

OPENING STATEMENT OF
SENATOR GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

GAO PERSONNEL REFORM: DOES IT MEET EXPECTATIONS?
MAY 22, 2007

Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome our witnesses and thank them for being here this morning.

I have a keen interest in the management of federal agencies. During my eight years in the Senate, GAO has played an integral role in providing comprehensive analyses and thoughtful recommendations on reforming the federal government's strategic human capital management. This has been the centerpiece of my efforts as the Ranking Member of the Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management and the Federal Workforce.

I know of no other individual in government who has worked harder to bring to the attention of Congress and Executive branch officials, the need for the government to invest first and foremost in its workforce. Not only has Mr. Walker led GAO in identifying weaknesses and recommending improvement to strategic human capital management throughout the executive branch of government, he has worked tirelessly to lead by example by reforming GAO's strategic human capital practices. Mr. Walker has often observed that for too long, federal employees have been seen as "costs to be cut rather than assets to be valued." He has done a fine job in changing that perception at GAO.

In the first nine years of his 15-year term as Comptroller General, Mr. Walker has begun an important cultural transformation of his agency, based in part on the authorities authorized in GAO Human Capital Reform Act. I am proud to have sponsored the Senate version of this legislation, and I look forward to Mr. Walker's testimony detailing how he has worked to implement these reforms.

As we hear the testimony of the witnesses' today, I would remind my colleagues that cultural transformation takes time; understanding and accepting the market based pay system that has been developed at GAO requires a change in culture. In its work, GAO has identified that transformation takes approximately five to seven years. After ten years as Mayor of Cleveland and eight years as Governor of Ohio, my experience is that GAO's assessment is accurate.

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I understand a few witnesses will suggest GAO's authority under the 2004 act should be repealed or modified; however, it is premature to make such judgments. Mr. Walker has faced, and today will continue to face, a strong critique of the work he has done to modernize GAO's personnel system. However, Mr. Walker, when I was Mayor of Cleveland I did what you are doing now – implementing pay for performance for a government body. I know first hand how difficult the process is. I also know first hand how when done right, how motivating and rewarding it is for those employees that participate, witnessed by the fact that GAO was just recognized as the second best place to work in the federal government by the Partnership for Public Service. I commend him for his efforts and look forward to his testimony here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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