Opening Statement of Senator George V. Voinovich
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce
and the District of Columbia
"Access Delayed: Fixing the Security Clearance Process"
June 28, 2005

Good morning, thank you all for coming. Today, the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia continues its investigation into the Government Accountability Office's high-risk list of federal programs that are susceptible to waste and mismanagement.

Today's hearing, entitled "*Access Delayed: Fixing the Security Clearance Process,*" will explore the security clearance backlog and discuss what actions need to be taken to reduce it. We will also examine the transfer of investigative responsibilities from the Department of Defense (DoD) to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), including the impact that this shift will have on the ability to investigate and adjudicate security clearances in a thorough and expeditious manner.

In order to improve the workflow of any process, one must first understand the root causes of the problem. In the case of the security clearance backlog, there appears to be several barriers to a streamlined process, including (1) the sheer size of the backlog; (2) an influx of new requests since September 11, 2001; (3) an inadequate number of investigator and adjudicator employees; and (4) the overall lack of a strategic plan for managing the process. In fact, according to GAO the clearance process is so disjointed that DoD has not calculated the size of the backlog since 2000, meaning that we do not have an exact number of investigations pending. However, in a February 2004 report, GAO estimated that the DoD clearance backlog is roughly 270,000 investigations and 90,000 adjudications.

Unfortunately, the implications of a broken security clearance process send shockwaves throughout the federal government's national security workforce. The bottom line is that the security clearance process is a major national security and human capital challenge that needs to be resolved immediately. The cumbersome and lengthy process can stall the hiring of both federal employees and contractors for classified positions, such as terrorism and intelligence analysts, which can adversely impact our national security.

During the lengthy security clearance process, prospective government employees are often in a state of limbo because they are unable to start their new job until they receive the proper clearances. I can think of nothing more frustrating for a bright, ambitious, and qualified individual who wants to serve our nation, but is told by agencies, such as the FBI and CIA, that they must sit idly for months on end because their security clearance is being slowly processed.

This scenario is all too real for the private sector as well, as GAO found that obtaining a clearance can take over one year. For example, in FY 2003, GAO reported it was taking DoD an average of 375 days to process clearances for private sector contracting positions. Whether they are computer technology consultants, network engineers, or intelligence analysts, contractors play a vital role in securing our nation.   Therefore, it is imperative that we improve this process because in today's job market, it is unrealistic to assume that the best and brightest applicants are going to wait over one year to receive a government clearance so that they can begin their jobs.

With all of these factors, it is no surprise that the security clearance process has been designated as high-risk by GAO. However, this is one area where I believe that we can make significant progress in the near future.

A number of simultaneous actions are occurring to streamline the security clearance process. First, as outlined in the 2004 Defense authorization bill, DoD transferred its security clearance investigation workforce to the OPM. With this event occurring on February 22, 2005, I am interested in the assessment from our witnesses regarding the transition, including the short and long-term impact this will have on the entire security clearance investigation and adjudication process.   I would also like to know if we have enough employees trained to process the growing security clearance demands of our post-9/11 federal government.

Second, last year I offered an amendment to the intelligence reform legislation in Committee to enhance and consolidate the federal government's security clearance process. My amendment, which was included in the final bill, directs the President to select a single executive branch department to develop and implement the policies and procedures for security clearance investigations and adjudications. The law also requires the President to select a singe executive branch agency to conduct security clearance investigations. Additionally, it requires reciprocity of security clearances in order to streamline the process of transferring employees from one agency to another.

I understand that President Bush issued an Executive Order late yesterday that provides the necessary framework for implementing the law. Under the Executive Order, OPM is the primary federal agency responsible for investigating security clearance applications, while the Office of Management and Budget is responsible for setting the federal government's policy on clearances. Although the Executive Order is not the focus of today's discussion, the timing is important as I plan to hold another hearing to examine its implementation later this summer.

Senator Akaka and I share a passion for improving the performance of the high-risk areas, and I look forward to working with the Administration and GAO to make sure the security clearance process is removed from the list as expeditiously as possible.

I would like to thank our witnesses for their participation this morning and I look forward to their testimony.

I now yield to my good-friend Senator Akaka.

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