices have developed individually tailored action plans to better equip first-line supervisors to reward excellent work, strengthen our union partnerships, recognize creativity, and maintain the agency's high standards for scientific excellence, public transparency and employee-driven innovation. Because approximately three-quarters of the EPA's employees are represented by bargaining units, often with nationally negotiated Collective Bargaining Agreements, the agency ensures that its labor partners are kept informed and engaged in action planning deliberations.

Administrator and Acting Deputy Administrator Are Leading the Way

In an effort to further bolster employee engagement, EPA is putting into practice several initiatives on complementary fronts. Both Administrator Gina McCarthy and acting Deputy Administrator Stan Meiburg have made it clear – to senior managers and all agency staff – that employee engagement should be a top priority because our workforce is our greatest strength.. Led by the Administrator and Acting Deputy, the EPA's leadership is improving its communication channels throughout the agency. For example, the Administrator sends out key messages to employees via video clips readily accessible through EPA's intranet homepage and YouTube. On March 23, 2015 Administrator McCarthy launched the fourth in her series of *Aim High* campaigns to promote employees' sharing of innovative successes in advancing the EPA's mission. The Acting Deputy held all-hands meetings in every national program office and will visit regional offices to communicate with employees, hear feedback and to share important news with staff. Both the Administrator and the Acting Deputy have also challenged the EPA's leadership team to facilitate directed problem-solving conversations with staff.

EPA Strength: First Line Supervisors

Data from the survey demonstrated quite clearly that first line supervisors are a strength and that employees have good working relationships with their immediate supervisors. To sustain and increase this strength, the EPA launched several critical initiatives to support first line supervisors. The Agency has since directed its senior management team in the Office of Administration and Resources Management, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, and the Office of Environmental Information to revamp its online Supervisor's Toolkit which now provides timely information on management issues. First line supervisors are also now receiving additional information that they can use to talk to staff on timely issues to improve and further facilitate employee engagement. Topics have included policies on guidance on how to effectively conduct a performance evaluation and the types of flexible work schedules offered by the EPA. In addition, senior managers will soon conduct focus groups with first line supervisors to get feedback about these new tools and learn more about other training and resources that would be helpful to them. EPA will use the focus group results to further refine how we support these critical leaders.

EPA Strength: Work-Life Programs

Work-life programs, such as the availability of telework and flexible schedules, is another EVS- indicated strength for the EPA. According to the latest numbers, 70% of the EPA's employees teleworked within the last year, and 81.5% of the EPA's employees are satisfied with our telework program. In order to maintain this strength, the EPA continues to educate employees and management about the right to request work schedule flexibilities and the availability of other work-life programs such as child care, elder care, and health programs. Agency managers are working with their union partners to potentially improve and expand the work-life programs at every EPA office across the country.

Rewarding Excellence

Rewarding good work is an area which needs improvement based on the EPA's 2013 EVS results. In response, the EPA launched a GreenSpark Challenge last fall to gather ideas from employees about how to best improve the EPA's awards and recognition program. GreenSpark is an online platform that solicits ideas and input from employees by encouraging interactive collaboration; through GreenSpark employees can submit ideas on a given topic and "like" or comment on other submissions. For instance, through the Greenspark Recognition Challenge, we gathered over 100 thoughtful and creative ways to improve employee recognition. For example, the EPA's Human Resources Council is using a number of these ideas to improve the EPA's recognition system, such as implementing an agency-level peer recognition program that allows non-supervisors to recognize fellow their peers. We are also looking at ways to simplify and streamline our awards processes so that recognition can be provided in a timely manner.

Rebalancing and Rebooting Skills throughout the Workforce

Last year, the EPA used Voluntary Early Retirement Authority/Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment opportunities, otherwise known as early out/buy outs, to restructure its workforce. As talented, experienced people left the agency, the EPA has been able to hire employees with needed new skills at lower grade levels. The addition of new staff reshapes our workforce while opening up developmental opportunities for more staff.

Our Skills Marketplace program provides another option for strengthening the skills of our workforce. Skills Marketplace is an internal work sharing program where employees can spend up to 20% of their time lending their skills and talents to projects in other parts of the agency. This is a great cross training and retention tool since it allows employees and project managers the flexibility to seek opportunities outside of their home offices on a part-time basis while still working in their home offices. Currently there are approximately 237 active projects in Skills Marketplace program.

Process Excellence That Taps Employee Experience

One of the focal priorities for the Agency is to work smarter by focusing on opportunities that coordinate efforts among offices and streamline business processes. For example, LEAN, a collection of principles and methods that focus on the systematic identification and elimination of non-value added activity involved in producing a product or delivering a service to customers, has been enthusiastically embraced by the Administrator. Its use, as well as other process excellence initiatives, are currently being applied to programs such as employee onboarding, training/development, and grants management. LEAN is a powerful tool to help us both engage our talented staff and streamline our processes. On average, the EPA's LEAN project teams were able to reduce process steps by 39% and redesign processes to become 53% faster, benefitting both EPA employees and their customers. Additionally, the Agency is striving to update and improve technology that will give employees the tools needed to improve efficiencies to meet mission demands.

In Closing

In spite of many challenges faced during the past several years, the Agency remains committed to fostering employee engagement and retaining a committed workforce. The data from the 2014 EVS show that the EPA's employees remain dedicated to our mission of protecting human health and the environment. Our retention rates remain high. EPA employees know that they work for an invaluable agency performing the critical work that enriches the lives and communities of Americans across the nation. It is this conviction that drives EPA employees to do their best every day.

KARL BROOKS
DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATION AND RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT

Appointed Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Administration and Resources Management in February 2015, Brooks directs provision of core support services to all EPA operations throughout the United States. OARM hires, protects, trains, offices, secures, and equips 15,000 career staff. OARM distributes federal grants that enable states and tribes to carry out their environmental protection duties. And OARM safeguards such fundamental principles governing the federal workplace as the civil service merit system, collective bargaining with union partners, and diversity and inclusion.

Before joining EPA's senior staff in Agency Headquarters, Brooks was EPA Region 7 Administrator, where he had supervised Agency operations in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and nine Tribal Nations since 2010. As in Region 7, he reports directly to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy.

Karl and his wife Mary are parents of three adult children: a lawyer in St. Louis, a standup comic in Los Angeles, and a wildland firefighter in Alaska. Mary Brooks, a graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism, is a professional indexer and editor of scholarly books for American publishers.

Brooks was educated at Yale College, London School of Economics, and Harvard Law School, before earning his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas and joining its faculty in 2000. He has taught American environmental, political, and legal history, as well as environmental law and policy, to thousands of KU undergraduate, graduate, and law students. Author of *Before Earth Day: The Origins of American Environmental Law, 1945-1970* (2009) and *Public Power, Private Dams: The Hells Canyon High Dam Controversy* (2006), and editor of *The Environmental Legacy of Harry S. Truman* (2009), Brooks has written many articles for newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals.

Brooks practiced trial and appellate law in his hometown of Boise, Idaho, for a decade, representing individual, small-business, and corporate clients in various American courts and agencies. A member of the Idaho State Bar since 1983, he is admitted to practice before the Supreme Court and several federal appellate courts. During 2001-2002, as a Supreme Court Fellow in Washington, D.C., he drafted a history of the U.S. Sentencing Commission.

Brooks was elected in 1986 to the first of three terms in the Idaho Senate, becoming co-chair of the Judiciary and Rules Committee and ranking Democrat on the Local Government and Taxation Committee. Retiring from elective politics after the birth of his second child, from 1993 to 1996 he served as executive director and legislative liaison for the Idaho Conservation League, his home state's largest citizens' environmental organization.