

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE
FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

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Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to address the Department of Energy's (DOE) efforts to build, strengthen, and maintain a high-quality acquisition workforce.

As the largest civilian contracting agency in the Federal government in terms of annual contract obligations, DOE must use sound contract placement and administration practices that rely heavily on a stable, experienced acquisition workforce to effectively support the Department's core missions. To this end, the Department has invested heavily in strategies to attract, train, and retain the best and brightest talent into its acquisition workforce.

The downsizing of the acquisition workforce in the 1990's throughout the Federal government was followed by a dramatic increase in workload. Between 1998 and 2006, the Department's contract spending increased by 71%, while the size of the Department's

acquisition workforce remained relatively constant. This strained the acquisition workforce and added increased risk to achievement of our desired acquisition outcomes. To address this challenge, the Department has undertaken a number of initiatives to better leverage existing acquisition resources by creating efficiencies through the use of technology, and by reengineering and standardizing internal processes. Although these initiatives are important, my comments today will focus on the efforts and strategies we now have underway to increase and develop our acquisition workforce.

The fierce competition among federal agencies for a limited universe of experienced acquisition talent has inhibited agencies' ability to quickly fill critical vacancies. While the Department is certainly a participant in this battle for talent, we are largely focusing our efforts on attracting new entrants into the acquisition profession. Fundamental to this approach is aligning our recruiting efforts with the career expectations of the next generation of acquisition professionals, which include professional accreditation, career development and advancement opportunities, project-based work opportunities, use of technology, flexible work arrangements, and job portability.

Over the past several years, the Department's recruiting efforts have emphasized active participation in broader federal initiatives such as Office of Personnel Management (OPM) sponsored Hiring Fairs, the Federal Career Intern Program, OPM's Central Register Pilot Program for entry-level contract specialists, and the Department of Veteran's Affairs "Coming Home to Work Program." DOE is also investing in recruitment efforts at local colleges and universities, advertising at local job fairs, and

posting vacancy announcements on USAJobs.gov and commercial job sites. The Office of Procurement is also working with the Department's Office of Human Capital to obtain direct hire authority, which will enhance our ability to recruit and hire qualified staff more quickly. And, last year we gained OPM approval to reemploy annuitants in acquisition positions. This authority has been, and will continue to be, used to fill short-term critical vacancies.

For the past two years, DOE has conducted an annual enterprise-wide competency assessment of the acquisition workforce to identify gaps and improve both training and human capital planning. This annual assessment is developed from data drawn from the Federal Acquisition Institute's Acquisition Workforce Competency Survey. The assessment involves the active participation of DOE's acquisition managers in identifying and validating competencies, and its results are used for organizational planning.

Information from the assessment helps us to identify priorities for Department-wide workforce development efforts and training to improve the capabilities of the acquisition workforce to meet current and future mission needs. The results of these assessments also help frame the Department's annual acquisition workforce training priorities, which are managed under our Acquisition Career Management Program (ACMP).

The ACMP provides a formal, structured approach to career development for DOE's acquisition workforce. As the acquisition environment continues to provide opportunities for growth, it also continues to provide significant challenges, and the workforce must be appropriately trained to meet those challenges. The ACMP is designed to increase the

proficiency of the acquisition workforce through competency-based training and provides a road map to guide acquisition employees through the training, education, and experience needed to advance in the profession.

DOE's Acquisition Career Management Program is actually more vigorous than current requirements in terms of its mandatory training and experience requirements. Under the Department's program, the electives permitted under the Office of Federal Procurement Policy Program have been replaced with specific required classes to address skill gaps within DOE, resulting in a more structured program. Additionally, continuous learning tracks have been developed to ensure that DOE has a cadre of acquisition professionals with specialized skills in such areas as project management, cost and price analysis, and supply chain management.

A key feature of the ACMP is the establishment of the DOE Site Acquisition Career Management Council in 2008. The Council is chaired by DOE's Acquisition Career Manager and its membership is comprised of representatives from each DOE field organization. The Council's responsibilities include maintaining the proficiency and currency of the Program's policies and procedures, education and training sources, and course requirements and curriculum. Another recent improvement has been centralizing the management of training resources within DOE's Office of Procurement to ensure complex-wide training needs are addressed. As a result, more than 90% of DOE's contracting workforce is currently certified under the Federal Acquisition Certification in Contracting Program, compared to 60% as of October 2007.

As part of the Department's initiative to institutionalize strong contract management practices, DOE has identified a number of opportunities for improvement which are outlined in the Department's July 2008 Root Cause Analysis Corrective Action Plan. One such opportunity is the capability to identify and maintain an adequate number of skilled federal contracting and project management professionals to plan, direct, and oversee project execution. To help meet this need, the Department developed an algorithm based on bench marking with other federal agencies. This algorithm will help to identify the appropriate level of staffing and skill mix that is required for a given project, and significantly improve future staffing decisions.

As a result of these efforts, the Department has made significant progress towards closing its resource and skills gaps. Since 2006, the DOE contracting workforce has increased by 30%. In addition, since the beginning of Fiscal Year 2008, more than 500 acquisition and program personnel have received training that targets both certification requirements and identified skills gaps across the spectrum of acquisition skills.

The Department is also leveraging existing authorities to retain critical experience and expertise. These include tuition reimbursement assistance, recruitment and retention incentives, employee reward and recognition programs, alternative work schedules and telecommuting, and employee development programs.

Improving the federal hiring process is a critical element in achieving a strong acquisition workforce. We appreciate the Committee's leadership in focusing attention on the need to improve the hiring process in the Federal government. In fact, the Department is currently working in cooperation with OPM and other agencies to improve the hiring process in all of the areas addressed in S.736. We believe that these changes should significantly improve our ability to recruit and hire acquisition employees.

In closing, I would reiterate and assure this Committee that the Department is committed to ensuring taxpayers' dollars are well spent in the contracting and project management areas through the Department's efforts to develop and sustain a robust, highly skilled, and professional acquisition workforce. We will fulfill that commitment by continuing to take advantage of every opportunity and resource available to attract, hire, develop, and retain the highest-quality professional acquisition workforce.

This concludes my formal remarks. I would be happy to respond to your questions.