



TESTIMONY BY

DAVID J. HOLWAY

**NATIONAL PRESIDENT
OF THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES
(SEIU/NAGE)**

BEFORE

**THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL
WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE AND DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA**

REGARDING

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS: TRANSFORMING FEDERAL HIRING

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is David Holway and I am the President of the National Association of Government Employees (SEIU/NAGE). On behalf of our more than 100,000 members, including more than 50,000 employees of the federal government, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee about transforming the federal hiring process.

We all know that the federal government is in dire need of hiring reform. The current process used by federal agencies is cumbersome, confusing, slow, and sluggish. When the process is this frustrating, the outcome is predictable: the unfortunate result is that federal agencies often fail to attract the best possible candidates for the available positions. This ultimately hurts agency productivity and minimizes the value federal government agencies provide to the American people.

We are at a tipping point. Our country faces two major crises that an improved federal hiring system can help alleviate. The first is the economic downturn. No one knows better than you what this downturn has done to our country's workforce. Unemployment is hovering at 10 percent. Even though pundits say that we may be turning the corner on this, the biggest recession this country has seen since the Great Depression, American workers have not begun to feel this improvement. I don't need to tell you that times are still tough out there – you see it every time you meet constituents from your districts. We need jobs. People want to work.

You can help put Americans back to work through your efforts on this Subcommittee. There are tens of thousands of federal jobs currently vacant and unfilled. Last week, your federal website, USAJobs.com, had 40,000 vacancies listed. These are good-paying jobs, budgeted and appropriated. These jobs sit there waiting to be filled. If you shorten the time between posting and filling, you will put tens of thousands of Americans to work. You can do this.

The second crisis we face is not as visible, but just as real. Baby boomers are reaching their golden years. The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) called the impending wave of retirement a “crisis” in its 2008 report on hiring. In the near future, the federal government is going to experience a tidal wave of retirement requests. Numbers show that of all the employers, the federal government will be hit hardest. You need to be prepared to replace these workers. If your hiring process expects quality applicants to wait six months or more before getting to the final stages of their interviews, you will lose. The American people deserve a streamlined and respected hiring process, and your subcommittee is positioned to provide this process now.

We at NAGE are encouraged to see the White House and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) take interest in this critical issue. Just last week, President Obama issued an executive memo to federal agencies instructing them to make some much-needed reforms to their hiring processes. It is clear that the Administration has an appreciation for the fact that the workers are what make federal agencies perform effectively. The federal government simply cannot function without a knowledgeable, motivated, and skilled workforce. Finding the

right people, with the right skills, in a reasonable period of time, is critical to recruiting and maintaining that workforce.

The Need is Great

Ask any job seeker who logs onto your employment website: it is imperative that the system be reformed. Because of the current hiring process, applicants are giving up searching for federal jobs. No employer facing a retirement wave and the level of turnover that occurs at federal agencies should allow a system that discourages and blocks candidates from applying.

Our 50,000 federal SEIU/NAGE members are your nurses, your police, and your emergency service workers. Not filling these jobs when they are vacant and available can literally be a matter of life and death.

At the Department of Veterans Affairs, your managers estimate that over 40,000 health care workers within the next couple years. The VA Hospitals need a hiring process that does not delay the delivery of care to veterans. A shortage of nurses will cause unsafe patient-to-staff ratios, which in turn will adversely impact patient outcomes.

At the Department of Defense, your managers project that more than half of the police officers guarding our military facilities will need to be replaced within the next two years. You need to be able to replace these federal police officers in a timely fashion, or you risk experiencing a lapse in security at our Defense installations.

The Obama Administration's Efforts on Hiring Reform

SEIU/NAGE believes that President Obama and OPM Director John Berry are moving in the right direction with hiring reform, but as they say, "the devil is in the details." The outline of their plan is good, but it will not be a success unless the agencies are committed and diligent to implement the plan correctly. We are willing partners in helping to accomplish the program's key goals and we stand ready to help the Administration make their plan work.

The American people deserve an effective hiring system.

Today, hiring federal workers takes too long. It takes an average of about five months to fill a federal vacancy. That is way too long a period of time to hire a good applicant and it is way too long to have a vacancy in an essential job.

Today, the hiring process is difficult to navigate. I challenge you to take a few minutes today to test the system. Log on to the hiring website and try to apply for a job. The federal hiring process is even more foreign to applicants that have not held a previous position in the federal government. Many well qualified applicants give up before finding a suitable job. This limits your pool of applicants because even the most determined applicants soon give up.

Resume-Based Hiring

SEIU/NAGE applauds Director Berry's move toward a resume-based hiring system. The lengthy "knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)" essays will be a thing of the past, and in our opinion, they will not be missed. KSA's are used by very few employers outside of the federal government. They have been

nothing more than barrier toward getting the best candidates for federal positions. A resume-based application, which is far more appropriate for hiring in this day and age, will suit the federal government far better.

Category Hiring

The White House proposal to abolish the “rule of three” could also streamline the hiring process. Being arbitrarily forced to narrow the choices to just three candidates both delays the process and excludes many highly qualified candidates from consideration. Opening consideration to a larger number of “well qualified” applicants will allow better hires to be made more quickly. Of course, managers will have to be properly trained to ensure that the reformed process is fair and open.

Bringing in Managers

Bringing operational managers and supervisors into the hiring process earlier and more fully is a common sense change that will potentially improve the hiring system substantially. It is often difficult for Human Resource officers to fully understand the details of work performed in the field. Bringing in people who are more involved with and responsible for the services an agency provides will almost definitely lead to better and faster hiring decisions.

As I mentioned, managers will need to be well trained in changes to the hiring process. SEIU/NAGE will be monitoring training programs as reforms are implemented. We also hope that details of the training will be a part of the

reports President Obama has ordered agencies to produce by November 1 of this year. It is easy to see how a lack of proper manager training could result in a less fair and open hiring process. Legislation may be necessary to ensure that such training takes place.

Insourcing

Over the past decade, too many federal jobs have been outsourced to the private sector. Creating an easier and faster hiring process will promote insourcing. Agencies will often use the difficulty and length of the competitive hiring process to delay insourcing. Reforming the hiring process will render such excuses invalid. Bringing formerly outsourced jobs back under the public sector will save money. The Defense Department has estimated it will save an average of \$44,000 for every federal position that is insourced. This is an important consideration in light of the federal deficit our nation has experienced in recent years.

Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP)

With all of the problems and delays in the current hiring process, it is no surprise that many agencies use the Federal Career Internship Program (FCIP) to fill vacancies. A 2008 report from the MSPB found that the FCIP had become the preferred method of hiring entry level employees. The direct hiring authority granted by FCIP allows managers to bypass the current process and place pre-selected candidates quickly and with little oversight. SEIU/NAGE believes this

program is too often used to bypass competitive selection and veterans preferences. We are pleased that the Administration has taken steps to examine FCIP more closely. We hope that the reforms we are discussing today will help change the government's reliance on the FCIP.

Conclusion

SEIU/NAGE welcomes a faster, more open, and friendlier federal hiring process. On behalf of the dedicated federal employees our union represents, I greatly appreciate the Subcommittee's decision to hold this hearing and thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide this testimony.