



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

**STATEMENT OF
HON. JOHN BERRY
DIRECTOR**

U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

before the

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE,
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

on

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS: TRANSFORMING FEDERAL HIRING

MAY 19, 2010

Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Chaffetz, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) efforts to transform Federal hiring. OPM has been working with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Federal agencies for almost two years to reform the Government's recruitment and hiring systems. We are excited about what we have already accomplished and our plans for the future.

I. Veterans Employment Initiative

Before I describe our overall approach to Federal hiring reform, I would like to begin with a word about the President's Veterans' Employment Initiative. OPM believes that improving the recruitment and employment of veterans is an integral part of making the entire Federal hiring process as effective as possible.

The Administration's hiring reform effort fully incorporates the goals of the President's Veterans Employment Initiative, which was outlined in Executive Order (E.O.) 13518 last November. That E.O. reinforced OPM's partnership with the Departments of Defense, Labor, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security in promoting the employment of veterans in the Federal Government. At present, for example, OPM is working with the Department of Veterans Affairs' Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, to increase the Government's effectiveness in recruiting and providing career counseling to veterans seeking Federal employment.

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The E.O. established an Interagency Council on Veterans Employment, co-chaired by the Secretaries of Labor and Veterans Affairs. I serve as Vice-Chair of the Council, which held its first meeting last December to begin strategizing on the implementation of the goals laid out under the President's order.

At the end of January, OPM issued the *Governmentwide Veterans' Recruitment and Employment Strategic Plan for FY 2010-2012*. The Strategic Plan focuses on dismantling barriers to veterans' employment by reinvigorating leadership commitment to the employment of veterans; providing employment counseling to veterans and opportunities to develop their skills; creating a marketing campaign to promote veterans' hiring; and, establishing a one-stop information gateway for employment information plus resources for veterans, human resources professionals, and Federal hiring officials.

In December 2009, OPM established a Veterans Employment Program Office to provide Governmentwide leadership in carrying out the Veterans Employment Initiative. The work of this office includes supporting the veterans' employment advocates in each of the 24 Federal agencies identified in the E.O. and educating Federal hiring managers on the use of the various hiring authorities that can be used to employ veterans. We are confident that these measures will enable the Federal Government to benefit fully from the skills and experience our veterans have to offer, thereby helping us reach our goal of recruiting, retaining, and honoring a world-class workforce to serve the American people.

II. Hiring "Wolf Packs"

Under my leadership, OPM launched two "wolf packs" to evaluate the Government's current recruitment and hiring processes and develop proposals for reform. The "wolf packs" conducted an extensive review of relevant literature, held focus groups, and sought the views of stakeholders and other interested groups. This process culminated in the adoption of comprehensive proposals for reforms. We have been implementing some of these proposals over the past several months, and others are addressed in the President's just-released memorandum for agency heads on "Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process" as well as an accompanying guidance memorandum from me.

III. Presidential Memorandum on Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process

The President's memorandum of May 11, 2010, directs agency heads to take specific additional actions by November 1 of this year. Agencies must eliminate any requirement that applicants answer essay-style questions as part of their initial application for a Federal job. We believe the requirement for detailed essays describing an applicant's job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities, may have discouraged many qualified applicants. We believe competencies can be assessed in other, less burdensome and more effective ways.

Second, under the President's memorandum, applicants must be allowed to use a resume and cover letter as their application. Alternatively, an agency may allow applicants to complete a

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simple, plainly written application. No matter the approach, agencies must use valid and reliable tools to assess applicant qualifications.

The President is also directing agencies to use the “category rating” method in selecting candidates rather than the “rule of three.” What this means is that selection will not be limited to the top three candidates, and agencies need not assign each applicant a numerical rating and rank them in score order. Under category rating, applicants are placed into one of two or more quality categories. Any of the candidates in the highest quality category can be considered for selection. Veterans’ preference still applies.

Finally, the President’s memorandum directs agencies to ensure that supervisors and managers are more involved in the entire hiring process, including workforce planning, recruitment, and interviewing, and that they are held accountable for the quality of their hires and for supporting the successful transition of new hires into the Federal service.

We have been working with OMB for months on planning for the issuance of the President’s memorandum. In fact, within hours of the President signing his memorandum to agencies, I issued my own guidance memorandum, which outlines what OPM is doing to provide support for hiring reform implementation at the agency level. We have a full implementation plan that was launched the day after the President signed his memorandum. We are deploying Mobile Assistance Teams (MATs) to support agencies in implementing the hiring reform initiative. These teams will be composed of individuals from OPM and other agencies with expertise in recruiting, staffing, and other relevant areas of human resources management. We are also developing a goal-focused, data-driven system that will help hold agencies accountable for improving the quality and speed of their hiring process, hiring reform targets, and the satisfaction of merit system principles and veterans’ preference requirements. We have created a web page dedicated to hiring reform implementation. It will have the latest news and information about hiring reform, along with guidance and training materials to help agencies meet the requirements in the President’s memorandum. We will be offering “bite-size” training sessions as well as more in-depth seminars for human resources professionals and line managers. These are just a few of the many ways in which we are prepared to support agencies in implementing the President’s directive.

A. End-to-End Hiring Roadmap

About 18 months ago, OPM released an *End-to-End Hiring Roadmap*, a tool we designed in partnership with the Chief Human Capital Officers Council to help Federal agencies streamline their hiring processes. The Roadmap focuses on the applicant’s experience in the Federal hiring process. The goal is to make sure applicants understand the hiring process, receive timely and clear communications to manage their expectations, and, once hired, they are assimilated quickly into their respective new organizations in order to become as effective as possible in their current position. The Roadmap describes how to integrate and streamline the five components of Federal hiring – workforce planning, recruitment, hiring process, security and suitability, and orientation. The Hiring Roadmap is designed to forge a more effective relationship between hiring managers and human resources professionals enabling agencies to attract, hire and retain top talent.

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The Roadmap gives agencies comprehensive, step-by-step implementation instructions that provide for an 80-day hiring timeline, beginning with the manager's request for the recruitment action and ending on the new employee's first day on the job. We have outlined the entire hiring process in the Roadmap, showing the interrelatedness of the five components, as well as timelines and standards for accomplishing each step of the process, successful practices, templates for simplified job announcements, and scripts for communicating with applicants. OPM is ensuring agencies implement the Roadmap through meaningful metrics that measure applicants' and managers' satisfaction with the hiring process. We believe the End-to-End Hiring Roadmap is helping agencies accomplish two essential goals – namely, to give applicants a better job hunting experience and to accelerate the hiring process.

The Roadmap is also helpful in identifying and addressing systemic obstacles to effective recruitment and retention at an early stage. When we are able to do this, we are likely to be more successful in resolving problems like extreme shortages in particular occupations. In such special circumstances, OPM works with the affected agencies to determine their needs. An example of this collaboration is the pilot project we implemented with the Federal Acquisition Institute. This project included streamlining the job opportunity announcement for entry-level contract specialists, reducing the announcement from more than 20 pages to around six pages, and outlining the duties and qualifications in plainer language. This project included a streamlined on-line assessment, a web page specifically designed for the acquisition community, and a centralized hiring strategy to share resumes among agencies.

B. June 2009 OPM-OMB Memorandum to Agencies

In June 2009, OPM and OMB outlined a collaborative approach to engaging Federal agencies in an assessment of the current state of hiring, which included establishing a baseline from which to set targets for improvement, and identifying barriers to progress. As of December 15, 2009, agencies were directed to shorten their hiring timeline by mapping their hiring process to OPM's End-to-End Hiring Roadmap 80-day model. This also included simplifying job announcements for their top ten occupations by using plain language, reducing the announcement to no more than five pages, identifying barriers to efficient hiring, and notifying applicants at a minimum of four points in the application process.

We were able to see significant, measurable progress by December 15. Eighty-four percent of the agencies met the five-page limit for their job announcements. Barriers were identified and corrective action plans were submitted by the agencies. The most common barrier was determined to be the time managers took to conduct interviews and make selections. Seventy-three percent of the major agencies met the applicant notification requirements by the December 15 target date.

C. Student Pathways

As part of our broader hiring reform effort, OPM is currently reviewing student pathways into the Federal Government. This includes a review of current programs such as the Student

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Temporary Employment Program (STEP), the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), and the Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF). Our goal is to establish clear paths for students who wish to work with the Federal Government, whether on a temporary or career basis.

Consistent with the President's May 11, 2010, memorandum, OPM also plans to evaluate the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP) and provide the President with recommendations on that program.

D. Shared Registers

OPM has established 14 new shared registers that cover a number of common occupations across the Federal Government, such as financial management, contracting, human resources, information technology, office support, and security. To create these registers, OPM used a streamlined job opportunity announcement and "category rating". We offered online, un-proctored assessments for the clerical occupations. The un-proctored assessments were pilot tests of commercially available clerical ability tests. Applicants liked taking the tests online, and the scores were similar to those achieved by applicants who had taken the test using paper and pencil in a supervised environment. OPM is maintaining these registers, including by referring high-quality candidates, responding to applicant inquiries, and removing unavailable candidates.

There are over 100,000 excellent applicants on these registers, and we know the applicants are excited about the opportunity to join the Federal workforce. This is a great opportunity for agencies to address some of their current staffing challenges. Agencies may request referrals from these registers at no cost. Once they identify their hiring needs, we will filter the 100,000-plus certified applicants for the location and grade they are seeking, determine who meets minimum qualifications, apply veterans' preference, and determine who is available for selection. This process takes us only two to three business days.

Use of these shared registers means that agencies will not have to develop or issue an announcement nor wait for applicants to apply. Agencies will no longer have to look at the applications, rate or assess the applicants, apply veterans' preference, and/or issue certificates. We estimate that these shared registers should save agencies about three weeks in the hiring process.

E. Enhancements to USAJOBS

OPM has made a number of upgrades to the USAJOBS site to make it more efficient and user-friendly. We made changes to the website based on usability studies, as well as extensive feedback from applicants through customer satisfaction surveys, help-desk tickets, and focus groups. These users often found the site confusing and challenging to navigate, and some had even abandoned their job search.

The refreshed USAJOBS enhances the user experience by:

- Updating the look and feel

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- Introducing social media and increased personalization
- Making it easier to move about the site
- Enhancing the job search tool so applicants find the right job for them
- Streamlining employment information to ensure guidance is readily available, and
- Providing targeted resources for certain groups (students, executives, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)

Later this year we plan to introduce two additional tools for agencies as part of the ongoing enhancement of USAJOBS. USAJOBSAssess will enable potential applicants to take cross-cutting competency-based assessments, which will help them choose a compatible occupation and agency to work for within the Federal Government. This will be done through advanced on-line assessments and job-matching based on the individual's competencies, education, experience, and interests. OPM is currently developing and procuring state-of-the-art job-related assessments for ten of our more commonly filled Governmentwide occupations. USAJOBSRecruit will provide tools, education, and collaboration within the Federal recruiting community in a virtual environment housed on the USAJOBS website.

F. Legislative Proposal

Finally, while there is much that we have accomplished and can still accomplish without legislation, we believe completing the reform process will require certain statutory changes. Some of these changes will simply involve bringing the staffing provisions of the law into the 21st century. We are working within the Administration on a proposal and look forward to collaborating with the subcommittee to bring this into fruition.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to discuss this important work with you and the subcommittee. I would be happy to respond to any questions that you may have.