

Progress or More Problems: Assessing the Federal
Government's Security Clearance Process
Senator Daniel K. Akaka
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia
May 17, 2006

Thank you very much Mr. Chairman. As always, I am delighted to work with you in our effort to make the federal government more efficient – more effective – and more responsive. One area that will benefit from our continued oversight is the government's security clearance process, and I'm sure that government contractors, whose applications for clearances were cut off three weeks ago, will agree.

Today's hearing is on the progress made by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Defense Security Services (DSS), and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in attacking the backlog of security clearance applications since we started our oversight. In addition, we will also discuss the unilateral decision by DSS to stop accepting security clearance applications from contractors on April 28, 2006.

I strongly believe this particular action illustrates the government's lack of strategic vision to identify problems today that will create bottlenecks in federal programs in the future.

Certainly I am pleased that DSS submitted its reprogramming request to Congress to transfer nearly \$91 million to fund contractor applications for the remainder of fiscal year 2006 in time for this hearing. However, it's troubling that contractor applications were stopped even though there was money to fund the program, and DSS knew as early as January that additional funds were needed for the remainder of the fiscal year.

I reviewed Mr. Rogalski's statement, and I was heartened by his candid admission that DSS has difficulties in forecasting funding and projecting clearance needs. I was also pleased to learn that DSS is taking immediate steps to address the interruption in accepting contractor applications and is looking at long term solutions.

However, had the Department of Defense (DoD) complied with a provision in the fiscal year 2001 National Defense Authorization Act that required DoD to establish a process for expediting investigations and conducting annual reviews of the process, we might not be facing this problem today. In my capacity as the ranking member of the Armed Services Readiness Subcommittee, I've spent significant time working on DoD's business transformation, and I want to see results. Like Chairman Voinovich, I understand that unless the government's security clearance system works smoothly, our national security may be compromised, program failures can occur because of inadequate staffing, or contractor costs can increase significantly due to schedule delays.

Last month, the DoD Inspector General found that delays in the security clearance process "may impact national security, completion of critical DoD missions, and support of the warfighter." This is unacceptable.

We must strengthen existing relationships and improve communication among DoD, OPM, and industry. Agencies cannot respond to problems in isolation. I want to make sure that the three agencies represented here today – and OMB – understand that the long-standing

problems affecting the government's security clearance program must be addressed jointly and openly. Too much depends on it.

Chairman Voinovich, our goal is simple: we want to get the personnel security clearance program off of the GAO high-risk list. We have challenged OMB, designated by the Administration to take the lead in resolving these problems, to work with OPM and DoD. While there has been forward motion, the halt in industry applications is a significant step backwards. However, I am confident that with our continued oversight of this high-risk area we will see results.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.