

THE FUTURE OF FEDERAL WORK

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE FUTURE OF FEDERAL WORK

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:27 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, and via Zoom. Hon. Gerald E. Connolly (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Connolly, Norton, Davis, Sarbanes, Lawrence, Lynch, Raskin, Khanna, Porter, Hice, Keller, Biggs, and LaTurner.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Good morning everybody, we're a little bit late this morning because I was at the National Defense University chairing a meeting on NATO, a congressional panel that unfortunately ran a little bit long. So thank you for your patience. Thank you, Mr. Hice, for your patience.

I want to welcome everyone to today's hybrid hearing. Pursuant to House rules, some members will appear in person, and others will appear remotely via Zoom.

For members appearing remotely, I know we're all familiar with Zoom by now, but let me remind you of a few points. First, the House rules require that we see you, so please have your cameras turned on throughout the hearing.

Second, members appearing remotely who are not recognized should remain muted to minimize background noise and feedback.

Third, I will recognize members verbally, but members retain the right to seek recognition in regular order. Members will be recognized in seniority order for questions.

Last, if you want to be recognized outside of regular order, you may identify that request in one of several ways. You may use the chat function to send a request—that's a preferable way of doing it—you may send an email to the majority staff, or you can raise your hand, and we will try to make sure that you are recognized.

Before we begin, I want to let members know that one of our witnesses, Ms. Cross, has service-related injuries that may require her to stand up and move around, and at those times, if necessary, the subcommittee is prepared to accommodate and take a break if requested. So we'll begin the hearing, I believe, right now.

The committee will come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time. And I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

I want to welcome everybody to the hearing which was requested specifically by my friend, the ranking member, Mr. Hice, earlier

this year, as part are our work together on the Chai Suthammanont Remembrance Act, H.R. 978, a bill that will help ensure that Federal workplaces remain safe amid and following the pandemic.

And while efforts on that bill have currently stalled, I hope that the ranking member remains steadfast in his commitment to floor consideration of this legislation. In light of the new variant, I think it's very much relevant.

In September 2019, just a few months prior to the onset of COVID-19, this subcommittee held a prescient hearing on how to build an effective Federal work force in the 21st century. What a difference two years makes in how we think about the work, the workplace, employment, and employees.

In December 2019, Congress, led entirely by the majority, enacted the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act, H.R. 1534, which as of October 2020, provides up to 12 weeks of paid leave to new parents in the Federal work force.

Then in early spring of 2020, the pandemic served as a cajole for many Federal agencies to embrace telework, something this committee and subcommittee have championed for a long time. Government simply had to adapt to ensure the continuity of operations and to make sure that quality service is continued to be provided to the American people uninterrupted.

What we learned in these last two years is that Federal employees continue to serve the Nation no matter how difficult the circumstances.

And while so much as changed in two years, some things remain stalwart. First, the need to educate, attract, and onboard the next generation of Federal employees has never been greater. Only about 6.9 percent of Federal employees are under the age of 30. In the private sector the comparable percentage is 23 percent.

Nearly 30 percent of Federal employees are over the age of 55, with potentially one-third of the Federal work force eligible to retire over the next several years.

These numbers present us with a staggering challenge. Yet the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that recruitment of early career individuals is not that difficult to achieve in the private sector.

If you look at the screen, you'll see the discrepancy between the two. The red bar show the age distribution of employees nationwide.

Well, if it was up there, you would see it.

And then we look at the age distribution of the Federal work force and the contrast. Young employees make up a much smaller fraction of the Federal Government than they do nationwide.

The work force is the lifeblood of our Federal Government, but our people committed to public service, taxpayers, vulnerable populations, small businesses, and others, will not have access and the resources and services they need.

If we fail to attract and hire the best and the brightest in Federal service, the Nation and the people we serve suffer.

Despite years of effort, strategic human capital management of the Federal work force remains on GAO, the Government Accountability Office's, high-risk list.

GAO notes that myriad items on their high-risk list are a result of the Federal Government's inability to close skill gaps and to hire, train, and staff up particularly critical Federal staff.

Some of those critical skill gaps involve the financial management of the Department of Defense's weapon system, for example, the acquisition work force, the enforcement of our Federal tax laws, ensuring the cybersecurity of our most sensitive information, effective vetting of our national security work force, purchasing ads, as well as information technology, to deliver Federal services to the public and providing accessible and quality healthcare to our veterans, just to name some.

At this hearing, we will focus on three areas that, taken together, will help government find and onboard early career talent, retain high performing employees, and ensure that the Federal Government equitably serves all communities.

These initiatives include more effectively leveraging Federal internships as talent pools for early career civil servants like we do in the private sector.

Second, offering greater workplace flexibility and benefits to attract top-level talent to Federal service, including telework and other flexibilities.

And third, ensuring that the Federal work force reflects the communities in which it serves at all levels.

Federal Government provides only 4,000 formal paid internships at any given time, and even those individuals struggle to move into Federal service after the culmination of their internship.

Meanwhile, the Federal Government's private sector competitors offer jobs to approximately 96 percent of their interns. That's staggering. We're in the single digits. They're at 96 percent.

In a Harris poll published in 2019, the U.S. Government's reputation ranked last in comparison to a hundred top companies. Last.

Simply put, individuals graduating from top schools are not attracted to Federal service, neither are the interns who intern for the Federal Government. We need to change that.

As a foundational component of our efforts to attract and onboard early career individuals into government, today I have introduced the Building the Next Generation of Federal Employees Act, or the Next Gen Feds Act.

The bill codifies existing, successful internship programs and brings uniformity and basic practices to other Federal internships across the government.

This legislation will, I hope, require agencies to incorporate agreed-upon best practices in their internship programs, including mentorships and exit interviews.

It will establish a Federal internship and fellowship center within the Office of Personnel Management.

It will direct the creation of an online Federal Government internship platform for use by agencies and those seeking internships as a one-stop shop for information and internship application.

It will establish a pilot program to recruit potential Federal employees in underserved markets and underrepresented demographics.

It will foster diversity and inclusion by requiring Federal agencies to pay their interns, and it will provide—which by the way we do now here on the Hill, belatedly but we do—and it will provide hiring advantages to interns who successfully complete at least one year of Federal internship service.

The bill is endorsed by the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, NARFE, it is represented by Mr. Thomas, who is a witness, as well as the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers and the National Federation of Federal Employees.

I want to highlight particularly important provisions in the bill. As I noted, the bill seeks to ensure that all Federal interns are paid. These provisions ensure that internships are not only available to students whose parents can afford to pay for them to live and work near or with Federal agencies without pay.

More importantly, paying interns ensures that they have protections against discrimination and workplace harassment and protections against discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, sex, or national origin.

Amazingly, unpaid interns have to pay to work and receive no workplace protections against such discrimination. This bill will vest them with those protections.

The hearing will also explore the expectations of our current and future Federal work force in terms of job flexibilities and benefits. Preliminary findings show that the move to telework largely increased employee productivity.

As a March 2021 Department of Defense Inspector General survey, for example, of more than 56,000 personnel, found that 91.1 percent of employees indicated their productivity either remained the same or improved while teleworking during the pandemic.

The Office of Personnel Management's Fiscal Year 2019 report to Congress on the status of telework in the Federal Government, shows that teleworkers are more engaged in and satisfied with their jobs, by the way, consistent with data about telework over the last 20 years.

Just more than a week ago, the Biden administration released telework guidance to assist agencies as they design their post pandemic telework plans. The guidance encourages agencies not to return to a pre-pandemic telework posture but instead to build off the successes we've experienced during the pandemic.

The Federal Government must employ those lessons, particularly if we seek to build a generation of public servants who reflect the communities from which they come.

We also eagerly await the administration's pending 2020 telework report to provide data and evidence that demonstrate the increased use of and benefits from telework.

I plan to soon introduce the Telework Metrics and Cost Savings Act, which would, among other things, prohibit agency leaders from unilaterally prohibiting telework and require agencies to quantify and report on the cost savings incurred through increased teleworking.

If we don't set metrics, it's all anecdotal and aspirational, and it may or may not be working. We got to have hard metrics, both

goals and evaluative metrics so we know whether it's efficacious or not, and to tell us where we need to improve.

We also want to ensure that the Federal work force at all levels reflects the people it serves. People of color make up only 47 percent of the professional Federal work force, 33 percent of our senior level positions, and 23 percent of our Senior Executive Service.

The figure on the screen again—apparently we're not on the screen—oh, there we are, the figure on the screen, they got it, all right—shows the percentage of people of color at each grade on the Federal pay scale, from entry level to senior executive. Not impressive.

We also have a lack of gender diversity in our senior level positions. As the slide shows, women make up 58 percent of all full time, entry level employees, but only 36 percent of senior executives. We can and must do better.

Government must reconsider the ways in which it attracts and supports individuals from all backgrounds and provide them with the appropriate career tools and training to grow to leaders within their organizations.

While 85 percent of the Federal work force lives outside the Beltway, increasing telework opportunities could further help the government hire outside of urban areas and better reflect all congressional districts including more rural communities like those served by my ranking member, Mr. Hice, and other members of the subcommittee.

Federal agencies must be clear-eyed about meeting young people, government future leaders, where they are. It is striking to think that anyone can walk up to the graduating student and invite them to a 30-year position with the government and the student will accept. I just don't think that's a realistic expectation anymore. And that's not how things are going to work with the millennial generation in particular.

So I look forward to working with my colleagues to enact meaningful internship legislation but also to explore other ways we can enhance and improve the Federal workplace and create a more vibrant, diverse, Federal employee population as we start to replace the generation that is about to retire.

And with that, I call on—I thank my friend for his indulgence and call on Mr. Hice for his opening statement.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate you calling this hearing on the future of Federal work force. I welcome all our witnesses for being here as well. Thank you for being a part of this hearing.

This is an important topic. It's appropriate for this subcommittee to take a good look at it from all perspectives. And as I said, I'm very pleased to have each of you here as our witnesses today, but I also believe that we should be talking with OPM directly. I am frankly disappointed in the continued lack of administration witnesses that this committee and the committee as a whole considers.

For that matter, we are going to be in a markup with an OPM-related bill tomorrow on the National Academy and Public Administration report that was released in March. It would seem to me that they ought to be here today as well.

So the bottom line I guess for today's hearing is the fact that the Federal Government exists, as we all know, to serve the American people, and we must ensure that the Federal work force carries out that mission.

But when we talk about the future of the Federal work force these days, it has really become a code for talking about expanding telework and remote work arrangements among Federal employees, in my opinion, with very little thought in regard to how that might impact the American people and other serious concerns.

And while we all know that circumstances surrounding COVID made some changes in our arrangements and how we do work necessary, the rest of the world has returned to work for the most part, while the Federal Government was very slow to do so and frankly continues to be slow. And in many instances, it is the Federal Government that ought to be taking the lead.

But in this instance and others, the Federal Government certainly did not do that, and now the Biden administration has made it clear that it wants expanded telework and remote work to become a permanent part of the Federal landscape, and they use practices of the private sector and the need to recruit as rationales. But that in itself is not adequate.

I don't think that, by itself, is a safe path for us to run down. There are differences between the private sector and Federal agencies, and we need to keep these in mind.

It's important to understand the differences as well as to ensure that the American people whom deserve and expect certain services, that that aspect of this whole debate is kept as priority and focus as we go through these discussions.

In some instances, for example, the Social Security Administration, the lack of in-person service during the pandemic created real problems for the American people. The recent announcement that the SSA will be opening field offices in January strikes me as wholly inadequate after a sharp decline in benefit awards in 2020.

And as we will hear from Mr. Biggs, Social Security Administration is one of the easier agencies for which to measure employees' impact. What about the others?

We need to have this discussion, honestly have this discussion. How can we be sure agency missions are not going to slip while we are in the midst of a drive to provide more and more telework and remote working arrangements?

We have legitimate questions that need to be answered, and above and beyond that, during the pandemic, there were also real national security problems that emerged.

The Department of Defense Inspector General, for example, found that DOD components that failed to provide sufficient work—network capacity. They found problems with communication tools. They found equipment lacking to support increased telework.

The IG reported that some teleworking personnel turned to unauthorized video conferencing applications and personal equipment. As a result, there was increased risk of exposing sensitive DOD information that could impact both the mission of the DOD as well as our national security.

It's fair that we have these questions. These are honest questions that need to be considered as we go through this. Before we just

jump into total embrace and acceptance of telework and remote work, we need to seriously take a look at the impact this may have, both to agencies, as well as the American people.

And I would ask the chairman to work with me to get some of these answers. I think they're legitimate questions that need authentic answers.

But turning to legislation, I would like to discuss the recently introduced Strengthening OPM Act and the soon to come Building the Next Generation of Federal Employees Act.

When the Trump administration was rolling out its plans to shift responsibilities away from OPM to GSA and OMB, I was quite vocal and Chairman Connolly was as well, but I was expressing my frustration and demanded that the administration provide more documents and justification for that kind of move.

But I was also vocal in saying that we need to take a holistic look at the problems facing OPM. The history of OPM is one of underachievement. It's one of mismanagement and problems. In truth, OPM has struggled to perform its core mission.

In more than just OPM, the entire subject, if you will, of human capital strategy, and the Federal Government is one that requires a lot of careful attention. So the whole rationale behind the select measures included strengthening—the Strengthening OPM Act, which we're going to consider tomorrow, it's all unclear to me and raises questions that need careful consideration and authentic answers.

I would point out that the bill's attempt to depoliticize OPM diminishes the President's ability to choose leaders who would carry out his or her vision. That's a deep concern for me personally and I believe for many others.

The American people elect a President so that that President can make sure that his or her vision is carried out. And if OPM is going to be the Federal agency deciding personnel policy issues and strategy, then it needs to reflect the wishes and beliefs of the chief executive.

I think it's very—a dangerous path for us to allow an unelected, unaccountable bureaucracy to dictate policy with no checks and balances. That's just not the way our system of government is supposed to operate.

So as for Building the Next Generation of Federal Employees Act, Mr. Chairman, I will say that it—making it easier to identify internships and scholarships across Federal agencies, there's a lot of merit to that, it makes a lot of sense, but obviously I would like to learn more about the other provisions of the bill as we move forward.

Again, Chairman, I thank you for holding this hearing, I thank our witnesses for being here, and I look forward to both the testimony and questions that are forthcoming.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Mr. Hice, and I also look forward to working with you on these issues and prospective legislation. I would only make a note that Congress exists for a reason. The President does not have unbridled power. He or she is not a king or a queen, and the Constitution, in fact, imbues the Congress with immense potential power in Article I, to provide checks and balances to the executive.

Mr. HICE. And we don't get checks and balances with an unelected bureaucracy with no accountability——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well——

Mr. HICE [continuing]. and that's the concern as I speak right now——

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. I would say respectfully that's an argument for repealing the Pendleton Act and politicizing the entire Civil Service. I mean, most of the Federal employee work force is nonpolitical, and, in fact, there's the Hatch Act to enforce that.

Mr. HICE. I would just like debate on this because we have obviously——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yep, we have a hearing.

Mr. HICE [continuing]. we have opinion on this for another time, but we need to deal with this authentically.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right.

Mr. HICE. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. But I just wanted to assert, I would not make any apology for Congress asserting its right to limit executive politicization of the H.R. agency of the Federal Government, namely OPM. But we will debate that later. Thank you, Mr. Hice.

Let me now introduce our panel. We have with us Mika Cross who is a Federal workplace expert.

We have Kenneth Thomas, remotely, who is the President of NARFE of the National Active and Retired Federal Employee Association.

We have Michelle Amante, who is the vice president of the Federal Workforce Programs and Partnership for Public Service.

We have Andrew Biggs, who's a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. I think, Andrew, you're also remote. Yep.

And then Meredith Lozar, executive director of programs and events, Hiring Our Heroes, at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Welcome all. We have your prepared statements, and we will enter them fully into the record, and we invite you each to summarize your testimony in five minutes.

And with that, Mika Cross, why don't you go first.

Oh, I have to swear you in first. If you would all rise and those remotely, raise your right hand, do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

Let the record show all of our witnesses today have answered in the affirmative. Thank you. You may be seated. The record will so note.

Ms. Cross, welcome.

STATEMENT OF MIKA CROSS, FEDERAL WORKPLACE EXPERT

Ms. CROSS. Thank you and good morning, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and distinguished members of this committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak about how we can build on the culture changes we're experiencing now to achieve an optimal Federal workplace of the future.

I served this Nation for two decades starting as a soldier in the Army when I was 18 years old. I created wide-ranging, flexible workplace policies and programs in agencies like the Defense Intelligence Agency, USDA, and working for OPM and Department of Labor, before I transitioned to private industry, where I led a re-

mote team at FlexJobs, working with global employers who leveraged their remote and flexible jobs to attract, hire, recruit, and retain top talent.

In my prepared testimony today, I'm going to cover how the government can meet three critical goals—quickly hire and retain diverse talent, increase productivity, performance, and work force engagement, and modernize management skills to help overcome barriers to change.

Well before 2020 the government faced labor shortages and attrition, especially in critical occupations like cyber, STEM, and technology. And both the CIL Council and the National Science Board agree that leveraging workplace flexibilities like remote and telework and other workplace flexibilities are a critical component of their future work strategies.

But some agencies like the State Department were already pairing remote work and part time internships, making public service accessible for those who can't accept onsite positions due to financial or family constraints.

Through the Virtual Student Federal Service program, over 10,000 students from community colleges, Tribal, and minority-servicing institutions, and other academic programs have worked with more than 70 Federal agencies, and last year alone, more than 8,000 of them applied to that program. So clearly there's a demonstrated high demand.

Consider how this could work for hiring re-employed annuitants or creating returnships to bring former seasoned Feds back to government service.

Agencies combining direct hiring authorities and recruitment efforts for remote and flexible internships or apprenticeships can quickly fill critical gaps in their talent pipeline.

For workers experiencing geographic or mobility challenges like military spouses, veterans, caregivers, older workers, people with disabilities, and rural workers, access to flexible Federal jobs can be a game-changer.

Now, throughout the pandemic we saw nearly 60 percent of Federal workers teleworking daily, but that can't work for all jobs. So agencies adopted a hybrid approach, using a mix of onsite, telework, and remote work options.

Federal workplace policies quickly changed to eliminate core hours and offer more choices in work hours, schedules, and locations in order to keep Federal workers safe.

And while millions of parents and caregivers were forced out of work because their jobs couldn't adapt, Federal managers used maximum flexibility to keep the mission going.

This proves that the government can overcome the greatest barrier to telework—management resistance.

So what were the impacts? The 2020 Federal employee viewpoint scores were their highest in five years in leadership practices that contribute to agency performance, overall engagement, and global satisfaction.

Nearly half of Federal workers reported an increase in work demand, and 73 percent of them believe their agencies will respond effectively to future emergencies.

In addition to increased engagement, agencies also reported improvements in innovation and productivity. Thousands of new Federal workers were hired and recruited and onboarded from the safety of their homes.

Some agencies reported significant reductions in time to hire, and many used new technologies to onboard more efficiently and reduce paperwork and increase the work flow efficiencies.

Now, as we look to the future, employee engagement and retention is becoming more important than ever, especially due to labor shortages and workers' desires to look for jobs that offer more flexibility.

We can offer them more support to keep the momentum going in using flexible workplace policies used during the pandemic by supporting managers and supervisors to lead Federal workers from any location.

We can also help promote the services we have in place to help managers lead from any location again and enhance performance through the Federal Coaching Network, the Employee Assistance Program, and agency ombudsman program.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Ms. Cross, if you can sum up.

Ms. CROSS. So thank you so much. This all will help to enhance productivity and prosperity and the future of our great country by looking toward the future and the clear path ahead for modernizing the Federal work force.

Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, and we look forward to exploring that further in the Q&A session. Thank you.

Our next presenter is Kenneth Thomas, president of NARFE. Mr. Thomas, you are recognized for your five-minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF KENNETH J. THOMAS, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ACTIVE AND RETIRED FEDERAL EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and subcommittee members. On behalf of the five million Federal workers and annuitants represented by the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, I appreciate the opportunity to express our views regarding the future of Federal work.

NARFE members dedicated their careers to serve our Nation. They want Federal service to succeed in its mission. To do so, the Federal Government must be able to recruit the next generation of Federal workers. NARFE and its members are here to pass the torch.

We live in a world that is becoming more interconnected, yet increasingly polarized. We face rapid technological, environmental, and economic change. This presents the Federal work force with new challenges like responding to a global pandemic but also new opportunities to utilize technologies, to better serve the American people.

Unfortunately, Federal Government personnel practices have not kept up with the pace of change. The last major reform to personnel management laws was 43 years ago, and the executive branch has failed to use existing authorities and capabilities to the

extent it should. There's widespread recognition that Federal personnel management needs modernization.

As it stands today, Federal agencies suffer from mission-critical skills gaps. According to GAO, these skills gaps impede the government from effectively serving the public. In fact, skills gaps contribute to 22 of GAO's 35 other areas identified as high-risk.

Agencies face a worsening situation. Nearly 28 percent of employees are eligible to retire within the next five years. Yet only eight percent of Federal employees are younger than 30. In the private sector that number is 23 percent.

It's also worse than it was 10 years ago. Today every Federal agency has fewer employees younger than 30 than they had in 2010. Unsurprisingly, this coincides with a large decline in Federal internships for more than 60,000 in 2010, to about 4,000 in 2020.

It's clear the Federal Government must focus on attracting more talented individuals into Federal service. The good news is, there's no shortage of good ideas to do so.

We agree with the President's management agenda, that we need an all-of-the-above approach. That approach must start with the recognition of a key source of problems.

Current hiring processes are often too complex. As a result, it takes too long to bring somebody on board. Because they are too burdensome, agencies often bypass competitive hiring. None of this serves merit-based hiring principles well. Rather than undermining those principles, process improvements would improve fidelity to them.

We also must improve Federal internship programs. The Next Gen Feds Act would help to do so, and I applaud Chairman Conolly for his leadership. The creation of a Federal fellowship and scholarship center, an online internship platform, and a reinvigorated paths program could serve as important tools.

Providing competitive examination credit for qualified interns would help convert them into full time employees.

However, we urge the committee to consider a shorter timeframe or even a sliding scale of credit based on the length of the internship.

Finally, ensuring interns are paid opens the door to recruiting a more diverse set of individuals into service. Government-wide improvements in hiring employees and improving internship programs will rely on the revitalized and forward-thinking OPM. We are very encouraged by Director Ahuja's leadership and OPM's initial response to the Napa report.

We also endorse the Strengthening OPM Act to codify several of the recommendations. We urge OPM to press forward on implementation.

We also urge this committee and Congress to provide support where needed and continued oversight to ensure progress. Efforts to improve Federal hiring must also ensure the Federal Government provides competitive pay and benefits.

While Federal employees are often attracted to the government by commitment to its mission, they face the same economic realities as other Americans. Even the best hiring practices and most compelling missions will not overcome substantial differences in compensation.

We must ensure pay rates do not fall too much further behind the private sector, authorize special pay authorities when needed, and preserve the value of existing benefits, which remains an important tool for recruitment and retention.

Federal agencies may also be able to take advantage of the changing nature of work by expanding telework operations over the long term. Such an approach could save taxpayers through increased productivity and provide a more attractive work environment for many current and prospective employees.

I want to thank the committee for—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Thomas, if you could sum up.

Mr. THOMAS. I want to thank the committee for allowing me to present today.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much.

Our next witness is Michelle Amante with the Partnership for Public Service. You are recognized.

STATEMENT OF MICHELLE AMANTE, VICE PRESIDENT, FEDERAL WORKFORCE PROGRAMS, PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

Ms. AMANTE. Good morning, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the Subcommittee on Government Operations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Michelle Amante, and I'm the vice president of Federal work force programs at the Partnership for Public Service.

The partnership is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to building a better government and a stronger democracy.

There is unprecedented movement in the American work force. In September alone, over 4.4 million people voluntarily left their jobs. People want flexibility, they want to feel a sense of belonging, and they want their work to have meaning.

The Federal Government has an opportunity to capitalize on this moment because our government has purpose-driven work. We do not know what is on the horizon, what natural disaster lies ahead, what cyber attack is lurking, or what the next pandemic may be. So we must invest in developing leaders who are resilient and adaptable.

These attributes are a core part of the public service leadership model which sets the new standard for effective government leadership.

We must abandon the notion that leadership development is nice to have training, rather, it's essential to fulfill complex missions and motivate, empower, and hold employees accountable under new workplace realities.

The Federal Government must institutionalize the positive changes that emerged during the pandemic, such as flexible work schedules and hybrid work environments. We recognize that there are jobs that cannot be performed remotely.

We advocate for agencies to focus on outcomes and mission achievement when determining the best course of action.

In many cases, it is beneficial to have remote workers. Agencies can access untapped talent in new locations and expand diversity, not only racial and ethnic diversity, but it increases opportunities

for young people to join public service and welcomes more workers with disabilities.

We know that artificial intelligence and advanced automation are bringing significant changes to how we work. We must build the infrastructure to upskill and reskill the Federal work force on a continual basis.

Agencies will not be able to fill gaps for mission critical talent through hiring alone. Reskilling will provide agencies a path for meeting needs and retaining talent as employees are looking for jobs with stronger career trajectories.

None of this is easy. It will require investment of resources and a recognition that this is an iterative process. We applaud both the Biden and Trump administrations for making the Federal work force a central part of their Presidents' management agendas.

We have several recommendations in our written testimony. However, there are three specific calls to action I want to highlight.

First, Congress and the administration must work together to improve pathways to join public service through internships, fellowships, and talent exchanges.

We're excited that Chairman Connolly is introducing legislation intended to improve and increase the use of internships and bring to fruition the ideas the partnership has recommended over the years.

We need to create more options for permeability between sectors and opportunities for tours of duty such as the U.S. Digital Service. One example is Congress should amend the Intergovernmental Personnel Act to allow the private sector to participate in short-term talent exchanges.

Second, a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility must be a cornerstone in the transformation of how government recruits, hires, develops, and retains talent.

This commitment ultimately leads to higher organizational performance by ensuring the door is open for top talent and by enabling new and creative ways of thinking.

Also, a government that better reflects the people will improve service delivery and increase public trust in our democratic institutions.

Last, rethinking how we recruit, reskill, and develop our talent is only possible with highly skilled and well resourced human capital offices.

Congress should jumpstart efforts to increase the skills and professionalism of the Federal H.R. community by requiring OPM to provide technical training and fund critical H.R. IT needs which would improve the capability to track performance metrics and collaborate across agencies.

We want this thank the chairman for introducing the Strengthening the OPM Act which is an important first step.

We have an opportunity to drive meaningful, systemic, and lasting improvement for our Federal work force. Thank you again for allowing me to share these ideas today, and we look forward to working with you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Perfect. Thank you so much.

Our next witness is Andrew Biggs with the American Enterprise Institute.

Mr. Biggs, you are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF ANDREW BIGGS, SENIOR FELLOW, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you very much. Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle agree that Federal personnel management has fallen short of producing a truly 21st century work force. Some reports call it a crisis.

But I submit that you enjoy the benefits of high performing Federal employees every day, from Capitol Hill staff who man your personal offices and work on this committee.

Every day congressional staff arrive early and stay late, take on new responsibilities on the fly, and produce the goods under pressure. Hill staff get the job done whether it takes nights or weekends.

But more important than thanking Hill staff is understanding how this unusually high performing segment of the Federal work force came to be.

A big reason is that you, as Members of Congress, can hire who you want, you can pay what you want, you can promote who you want, and you can fire who you want. Managing the staff of a congressional office will be significantly harder and your productivity as Members of Congress will be lower if you are hamstrung in hiring, firing, promotion, and pay. Yet that is how the typical Federal agency operates.

Today, as Congress considers new tools for the Office of Personnel Management, it is worth considering President Carter's statement upon passage of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. By itself, President Carter said, the CSRA will not ensure improvement in the system. It provides the tools. The will and determination must come from those who manage the government.

Since the CSRA was passed in 1978, Federal employee pay and benefits have risen faster than in the private sector. Nearly every study finds that Federal employees receive higher pay than similarly educated and experienced private sector employees.

What has fallen short, I believe, is what President Carter called the will and determination, to insist on excellence and thereby attract and retain employees who exhibit excellence.

For instance, the CSRA created a Senior Executive Service, intended as a nimble, flexible, and accountable class of upper management with the very best SES employees eligible for cash bonuses.

Today OPM data show there's no correlation between SES employees' job performance ratings and their salaries. In some agencies, including OPM itself, the correlation between pay and performance is actually slightly negative, meaning the lower rated employees get paid more than high performers.

And while SES bonuses were originally intended for just the top performers, today 81 percent of all SES employees and 100 percent of OPM's SES work force receive an annual bonus averaging about \$13,000 per year. This is happening within OPM itself and with a

class of employees where accountability and reward were a goal from the outset.

Likewise, as the GAO has noted, Federal managers face significant hurdles to dismissing poorly performing employees. A private sector employee has a roughly 1 in 16 chance each year of being dismissed for poor performance. But a Federal employee who makes it through their probationary period has a roughly 1 in 1,800 chance of dismissal.

One explanation is the Federal Government's exceptionally good at hiring the best employees and coaxing poor performers back to excellence. More plausible explanation, I believe, is that lawmakers and Federal managers have lacked the will and determination to reward the very best employees and dismiss the very worst.

Federal employees agree, only 4 in 10 Federal employees state that steps are taken to address poor performers. Over half say the outcome is simply to let the poor performer remain and the poor performance to continue.

I experienced this firsthand during my time in the Social Security Administration, where, among a small office of highly motivated, high performing, and supremely non-partisan career employees, I had one employee who just didn't want to do their job.

Counseling didn't produce results, but there wasn't an appetite up the management chain to take things further. I ended up transferring that employee so that my high performers didn't have to be confronted with. That cost me an FTE and probably cost the taxpayers a hundred thousand dollars per year in paying benefits.

But like many Federal managers, I had a choice between doing the job I was hired to do and devoting all my time to a single problem employee. That shouldn't happen.

As I said, most Federal employees are very good, but they no more wish to be surrounded by poor performers than do the employees who jump through hoops to work at places like Google. And performance pay doesn't just reward with extra money, it rewards in validation of a job well done.

I see some merit in reforms included in Chairman Connolly's legislation as well as some dangers, but I would instead focus on getting the fundamentals right. Those fundamentals reward excellence and dismiss the worst performers, help to make the U.S. private sector one of the most productive in the world. And if applied, they can do the same for the U.S. public sector.

Thank you very much.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Great job. Thank you so much.

And our last presenter, before we get to members' questions, is Meredith Lozar with the Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

Ms. Lozar?

STATEMENT OF MEREDITH LOZAR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PROGRAMS AND EVENTS, HIRING OUR HEROES, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION

Ms. LOZAR. Good morning, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Meredith Lozar, and I am the executive director of programs and events for the Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes. Thank you for this opportunity to address the subcommittee.

Today I am here to specifically discuss how military spouse talent can help the Federal Government meet its work force modernization needs while reducing a decades long un-and under-employment crisis amongst military spouses.

I am an Active Duty Marine Corps spouse, and while I'm sharing statistics with you today, military spouse employment challenges are something I have personally navigated for the last 16 years, through 11 permanent changes of station, multiple deployments, and nine job changes. I have been with hiring our heroes as a remote and flexible employee at three different duty stations in the past three years.

Let me begin by sharing some background on military spouse unemployment. Military spouses are a young, diverse, population, whose unemployment rate hovered around 22 percent for more than a decade prior to the pandemic.

As a result of the pandemic, Hiring Our Heroes' most recent data suggests—excuse me—suggests a 34 percent current unemployment rate for military spouses, with over 50 percent of them actively seeking to rejoin the work force within the next six months.

The average age of military spouses is 31 and a half years, placing them squarely in a talent pool that makes up the largest share of the U.S. work force, and the work force that the Federal Government is struggling to leverage.

Military spouses are a highly educated, highly skilled, pool of talent. Fifty percent of them hold bachelor's degrees or higher, compared to tell 37 percent of their millennial, civilian peers.

In short, there's great opportunity to include military spouses in government work force modernization efforts. As we know, the Federal Government currently faces a mission-critical challenge of recruiting and retaining the next generation of employees.

Hiring military spouses is an efficient and strategic way to support the government's need to recruit and retain the next generation of talent.

For military spouses, Federal employment is highly attractive because it offers access to desirable retirement benefits and savings, moving ten times more frequently than their civilian counterparts and earning significantly less.

Retirement vesting times and savings are difficult for military spouses to realize. The Federal Government has the power to help change this by harnessing the military spouse work force and providing them with benefits, as well as pandemic-proven remote work roles.

As the Federal Government considers how to effectively modernize its work force, attracting military spouses with retirement benefits and continuity of employment through remote work is an effective place to start.

Additionally, implementing flexible employment practices is vital to modernizing the Federal work force.

Prior to the pandemic, military spouses were excelling in remote work roles. Now, as the rest of the world realizes remote and flexible work is highly effective, military spouses have emerged as a premier remote work force.

The COVID-19 pandemic refuted previous beliefs that remote employees were less productive. By demonstrating remote and

flexible work schedules allow people to remain productive outside a traditional brick-and-mortar office setting.

Now research tells us that 97 percent of employees prefer a hybrid telework model. As the committee looks to modernize the work force and attract younger talent, providing remote work opportunities is a must.

Ensuring the Federal work force reflects the larger U.S. population is also paramount to modernization, and including military spouses can help achieve that goal.

In addition to being young and highly skilled, military spouses are a racially and ethnically diverse pool of talent. The 2019 Department of Defense Active Duty Spouses Study reports that nearly half of military spouses identify as being members of minority populations.

In conclusion, the subcommittee will receive many recommendations for ways the Federal Government can modernize its work force. This testimony highlights the need to include military spouses and remote work opportunities as part of that modernization.

Military spouses represent a highly qualified, diverse talent pool that's actively seeking roles within the Federal Government. Like their millennial counterparts, they thrive in remote, flexible work opportunities.

Now is the time. As the Federal Government seeks to modernize its work force, tapping into military spouse talent is a logical solution.

Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much. Right on time. And I appreciate all of the presentations. We're now going to go to member questions, and the chair calls on the Congresswoman from the District of Columbia, Ms. Norton, for her five-minutes.

Ms. NORTON. I thank my good friend for this hearing. It is especially timely now as we note what the Federal Government is being—has been doing for the past two years with COVID-19, just pulling out whatever flexible work force strategies we've had. Some we've had all along like telework. We've certainly had to improvise.

So this hearing comes at a time when we ought to evaluate these practices and determine how many of them should be kept permanently, for example. Businesses, I should note, are doing the very same thing.

So it's fortunate that as we face this pandemic that we already had some strategies. For example, we've used telework for a very long time. We've used alternative work schedules. Perhaps the oldest is paid and unpaid leave.

So my first question is for Ms. Cross. Ms. Cross, have you looked to see what agencies have been at the vanguard of improving work force—workplace flexibilities? Who's in the leadership?

Ms. CROSS. There are so many agencies that are forging ahead and really paving the way for the rest of the Federal Government to emulate, and I can certainly highlight a few of those.

First I'd like to call out the United States Department of Agriculture who just yesterday, I believe, promoted that they were going to publicly announce their new remote work and updated

telework policy for a number of really strategic, important, Federal human capital reasons.

The first is because they had to try to reverse the impacts to labor shortages and attrition due to previous years' announcements of relocation of those positions. That really hit the USDA very significantly in terms of personnel shortages. So that was one strategy.

The second was for them to take a look at their employee engagement scores, knowing that highly engaged workers also affect retention and attrition, and that certainly costs the agency and the taxpayer in productivity.

And then ensuring that they're rolling out flexible choices so that they are hearing from employees engaging with labor unions very proactively and making certain that managers are equipped with the information that they need to be able to determine which positions can fit into a telework model, versus a remote model, versus a hybrid model, and versus maybe just leveraging scheduling flexibilities. So that's one.

GSA is forging ahead and not only for its own work force but also for rolling out their vision of the future of work 2030, which is offering services in the form of reimagined office space, you know, a home office in the box where agencies can equip their home workers with more ergonomically correct materials.

And of course, I'd like to call out NASA who have already been leveraging remote work opportunities even at the Senior Executive Service level for recruitment purposes. In fact, just in the last year, they were hiring for a senior-level innovation executive remotely.

So those are just a few examples.

Ms. NORTON. Oh, those are very helpful examples. It tells us that it can be done. Ms. Cross, as I mentioned, private sector employers face the same challenges as Federal agencies. Do you have examples of recent innovative private sector practices that could be adapted to the Federal work force?

Ms. CROSS. I do have some examples, and the first example I'd like to cite in contrast to how the Federal Government operates—and of course there are reasons for doing so, but—is that many of the top employers in the private industry who are remaining remote or committing to a hybrid model moving forward are simply using a process by presuming that if employees were working that way during the pandemic successfully, then they could continue to do so.

In addition, they're allowing employees to take their jobs wherever they see fit. Many companies are recognizing the impacts to the work force and focusing on well-being, empathy, avoiding productivity risks, and risks to stress, and so those are just a few examples.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. The gentle lady's time has expired. I thank her.

The chair now recognizes the distinguished ranking member from Georgia, Mr. Hice.

Mr. HICE. Go dogs. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Biggs, let me begin with you. When it comes to increased teleworking remote work in the Federal Government, I think one

of the first questions at least that we have to ask is, how will this affect the mission of the agency.

In some areas that may be easy to determine. Other places, I think it's certainly more difficult. But I would appreciate your comments on perhaps what type of metrics you believe should be in place to ensure that the American people are getting the services that they deserve.

Mr. BIGGS. Well, thank you very much, Congressman.

I think the core challenge that the government faces in general is monitoring the productivity of their employees. In the private sector, you can look at, you know, how many products or services an employee provides. You can look at the profits of either sales or of the unit that he is part of. The government is just much harder to do that.

Telework makes that harder still. I worked in an agency, the Social Security Administration, where productivity is relatively easy to measure. You had claims representatives were handling retirement for disability claims. We can measure how many claims they process. We can measure the accuracy of their work.

That is an area where I think really deserves increased attention, because it gives you a best-case outcome for telework in the Federal Government.

I have not seen what we would consider to be convincing evidence yet or how that has played out. There has been anecdotes that teleworkers worked well at Social Security; in other cases, it hasn't. In general—

Mr. HICE. Mr. Biggs, if I can interrupt you, we're still having some audio problems with your responses coming through, but it is very difficult to understand. If you could submit that answer to us, I would appreciate it.

And also, I would like to followup, and I'm not going to ask for a verbal response, but if you could get back to me on the post-pandemic era, it may make sense to have some pilot programs for expanded telework and remote work. But I think we need to work out some of the kinks, and the pilot program would do that.

And I would like your thoughts on, what would that look like, a pilot program, to be successful? If you could submit that to us in writing, I would appreciate it.

Let me go on, Ms. Amante, to you.

The metrics for measuring telework performance is critical. We all know that. And you suggest that the Patent and Trademark Office is one of the agencies that is being successful with their telework program, and precisely because they have metrics in place.

But we also know, probably those metrics are theirs because they had problems in the past; in 2016 issues, with, shall we say, rampant fraud in the telemarketing. I mean, they had something like 8,100 workers, or something in that ballpark, reporting 130-something thousand hours of unsupported work evidence. So that's probably why they have metrics in place.

But all of that aside, the basic question is, couldn't the Biden administration potentially be running into a risk of new fraud—abuse, perhaps, is a better word—in the teleworking and remote working system? I guess that's really the question. Are we running

a risk by moving forward with this without doing more research and having metrics in place before we just open it up?

Ms. AMANTE. Yes. Well, thank you for your question.

And certainly, depending on the agency's mission and the type of work the agency performs, fraud always has to be considered. But I don't think we should start with the premise that there will absolutely be fraud. I think establishing performance metrics is the key, as you said, absolutely for any kind of job. And I agree with you that mission always needs to be the primary focus when determining whether a job should be remote or in person.

But I think, you know, if we have strong performance metrics and we invest in our leadership, they can watch fraud metrics. You can track those caseloads to make sure that there is not fraud going on, whether it's in person or remotely.

Mr. HICE. I agree metrics is the key, and I'm not trying to imply that there would be fraud and abuse. But there has been in the past, and to protect that, I agree metrics is key.

Just in the last few seconds, Ms. Lozar, the whole issue about military spouses, should this be a part—should this be included in the Building Next Generation of Federal Employees Act, do you think? Because it's missing in there, and I think based on your testimony, it may be worth looking at.

Ms. LOZAR. I would agree. Thank you for asking.

Mr. HICE. OK. And thank you for being brief with that.

I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Hice.

And, by the way, the chair looks forward to working with you on metrics. I completely—I mean, metrics are key to measuring effectiveness, fraud, you name it. And I assure you, you will find a willing collaborator with me in trying to set metrics.

But I also think you have to set metrics goals, so I invite you to join me in the next bill on telework which is focused on metrics. I couldn't get metrics back in 1909 and 1910 when we introduced the Telework Enhancement Act, but I wanted to. And maybe that time has now come. So I look forward to working with my friend on that.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Raskin, for five minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much.

You know, we're living in a time where huge numbers of Americans are approving of unions and would like to be able to join unions, and it's not just wages and benefits and things like that, but it's also a sense of participation and belonging in the workplace, and the quality of the work experience.

Mr. Thomas, why is it important that Federal agencies establish and cultivate effective and cooperative relationships with Federal employee unions and associations? You know, how do good relations between unions and agencies affect both work product and the effectiveness of the agency, and, also, the quality of work life for the employees?

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you, Mr. Raskin, for the question.

While NARFE is not a union, we do believe in the practices that they can bring to the table. Part of what goes on with any group of employees, especially if they're unionized, is that there can be

productivity issues. There can be confrontational issues with the supervisor. There can be all kinds of things that are going on.

So you have union, you might say, capabilities there to use them. If you're a manager, you can use them to your advantage.

So that would be one of the things——

Mr. RASKIN. Well, let me pick up on that point. I appreciate that.

Mr. THOMAS. OK.

Mr. RASKIN. Let me come to Ms. Amante.

You know, while the polls are showing that unions are being held in very high esteem, only 10 percent of American workers are union members now, and only around six percent for private sector unions. It's a bit higher in the public sector. There are more than 1 million Federal employees who are represented by labor unions right now. That's aside from postal workers.

And to followup on the point Mr. Thomas was making, do you think that the Federal Government can leverage strong union and worker association participation in the Federal work force to attract and retain talent, to help recruit and bring in new workers?

Ms. AMANTE. Thank you for the question.

I think we're—we need to leverage every possible tool in the toolbox to be recruiting talent into the Federal Government, including our unions. Our unions are important stakeholders at the table. They represent the Federal work force voice. And I welcome and the partnership welcomes their ideas, and this committee should welcome their ideas and thoughts on recruiting the next generation.

Mr. RASKIN. Yes. And, Mr. Thomas, do you agree with that, that unions can be part of the solution here in terms of making Federal employment a really attractive and exciting option for young people who are launching their careers?

Mr. THOMAS. Absolutely. I firmly believe that unions can be used for that particular purpose, and I think we need to do probably more of it. There were members of my family that were members of unions in the past, PATCO, for one, many years back.

But the thing is that unions have their place, not only in recruiting but also in retaining employees, so very, very, you might say involved with the various organizations or agencies within the government.

Mr. RASKIN. I would like to followup with you on a final question, Mr. Thomas, since you do represent hundreds of thousands of retired Federal employees, and you have had a chance to think about all of these issues about the status and the public reputation and image of Federal employees.

What is the effect of politicians who just sort of, with wild abandon, attack Federal workers, whether they are people who are, you know, working on nuclear safety or OSHA safety or they're working to get people their Medicare checks, or they're working to make sure that everybody is paying their fair share of taxes, whatever it is, what do you think about politicians blasting Federal workers? And do you think that creates a problem for us in terms of recruitment and the image of Federal workers?

Mr. THOMAS. I think the——

Mr. CONNOLLY. The gentleman's time has expired, but the witness may respond.

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you, Chairman.

I think it's, again, what's new? The thing is that this has been going on for a considerable period of time, and every time we have to sort of confront that, oh, whether it's a news article or whether it's a citizen who comes up and says, I didn't get the service that I was entitled to or wanted to get.

So whether it's a politician or a member of society out there making accusations, unfortunately, it's—you can't—how do I want to say it? You can't really solve everybody's problem. We try to. We try to be the best that we possibly can. We try to provide the services to the population. And, unfortunately, sometimes we get a bad rap from not only politicians, but also from the society in general about that.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. THOMAS. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Keller, is recognized for his five minutes.

Mr. KELLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I think we all know it's no secret that the Federal work force is aging, and there's a significant need to promote a competitive job market that is attractive to those entering the work force and keep sufficient staffing levels.

Congress needs to be working with agencies to improve services and streamline government operations. Unfortunately, many of the proposals discussed today would do more for the Federal Government rather than the people we serve. That's who we work for. It's not about us and the government. It's about the people for which we work that are the stakeholders in the government.

We also can't ignore one of the most pressing issues affecting the Federal work force, and that's President Biden's vaccine mandate on virtually all Federal employees and Federal contractors. Many people in Pennsylvania have told me this will disrupt their work force and drive them out of business. In fact, I have a woman-owned business in Montoursville, Pennsylvania, who, due to government—she does government contracting work, and she might lose 40 percent of her work force if she doesn't have that contract. But, again, it's up to her employees.

So I do have some questions. And I guess, Mr. Biggs, how would the administration's vaccine mandate on Federal workers and contractors impact businesses that contract with the Federal Government and the government's ability to recruit and retain high quality employees?

Mr. BIGGS. I hope you can hear me now.

Mr. KELLER. Yes.

Mr. BIGGS. That's fantastic. I apologize for that.

I'm an example of some of the downside of remote work. I am coming to you from rural Oregon, so perhaps this is a rural broadband issue we're having.

I think the issue, particularly with contractors, is that a contractor may serve the Federal Government, but they serve many other markets as well, many other customers. So imposing a mandate on a contractor where their work force simply doesn't want to do it doesn't simply hurt their ability to serve the Federal Government, it also hurts their ability to serve the rest of the economy.

So I think that the administration should think carefully about this. I'm, in general, pro vaccine. At the same time, though, we should vaccinate up to the point at which the cost exceeds the benefits. And the vaccination rates with Federal employees are already very high. A certain number of them have acquired immunity by having gone through COVID.

So the question I face is how much additional gain do we have by having this fight over contractors. And I suspect some flexibility would be a better approach on that.

Mr. KELLER. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Also, Mr. Biggs, how might adding more bureaucratic layers to OPM, as some of the legislation being discussed today, what effect would that have on the daily operations?

Mr. BIGGS. Well, there are both pros and cons of legislation. There are advantages of having continuity in OPM, having career employees there over time. But there are also disadvantages. And the disadvantages come of locking in place the problems with Federal management that have existed for 40 years. You know, a World Bank report I cite in my testimony says to have a highly effective work force, what is really needed is political buy-in. You have to have the elected officials insisting working with the work force to make this happen. Making OPM I think more

[inaudible]

So I think we just need to be very careful of the advantages and disadvantages of this. There has to be some accountability to

[inaudible]—

Mr. KELLER. Mr. Biggs, we're having difficulties hearing you. So maybe if you could just submit that for the record, we could get the rest of your answer in writing, and I will just sort of sum things up here and then you can respond after I'm done.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you.

Mr. KELLER. One of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, you know, they have spoken at length about the benefits of teleworking, but not the risks associated with remote work. While there is no doubt that we have entered a new era of working styles, that does not evade us of doing so responsibly.

For instance, I hear regularly from Pennsylvanians unable to access in-person services at local Social Security offices. And I know we also have the NPRC, the Records Act, for our veterans to get the information they need.

So there is a need for us to make sure that the people that are the government, we're not—we work for the people in government, but they are the people that we work for.

So I just want to make sure that we have that in mind when we're looking at metrics, when we're looking at however we're—Federal agencies, that we put the people that we work for at the front of everything that we do. And that means accountability, because the people we work for have that every day in their life.

In private industry, it was always said to me, when I managed a factory, Thank you for yesterday, but what about tomorrow? And we need to make sure we drive improvement and not just change.

Thank you. And I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentleman. And he makes a very good point. And a number of us who are strong telework advocates,

nonetheless, are rode herd on certain Federal agencies that weren't entirely functioning during the height of the pandemic. One example, for example, was the Passport Office. They had kind of totally stopped for a period of time, and there was no reason for that. And I agree with you about some of the other Federal agencies you have also cited.

So we would be glad to work with you on that.

Telework is a huge useful tool, but it's not a substitute 100 percent for, you know, the work that has to be done at the Federal Government level, nor is it ever 100 percent substitute in the private sector. So we would not expect any different standard in the public sector as well.

So thank you, good point.

And I look forward to seeing the written response of Mr. Biggs because he was breaking up there. He was talking about the OPM, but what I heard him say was that he completely agreed with me about the role of OPM. So look forward to, you know, seeing that in writing.

All right. The gentleman from Maryland is recognized for his five minutes, Mr. Sarbanes.

Mr. SARBANES. Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for the hearing.

I want to pick up kind of where you were just leaving off on telework. I absolutely agree with you that you can strike the right balance between telecommuting and telework on the one hand, and continuing to provide high quality, accessible in-person services on the other hand. Private sector has long found that balance. I think, even though there's a different dimension to the way the public sector has to reach out and touch our citizens across the country, that that balance can be struck there as well.

It won't surprise you that my question line, Mr. Chairman, is going to be around telework because you and I have been obsessed with this as an important resource for the Federal work force for many, many years. I want to thank you for your partnership in pushing forward very, very important legislation in that space.

You mentioned, in your opening remarks, Mr. Chairman, that one of the key issues facing our Federal work force is the lack of younger employees. In fact, as of June of this year, I think the statistic is only 6.9 percent of Federal employees are under the age of 30 compared to 23 percent in the private sector. So, I mean, there's a big disparity there when you look at the statistics.

Ms. Amante, how important is telework as a tool for recruiting younger workers to the Federal Government? I mean, it's kind of a no-brainer question, but maybe you can just emphasize the imperative of that. I appreciate it.

Ms. AMANTE. Absolutely.

I think the more we learn about generation Z, the more we know, even before the pandemic happened, that they seek flexibility. They seek flexibility in schedules. They seek flexibility in location. There's a strong commitment to mission for this next generation coming up which, once again, is the silver lining for the Federal Government, and there's no lack of productivity. It's just that they are looking for flexible work options. And I think the positive com-

ing out of this pandemic is that that might be available now for the Federal Government on a permanent basis where it makes sense.

Mr. SARBANES. Thanks very much.

And you sort of alluded to productivity. I think the statistics show, Mr. Chairman, that agencies that have embraced telework for a number of years now actually demonstrate heightened productivity across the entire work force, not just those that are teleworking, but those that are not teleworking on a frequent basis because it leads to a different set of metrics, how you measure performance, and I think the entire work force then steps up into an approach that can raise the bar on what that agency is delivering.

Prior to the pandemic, only three percent of the Federal work force was teleworking every day. At the peak of the pandemic, no surprise here, 59 percent of the Federal work force was teleworking every day. And a Federal survey conducted at that time found that 79 percent of the Federal employees were either very satisfied, or satisfied with their agency's telework program, which is a tribute to what agencies have done since we put the Telework Improvement Act of 2010 in place, because they have really embraced this. I mean, it's not completely uniform in terms of where the different agencies are. But, obviously, this has become part of the go-to tool kit for how these agencies operate in a very productive way.

But let's speak to continuity here of operations, which is what the pandemic was shining a light on.

Ms. Cross, can you elaborate on how telework allows for operations to continue under difficult circumstances?

Ms. CROSS. Absolutely.

Telework has always been considered a critical tool in continuity of government and continuity of operations, but it's contingent on eligible workers practicing those skills in order to continue the mission to be done.

And so if you look at the same data points that you are referencing, sir, over the years, eligibility determinations have actually dipped down. In fact, in the Fiscal Year congressional report on telework, it dipped down as low as—in eligibility ratings, as low as the levels in 2012.

So it can't work unless we truly redefine what eligible is, and a great place to start is looking at those who have been working this way successfully during pandemic eligible. The level of participation, of course, has to be based on the mission, based on the services they provide to the American public, and the efficiencies of how they're working.

Mr. SARBANES. Thank you.

That's an outstanding encapsulation of the challenges and how we meet them.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back my time.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Sarbanes, thank you. And thank you for your leadership on telework. The bill that is law—and I think it's the last bill Congress has passed on telework—you were the chief author of, and you were gracious enough to allow me as a freshman to join you in that endeavor, and I very much appreciate that. It has been a passion of mine for a long, long time in local government, as well as Federal Government, but I know it has also been a passion of yours.

Thank you for your leadership.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Biggs, for his five minutes.

Rep. BIGGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate this hearing, and I appreciate all of the witnesses being here today. And I appreciate Mr. Biggs from Oregon, who we've run into occasionally on these—in Congress and around the Hill.

We're focusing today on recruiting, innovating, and improving Federal work force conditions and the Federal work force in and of itself, but I think a more pressing and, in fact, an even more important question is whether the fourth branch, the bureaucracy, has grown too big. And I think the answer is yes.

If the roots of the tree of government are the constitutionally set forth delegated duties to the three branches of government, we can conclude that the programs, agencies, and departments, which are effectively for our tree of government, they are the branches and the leaves of the tree, they have overgrown the roots. And, thus, we have become—because of this overwhelming spending, quite frankly, of both parties an expansion of government into all places and all things from the Federal level, we've placed the tree of our government actually in danger, quite frankly, of failing, of failing.

The American people deserve a Federal Government that puts their needs first and is held accountable for its decisions. Unfortunately, the American people are denied this because Federal bureaucrats constantly undermine the elected officials, the Presidents of both parties, and the bureaucrats are not held accountable for circumventing the will of the American people because there's no direct accountability to them.

The American people elect a President to carry out their vision. That vision should not be blunt or obstructed by unelected bureaucrats who disagree with the will of the American people. The Federal bureaucracy should work to advance the President's agenda, and if they disagree with the President's agenda, they should resign from office.

Often, however, Federal bureaucrats decide that they know better and that they will block the President's agenda. This goes back—there is literature on this literally for 30 years.

The Federal bureaucracy constantly undermined President Trump. Federal employees openly defied a constitutionally elected President and faced no repercussions. They worked against him at every turn and openly bragged about doing so. Yet, President Trump was unable to remove them.

My colleagues across the aisle love to talk about the importance of democracy, but if unelected bureaucrats block the will of the American people who want that agenda enacted, have we undermined democracy?

At the most basic level, constitutional republics can only survive and thrive if those in government are accountable to the people they serve. Yet, thousands of government employees are not accountable to the American people.

The highest paid government official is Dr. Fauci. He has faced no repercussions for lying to Congress, misleading the American people, or undermining the American people's faith in science and

our republic. He's engaged in partisan attacks against senators and showed a total disregard for this body, but he has faced no repercussions for this.

It does not end with Dr. Fauci. The FDA recently announced that it will take more than 55 years to process FOIA requests regarding vaccine data, 55 years. And many veterans are dying because they cannot gain access to their records. They can't even get access to their records in a timely fashion for them to receive treatment at the VA. This is completely unacceptable, and, yet, no Federal worker is going to face any repercussions for this.

Mr. Biggs, how would making all executive branch employees, at-will employees who serve at the pleasure of the President, allow for more accountability within the Federal bureaucracy?

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you, Congressman.

If the audio problems I had previously continue, just cut me off and I will respond in writing.

I will say that during my time in a Federal agency, Social Security—this is during a period in which I was working on Social Security reform, which was extremely controversial at the time—the Federal employees at SSA that I worked with were extremely professional. I mean, they did everything you asked of them. They went above and beyond.

So I agree with you that, obviously, we don't want Federal employees undermining the agenda of elected officials. At the same time, though, at least in my experience, I found them to be very professional.

In general, private sector employment is at-will, meaning you don't have to give a reason to dismiss somebody. The Federal Government is the opposite of that. And partly that arose for reasons you don't want a politicized work force, and that goes back 100 years. You don't want patronage appointments, things like that.

At the same time, though, you know, an administration should have the ability to put in place political leadership that will carry out the policies that they were elected to do.

So I think we need to have some middle ground here. Just everybody has to be cognizant of what their role is, and so, that's as far as I can really go while staying within my expertise.

Rep. BIGGS. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit a number of documents for the record: "Washington Bureaucrats are Quietly Working to Undermine Trump's Agenda"—that's from Bloomberg; "FDA Will Take 55 Years to Answer FOIA on Vaccine Approval Data"; an article entitled "Fauci Was Untruthful to Congress About Wuhan Lab Research New Documents Show"; and two more—sorry, Mr. Chairman—"Wait What? FDA Wants 55 Years to Process FOIA Requests for Vaccine Data"; and, finally, a series of letters from Chris Crane, president of the National Immigration Enforcement Council and Brandon Judd, National Border Patrol Council.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Without objection.

Rep. BIGGS. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The chair will note that the issue Mr. Biggs mentioned—from Arizona, Mr. Biggs, about the National Archives' VA records, that the Build Back Better bill that passed this body, on

a partisan line vote, contains \$60 million to address that very issue to try to help.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Illinois, Chicago, Illinois, Mr. Davis, for his five minutes.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing. And I also want to thank all of the witnesses for appearing.

And let me add my commendation to Mr. Sarbanes for his leadership in telework. And I have been around long enough to sort of see the emergence of teleworking as an integral part of government operations, and so I'm a fan.

For the eleventh consecutive time, dating back to 2001, human capital management has appeared on the Government Accountability Office's High-Risk List. According to the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, eight or nine percent of Federal employees believe their work is important, and 95 percent say they're willing to put in extra effort to get the job done. Yet, only 48 percent believe they have the resources they need to do their jobs, including staff support, compared to 72 percent of employees in the private sector.

To ensure that it has the talent it needs to respond to a wide range of domestic and national security challenges, the government must become more strategic in how it hires employees.

Ms. Cross, let me ask you, why is it important for Federal agencies to identify and plan for our future hiring needs, especially for our mission-critical positions?

Ms. CROSS. Well, planning for and looking ahead in a future-focused way, allows the government to strengthen itself to be able to continue operations again, because we cannot do that without the people. And instead of being in reaction mode and hiring only when people leave and turn over, you're able to forecast future needs, and also strengthen the way you source and to hire the right talent to fill those gaps.

Mr. DAVIS. So it is in the best interest of the government to actually do this, I'm assuming.

And let me ask you, Ms. Amante, what tools should agencies use to predict future work force needs?

Ms. AMANTE. There's some actually really great examples of this currently in the Federal work force. For example, two years ago, the FBI built an attrition model to help fill staff vacancies. As you can imagine, given the long security process, it can be a very arduous task to fill those jobs. So when they released this model in 2019, they're able to predict vacancies across multiple positions, and then start backfilling those jobs nine months ahead of schedule.

So what I would, you know, ask agencies to do is look for the bright spots across government and the great examples amongst their colleagues because these models do exist, and they should be looking toward more strategic work force planning so they can fill those critical skills gaps timely.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

And, Ms. Lozar, let me ask, do you know anyone in your organization who has had to forego a Federal job because it simply is too long to get the job offer?

Ms. LOZAR. Thank you for that.

Yes, there are a multitude of military spouses who have been discouraged by the length of time that it takes to obtain responses about Federal employment opportunities. Our own deputy director for Military Spouse Programs received a Federal employment offer seven months after interviewing for the position, which forced her to accept another role while waiting for the job.

So streamlining that response time is paramount when you're looking at military spouse and veteran populations.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, thank you very much. And I thank all of you for your answers.

And let me just conclude, Mr. Chairman, by saying we don't ever want a lengthy hiring process to prevent us—or to prevent critical mission work and mission activity being carried out. So I certainly agree that we need to make sure that we can do this in a timely fashion.

I thank you all for your answers.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentleman from Illinois, and I agree with him. We have to find more flexibility to expedite skilled workers, especially being hired by the Federal Government, given the vacuum that's going to be created because of retirements. On the other hand, we have to keep in place protections against whimsical hiring, nepotism, favoritism, and the like. It has got to be a merit-based kind of hiring system.

So where that fine line is in the 21st century with new technologies, new generations, and a huge retirement gap that's going to occur because the baby boomers are retiring is going to be our challenge.

And I think you're quite right, Mr. Davis. Thank you for that observation.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady, our vice chairperson of this subcommittee, Ms. Porter, for her five minutes. Welcome.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The pandemic, as we've noted, has upended the way that we work and has many of us working from home when we otherwise have worked in office buildings.

The 2020 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey found that 59 percent of employees teleworked daily at the peak of the pandemic, and 79 percent of the Federal civil service was very satisfied with their agencies' telework policies during the pandemic.

Mr. Biggs, do you believe that the Federal Government should continue to offer more telework opportunities?

Mr. BIGGS. Well, thank you very much, Congresswoman.

I think they should, but I think there should be a fair amount of discretion involved in the sense that telework shouldn't be just seen as an employee perk where everybody gets it or everybody doesn't get it. In certain circumstances, it works well; in others, it doesn't.

We should also look not just at employee satisfaction with telework, but also some measures of employee productivity. I think that's a lot harder to get.

One thing I would simply point out is, you know, everybody has been teleworking unavoidably in the past several years. Interestingly, some companies, like IBM, like Aetna, Yahoo, which for a

long time championed telework just prior to COVID had reversed their decision.

So the point I'm making here is that we should not blindly embrace it. We should look to the experiences some of these companies had, try to measure productivity as best we can, and move ahead.

I do agree, though, that trying to—if we can use telework flexibly, it helps you get a more diverse work force, people from outside the Washington, DC. area, and I think that would be helpful. So I think we just don't want to do an all-or-nothing approach here.

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Biggs, do you currently telework in your role at the American Enterprise Institute?

Mr. BIGGS. As you can see, I do. I have been teleworking for the last nine years. I live in rural Oregon. I come to Washington, DC. when I need to. What works is that AEI can measure my output pretty accurately. They know if I publish an op-ed. They know if I write a journal article. They know if I testify before you. If they didn't know those things, it gets tougher to manage.

Ms. PORTER. But why do you think that we couldn't measure Federal employees' work in the same way? They all have required job duties. They all have things that they have to do.

Do you have the same confidence—do you think we should put the same confidence and trust in Federal managers that you have in your managers and in Federal employees as in you as an employee?

Mr. BIGGS. It's not—to me, it's not a measure of trust in the managers. It is that—let's say, if I work on an assembly line or something like that, it is very easy to know what I'm producing, or let's say I'm in a private firm and I'm working—

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Biggs, reclaiming my time.

In fact, you don't work on an assembly line.

Mr. BIGGS. Correct.

Ms. PORTER. You have a higher level—you're a higher-level employee at the American Enterprise Institute. You have sort of a fair amount of discretion. A lot of your projects are longer term. I would say like in contrast to a lot of our Federal employees, many of whom have to perform routine tasks over and over and over again, answering customer inquiries, writing letters, processing paperwork, I mean, if we can do it for you for nine years, shouldn't we lean toward at least giving Federal employees the benefit of the doubt, and giving Federal managers the benefit of the doubt to be able to assess productivity?

Mr. BIGGS. I will just say my productivity is much easier to measure today working at the American Enterprise Institute than it was when I worked at the Social Security Administration. You know, how long should it take me to do a computer modelling project that—nobody really knows. You know, it's—so I'm just trying to point out what I think are commonly understood—

Ms. PORTER. Reclaiming my time.

Mr. Biggs, With all due respect, I think you're a little bit of a hypocrite here. I mean, I'm glad that this works for you, but trust me when I say that whether you write an op-ed or not is not particularly visible to the American people. Whether benefits are piling up and people are not getting them is something that there are

a lot of folks, including everyone in Congress, monitoring and paying attention to.

I mean, I have a hard time reconciling the fact that you have teleworked for almost a decade, that you are, obviously, very successful at doing it with your skepticism about telework for Federal employees.

Now, I do want to echo what you said. Telework is not an employee perk. It is the tool to allow Federal employees to be more productive in the same way that you have identified that it's allowed you to continue in this position even though you're outside Washington. It's allowed you, you know, to be able to travel when you need to, but save time commuting when you don't need to. It's allowed you to have that balance of concentrated work time with an interpersonal teamwork time.

I just think it's the wrong impulse to be suspicious about Federal employees' productivity and Federal managers' capacities even as you, yourself, are a successful example of telework in the private sector.

And the last thing I want to say is, you are right, that there are a few employee—employers that have returned to more in-person office right as the pandemic was beginning. But there are also a number of employers who have doubled down and continue to expand telework and, in fact, companies who have cut back on office space, companies like Prudential, who are going to a more hybrid work system, companies like Google. We're seeing this in commercial real estate markets all around the country decline in the need for office space.

So I would just say, Mr. Biggs, with all due respect, I think you're thinking about this in the right way. It's about productivity. It's about employee diversification. It's about employee success. But your priority—your sort of fundamental assumption that we should treat Federal employees with skepticism instead of respect I think is misplaced and misguided.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. BIGGS. I would refer you to my written testimony.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mr. Biggs, you are recognized to respond.

Mr. BIGGS. Sure. First, I would refer you to my written testimony on this. Second, it's—which references the issues of measuring productivity in government which exists even before you're bringing telework into it.

Second, I would refer you to large firms like IBM, very similar in some respects to Federal Government, and ask why they moved away from telework. I'm not saying telework doesn't work. In certain cases, like the Social Security Administration, productivity is very easy to measure, and I think it could work well. So I'm not taking a one-sided approach to this.

But to be honest, I prefer not to be called a hypocrite if you haven't read my written testimony.

Thank you.

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Chairman, may I respond briefly? Just one thing, Mr. Chair.

Mr. CONNOLLY. You have got 30 seconds, Ms. Porter, and then I'm going to—

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Biggs, I have, in fact, read your written testimony, and I do really appreciate it. And I think I'm, in fact, agreeing with you on a number of points that you raised. I just think it's the framing of where you're starting that doesn't get you to where we ought to be going. So I have, in fact, read your written testimony. And I don't appreciate you suggesting that I come to a hearing being less than prepared.

I apologize for calling you a name sincerely, I really do.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for your indulgence.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Ms. Porter.

Mr. Hice.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I appreciate the attitude that Ms. Porter just showed. I appreciate that. But it's my understanding Mr. Biggs does not get paid by Federal dollars to start with. So making that accusation is not a fair accusation in itself.

I just want that clarified. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. I think Ms. Porter wasn't implying Mr. Biggs was a Federal employee, or should be held to Federal employee standards; She was simply pointing out that there was the appearance of a double standard as we were talking about telework and its viability.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Michigan, Mrs. Lawrence, for five minutes. Welcome.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you so much.

Today is a very important conversation in setting of our priorities for Congress.

One of the issues that is very important to me, and I wanted to bring up is how can the Federal Government increase opportunities for work force development among foster youth and disadvantaged youths?

And I have been on a mission and have talked to a number of industries, and they find it a no-brainer to make a priority for internships, make a priority for introducing the foster care work force into their employment opportunities. Well, here we are, the Federal Government. These children are a ward of the state, and they don't have a parent and the resources that our children in America have. We are the Federal Government.

And so, I want to ask, Ms. Amante, when you think about the opportunities that we could, like, saying that foster youth, there's an application, check on that, that we will give special consideration for empowering this group of children, through no fault of their own, that have been stripped of resources that others don't have.

Ms. AMANTE. Thank you for the question.

And I love the notion of thinking specifically about that population. As Chairman Connolly mentioned earlier when he was referring to his bill, there's no shortage of need for more internships in Federal Government. We absolutely need to be thinking of creative ways of building talent pipelines across many different avenues. And I think certainly thinking about foster youth in America and inspiring them to serve in our government is a wonderful way to do it.

And this will be another way that we can empower OPM to create programming to think more strategically about that population.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. I want to say thank you, and I would like for that conversation—I would love to engage with you in as we move forward.

The other question I want to turn to is diversity and inclusion.

Last month, people of color in the United States made up 47 percent of all full-time and entry-level jobs, but only 33 percent of the senior level and 23 percent of senior executives make up the pool of executives.

And I want to ask the question, what is it that we can do? Again, why has the Federal Government struggled with people of color in leadership? And what can—we have this graph up, and I want you to look at that, and to talk to me about the racial inclusion.

Ms. Amante, can you please talk to me about what we can do to change this graph?

Ms. AMANTE. I think looking at the private sector for examples of how we can improve this is one path forward, and one example of a tool that many private sector companies use is sponsorship programs, where they will actually shepherd young people through the company, help them build networks, help them really focus on their development so that they can achieve higher levels and really have a career path.

That doesn't really exist in the Federal Government. There are mentoring programs. Certainly there are leadership development programs, but there isn't a lot of examples of specific attention paid to underrepresented populations where you really help them shepherd—you know, increase their networks, and really shepherd them through different processes.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. So give me a hope or optimism that we as a Federal Government can get there? What do we need to do now to ensure that we are on the right projection to turn this around? And any of the other panel can comment as well.

Ms. AMANTE. I'm happy to start.

And I think we're having this conversation, so that is the first step. Everyone recognizes that this is an issue, that our government needs to better reflect the people it serves at all levels of management and leadership. And, so, I think the fact that we are talking about this today, that it is a strategic priority of the administration is really step one.

All agencies are required to put together a strategic plan really focusing on DEIA at their agencies. So it is now, you know, a major topic of conversation at every agency.

So I think there is optimism and hope that we are going to see change.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. I just wanted to say as a closing, Chairman, that we have to move from optimism and conversation to action.

Thank you so much.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

And I think Ms. Cross wanted to respond to your last question, Mrs. Lawrence.

Ms. Cross.

Ms. CROSS. Thank you so much.

I wanted to give another example of a way that Federal agencies could be doing that and expanding opportunities to more diverse candidates, and that's through registered apprenticeship programs as well. In fact, many agencies are already on the pathway to do that. And so, it reaches candidates outside of the traditional academic pathways through college and student kinds of programs. In fact, even the Bureau of Prisons is looking at registered apprenticeship programs to bring in formerly incarcerated talent into the Federal work force. So just wanted to offer that as an example.

And one last one, the OPM's neurodiversity pilot project is underway, both in the United States intelligence community, and now looking to expand across other Federal agencies in data science fields and other occupations, a really interesting way to attract new and diverse talent.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you. That's helpful.

Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mrs. Lawrence. And thank you, Ms. Cross.

The chair now recognizes himself for his five minutes, and I'm going to try and go quickly.

Ms. Cross and Ms. Amante, we've been talking about OPM. We have a bill we're going to be marking up, I believe, tomorrow. And from my point of view, OPM is the H.R. agency, the human resource agency of the Federal Government. It should not be partisan. It shouldn't be politicized. It ought to be professional.

Does the bill you've looked at that was introduced and that we hope to mark up tomorrow, in your view, do just that? And in any way, do you believe that that bill deliberately or inadvertently circumscribes the ability of the President to exercise his or her political mandate?

Ms. Cross.

Ms. CROSS. Thank you.

I haven't looked at the bill through that lens necessarily, but I'm excited to see Congress pass legislation to strengthen OPM to do its job better and more effectively. They have already been working so hard to do just that, and so I'm excited to see that.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And I should say, Ms. Amante, the bill we're looking at tomorrow is actually predicated on a study from outside Congress. Is that correct? Do you know?

Ms. AMANTE. The NAPA report?

Mr. CONNOLLY. That's right.

Ms. AMANTE. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So we're actually acting on recommendations that came to us after some study about OPM. Is that correct?

Ms. AMANTE. Absolutely. And I believe that study was commissioned out of the NDAA, and the partnership supports the recommendations that were produced in the NAPA report and certainly supports a stronger OPM.

For many years, agencies have viewed OPM as a compliance-focused organization, not as an organization that's actually helping them support their missions. So we look forward to strengthening OPM and making it more nonpolitical to really help agencies strengthen their human capital offices.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. Thomas, you have endorsed the intern legislation, which I certainly appreciate. Some have argued, however, that with the best of intentions such a program would circumvent normal civil service hiring by giving a special credit if you served as an intern.

How would you address that criticism?

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Chairman, I think the—I don't think the criticism is well-taken for the simple reason that this is something that's very diverse from what you normally would be seeing. You're looking at creating the pipeline, you might say, for encouraging people to apply, not only apply, but also get into the Federal work force, or another way of getting into the Federal work force.

So I'm not sure the criticism is deserved at all.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And if I could just followup on that with you, Mr. Thomas, if my numbers are correct, we're looking at about 30 percent of the entire Federal work force being eligible for retirement in the next several years. That translates into around 600,000 people.

Mr. THOMAS. That is correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And the intern—the total Federal intern number is about 4,000 currently. Is that correct?

Mr. THOMAS. Correct. Yes, it dropped from 60,000, yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right. So the idea that somehow this is a violation of and circumvents, in some profound way, the Civil Service, you know, merit system of hiring is a little bit of a stretch, given the fact that we're talking about less than one percent of the entire Federal work force being interns, if we're lucky? Is that correct?

Mr. THOMAS. Yes. We sort of look at it over at NARFE, we look at it as part of our tool belt, something that can be useful.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Exactly.

Mr. THOMAS. And that's the purpose of it.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. And even professionalizing it, there's a thought. The private sector does that and does it very well. We do not do that professionally, or well, in the Federal Government.

Mr. THOMAS. Correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. There's no way to look at it and draw a different conclusion. I think we have a lot to learn from the private sector. I mean, you look at some companies, I won't name them, but if you're lucky enough, through a competitive process, I might add, to be hired as an intern, the chances are 90 percent you will be hired by that company and you will accept that job.

I wish we had something like that in the Federal Government, especially when we look at the enormous void we're going to have in terms of how do we recruit this massive number of people who have to replace people who are about to retire.

Telework, Ms. Cross, and anyone else, but—Ms. Amante, I will put it to you as well, but, Ms. Lozar, you're more than welcome to comment. How do we do—how have we done with telework as a Federal Government during the pandemic? I mean, have things collapsed? Have they become profoundly dysfunctional? Is it an experiment that we never want to return to? Is it something that has worked well enough that actually we would like to build on it and expand?

What's your sense? What kind of grade would you give the Federal Government in deploying telework during the pandemic?

Ms. CROSS. I would say the Federal Government is on par with private industry, especially for those employers who weren't accustomed to working fully remotely, en masse, like we had. In fact, we also used it as just one of the tools in our tool kit.

So by leveraging the full range of flexibilities for—even those who couldn't telework or fully remote work, again, by stripping those core hour restrictions, allowing more choice in when and where you're able to work, all Federal workers were kept safe, No. 1.

No. 2, the data we do have points to much higher satisfaction and perceptions of agency performance and increased workload.

Now, increased workload may not be a positive factor in this. In fact, we might want to look at modernizing and investing more ways to leverage technology to work efficiently on behalf of the American public. But overall, I would say right on par and, as the Nation's largest employers, we are able to pave the way for others.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Ms. Amante?

Ms. AMANTE. Yes. I agree with everything that Mika just said.

And I would just also echo on the employee engagement front. The partnership has been studying employee engagement, as you all know, since 2003, and our best places to work in the Federal Government rankings. We know there's a direct correlation between the employee engagement and mission accomplishment.

And what we saw in the past year was, you know, an increase of eight points employee engagement across the Federal Government, largely due to flexible work schedules, the ability to telework, and the acknowledgment from their supervisors that flexibility did not affect productivity.

We will always be able to find anecdotes where it didn't work, but that happened before telework too. So I think we need to keep focus on the American people and serving them and mission accomplishment. And I do believe telework can be a successful tool.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And I would echo with the ranking member about metrics, but we have got to make sure that we're measuring it, so we are confident that's true. I mean, productivity can be both subjective and objective. If I'm building widgets, you can measure precisely whether my productivity has gone up or down per hour per day. If I'm writing op-ed pieces, that's a little more difficult because there's thought time that goes into it, there's research that goes into it; there are drafts and redrafts and, you know, rejected drafts. You know, how do you measure that kind of productivity?

So at the end of the day, though, it's important to try and capture it, as Mr. Hice indicated, because the bottom line is we're here to serve the American people. And have we improved that service or not? And if not, how can we do better, and what lessons have we learned from the pandemic?

So thank you very much for those observations.

Before we close, I want to call on the ranking member if he has anything additional he would like to add before we adjourn the hearing.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Nothing to add really that hasn't already been said. I want to again thank each of you for being here today and for your insight that you have brought to the table.

But we do have issues, questions that need to be answered and resolved before we move forward in this, and I would just urge us to proceed with caution.

The American people and the service effectiveness of our Federal Government is at stake as are obviously, depending on agencies, critical issues like national security, and we cannot put any of this at risk or diminish the effectiveness of our various agencies. So I would just urge us to proceed with caution as we move forward. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentleman and hope upon reflection and examination he might want to be an original cosponsor of the intern bill because I do think it's a tool, as Mr. Thomas indicated from NARFE, in a much larger challenge that we face, the Federal Government.

I want to thank our panelists for their very thoughtful testimony and their even more thoughtful responses to our queries. Thank you.

And I want to commend my colleagues, we had good participation today, which I think shows the level of interest in preparing the work force of the future.

I want to insert into the record without objection, statements by the National Academy of Public Administration, National Federation of Federal Employees, and the National Treasury Employees Union.

In addition, I'd like to insert into the record, the National Academy of Public Administration's report, entitled, Elevating Human Capital, Reframing the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's Leadership Imperative, along with the RAND Corporation's research report, entitled, Recruiting and Hiring a Diverse and Talented Public Sector Workforce.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CONNOLLY. With that, all members have five legislative days within which to submit extraneous materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

And I'd ask our witnesses if you can—in as expeditious manner as you can, get back to us with those responses, should you get queries. With that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:29 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

