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"Future of Federal Work, Part II"

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Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today and giving me the opportunity to recognize the important work of the federal workforce.

At the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), we are committed to equipping our agency partners with the tools they need to improve federal personnel practices and policies, serve as model employers, attract top talent, and strengthen the existing workforce – all to create a more effective and efficient federal government.

I am honored to lead OPM in these exciting and challenging times. I look forward to highlighting our accomplishments and efforts over the past year, and sharing more about our plans to continue and build on this important work.

It is a unique moment for the federal workforce. The past two and a half years have been challenging for workers nationwide. Federal employees had to adjust to the realities of the pandemic and are still adjusting today to the ongoing pandemic and their changing work environments.

I applaud the entire federal workforce—those who continued to work from their duty stations or in the field throughout the pandemic and those who had to quickly adapt to new ways of working. Their commitment and dedication to the mission and the American people is truly inspiring. Federal employees' resilience and continued ability to deliver vital services to the American public is yet another reminder of the incredible potential of the federal community.

Beyond the pandemic, the past six years have been challenging in other ways for OPM. The effort to merge parts of OPM with GSA, the departure of the background investigations function, and the resulting budget challenges left us with a significant need to rebuild and fulfill OPM's critical role for the federal workforce.

That need was affirmed by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), which highlighted the importance of a strong, vibrant, and strategic OPM in its March 2021 report. OPM has taken this report to heart and used it to inform our rebuilding. Throughout this work, we focused on positioning OPM as a leader in advancing the Administration's goals and a true

partner for agencies. Under my leadership, OPM has deliberately engaged with federal agencies to encourage the development of tailored policies regarding the application of workforce flexibilities within their organizations to meet their programmatic goals and human capital objectives. This strategic workforce guidance is aimed at ensuring agencies can recruit hard-to-find, specialized and experienced talent wherever it is located, and retain employees who are critical assets to the organization.

And just as OPM is committed to helping federal workers, the Administration is committed to OPM and the federal workforce. The first priority of the President’s Management Agenda (PMA) is “Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce.” The second priority is “Delivering Excellent, Equitable, and Secure Federal Services and Customer Experience.” Those priorities are closely aligned, and the overall agenda offers a critical roadmap on how the federal government can deliver better results for all Americans. I am honored to help lead the workforce priority, bringing together other agencies in service of a stronger federal workforce.

I am pleased that my colleague and friend Jason Miller, from the Office of Management and Budget, is here today. Jason has been a critical and like-minded partner during my tenure.

I would like to discuss today three main ways OPM is working every day to be a strong strategic partner to agencies and put the priorities, strategies, and goals of the PMA into action.

Those three areas are:

- Promoting retention by making every federal job a good job.
- Attracting much-needed talent to the federal workforce.
- Strengthening the workforce and preparing it for the demands of the future.

Those three areas generally align with the first three strategies under the PMA’s workforce priority. OPM is also excited to work with OMB and other agencies on the fourth PMA workforce strategy, which focuses on strengthening OPM and the ability of OPM and agencies to use data and other information to empower the federal workforce. Making progress on this fourth strategy is critical for OPM’s ability to be the strategic partner agencies need.

Promoting retention by making every federal job a good job

The federal government’s most important asset is its people. Particularly in the current labor market, it is critical that government must position itself to retain the expertise, commitment, and knowledge of the federal workforce.

That is why, from the start of my tenure, OPM has aggressively worked to ensure that every federal job is a good job, and to ensure that the federal government—as the nation’s largest employer—is adopting employment practices that set the pace for other sectors to follow. Some of these efforts are highlighted below.

Federal worker minimum wage

During his first week in office, President Biden signed an Executive Order on “Protecting the Federal Workforce.” That Executive Order charged OPM to work toward ensuring a \$15 minimum wage for federal employees. One year later—this past January—we made that a reality. This change immediately raised the pay for more than 67,000 workers, many of whom had been on the front lines through the COVID-19 pandemic.

These workers live in every state in the country and hold a variety of jobs vital to delivering services to the American people. More than 56,000 workers at the Department of Defense received an increase, as well as many employees at the Departments of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Agriculture (USDA), among others. They are the cleaning professionals and maintenance workers keeping our work environments safe, the nursing assistants caring for our veterans’ health, the food service workers feeding our military members, the laborers repairing our roads and bridges, and so many others. The workers affected were also more diverse than the overall federal workforce, as the minimum wage increase particularly benefitted women, workers of color, and workers with disabilities.

This policy change resulted from months of interagency coordination and collaboration across the entire government, particularly with the Department of Defense. This early partnership allowed for agencies’ thoughtful and meaningful input, which then shaped the design and implementation of the policy. I am proud of the work of my OPM team and the transformative policy change that has improved, and will continue to improve, the daily lives of so many. Raising pay across the federal government to a minimum of \$15 per hour reflects our appreciation for the federal workforce and our values as a nation.

Wildland firefighter occupational series and partnership with DOI and USDA

Another effort that I am similarly proud of, and which shows OPM delivering for federal employees and the American people, is our recent partnership with the USDA and the Department of the Interior (DOI) to better serve our critical wildland firefighters.

As you all know, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)—also commonly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)—included important provisions to help federal wildland firefighters. These firefighters are in action across the nation, almost every single day, protecting infrastructure, defending lives and property, and preserving forests as they help combat climate change.

The BIL provided funds for a pay increase of \$20,000 or 50 percent of base salary (whichever is less) and a requirement for OPM to develop a new occupational series for wildland firefighters. Traditionally, given the research and collaboration that needs to occur, a new occupational series takes at least a year to complete. But I am proud to report that OPM published this occupational series in nearly half that time.

OPM developed the Wildland Firefighter job series as a part of the long-term effort to ensure that federal wildland firefighters are supported, are equitably compensated, and have a better work-

life balance. For the past 50 years, there has been no specific federal wildland firefighter job series or position descriptions. Moving forward, the Wildland Firefighter Series will identify and provide job titles/specialties, and offer a clear path to career advancement that reflects the true nature of the work.

OPM also played a critical role in assisting USDA and DOI in their efforts to implement the pay provisions. When agencies need assistance to solve hiring or retention challenges, OPM is always ready and eager to provide personnel policy expertise. We convened intra-agency working groups and dug into the details of how to define the eligible population and quickly get money into firefighter paychecks.

During the week of the announcement, I got an opportunity to interact directly with firefighters who visited Washington. It was wonderful to hear their stories and see firsthand how much our work meant to them and their families.

OPM is now committed to working with our agency and congressional partners to develop a permanent solution to the pay challenges federal firefighters have faced for decades.

Labor-management relations across the Executive Branch

On January 22, 2021, the President issued Executive Order 14003, Protecting the Federal Workforce, as one of his first executive actions. Since then, OPM has diligently worked to execute that order and the statutory principle that labor organizations and collective bargaining in the civil service are in the public interest.

OPM issued comprehensive guidance to agencies on March 5, 2021, which outlined actions agencies should take, working with unions, to implement the order and to support the President's policy of resetting federal labor relations. In addition, OPM partnered with the Federal Labor Relations Authority to deliver training to agencies and union officials on the implementation of certain aspects of the order. Finally, OPM serves as a point of escalation for both agencies and unions regarding disagreements on the implementation of all aspects of the order. OPM works daily with unions and agencies to identify potential solutions to address these disagreements.

OPM is a member of the Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment, created by Executive Order 14025. OPM, in partnership with the National Economic Council and the Office of Management and Budget, developed a comprehensive strategy to empower federal workers to organize and remove unnecessary obstacles to organizing, and has issued multiple rounds of guidance to assist agencies in implementation. We believe that federal employees should have an effective voice in workplace issues through their unions, and that management should work closely with these unions to solve workplace issues to advance agencies' missions and produce high-performance workplaces.

Telework and the Future of Work

One lesson we have learned throughout the pandemic is that workplace flexibilities, such as telework and hybrid work schedules, can promote resilience of federal government operations in

the face of disruptions, enhance productivity, and improve employee morale. During this time, we have seen the private-sector labor market—and what workers expect from their jobs—change quickly. Private-sector employers have had to quickly learn how to respond to employee needs. Federal employers must do the same to attract and retain talent in this tight labor market. OPM is committed to working with agencies to help them do just that.

In June 2021, OPM helped develop – alongside OMB and GSA-- guidance on helping agencies return employees to physical workplaces and develop smart personnel policies to ease that transition. At the end of last year, OPM issued the “2021 Guide to Telework and Remote Work in the Federal Government.” This important document helps agencies leverage telework and remote work as strategic workforce management tools to enhance mission delivery and employee experience.

In the year ahead, we look forward to providing agencies with additional resources—to help chart a path for what the future federal workforce looks like. Agencies need additional tools to successfully manage performance in our new hybrid environment.

And telework and remote work are also critical recruitment tools. OPM will continue prioritizing working with OMB, other agencies, and Congress on telework and remote work policy improvements.

Employee well-being and health

Employee well-being and health is another critical factor in improving retention, which became even more relevant in the height of the pandemic. In October, OPM held a Work and Family Summit (webinar) for National Work and Family Month. The intent was to empower agencies to carry out efforts that create and improve existing workplace supports that maximize engagement for working families. OPM also leads bi-monthly meetings with Work-Life Coordinators across the federal government through our Work-Life Community Connect Initiative to share best practices. For Mental Health Awareness Month in May, OPM developed and distributed a government-wide tip sheet to all federal employees who provided suggestions to help improve employee wellness. We plan to work with agencies to strengthen long-standing Employee Assistance Programs in the future.

Improving recognition, benefits, and data

We are also taking other steps to improve the overall experience of federal employees. OPM has revived the Presidential Rank Awards, the premier awards program for federal Senior Executives. These awards are critical to recognizing dedicated civil servants’ hard work and important contributions. This year, the President selected 230 winners from 37 federal agencies.

We recently released the FY 2021 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). The survey is a critical source of data that helps agencies understand how they can better engage, retain, and motivate their employees. Research shows that more highly engaged employees are more productive and deliver better customer service, which is why the FEVS data is so valuable.

Currently, OPM is engaging in a multi-phase process to modernize the FEVS. This starts with a focus on new content (such as employee resilience, customer responsiveness, and innovation) that will provide agencies with even more data on how to best support employees.

OPM has also taken steps to improve employee benefits. We implemented consumer protections against surprise billing by out-of-network providers as authorized by the No Surprises Act, and mental health and substance use care improvements from the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 related to treatment limitations. OPM is working with Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) carriers to improve communications with policy holders and access to telehealth services, including mental and behavioral health.

We understand the importance of providing strong employee benefits to retain and recruit federal employees. In the 2021 Federal Employee Benefits Survey, over three-quarters of surveyed employees reported that programs such as FEHB, the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), and retirement annuities influenced them to stay with the federal government.

Chief Human Capital Officers

Another key step OPM has taken is strengthening its relationship with agency Chief Human Capital Officers, or CHCOs. This effort is critical to improving agency-OPM communication and making sure that OPM understands what agencies need to retain their workforces.

In 2021, OPM restored CHCO Council functions to OPM, updated the CHCO Council charter, and launched a new Executive Steering Committee to elevate the CHCO voice in setting the strategic direction for the council. We hold monthly meetings, oversee three working groups, and regularly consult with CHCOs to develop and inform policy initiatives and discuss agency needs across the human capital enterprise.

We rely heavily on CHCOs—agency human capital experts—to inform the development of government-wide policy. Early this year, OPM began hosting monthly CHCO Council Personnel Policy Office Hours, where we seek feedback on key topics, from internship guidance to bereavement leave and executive service reform.

The council is one of the preeminent councils for interagency collaboration across the federal government and has been crucial to helping solve critical human capital management challenges facing the federal workforce, including the transition to the hybrid workplace. And in many of our most significant accomplishments highlighted above—for instance, the development of a Wildland Firefighters Pay and Occupational Series, and others—CHCOs were a critical partner in that success.

Attracting much-needed talent to the federal workforce

The next key area I want to discuss is OPM's efforts to attract the best possible talent to the federal workforce.

From attracting early-career talent who are just starting their careers, to mid-career experts who want to serve the American people, as well as welcoming back former federal employees, OPM has been focused on helping agencies rebuild the federal workforce while making sure that we are drawing from a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and viewpoints.

Private-sector companies know it is critical to aggressively seek out new talent. OPM is helping agencies do the same in its role as the strategic human capital leader.

DEIA

One of the efforts in this area that I am most proud of is OPM's work to implement President Biden's Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in the Federal Workforce, EO 14035.

As the President's Executive Order recognizes, the federal government is at its best when it draws from all parts of society, and our greatest accomplishments are achieved when diverse perspectives are brought to bear to overcome our greatest challenges. That's a core principle animating this Administration's work to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility across the federal government.

The federal government should have a workforce that reflects the diversity of the American people – including, for example, communities of color, veterans and military spouses, persons who face discrimination based on disability, sex or religion, or persons in rural areas or who face persistent poverty. In any workplace, all employees should be treated with dignity and respect, and as the nation's largest employer, we take this very seriously. In addition, enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the federal workforce helps us to recruit, develop, promote, and retain our nation's talent and remove barriers to equal opportunity – all of which helps us deliver for the American people.

I am proud of our work to help position the federal government as a model for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility with a focus on expanding opportunities for internships, making work environments accessible for all, identifying ways to improve pay equity, and supporting agencies in this important work.

Skills-based hiring and improving competitive hiring

Executive Order 13932 directed merit-based federal hiring reforms to expand the use of competency-based assessments to help hire the individuals with the right skills to execute agency missions. This extremely important effort improves competitive hiring and opens the doors to a wider array of job candidates.

In May, OPM issued critical guidance to help agencies implement this vision and launched an effort to help agencies move toward more skills-based hiring. Educational qualifications remain part of the hiring process, but the focus should be on what applicants can do – not where they learned to do it.

This is an important step in bringing the federal government’s assessment process in line with leading private-sector employers. The benefits of this approach are myriad.

- It gives opportunities for people without traditional four-year degrees, who may have developed skills at work, on their own, or in other educational settings (community colleges), to access good federal jobs.
- As skills needed to succeed evolve more quickly as technology and automation change the way work is done, skills-based hiring can help agencies identify what they’ll need to deliver on their mission successfully –both now and in the future.
- This approach can strengthen the competitive hiring process. It can reduce time to hire by helping agencies find qualified candidates when they first post a position. Over time, it demystifies and widens the federal hiring process for job seekers by making the process easier to understand. Candidates can quickly determine if they have the skills the agency is looking for and then face an easier-to-use application process.

Focusing on skills-based hiring is crucial to protecting merit-based hiring principles and improving competitive hiring. This effort will remain a focus of mine throughout my tenure at OPM. A couple of our other initiatives on this front include:

- Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessment pilot program: We are working closely with OMB to scale the Subject Matter Expert Qualification Assessment pilot program, which works to bring subject-matter experts into the hiring process for technical positions.
- Eligibility of Employees in Time-Limited Appointments to Compete for Permanent Positions: OPM is interested in working with Congress to support agencies in considering time-limited employees for permanent positions through merit-hiring procedures. This can help agencies retain critical expertise, strengthening workforce skills.

Using lessons learned to address federal hiring challenges

OPM is also seeking opportunities to assist agencies in solving their specific hiring challenges and learning from our ongoing and past efforts in this area.

The BIL created an excellent opportunity for OPM to lead, assist, and learn. Even before the bill was passed, OPM experts started to work with the infrastructure agencies to identify their specific hiring needs for technical and professional talent to implement the law. OPM knew that agencies would need to quickly hire to fill essential and mission-driven roles to support implementation of the critical bill—scientists to combat climate change, engineers to repair and rebuild our roads and bridges, and workers to help ensure that every community in America has clean water, just to name a few. OPM formed robust teams that brought together expertise from across the agency to provide tailored support for each agency while also identifying common needs to determine what resources could be most useful for all the impacted agencies.

OPM released a Talent Surge Executive Playbook, conducted dozens of webinars for over 2,000 agency staff members to improve hiring, designed a page on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law on USAJOBS.gov as a one-stop-shop landing page to attract applicants, issued government-wide announcements for HR and grants specialists to streamline the hiring process, engaged agency

and OPM communications professionals to raise the visibility of federal infrastructure jobs, and granted approval to speed up hiring for specific positions.

With OPM's support, agencies are bringing people on board for BIL positions—from the date on which a hiring need is validated to the day on which someone starts on the job—faster than government-wide averages.

This experience has taught us a lot, which we hope to build on as we partner with agencies to support other surge hiring efforts. Four key lessons are:

- Internal coordination with OPM to support agencies: OPM worked to provide a single point of contact for agency needs. This streamlines intra-agency efforts and makes providing timely strategic support for agencies easier.
- Embrace economies of scale: By identifying common needs, OPM has helped agencies hire faster using shared certificates and shared applicant pools. For example, we were able to help bring on 83 HR professionals for seven agencies using a new approach that combined direct hire with a cross-agency announcement.
- Leveraging data: We have built a user-friendly dashboard that lets senior agency leaders track hiring and address challenges.
- Focus on recruitment: We saw the benefits through proactive outreach to communities nationwide. Roughly 83 percent of federal BIL job announcements can be accessed by people who live outside the DC area, and many can be done remotely. If we use remote work for some of these positions, we can create good jobs for communities across the country, including those that do not usually have access to jobs with federal agencies, such as rural communities. This recruitment requires parallel efforts to demystify the federal hiring process and clarify the role telework and remote work can play in attracting top talent.

I and the rest of OPM look forward to taking these lessons and implementing them as we help other agencies with their hiring needs.

One other area I should mention is OPM's efforts to assist military spouses. The regulation we finalized this past September creates new avenues for military spouses to join the federal workforce. It makes it easier for agencies to offer non-competitive appointments to all spouses of active-duty service members, and all spouses of 100 percent disabled or deceased Armed Forces members. It removes limitations — such as relocation requirements, geographic restrictions, and arbitrary quotas — that caused this authority to be previously underused. Now, more military spouses can find their place in the federal workforce and agencies have a larger pool of candidates. OPM supports making this authority permanent.

Early Career Talent

Another area of focus has been on early career talent. The federal government needs to constantly bring in new talent, perspectives, and ideas. And we must make those opportunities available to early career professionals, including those who have been deterred—either because

they cannot afford to take an unpaid internship or because student debt attracts them into private sector opportunities for their first jobs.

And once we do bring early career talent into government, it's equally important that we provide them a positive experience. Providing mentorship, training, and growth opportunities increase the likelihood that more early-career employees will have a future in federal service later in their careers.

We have done a lot so far to advance these goals at OPM.

OPM published two rules allowing college graduates and post-secondary students to apply for positions more easily across the federal government. These regulations will help bring new perspectives and tech-driven skillsets to the federal workforce and help early-career professionals, from all walks of life, to improve America for decades to come. We also are working on internship guidance, focusing on expanding the number of paid internships available in federal service, ensuring a positive experience for interns, and incorporating interns in overall workforce planning. Additionally, we have set ambitious goals to strengthen the Pathways program and expand and enhance the Presidential Management Fellow program as the premier early-career leadership program in federal service.

Looking ahead, we believe there is more to do regarding student loan repayment. By developing initiatives to increase the allowable amounts of student loan repayment for federal employees, federal service becomes more attractive to early career job seekers who are more likely to have student debt. Such a policy update makes federal employment more competitive with the private sector, responds favorably to recommendations from CHCOs, and recognizes the increasing tuition costs.

On the internship front, one final note I want to make is on Chairman Connolly's internship bill – the Building the Next Generation of Federal Employees Act. As the bill advances, we look forward to working with the Chairman and other committee members on this important legislation.

Future goals for attracting skilled talent

OPM has made great strides over the past year in improving recruitment, but there is much more to be done. I want to spend a few minutes describing some of our current initiatives. We hope to work with Congress and share additional information as we develop legislative proposals.

As part of our efforts with CHCOs, OPM is examining various efforts related to limited delegations of authorities for low-risk activities, which can give agencies important tools to solve their workforce management challenges. This is responsive to the March 2021 NAPA report and CHCO requests for such commonsense delegations and would enable OPM to focus its capacity on high-priority policy and program work.

Another need OPM aims to explore is a government-wide approach to attracting cyber talent. While every federal agency has its own cyber needs, we want to work with Congress on a Cyber

Workforce Plan that advances a strategic approach to put agencies on more of an equal footing in competing for cyber talent. This effort could require new authorities with respect to classification, hiring, and pay. A key goal for this effort includes promoting skills-based hiring reforms to make sure the government gets the right cyber candidates.

As this committee knows well, smart and commonsense telework and remote work policies are critical to successful federal government operations, as well as employee recruitment and retention. OPM continues to work with agencies to collect and analyze data on the impact of telework. OPM has been publishing updated telework and remote work guidance and FAQs, as well as re-entry guides, to support employees and supervisors, so that agencies can reap the benefits of the flexibility that greater ease of telework provides.

We know that telework is a priority for you, Chairman Connolly, and OPM is interested in working with this committee on additional policy initiatives that better reflect the current labor market. For example, giving agencies the discretion, where appropriate, to design employee work schedules to meet mission requirements and better compete with private-sector employers. Additionally, we need to re-imagine the role and potential of remote workers and how we support them. We need to have policies, collaboration, and clear authority that support remote workers accessing office space or secure facilities, or getting other support from the nearest agency, even if not their employing agency.

Like the private sector, the federal government needs the flexibility to offer fair pay to recruit and retain its workforce and execute agency missions. We look forward to working with Congress to develop initiatives to help agencies adapt to current workforce trends and use new and existing flexibilities to retain and attract top talent.

Some of these opportunities include:

- **Critical position pay and skills incentives for highly-skilled experts** – We hope to explore ways to increase the pay rates for employees in critical positions who have extremely high levels of expertise and are critical to agency missions.
- **Special Pay Rate limitation flexibility** – We are working to identify ways to allow higher special pay rates for employees in cybersecurity, science, technology and engineering, and health-care positions.
- **Incentive awards authority to agencies** – We see an opportunity in amending existing incentive awards authority that an agency can independently approve to address retention challenges promptly.

These ideas are not just focused on using pay to hire and retain employees for positions such as engineers or economists; rather, these flexibilities – as well as our other pay efforts such as the federal minimum wage – can be used broadly to help federal agencies meet their staffing needs. The wildland firefighters effort I discussed earlier is a good example of how OPM and agencies can work together to tackle pay challenges across various pay levels.

Finally, there is no substitute for innovation. For the federal government to attract and retain top personnel, it must effectively develop and test new ideas in workforce policy and management through smart use of demonstration projects to make long-term improvements. This effort can

potentially improve recruitment, retention, and every other aspect of a federal employee's experience. OPM is working to streamline and strengthen existing demonstration project authority so it is easier to use and produces better data. We look forward to collaborating with Congress on this effort.

Taken together, these initiatives will provide tools and lead to innovations that will help agencies compete with the private sector for our nation's top talent.

Strengthening the federal workforce and preparing it for the demands of the future

That point leads me to my final subject for my testimony: how we can strengthen the federal workforce now to prepare it for the future.

A big part of this is taking the lessons we have learned together throughout the pandemic to heart. As I said earlier, the pandemic and returning to the office has been tough on workers across the nation – federal employees included.

Three general lessons are critical:

- The federal workforce is resilient and ready to serve: All agencies had to quickly respond to the pandemic environment and maintain the delivery of vital public services. Federal employees did exactly that.
- Flexibility is always needed: The federal government must remain nimble and provide flexibility in the workplace to meet existing and future workplace challenges and compete for top talent. Nimbleness can help federal agencies tackle unexpected challenges in creative ways, and flexibility is essential to respond to the changing environment of a post-pandemic workplace.
- Federal Agencies should prioritize Innovation: We can and must build on the innovations and efficiencies we developed during the pandemic to improve government efficiency. That shouldn't be just a goal but a firm pledge to create a stronger federal government powered by the best possible workforce.

Ongoing and future OPM Initiatives

Those lessons drive the initiatives I want OPM to tackle over the next year. Throughout my testimony, I have shared some of the initiatives OPM will focus on. To review, this includes:

- Expanding opportunities for early-career talent in federal service through improvements to the Pathways and PMF programs and support for agencies to promote internships, including more paid interns;
- Continuing to make the federal workforce a model for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility;
- Strengthening the competitive hiring process through support for effective selection practices that help agencies hire based on skills, as well as additional efforts to enhance the competitive hiring process, such as allowing term-limited employees to compete for permanent positions;
- Leveraging lessons learned from OPM's implementation of the BIL to support other agencies' hiring efforts;

- Improving innovation in federal talent by considering how to best improve the use of demonstration projects and help agencies meet some of their own hiring needs through limited delegations of certain authorities;
- Strengthening pay flexibilities to allow agencies to recruit and retain highly qualified experts and recruit those with critical skills, and provide agencies more flexibility around special rates;
- Promoting pay equity and developing long-term solutions to pay challenges facing the federal firefighter community; and
- Leveraging lessons from the pandemic to strengthen agencies' ability to use telework and remote work as strategic workforce management tools to improve mission delivery, recruitment, and retention.

Taken together, this is a long list, but OPM is ready to do the hard work to be the partner that agencies and the entire federal government needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to again thank Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and all the Members of the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing.

I am proud of what OPM has accomplished over the last year, and I am excited about the opportunities to accomplish even more over the next year.

I look forward to working with the Members of this Subcommittee, and the full committee on the critical topics I discussed today.

- Promoting retention by making every federal job a good job.
- Attracting much-needed talent to the federal workforce.
- Strengthening the workforce and preparing it for the demands of the future.

I hope today's discussion showcases OPM's dedication to these efforts.

Again, thank you and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.