



**PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE**

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Prepared for

**The Senate Committee on  
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management**

**Improving the USAJobs Website**

April 12, 2016

Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Heitkamp, members of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management, thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in the Subcommittee's roundtable on improving the USAJobs website.

I am Max Stier, President and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization that works to revitalize our federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and transforming the way government works.

The Partnership's founder, Samuel J. Heyman, who served in the Justice Department of President John F. Kennedy and later achieved great success in the private sector, started the Partnership in 2001 with the goal of revitalizing the federal civil service and attracting the country's most talented, intelligent and committed workers to serve the American people. Those goals remain core to the Partnership's mission. Through our programs such as *Call to Serve*, which connects more than 1,000 colleges and universities with dozens of federal agencies to inspire students and recent graduates to enter public service, and *Federal Student Ambassadors*, a peer-to-peer recruiting program that engages students who have recently completed a federal internship to become passionate advocates for employment opportunities at federal agencies, the Partnership is working to broaden and reshape the federal workforce by increasing knowledge about federal careers and removing impediments to public service.

The immensity and diversity of the challenges facing our country demand a workforce as exceptional as the people it serves. Building and sustaining this workforce requires a 21st-century personnel system that respects merit principles and sustains the nonpartisan integrity of the civil service while being flexible and adaptive enough to accommodate a wide variety of agency missions, workforces and customers. The system should also be designed to easily attract, hire, promote, reward and retain the best qualified employees. Unfortunately, this is not the system we have today. While there have been positive steps forward, for the most part the federal hiring system, now nearly 70 years old, reflects a time when federal jobs did not require the highly-specialized knowledge and skills they do today. As currently constructed, the system poorly serves both federal employees and the American people, and is now more of a barrier than an aid to highly skilled and educated employees joining the federal government, particularly younger employees.

## **GOVERNMENT STRUGGLES TO RECRUIT AND HIRE MILLENNIALS**

Government's talent challenges are especially acute when it comes to millennials. Though individuals younger than 30 years of age make up 23 percent of the US workforce, they account for just 7 percent of permanent, full-time federal employees.<sup>1</sup> The numbers are worse in mission-critical occupations like information technology and cybersecurity, where just 3 percent of employees in the 2210 occupational code (which covers information technology) are under the age of 30.<sup>2</sup> The dearth of millennials entering the federal government is a key symptom of the broken federal hiring process. This is despite the fact that millennials are, as a cohort, very interested in and highly committed to public and national service. Universum's 2015 rankings of the most attractive employers in the United States placed federal agencies in the top three in the categories

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<sup>1</sup> Rein, Lisa. "Millennials Exit the Federal Workforce as Government Jobs Lose Their Allure." *The Washington Post*. 16 Dec. 2014. Web. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

of engineering (NASA) and natural sciences (NIH, CDC).<sup>3</sup> Further, a report by OPM, "Millennials: Finding Opportunity in Federal Service", found that, according to the 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, millennials already working in government tend to be satisfied with their jobs and believe the work they do is important.<sup>4</sup> Yet the number of employees under 30 in government is in decline.<sup>5</sup>

A major factor driving the relative paucity of young people entering the federal workforce is how poorly government utilizes internships as an entry-level talent pipeline, something which I will discuss in greater detail below. The Partnership's 2009 report, *Leaving Talent on the Table*, noted that, while the private sector uses student internships as a low-cost, effective way to recruit entry level talent and build a diverse workforce, government tends to lack the same strategic view and, in the process, loses out on a motivated, service-oriented pool of talent.<sup>6</sup> The Pathways programs, created by President Obama's Executive Order 13562, "Recruiting and Hiring Students and Recent Graduates", were meant to resolve at least some of these issues by consolidating the multiple federal internship programs and providing a clear conversion authority for agencies to noncompetitively convert interns to federal employment.<sup>7</sup> However, these programs have not yet lived up to their potential. Even within the agencies that do the best job of utilizing Pathways, the numbers are discouraging. At the Department of the Army, which leads all agencies in Pathways hires with 16.8% of the government-wide total (or 1,508 total hires), these hires represent less than 1% of the Department's total civilian workforce.<sup>8</sup> For the Social Security Administration, which ranks second in overall Pathways hires, the comparable figure is just over 2%. These data are troubling to say the least, but the causes are many and varied. Internship opportunities, such as those posted on USAJobs, can be difficult to find and understand, and for agencies facing declining budgets but increasing mission demands, the desire of hiring managers may be to replace an employee with a mid-level hire rather than with an entry-level employee who will require additional training. Whatever the case, government's under-utilization of internships as a pipeline for entry-level talent is a critical missed opportunity and one whose consequences will grow more acute as the federal workforce ages. It is worth noting that by 2025, 75 percent of the global workforce will be made up of millennials.<sup>9</sup> If it cannot recruit, hire and retain this group effectively now, government's talent crisis will only grow worse.

## **USAJOBS PRESENTS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

USAJobs is the primary means by which agencies recruit and hire, and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) should be commended for their recent improvements to the website. The addition of an application tracker allowing candidates to see the status of their job application, a resume-building tool and the ability to save an application in progress will, taken together,

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<sup>3</sup> "United States of America's Most Attractive Employers - Trends and Rankings." *Universum Global RSS*. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> United States of America. Office of Personnel Management. *Millennials: Finding Opportunity in Federal Service*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Personnel Management, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Rein, Lisa. "Millennials Exit the Federal Workforce as Government Jobs Lose Their Allure." *The Washington Post*. 16 Dec. 2014. Web. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> *Leaving Talent on the Table*. Report. Washington, D.C.: Partnership for Public Service, 2009. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Exec. Order No. 13562, 3 C.F.R. Print.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management - Ensuring the Federal Government Has an Effective Civilian Workforce." *FedScope Home Page*. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.

<sup>9</sup> *Big Demands and High Expectations: The Deloitte Millennial Survey*. Deloitte, January. 2014.

significantly improve the usability of the website and make it more applicant friendly.<sup>10</sup> OPM has also made positive changes to USAStaffing, which is the “back end” of the hiring portal. These improvements include better resume mining tools, the ability to store multiple position descriptions online and functions which make it easier to edit job postings. OPM’s commitment to agile development – releasing new iterations of the website and adding new features every six to eight weeks – is also a welcome change to government’s traditional “waterfall” approach to IT development. USAJobs Program Manager Michelle Earley and her team deserve a great deal of credit for the work they have put in over the last few months to make USAJobs a more effective and more accessible tool for both agencies and federal jobseekers. However, more can and should be done to make USAJobs the world-class recruiting tool the federal government needs and deserves.

The success of USAJobs is critical because the site is, in many cases, the first “touch” a job applicant has to the federal government; as one federal hiring manager has told us, the site is the first chance to establish a relationship with a potential new employee. For this reason, both OPM and agency leaders must make the visibility and marketing of federal positions on USAJobs as much of a priority as the usability and features of the website. Private sector companies do not simply “post and pray,” or wait passively for the right people to find their way to the right jobs, and neither should the federal government.

OPM and agencies must shift their mindset from viewing USAJobs as a tool for gathering applications to a tool for recruiting talent. As the USAJobs program team continues to refine the site, it should proceed with two key questions in mind: how can the application process be made more intuitive and easy to navigate, and how can USAJobs help people find the positions that are right for them? Several agencies are already moving in this direction. The intelligence community’s “Job Fit Tool” asks applicants a few questions about themselves and their experience, and recommends job openings in the intelligence field that are right for them.<sup>11</sup> This is an excellent model for OPM to consider. The Partnership, too, provides resources for federal jobseekers through GoGovernment.org, a website that helps individuals interested in federal careers understand and navigate the federal hiring process.<sup>12</sup>

Improving the visibility of USAJobs to new and current jobseekers requires agencies to adjust the way they think about developing job announcements and to make efforts to proactively recruit talent. One persistent challenge is the readability (or lack thereof) of federal job announcements. Announcements are typically overly long and full of government-specific terminology difficult for non-federal employees to understand. OPM’s “Delegated Examining Operations Handbook” requires that agencies include 21 separate items in the job announcement, with the option to include an additional 11.<sup>13</sup> These requirements make it difficult, though not impossible, to craft impactful job announcements and can lead to high levels of application abandonment, something that is a real issue for many agencies and leads to a smaller pool of candidates and harm to the

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<sup>10</sup> Ogrysko, Nicole. "First round of USAJobs.gov Improvements out from OPM." *Federal News Radio*. 24 Feb. 2016. Web. 5 Apr. 2016.

<sup>11</sup> "Job Fit Tool." *Central Intelligence Agency*. Central Intelligence Agency, 2013. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.

<sup>12</sup> "Go Government." *Go Government*. Partnership for Public Service. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.

<sup>13</sup> United States of America. Office of Personnel Management. *Delegated Examining Operations Handbook: A Guide for Federal Agency Examining Offices*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Personnel Management, 2007.

agency's brand.<sup>14</sup> OPM has already taken some positive steps to make USAJobs more applicant-friendly, and we encourage OPM to continue to simplify job posts and other information.

It is also worth noting that the *Plain Language Act of 2010* (P.L. 11-274) does not explicitly cover job announcements, though some agencies, notably the Department of the Interior (DOI), have committed to using plain language in agency job postings.<sup>15</sup> The Federal Chief Human Capital Officers Council issued guidance as far back as 2004 recommending that agencies write their job announcements in plain language.<sup>16</sup> OPM is reportedly working with agencies on this issue and we encourage them to see this work through.<sup>17</sup> The Partnership strongly recommends that OPM and agencies use better, more clear and easy-to-understand language to describe federal jobs, for example by using the more common phrase "job opening" rather than "vacancy announcement".

However, the language of the job announcement is not the only problem. Agencies need to be going to where the potential applicants are. This means using targeted, localized recruiting, something that agencies like the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and DOI already do, and taking advantage of the thousands upon thousands of resumes already in USAJobs to develop lists of qualified candidates who have already expressed an interest working for the federal government. These lists can be used to target qualified veterans, individuals with disabilities, and other diversity candidates whose information is already in the system with new job posts or other information. Agencies should also invest time in teaching students and university career services staff how to get the most out of USAJobs. One very promising practice at DOI has agency HR specialists rent out a campus computer lab to walk students through the application process in person. This gives students the opportunity to work with someone from the agency and get questions answered immediately. When three or more students have the same question, the HR specialists stop everyone and explain the answer and then note the question for future reference. The list of questions is then shared internally and used to make improvements to other job announcements. Though this activity may be time-intensive, it is also highly effective – of the roughly forty participating students in one session, all but one went on to make the agency's hiring certification list.

Hiring managers and agency leaders can also play a valuable role in selling the agency's mission, culture, and the benefits of working for the federal government, to potential new employees. For example, the National Protection and Programs Directorate (NPPD) within the Department of Homeland Security, which is responsible for the Department's critical cybersecurity mission, requires its GS-14 and GS-15 employees to set up recruitment dinners when traveling to meetings or conferences and sell the NPPD's mission. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Bob McDonald has also been conducting regular visits to medical schools across the country to encourage young doctors to consider working for the Department of Veterans Affairs. This kind of active recruiting – proactively

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<sup>14</sup> "What the Revamped USAJOBS Site Can Teach Employers Government Follows Private Sector's Best Practices in Improving Candidate Experience." *What the Revamped USAJOBS Site Can Teach Employers*. Society for Human Resource Management. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.

<sup>15</sup> "Plain Language." *Plain Language*. Department of the Interior. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.  
<https://www.doi.gov/plainlanguage>

<sup>16</sup> United States of America. Office of Personnel Management. Chief Human Capital Officers Council. *Ten Things You Can Do To Improve Federal Hiring*. By Kay Coles James. Washington, D.C.: CHCO Council, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> "What the Revamped USAJOBS Site Can Teach Employers Government Follows Private Sector's Best Practices in Improving Candidate Experience." *What the Revamped USAJOBS Site Can Teach Employers*. Society for Human Resource Management. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.

engaging with potential candidates, building relationships with students and career services staff, creating lists of qualified and interested candidates – would be a huge step forward for many agencies in meeting their talent needs, and a major shift away from the “post and pray” mentality of many agencies, particularly when it comes to the Pathways programs. Pathways does, in fact, allow for agencies to target their outreach to specific academic institutions and other sources of talent, providing that their approach complies with applicable law and regulatory requirements. OPM can and should support agencies seeking new and creative ways to acquire the talent they need, and agency leaders should set the tone by holding themselves and hiring managers accountable for “owning” talent at the agency and conveying to leaders at all levels that recruitment is a shared responsibility with human resources. The Subcommittee should also make clear that it would support these efforts.

As the primary portal for job opportunities in the federal government, USAJobs plays a critically important role in attracting the talent government needs, millennials especially. For the website to be successful, it needs to not just become more user-friendly to current applicants, but must attract new users as well – especially new users who have not previously thought about government as a potential employer. Government offers attractive and unique professional opportunities that are not, for the most part, available elsewhere. We are optimistic that, if OPM and agencies invest the necessary time and resources to strengthen USAJobs and their individual online hiring processes, USAJobs can realize its potential as a state-of-the-art online recruiting tool.

#### **AGENCIES UNDER-UTILIZE INTERNSHIPS AS PIPELINE FOR ENTRY-LEVEL TALENT**

Internships, which for the federal government primarily means the Pathways programs, remain the best way for agencies to recruit, assess and hire entry-level talent. And USAJobs, for all its faults, remains the gateway by which students and recent graduates interested in federal internships find their way into government. Internships give agencies the opportunity to see how a potential employee performs on the job, while the intern can get a sense for the work and culture of the agency. The internship can be a win-win situation for both federal agencies and future employees by ensuring that agencies are bringing in proven performers who are committed to the mission of the agency. Data from the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) show that job simulations such as internships are much more successful at predicting an employee’s future performance compared to other types of assessments.<sup>1819</sup>

Yet, as I noted above, the Pathways programs continue to face significant challenges. The program got off to a troubled start in 2012, when sequestration made agencies hesitant to bring on Pathways interns while furloughing full-time staff. The program is still struggling to fully recover. An analysis by the Partnership for Public Service, in collaboration with the Volcker Alliance and the Robertson Foundation for Government, found that a lack of program staffing, limited training, confusion over eligibility requirements, and poor assessment mechanisms have hindered effective implementation of Pathways.<sup>20</sup> In 2015, just 11.3% of under-30 hires across government came in through the

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<sup>18</sup> United States of America. Merit Systems Protection Board. *Job Simulations: Trying Out for a Federal Job*. MSPB, Sept. 2009. Web. 5 Apr. 2016. 52.

<sup>19</sup> United States of America. Merit Systems Protection Board. *The Impact of Recruitment Strategy on Fair and Open Competition for Federal Jobs*. Washington, D.C.: MSPB, 2015. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Rein, Lisa. "Millennials Exit the Federal Workforce as Government Jobs Lose Their Allure." *The Washington Post*. 16 Dec. 2014. Web. 2016.

Pathways programs.<sup>21</sup> The Partnership's 2014 report, *Embracing Change: CHCO's Rising to the Challenge of an Altered Landscape*, surveyed chief human capital officers from across government about their experience with the Pathways programs and found troubling results. Many HR specialists rated the program as "poor" in its ability to meet their needs, and just under half of agencies reported using Pathways "not at all" or "to a limited extent." One CHCO even stated that "[w]e are not happy with Pathways. It is simply not working."<sup>22</sup> Data from OPM's FedScope database bear this out. In 2015, there were just 8,954 Pathways hires in all of government, just under 5% of total federal hires in 2015.<sup>23</sup>

Fortunately the situation is slowly improving, and there is more OPM and agencies can do to make the program successful. One thing that can be done immediately is to facilitate better sharing of data and best practices on Pathways implementation across agencies. In 2014 the Partnership brought together OPM and agency HR specialists to compile a set of "mythbusters" and a Pathways hiring toolkit with the goal of reducing confusion and correcting the most common misconceptions regarding the government-wide Pathways regulations and implementation guidance.<sup>24</sup> The tools developed by the group clarified rules around the use of targeted recruiting, public notice, and the application of veterans' preference, among other issues of particular concern. The convening gave OPM, agencies and the Partnership much greater insight into what the real issues were in implementing the program. OPM's Office of General Counsel is still reviewing the Pathways hiring toolkit for broader distribution to agencies, and we encourage OPM to expedite this review so that these materials can be shared broadly and help agencies better utilize the Pathways programs.

Going forward, we recommend that OPM continue to look for new and better ways to share Pathways implementation best practices across agencies by focusing on which agencies are effectively implementing particular aspects of the program, such as developing meaningful assessment processes or writing clear job announcements. OPM should also share the data from agencies on their individual Pathways programs. The agency is currently collecting information on a number of data points relevant to the program, including the occupations for which the Pathways programs will be used to fill entry-level positions, the percentage of overall hiring expected under each program, the number of participants initially appointed during the previous year, the percentage of overall hires made under the program during the previous year, the number of Pathways participants converted to the competitive service, and the number of Pathways participants separated from the program. OPM should make this information public so that Congress, key stakeholders, and students and recent graduates seeking internships can see how each agency fares in implementing the program.

The Pathways programs are still relatively new, and show great promise for creating a unified, enterprise-wide internship program that gives all agencies the tools and resources necessary for hiring the best and brightest young talent. The Partnership stands ready to work with OPM and

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<sup>21</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management - Ensuring the Federal Government Has an Effective Civilian Workforce." *FedScope Home Page*. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.

<sup>22</sup> *Embracing Change: CHCOs Rising to the Challenge of an Altered Landscape*. Publication. Washington, D.C.: Partnership for Public Service, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Office of Personnel Management - Ensuring the Federal Government Has an Effective Civilian Workforce." *FedScope Home Page*. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.

<sup>24</sup> "Pathways Myth Busters." *Partnership for Public Service*. 2014. Web. 07 Apr. 2016.  
<http://ourpublicservice.org/issues/inspire-and-hire/pathways-myth-busters.php>

other federal agencies to help make this program the best it can be, and encourages the Subcommittee to continue to conduct rigorous oversight of the Pathways program to ensure it is working as intended.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Government needs to do a better job of recruiting, assessing, and hiring millennials and others. Fortunately, the necessary tools, such as USAJobs and the Pathways programs, are largely in place to do that. OPM, along with agency leaders, hiring managers, and HR staff, must make bringing in new talent a key priority for their organizations, and act accordingly. Below, I offer several recommendations for how government can address its most pressing talent needs.

- **Create a Common Pool of Interns for Mission-Critical Occupations** – The Pathways programs give agencies the ability to noncompetitively convert program participants from any agency as long as the individual meets the eligibility requirements. Given this authority, OPM should take steps to develop a common pool of interns in mission-critical occupations, such as cybersecurity, to which all agencies would then have access for the purposes of converting to entry-level hires. The pool would greatly expand the pipeline of available, proven talent for agencies with critical hiring needs, and enhance the opportunities for Pathways interns to find employment in the federal government.
- **Build a “Find Your Fit” Tool for USAJobs** – Too often with federal job announcements it can be difficult for an applicant to understand how his or her skills match up against a particular job. Agencies of the intelligence community have already begun to use “Find Your Fit” tools as a way to help potential applicants understand how their knowledge, background, and skills will fit within the organization. Such a tool would give jobseekers a way to see in clear, plain terms how they can contribute to the mission of the agency.
- **Issue Guidance on Job Posting Content Requirements and Mandate Plain Language for Announcements** – USAJobs posts can be notoriously long and difficult for non-federal employees to understand, and can deter individuals who may be a perfect fit for a federal job from applying in the first place. To attract the right candidates, agencies must balance what is required to be in a job announcement and what is needed to get the attention of the desired candidates. OPM should develop guidance for agencies on how to structure job announcements in a way that meets legal and regulatory requirements while de-emphasizing nonessential information, and making the posting simple for potential applicants to understand using common, easy-to-understand job terms. OMB could also consider clarifying that job announcements are covered under the *Plain Language Act of 2010*.
- **Collect Data on Customer Satisfaction with OPM** – OPM plays an important dual role as both the administrator of federal personnel laws and regulations and as an advocate for human capital innovation. Collecting data from the agencies which serve as OPM’s internal customer base would provide valuable insight into where OPM is succeeding, where it can improve, and how it can better serve agencies. Such information could make a potentially significant impact in how OPM works with agencies to improve their workforces.
- **Develop Assessment Systems That Go Beyond Self-Ranking** – The delegation of examining authority from OPM to agencies required HR offices to develop robust, state-of-the-art assessment systems to manage their own application processes. In most cases, however, this transition was not managed successfully. The assessment processes used by



the majority of agencies depend on self-ranking of applicants. In effect, this means that, in order to advance in the application process, applicants must portray themselves as experts at everything, even when they are not. This perverse incentive structure has led many agency HR specialists to be overwhelmed with applicants who make it through the process but clearly are not qualified to do the job. The Partnership's *Embracing Change* report found that "[m]ost agencies lack the assessment tools or processes to assess applicants efficiently and effectively when screening thousands of them."<sup>25</sup> This is particularly true of Pathways, where agencies cannot base assessments on training and experience, but must depend on assessments of soft skills like innovation and the ability to work in teams. To address this, OPM should prioritize efforts to improve the quality of federal assessment processes and consider benchmarking USAJobs and agency online assessments against best-in-class private sector companies to determine how assessment can be done better in the federal government.

- **Hiring Managers Must Be More Engaged in the Hiring Process** – Bringing needed talent into the organization is not just a job for human resources specialists; hiring managers play a crucial role as well. Hiring the right person should be a collaborative effort. Too often, however, hiring managers dismiss crafting job announcements or recruiting potential candidates as the job of HR, while HR specialists may keep hiring managers at arm's length and cut them out of the process. This leads to hiring managers not getting the right people and a breakdown between the goals of the hiring manager and of the HR specialist. While OPM's "Hiring Excellence" campaign is a good start, OPM and OMB must more aggressively share best practices and promote human capital innovation across government, especially outside of the Beltway, and expand training on effective hiring practices and use of special hiring authorities and flexibilities beyond just HR to include hiring managers as well. In addition, agency leaders and hiring managers should be held accountable for building their workforces and bringing talent into the organization, which should include activities to actively recruiting students, recent graduates and other talent.
- **Codify Pathways Conversion Authority for Third-Party and Unpaid Interns** – The Partnership recommends the Subcommittee codify existing intern conversion authority under the current Pathways programs and expand it to include unpaid interns and interns hired through third-party internship programs. Interns hired through third-parties have only half of their work hours credited towards conversion to a full-time position, despite the fact that they are performing substantially the same work; unpaid interns receive no credit at all towards conversion. This change would expand the pipeline of proven, high quality entry-level talent entering the federal government and is especially critical given the overall lack of young talent in government. This legislative change would also demonstrate Congress' commitment to the Pathways programs and to increasing the ethnic and demographic diversity of the federal workforce.
- **Collect Comprehensive Data on Hiring Effectiveness** – Agencies and OPM cannot manage what they do not measure. There has been some progress towards gathering data internally on the Pathways programs, but data on the overall effectiveness of the hiring process is still scant. In 2009, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee reported the *Federal Hiring Process Improvement Act of 2009* (S.736), which subsequently passed the

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<sup>25</sup> *Embracing Change: CHCOs Rising to the Challenge of an Altered Landscape*. Publication. Washington, D.C.: Partnership for Public Service, 2014. 17

Senate. The bill required agencies to collect information on indicators of hiring effectiveness, including the agency's ability to recruit well-qualified talent, the use and impact of special hiring authorities, applicant, hiring manager and new hire satisfaction with the hiring process, and more. These data would allow agencies to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their internal hiring processes, and where to target actions for improvement. We strongly recommend that the Subcommittee take another look at this legislation and how it might be tailored to address the specific current challenges facing the federal government in recruiting and hiring the best talent.

- **Fully Implement the Competitive Service Act** – I would first like to thank the Committee for its commitment to effective government in reporting the *Competitive Service Act of 2015*, which was recently enacted into law. The Act will better enable our government to recruit top talent and quickly fill mission-critical positions in fields ranging from cybersecurity to veterans health care. This bipartisan legislation is a common-sense way of treating our government as a single enterprise trying to achieve shared goals, rather than a disconnected collection of agencies competing for the same talent. We are aware that OPM has begun the process of developing regulations to implement this law, and urge the agency to work as quickly as possible to issue an interim rule with comment. Shelley Metzenbaum, President of the Volcker Alliance and former Associate Director for Performance and Personnel Management at OMB, offered several excellent recommendations on how OPM could quickly and meaningfully put this legislation into effect, which I would like to reinforce here.<sup>26</sup> Besides drafting an interim rule, OPM should develop new language agencies can use for job postings to allow hiring from agencies' lists of eligible candidates, name senior executives to serve as implementation leaders, and create a mechanism by which agencies can share candidate lists, assessments, and lessons learned. I commend the Committee for its work and hope you will conduct continued oversight of OPM and agency efforts to implement this important law.
- **Reform the Federal Hiring Process** – The best way to fix government's talent crisis is to reshape the federal hiring process for the 21st Century. As outlined in the Partnership's 2014 report, *Building the Enterprise: A New Civil Service Framework*, comprehensive reform would include strengthening assessment processes, granting all agencies access to excepted service hiring authorities that currently only a limited number of agencies have access to, instituting a market- and performance-sensitive pay system, creating government-wide talent pools for key mission-critical occupations, permitting former high-performing federal employees to re-enter government at any grade at which they qualify, making better use of the Pathways programs, and allowing agencies to demonstrate a shortage of "highly qualified" candidates, as opposed to "minimally qualified" candidates, to obtain direct hire authority.<sup>27</sup> These changes, taken together, would revolutionize federal hiring and help build the high-performing, effective, efficient and accountable workforce our government needs.

## Conclusion

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<sup>26</sup> Metzenbaum, Shelley. "OPM Could Significantly Improve Hiring, But Will It?" *The Volcker Alliance*. 28 Mar. 2016. Web. 07 Apr. 2016. <https://volckeralliance.org/blog/2016/mar/opm-could-significantly-improve-hiring-will-it>

<sup>27</sup> *Building the Enterprise: A New Civil Service Framework*. Rep. Washington, D.C.: Partnership for Public Service, 2014. 27.

Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Heitkamp, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Partnership's views and recommendations on USAJobs and its implications for the broader hiring process. The ability of federal agencies to accomplish their unique and diverse missions depends upon whether they are able to recruit, assess, hire, and retain the talent they need, and the Subcommittee's oversight in this area is crucial. I look forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee on this topic. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.