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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee today held a hearing assessing the state of the federal acquisition workforce. Senator Akaka has been active in oversight of contract management across the federal government, and is a cosponsor of the Accountability in Government Contracting Act (S. 680).

Senator Akaka's remarks prepared for delivery appear below.

Good morning. This hearing of the Oversight of Government Management Subcommittee is called to order.

Over the past year, this Subcommittee, as well as the full committee, has emphasized the need for better acquisition management across the federal government. This is of great importance as the government continues to increase spending on contracting year after year.

Today we turn our sights to an important aspect of acquisition management: acquisition workforce. According to the Government Accountability Office, in fiscal year 2006, the government acquired over \$400 billion in goods and services. That same year, the government only had 20,000 contracting specialists in the acquisition workforce.

Poor contract execution and oversight inevitably leads to problems much like we saw with the Department of Homeland Security's SBInet [S-B-I-net] virtual border fence contract, which was delivered months past due, or the dozens of failed contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Many point to the size of the acquisition workforce as a major factor in poor acquisition outcomes. During the 1990's, the size of the acquisition workforce dropped dramatically, leveling off at its current size in the last 10 years. However, during that same period, spending on acquisitions ballooned. Americans need to know if there are enough people to provide oversight of contracts so that taxpayer dollars are wisely spent.

It is important that agencies have the right tools to recruit and retain a strong acquisition workforce. Agencies already have some flexibilities to help with the hiring of certain acquisition professionals.

In addition, some agencies, such as the Department of Homeland Security, are setting up acquisition internship programs to attract younger professionals into the federal workforce and provide real-world on the job training for a career in acquisitions.

Another issue is the skill sets and training of the acquisition workforce. Acquisition specialists and program managers need to have the best training available and keep that training up to date. As contracts become more complex and agencies rely on the contractors themselves to help define contract requirements, training is essential to execute contracts effectively and oversee them throughout their lifecycle.

A problem that I am very concerned about with the federal workforce as a whole, but especially with the acquisition workforce, is the looming surge of baby boomers set to retire from federal service.

According to the Federal Acquisition Institute, 53 percent of the acquisition workforce will be eligible for retirement by 2016. This is especially worrisome in looking at the acquisition workforce where it can often take several years to get all of the training and accreditation needed for certain specialties.

With every new retiree, the government is losing important institutional knowledge. The government must act aggressively now in analyzing acquisition workforce trends so that a brain drain does not develop in the acquisition community.

To address many of the concerns with acquisition management, the Senate passed the Accountability in Government Contracting Act, S. 680 last year. I am pleased to be a cosponsor of this bill. S. 680 would establish a government-wide internship program for acquisition professionals, much like one that is already in place at DHS which has shown promise.

The bill would also create a contingency contracting corps to ensure that the federal government has the acquisition professionals it needs during emergencies such as Hurricane Katrina. It is my hope that we can work to enact a bill that contains the tools to help bolster the workforce.

This hearing is intended to serve as a benchmark, giving an overall view on the current state of the acquisition workforce. This is an important aspect of our acquisition management strategy that needs continued attention from this Administration as well as the next.

Recruiting, training, and retaining an outstanding federal workforce is a difficult job, maybe even more so with the acquisition workforce. I hope that our witnesses here today will be able to share with us their views on the workforce and what can be done to strengthen it.