

**SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER: WHY IS MORALE AT
DHS STILL LOW?**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT,
AND ACCOUNTABILITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER: WHY IS MORALE AT DHS STILL LOW?

Tuesday, January 14, 2020

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT,
AND ACCOUNTABILITY,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:04 p.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Xochitl Torres Small [Chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Torres Small, Barragán, Crenshaw, Higgins, and Taylor.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. The Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability will come to order.

Good afternoon. We are here today to discuss employee morale at the Department of Homeland Security.

Concerns about morale transcend party. Nearly 8 years ago, my Republican colleagues on this committee held a hearing on this very same subject.

Today, the timing of this hearing coincides with the recently released “Best Places to Work in the Federal Government” rankings released by the Partnership for Public Service. Unfortunately, the results indicate a strong need for improvement. This year, as has been the case since 2012, DHS ranked last out of all large Federal agencies. DHS also ranked last out of the 7 National security agencies.

I am particularly concerned by the fact that after a few years of minor improvements in overall morale, in 2019 employee morale at DHS decreased again.

Given the critical mission of the Department, I fear the consequences should the Department not take urgent and drastic action to improve employee morale. We will have a greater challenge to face.

I also worry about how this environment affects the well-being of the more than 200,000 hardworking DHS employees, from Border Patrol agents and CBP officers working throughout my district to the thousands more keeping America safe. These employees deserve better.

It is true that lifting morale at DHS is challenging when the Department remains a target of public criticism and intense scrutiny. Morale may be low, in part, because DHS employees are engaged in tough jobs on the front line.

Yet, this is clearly not the whole picture. Such explanations fail to account for the fact that morale at DHS has been low since the Department's inception.

Moreover, headquarter offices and support components, like the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, the Management Directorate, and the Office of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, receive poor ratings from their employees as well.

For example, DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis, I&A, sits toward the bottom of the rankings, while other offices in the intelligence community have some of the highest morale Government-wide.

In 2018, I&A was the second-worst-ranked Government office out of 415. Even with a modest improvement in employee morale, the office still sits ranked at 406 out of 420 ranked offices.

Even more concerning is the fact that the Office of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, the office tasked with preventing attacks against United States soil, debuted on the list as the lowest-ranked office Government-wide.

As the Partnership's data show and as Mr. Stier's testimony will further illustrate, this ultimately is a failure of leadership. According to the Partnership, while many factors influence an agency's overall ranking, effective leadership is the key driver for Federal employee morale.

Despite these concerns, there were some bright spots throughout the Department that I hope we can learn from and apply DHS-wide.

For example, the Coast Guard and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have both consistently received high scores from employees and are currently ranked in the top 25 percent of all Federal offices.

I was also encouraged to see that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, CISA, has seen steady and consistent improvement in employee morale since 2013.

Finally, the Secret Service, which has historically struggled with low employee morale, has shown signs that a multi-year effort to solicit and respond to feedback from employees and their families is beginning to pay off. I understand that the Department has recently launched a similar effort in the form of an Employee and Family Readiness Council, to identify and begin to address some of the primary concerns facing employees.

Ms. Bailey, I hope to hear more from you this afternoon about these efforts as well as how Congress might be able to act to give the Department additional tools to improve morale. I also look forward to hearing from Mr. Stier about what models throughout Government the Department should be looking to as it pursues these efforts.

Finally, I look forward to getting an outside and objective perspective from Mr. Currie about what DHS is doing well, where it needs to continue to improve, and what risks it exposes itself to under current circumstances.

Before I conclude, I would like to take a moment to highlight some of the work this committee has done to improve morale at the Department.

In 2019, I co-sponsored legislation introduced by Chairman Thompson, the DHS Morale, Recognition, Learning, and Engagement Act—very cleverly creating the MORALE Act—to require action on DHS’s part to respond to its employees’ concerns. This bill passed out of committee and the House on a bipartisan basis, so I am grateful to my Republican colleagues for their support of this legislation.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining the subcommittee this afternoon. Good morale contributes to good job performance, something we all rely on when it comes to Homeland Security. I hope we have a productive discussion.

[The statement of Ms. Torres Small follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN XOCHITL TORRES SMALL

JANUARY 14, 2020

Concerns about morale at DHS transcend party. Nearly 8 years ago, my Republican colleagues on this committee held a hearing on this very subject. Today, the timing of this hearing coincides with the recently-released “Best Places to Work in the Federal Government” rankings released by the Partnership for Public Service. Unfortunately, the results indicate a strong need for improvement. This year, as has been the case since 2012, DHS ranked last out of the all large Federal agencies. DHS also ranked last out of the 7 National security agencies. I am particularly concerned by the fact that, after a few years of minor improvements in overall morale, in 2019, employee morale at DHS decreased again.

Given the critical mission of the Department, I fear the consequences should the Department not take urgent and drastic action to improve employee morale. I also worry about how this environment affects the well-being of the more than 200,000 hard-working DHS employees—from the Border Patrol Agents and CBP Officers working throughout my district to the thousands more keeping America safe. These employees deserve better. It’s true that lifting morale at DHS is challenging when the Department remains a target of public criticism and intense scrutiny. And, morale may be low in part because DHS employees are engaged in tough jobs on the front line. Yet, this is clearly not the whole picture. Such explanations fail to account for the fact morale at DHS has been low since the Department’s inception. Moreover, Headquarter offices like the Office of Intelligence & Analysis, the Management Directorate, and the Office of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction receive poor ratings from their employees. For example, DHS’s Office of Intelligence & Analysis (I&A) sits toward the bottom of the rankings while other offices in the intelligence community have some of the highest morale Government-wide.

In 2018, I&A was the second-worst ranked Government office out of 415. Even with a modest improvement in employee morale, the office still sits ranked 406th out of 420 ranked offices. Even more concerning is the fact that the Office of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, the office tasked with preventing attacks against U.S. soil, debuted on the list as the lowest-ranked office Government-wide. As the Partnership’s data show and as Mr. Stier’s testimony will further illustrate, this is ultimately a failure in leadership. According to the Partnership, while many factors influence an agency’s overall ranking, effective leadership is the key driver for Federal employee morale.

Despite these concerns, there were some bright spots throughout the Department that I hope we can learn from and apply DHS-wide. For example, the Coast Guard and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have both consistently received high scores from employees and are currently ranked in the top 25 percent of all Federal offices. I was also encouraged to see that the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has seen steady and consistent improvement in employee morale since 2013.

Finally, the Secret Service, which has historically struggled with low employee morale, has shown signs that a multi-year effort to solicit and respond to feedback from employees and their families is beginning to pay off. I understand that the Department has recently launched a similar effort in the form of an Employee and Family Readiness Council to identify and begin to address some of the primary concerns facing employees. Ms. Bailey, I hope to hear more from you this afternoon about these efforts as well as how Congress might be able to act to give the Department additional tools to improve morale. I also look forward to hearing from Mr.

Stier about what models throughout Government the Department should be looking to as it pursues these efforts. Finally, I look forward to getting an outside and objective perspective from Mr. Currie about what DHS is doing well, where it needs to continue to improve, and what risks it exposes itself to under current circumstances. Before I conclude, I would like to take a moment to highlight some of the work this committee has done to improve morale at the Department. In 2019, I cosponsored legislation introduced by Chairman Thompson—the DHS Morale, Recognition, Learning, and Engagement Act (DHS MORALE Act)—to require action on DHS's part to respond to its employees concerns. This bill passed out of committee and the House on a bipartisan basis so I acknowledge my Republican colleagues for their support of this legislation.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Crenshaw, for an opening statement.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Thank you, Chairwoman Torres Small, and I am very pleased that you called this hearing today. The morale of the Department of Homeland Security and its employees is of the utmost importance.

Thank you all for being here and taking time out of your day.

DHS has been besieged with issues of low morale, high-level vacancies, and mismanagement since its inception. Some of the struggle is understandable from an agency that was created by combining so many unique entities with their own mission sets. However, almost 17 years after its creation we need to see some real progress in this area. The work the Department does makes this too important to ignore.

DHS employs over 200,000 individuals dedicated to protecting the homeland and the American people. It is imperative to our security that those individuals are satisfied in their job, feel supported by Department leadership, and have support from the people of this country in their mission to secure the homeland.

The most recent survey of DHS employees shows that 56 percent of employees are satisfied in their jobs. While this is an improvement over recent years, DHS is still ranked last among large agencies. The survey shows that while 87 percent of the employees feel that they do important work, 63 percent felt that there was no consequence for employees who underperform, and only 36 percent felt motivated by their leadership.

Unfortunately, these employee viewpoints are not new. Similar numbers were reported at a hearing this committee held on morale during the Obama administration.

The responses to these questions show fundamental issues with the leadership of DHS and its components. While the employees value their work, they do not feel valued in their workplace. This is a problem that starts at the top. DHS leadership must hire and promote leaders who can motivate their staff, and they must find ways to reward good performance and address underperformance.

I was pleased to find out that DHS has established an Employee and Family Readiness Council to address challenges DHS employees face. This is a step in the right direction. However, I believe more needs to be done to determine the root causes of the employee dissatisfaction.

While I believe some of the dissatisfaction has its roots in the organization of the Department, I also believe and need to point out that the physical attacks on the Offices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the verbal attacks on ICE and Customs and

Border Protection as well as the Department as a whole by Members of Congress and the media absolutely undermine employee morale.

Every day DHS employees strive to carry out critical missions to protect the people of this country, from CBP agents on the border, ICE, HSI conducting counter proliferation operations and counter human trafficking operations, and CISA ensuring physical and cybersecurity that keep us safe. They should not be blamed for the failings of an immigration system that we as a Congress have not acted to fix.

Good morale at an agency can help drive progress and ensure mission success. Bad morale can lead to a disconnected work force and a lack of commitment to an agency's mission. With an agency like DHS, the stakes are too high to allow this to happen.

DHS needs to develop a clear vision for addressing the root causes as well as metrics to measure its success. It also needs to develop ways to motivate, instill, and reward performance.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on the causes of the low morale at DHS as well as the steps DHS should take to address it.

I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Crenshaw follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER DAN CRENSHAW

JAN. 14, 2020

I am pleased that you called this hearing today. The morale of the Department of Homeland Security employees is of the utmost importance.

DHS has been besieged with issues of low morale, high-level vacancies, and mismanagement since its inception.

Some of this struggle is understandable from an agency that was created by combining so many unique entities with their own mission sets. However, almost 17 years after its creation, we need to see some real progress in this area. The work the Department does makes this too important to ignore.

DHS employs over 200,000 individuals dedicated to protecting the homeland and the American people. It is imperative to our security that those individuals are satisfied in their jobs, feel supported by Department leadership, and have support from the people of this country in their mission to secure the homeland.

The most recent survey of DHS employees shows that 56 percent of employees are satisfied in their jobs. While this is an improvement over recent years, DHS is still ranked last among large agencies. The survey shows that while 87 percent of the employees feel that they do important work, 63 percent felt that there was no consequence for employees that underperform and only 36 percent felt motivated by their leadership. Unfortunately, these employee viewpoints are not new; similar numbers were reported at a hearing this committee held on morale during the Obama administration.

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While I believe that some of the dissatisfaction has its roots in the organization of the Department, I also believe that the physical attacks on the offices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the verbal attacks on ICE and Customs and Border Protection, as well as the Department as a whole by Members of Congress and the media undermine employee morale.

Every day, DHS employees strive to carry out critical missions to protect the people of this country. From CBP agents on the border, ICE HSI conducting counter

proliferation operations, and CISA ensuring physical and cybersecurity—they keep us safe. They should not be blamed for the failings of an immigration system that we as a Congress have not acted to fix.

Good morale at an agency can help drive progress and ensure mission success; bad morale can lead to a discontented workforce and a lack of commitment to an agency's mission.

With an agency like DHS, the stakes are too high to allow this to happen.

DHS needs to develop a clear vision for addressing the root causes, as well as metrics to measure its success. It also needs to develop ways to motivate staff and reward performance. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on the causes of the low morale at DHS, as well as the steps DHS should take to address it.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you.

Other Members of the committee are reminded that, under the committee rules, opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JANUARY 14, 2020

At a similar hearing before this committee nearly 8 years ago, I lamented that 11 years into the Department's existence, it remained at or near the bottom in Federal Government morale rankings. I am disappointed to say that little has changed in the ensuing years. The Department continues to be plagued with low morale and employee dissatisfaction and remains ranked at the bottom of Federal human capital surveys. In rankings recently released by the Partnership for Public Service, the Department is the worst-rated of 17 large Federal agencies. The Department also ranks last among large agencies in the following categories: Training, teamwork, work-life balance, and support for diversity, among others. Given its mission, this crisis is not just about human capital management. It is about the security of our country. More than 200,000 employees who serve every day at the Department are dedicated in their effort to keep our country safe. They are committed to their mission, and according to Office of Personnel Management survey data 87 percent believe the work they do is important. This is, ultimately, a failure in leadership.

According to the Partnership for Public Service's analysis, effective leadership is the key driver in overall employee morale. Unfortunately, in 2019, the Department ranked as the worst large Federal agency in the "effective leadership" category. And Office of Personnel Management survey data shows that less than half of DHS employees have a high level of respect for the Department's senior leaders. This crisis requires urgent action. In his exit memorandum, former Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson cited the need "for an aggressive campaign to improve morale and satisfaction at the Department." Yet I am concerned that low morale is not being treated with the necessary urgency. For example, right now, 13 senior leadership roles throughout the Department are filled by acting officials who have little empowerment to implement the kind of organizational change needed to improve employee morale.

And after 3 years of slight improvement in morale, the Partnership's data show that employee morale decreased again in 2019. As such, one of the first pieces of legislation I introduced this Congress was the "Department of Homeland Security Morale, Recognition, Learning, and Engagement Act" (DHS Morale Act). The bill would create and catalogue leadership development opportunities and would create an Employee Engagement Steering Committee to identify and address issues affecting morale. It also would also authorize the Secretary to establish an award program to recognize employees for significant contributions to the Department's goals and mission. The DHS MORALE Act has been endorsed by the National Border Patrol Council, the National Treasury Employees Union, and the American Federation of Government Employees—unions representing a large swath of the Department's employees.

I was encouraged to learn that the Department recently launched an Employee and Family Readiness Council, made up of representatives from all the components, to identify and begin to address some of the primary concerns raised by employees. I hope to hear more from Chief Human Capital Officer Bailey about these efforts and see evidence that DHS is treating this morale problem with the urgency it deserves.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I now welcome our panel of witnesses and thank them for joining us today.

Our first witness is Ms. Angela Bailey, chief human capital officer of the Department of Homeland Security. In that role, she is responsible for the Department's Human Capital Program, including human resource policy, recruitment and hiring, and employee development. She has dedicated more than 38 years to a career in public service, with 32 of those years in human resources. Ms. Bailey was appointed to her current position in January 2016.

Our second witness, Mr. Chris Currie, is a director on the Homeland Security and Justice Team at the Government Accountability Office. He leads the agency's work on National preparedness, emergency management, and critical infrastructure protection issues. Mr. Currie has been with GAO since 2002 and has been the recipient of numerous agency awards, including the Meritorious Service Award in 2008.

Our final witness is Mr. Max Stier, founding president and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service. At the Partnership, he has overseen a center focusing on the Presidential transition, an awards program that recognizes exceptional civil servants, annual rankings that examine employee engagement, and numerous leadership development programs. Before joining the Partnership, he had a career spanning all 3 branches of Government.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted in the record. I now ask each witness to summarize his or her statements for 5 minutes, beginning with Ms. Angela Bailey.

STATEMENT OF ANGELA BAILEY, CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICER, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Ms. BAILEY. Good afternoon, Chairwoman Torres Small, Ranking Member Crenshaw, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's sustained efforts to enhance employee morale and engagement.

DHS employees are on the Nation's front lines, performing extremely difficult work under challenging conditions. Think of our Transportation Security Officers screening frantic passengers who are trying to make flights home, knowing that 1 second of inattention could jeopardize their lives, or FEMA employees leaving their families to deploy to a disaster site under austere conditions, or Border Patrol agents trying to humanely manage an overwhelming volume of migrants.

In addition, think of the ICE Homeland Security Investigations team whose work led to capturing and convicting El Chapo, the notorious international drug cartel leader, or one of our Coast Guard employees whose work during Hurricane Florence contributed to saving 75 lives.

It is all difficult, critically necessary, and often thankless work, and it can put our dedicated employees under harsh public scrutiny for simply doing their jobs.

At the same time they are performing these incredibly important duties, our employees worry about life challenges as well, like paying student loan debt, picking up their kids on time, taking care

of sick or elderly family members, or missing yet another family obligation, such as a vacation, birthday, or anniversary due to work.

This is why we see DHS's employee engagement as a team effort. Our Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey scores reflect the hard work that all levels of our Department have undertaken to meet the needs of our talented and dedicated work force.

Our leaders are actively engaged. Our union representatives take personal time to take a fallen agent's little boy to a baseball practice, and our employees volunteer to assist their colleagues through extra assignments and peer support.

Perhaps this is why the DHS Employee Engagement Index, or EEI, improved again, by 2 percentage points in 2019 and by 9 percentage points since 2015. During this same period, the Government-wide score increased only 4 percentage points.

In 2019, the Department's positive responses increased on 55 of the 71 core FEVS questions. In fact, OPM shows us as 1 of the 3 most improved very large agencies, and GAO rated our efforts as mostly addressed as a result of our continued improvement.

Improving employee morale and engagement is a sustained effort by everyone in DHS. The cornerstone of this positive change is the collective support of our various Department and component-level councils, including the DHS Employee Engagement Steering Committee.

As a result, we have seen some notable component-level successes. For example, the Secret Service has achieved substantial sustained improvement since 2016. This progress is the result of paying attention to FEVS data and reaching out directly to employees to solicit feedback on root causes of dissatisfaction. It is a textbook example, and it has paid off.

Another example is at TSA, where employee satisfaction data helps identify root causes and solutions for local implementation. In 2018, sites receiving this support experienced an 8 percent increase in the EEI, and in 2019 sites improved 5 percent. In fact, since 2015, all of our major components increased and in 1 case by 15 percentage points.

We have also instituted new initiatives, like Leadership Year and Employee and Family Readiness, or EFR. EFR is designed to build a more robust infrastructure of support for employees and their families. In 2019, our EFR Council, made up of representatives from all of the components, began work on the top 5 issues our employees experience on a daily basis: General stress, personal relationship issues, mental health, dependent care, and financial concerns. Work continues on these in 2020, plus we have added 2 new focus areas: Social connectedness and wellness.

My office, in collaboration with partners across the Department, will continue to enhance our efforts, listen to and act on employee feedback, and support the Department's leadership commitment to our work force.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. The Department would not be successful without your support and the support of our brave men and women, who sacrifice each day to make our country safe.

I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bailey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANGELA BAILEY

JANUARY 14, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Torres Small, Ranking Member Crenshaw, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss efforts to enhance employee morale and engagement at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department).

I am Angela Bailey, the Department's Chief Human Capital Officer. I joined DHS in January 2016 as a career Federal executive and have more than 38 years of service, 32 of those in human resources.

DHS was established in 2002, combining 22 different Federal departments and agencies into a unified, integrated Cabinet agency. While each of our components has its own distinct homeland security mission and history, we are unified and steadfast in our goal—to safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values.

Many of our employees are on the front lines, executing our mission every day, performing extremely difficult work under some of the most challenging circumstances and conditions. They interact with the American public and people from around the world to prevent terrorism; enhance security; secure and manage our borders; administer and enforce our immigration laws; safeguard travel; monitor and secure cyber space; respond to and provide relief from disasters; protect our National leaders; and prevent drug and human trafficking.

At the same time our employees are performing these incredibly important duties, the approximately 240,000 men and women in the Department are also mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, neighbors, and engaged members of their community. They worry about the same things other Americans worry about, including: Student loan debt, making it on time to pick up their children from daycare or school, taking care of an elderly family member, or missing yet another family vacation due to work obligations. Adding to these concerns is the possibility of future Government shutdowns, meaning our employees may work without pay, for some period of time, due to lapsed appropriations.

In fact, during the partial Government shutdown last year, 86 percent of the DHS workforce continued to work without pay—most of those employees were our front-line law enforcement officers and agents who face danger each and every day. However, our 2019 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results show that despite unmanageable workloads, delayed work, missed deadlines, and time lost restarting work for many of our employees, only 3 percent of respondents said they are looking for another job specifically because of the shutdown.

Another indicator of how dedicated our employees are to the DHS mission is that almost 1,000 employees across the Department joined the DHS Volunteer Force, to alleviate stress the crisis on the Southern Border has on U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement front-line personnel. While these employees were volunteering, others in their home offices sought to ensure their responsibilities were covered. These actions represent an incredible effort that speaks volumes about a workforce who values and supports each other day-to-day and steps up even more in crisis situations.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The Department's FEVS scores over the last several years reflect the hard work leadership at all levels has undertaken. DHS is listening to employee feedback and taking action. In an organization as enormous and diverse as DHS, change comes slowly and incrementally—yet change is happening.

The Partnership for Public Service and their Best Places scoring currently shows DHS decreased less than 1 point, yet this information is based on only 3 core FEVS questions out of 71. DHS tracks the Employee Engagement Index (EEI) score as calculated by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) from FEVS data. The EEI is comprised of 15 key questions that together are a good indicator of employee engagement. The DHS EEI improved by 2 percentage points in 2019. In fact, DHS is 1 of 3 very large agencies identified by OPM as having top EEI increases (the other 2 were the Air Force and the Army). In addition, the Department's positive responses increased on 55 of the core FEVS questions, decreased on only 4, and those decreases were by just 1 percentage point.

The cornerstone of this positive change is the DHS Employee Engagement Steering Committee (EESC), chaired by the Under Secretary for Management and staffed by component executives. This body serves as a forum for sharing ideas and best

practices and helps ensure component accountability. The EESC also represents a mixture of internal and external information exchange.

Internally, components share ideas and knowledge for employee engagement with each other. Externally, for example, DHS is holding executive sessions with corporations to hear about their leadership practices. In a recent session, we gained tremendous insight into the benefits of an intentional approach to building a supportive culture. Our next panel session will focus on another corporation's culture change journey. Although the private sector is very different in many ways from the Federal Government, what is striking about the session so far, and I expect the same in future sessions, is how very similar we are in working to create an engaged culture, and how much we can learn from our shared challenges and successes.

Members of the EESC are also responsible for component-level employee engagement action plans, which are updated each year based on FEVS results and are approved by component leadership. Through this mechanism, DHS has empowered components to tailor their plans according to their mission and workforce needs. In addition, the EESC has created a loop of accountability that keeps leadership focused on formulating and executing plans.

DHS data from the FEVS shows that over the last 4 years, when DHS employees were asked the important question, "I believe the results of this survey will be used to make my agency a better place to work," we have made consistent progress informing employees that their input is heard. In fact, this year 40 percent of our employees responded positively to this question, which is only 1 percentage point below the Government average—and 8 percentage points above our score in 2015.

The General Accountability Office (GAO) has recognized our strong work and success addressing engagement and accountability. Of the 2 employee engagement items on the Department's High-Risk List, GAO rewarded our progress on Component Action Plans with a "fully addressed" status in 2018, and our progress on improving FEVS scores with a "mostly addressed" status just last month.

Below are some notable examples of DHS component accomplishments toward employee engagement:

- With the release of the most recent *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* rankings, the Partnership for Public Service specifically mentioned the U.S. Secret Service as having substantial, sustained improvement from 2016 forward. This progress is the result of paying attention to FEVS results, reaching out directly to employees to solicit further feedback on root causes of dissatisfaction, and finding 3 main focus areas to take action: Staffing, work-life balance, and leader development. This is a textbook example of executing on the Department's expectations for action planning, and it has paid off.
- Another example is an initiative of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which offers "Local Action Planning" at sites with lower levels of employee satisfaction to identify root causes of challenges and solutions for local implementation. TSA sends expert teams on-site to conduct focus groups, make recommendations, and guide local leaders through the planning process. TSA has experienced positive trends in FEVS ratings in these targeted locations. The Department's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) is collaborating with TSA and OPM to pilot another tool, the DHS Leadership Survey, that allows employees to provide upward feedback on their first-, second-, and third-line supervisors. DHS experienced tremendous success with this tool at Los Angeles International Airport and with the Federal Air Marshals Service and is moving forward with 2 new airport sites in 2020.

We know that meaningful engagement takes continuous attention and it starts with leaders. Within my office, the DHS OCHCO, we take FEVS results very seriously, at even the most local levels, including making personnel changes to improve the organization.

In November 2019, OCHCO brought together the executive cadre of DHS to hear from the Acting Secretary and from our Presidential Rank Awardees in what has become an annual gathering focused on excellence in leadership. One of the featured presentations was from the leadership team from Los Angeles International Airport that discussed their experience with the DHS Leadership Survey.

DHS has also strengthened its agency-wide leadership development programs by providing more opportunities for lower-grade employees to begin their leadership journeys, additional rotational experiences, and further career path guidance. Several examples of these efforts are highlighted below:

- In fiscal year 2019, DHS implemented a brand-new part of its leader development strategy called the "Leadership Bridges Program." Instead of waiting to develop leadership skills at each level, this new element of the strategy establishes a variety of products and tools for employees seeking to increase their capabilities and aspire to higher leadership levels.

- One of the most exciting new products is the roll-out of a program to prepare employees in supervisory acumen ahead of their advancement to supervisory positions. DHS launched an innovative self-paced program that meets the needs of our geographically-dispersed workforce and provides motivated employees—at any grade level—with a set of curated activities central to the development of essential supervisory leadership competencies.
- Additionally, in fiscal year 2020, DHS will launch a 6-month pilot Supervisory Leadership Bridges Cohort program to guide participants in specific job series through a rigorous process to identify traits validated to be predictive of leadership success and build on those traits with classroom, mentoring, and experiential learning. As DHS anticipates both a hiring surge and significant retirement in the 1800 job series, the Leadership Bridges Program provides a ready talent pool of employees who will hit the ground running, already familiar with the critical supervisory acumen that results in an engaged, proficient workforce.

EMPLOYEE AND FAMILY READINESS AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Kicked off in 2019 and continuing into 2020, DHS's current signature employee engagement initiative is Employee and Family Readiness (EFR). With a workforce that operates day in and day out under tremendous stress and challenge, OCHCO identified the need for a more robust infrastructure of support not only for employees, but for their family members as well.

One key program we are working on across all components is enhanced initiatives to prevent suicides. We are working to improve and expand existing programs while also adding new approaches. In addition, DHS established an Employee and Family Readiness Council (EFRC), made up of representatives from all the components, that serves in an advisory capacity to the EFR Initiative. The goals are to develop and promote a unified strategy and common vision of EFR, explore opportunities to share resources between components, set annual priorities, and collaborate to address these priorities across the enterprise.

In addition to permanent programs such as suicide prevention, the EFRC identified and ranked 18 family resilience issues by priority to create annual goals and began working on the top 5 in 2019. These 5 areas were: General stress, personal relationship issues, mental health, dependent care, and financial concerns. Work continues on all of these areas in 2020, plus we have added 2 new focus areas: Social connectedness and wellness.

- *General Stress.*—In fiscal year 2019, 24 mindfulness resilience and stress reduction training classes were held across DHS, reaching over 700 employees. The response to this training was positive and additional courses are planned for fiscal year 2020. This training helps our employees, in particular the law enforcement community, stay in the present, let go of negative experiences, and increase resilience to adverse life events.
- *Personal Relationships.*—DHS is using a 2-pronged approach to address personal relationships, to include Stronger Bonds training and counseling through Employee Assistance Programs. For example, the Stronger Bonds curriculum draws upon proven strategies from couples therapy and research on commitment and relationship development. This curriculum was reviewed by the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices and is listed in the U.S. Government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's registry of evidence-based programs and practices. In 2019, OCHCO trained 45 DHS employees to facilitate Stronger Bonds Workshops for DHS employees and their family members, and in 2020 we plan to train more DHS employees to facilitate this course.
- *Mental Health.*—DHS will launch a public-facing website in 2020 to provide easily accessible information for employees and their families. The site is life-event based, with a focus on encouraging individuals to seek help to address concerns. The overarching message of this initiative is that there is no stigma in reaching out for help. The site soft-launched in 2019 and will be updated for the 2020 full launch with 2 new content areas designed for spouses and children of DHS employees.
- *Dependent Care.*—According to OPM research, by 2021, 43 percent of DHS employees will have childcare responsibilities and 32 percent will have adult care responsibilities. To ensure that DHS understands the needs of the workforce, the Department is currently conducting a Nation-wide workforce needs assessment. This effort will allow DHS to identify both the current needs of its workforce regarding dependent care as well as projected needs 5 to 10 years in the future.

- *Financial Concerns.*—The Financial Literacy Campaign, “Invest in Your Financial Health,” provides helpful information and accessible financial resources, addresses common concerns, and directs employees to internal programs promoting financial wellness. This campaign kicked off in March 2019 and runs through March 2020.
- *Wellness.*—An awareness campaign encouraging healthy lifestyle choices kicks off this month. Each month, articles and/or podcasts will be made available to employees and their families, through the DHS public-facing website.
- *Social Connectedness.*—Initiatives in this area include exploring ways to facilitate awareness of employee resources and affinity groups across components. DHS is also seeking to connect with spouse networks and family support groups to provide information about the EFR Initiative.

These programs noted above are coupled with other traditional retention strategies, such as cyber retention pay, special salary rates, student loan repayments, child care subsidies, and employee engagement, to round out the overarching DHS retention strategy.

HIRING

Due to DHS’s critical mission, we are fortunate to have an abundance of applicants for many of the jobs we post. In order to serve both the applicants and DHS well, we have worked to innovate and streamline our hiring practices to reduce time-to-hire and get people on-board as fast as practical. Through our innovations, our time-to-hire is down to as low as 107 days, a reduction of 34 percent from our rate 5 years ago, and we continue to look for more efficient and innovative practices every day.

While DHS hiring strategies include time-to-hire, hiring hubs, and hiring events, they start with DHS thinking about not only our requirements for today, but also 5 to 10 years from now. Determining how many and what type of employees will we need is a critical first step, followed by a discussion of the kind of skills and abilities we need, as well as where will we find such talent. Based on these discussions, strategies concerning how best to “buy or build” talent, including partnering with local schools, universities, industry, the military, and our local communities, are developed. These strategies are coupled with examinations of our hiring process, finding ways to streamline the hiring process and making it less arduous for those applying for our positions, and identifying technology advancements that can integrate our hiring systems making the process more efficient.

The reason these hiring strategies are so important is that, by ensuring our positions are filled with the right leaders and technically skilled personnel, we can drive down overtime, shorten deployments, and create a better work-life balance for our employees—all of which our employees have told us through the FEVS and other focus groups that they desire. Our hiring strategies help us retain our talented workforce. However, just having positions filled is not enough to retain our employees, or more importantly, to ensure that while they are carrying out their missions they have the tools necessary to deal with all that the job and life throws their way. As a result, and noted above, we place special emphasis on taking care of our employees and their families as the cornerstone of our retention strategy.

Despite our hiring efforts, there is always room for improvement. Additionally, a way for Congress to help us is to support our legislative proposal, the *Department of Homeland Security Enhanced Hiring Act*. DHS seeks to use this authority in an effort to streamline and simplify the agency’s hiring authorities in a manner that ensures the Department is able to expeditiously hire the best-qualified candidates for mission-critical positions and sustain its record of hiring veterans. This legislative proposal would enhance the current noncompetitive hiring authorities for veterans and establish other important hiring authorities. I respectfully request that Congress expeditiously takes up and passes such legislation.

CONCLUSION

The Department recently celebrated the Secretary’s Awards Ceremony, which recognizes achievements of dedicated and talented DHS employees from across the country. In listening to the descriptions of all the accomplishments, I was reminded that every day the men and women of DHS carry out difficult and often dangerous work that often is unseen by the American public. They do an outstanding job and have a deep commitment to the mission. Through our efforts dedicated to employee engagement, retention, and hiring, OCHCO is determined to enhance their work experience and home life and honor their contributions.

My office, in collaboration with partners across the Department, will continue to enhance our efforts, listen to and act on employee feedback, and support the Department's leadership commitment to our workforce.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. The Department would not be successful without your support and the support of our brave men and women who sacrifice each day to make our country safe. I look forward to your questions.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you for your testimony.

I now recognize Mr. Currie to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CHRIS CURRIE, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE TEAM, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Mr. CURRIE. Thank you, Chairwoman Torres Small, Ranking Member Crenshaw, other Members of the committee that are here today. We appreciate the opportunity to be here to talk about GAO's work on DHS morale.

I personally and those of us at GAO have been working on this issue since the Department was created, and I want to say from the beginning we have tremendous respect for the men and women at DHS and the hard work that they do every day and the intense public pressure they face and the public scrutiny with which they do their jobs.

I also know that nobody cares more about this problem than the leadership of the Department, and we have seen this across administrations. It is not a partisan issue. It is something that every administration has really worked hard to address.

Since 2003, DHS has been on our high-risk list at GAO, and a big part of that is because of human capital management challenges. A big part within the human capital management area has been employee morale and training, performance management standards, and all the things that lead up to what creates a person's morale.

Over the last 5 years particularly, we have seen a number of positive changes in this area. As Ms. Bailey mentioned, we have seen DHS make steady progress in the FEVS scores, and do it in years when sometimes other Government agencies have actually seen a decrease. So they are making slow and steady progress, but obviously there is a lot more that needs to be done.

They have done this by implementing a number of recommendations across a number of agencies. For example, they have implemented our recommendations to develop employee engagement plans, not just the whole Department but the components themselves, that identify the root causes of morale issues.

As the Ranking Member said, these root causes are varied. A lot of these things have to do with just core leadership management issues. Do I trust my supervisor? Do I believe in our performance management system? Do I think our agency has the ability to hire the people we need to do their jobs?

These are the kind of things we see not just at DHS, but across Government. So I absolutely agree that while DHS faces a unique mission and unique challenges, a lot of agencies face unique missions and unique challenges and don't have the level of morale that DHS has right now.

I also want to say that, unfortunately, as was said, DHS's morale scores are still toward the bottom of large departments. I think that you have to look within DHS to really get a better sense of those numbers. The Department is huge, and the components are so varied and different, and different in size, too.

So what plagues TSA is going to be completely different than what the Coast Guard faces. The Coast Guard is an agency that has been around for many, many years, has a strong leadership culture, has its own academy, well-grounded management principles, and a structure and hierarchy. So it is understandable that TSA is going to take much longer to get to the point where they have addressed their morale issues.

There are really just a few things I want to point to moving forward that I think we need to focus on moving forward.

First is, I really think that this committee and other committees, as you are conducting your oversight over component missions, like border security, cybersecurity, emergency management, that you speak to the leadership of those components about this issue, too, and that human capital and morale issues be held at the same standard of accountability as the mission side, as otherwise they are not going to have the incentive to address the issues like they will on the mission side.

Also, I think there needs to be a focus on a few specific components. If you look at CBP and TSA, they have somewhere in the range of a third to almost a half of the Department's employees. So I think a focus needs to be put on the place where the most impact can be made.

Then last, I think that you need to continue the oversight in terms of these types of hearings and with the components as well, and really to drive this home.

So thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to the questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Currie follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRIS CURRIE

JANUARY 14, 2020

GAO HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights of GAO-20-349T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives.

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS is the third-largest Cabinet-level department in the Federal Government, employing more than 240,000 staff in a broad range of jobs, including countering terrorism and homeland security threats, providing aviation and border security, emergency response, cybersecurity, and critical infrastructure protection. Since it began operations in 2003, DHS has faced challenges with low employee morale and engagement. Federal surveys have consistently found that DHS employees are less satisfied with their jobs compared to the average Federal employee. For example, DHS's scores on the FEVS and the Partnership for Public Service's rankings of the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*[®] are consistently among the lowest for similarly-sized Federal agencies.

This statement addresses our past and on-going work monitoring human capital management and employee morale at DHS and select work on employee engagement across the Government. This statement is based on products GAO issued from September 2012 through May 2019 as well as GAO's on-going efforts to monitor employee morale at DHS as part of GAO's high-risk work. For these products, GAO

analyzed DHS strategies and other documents related to DHS’s efforts to address its high-risk areas, interviewed DHS officials, conducted analyses of FEVS data, and interviewed officials from other Federal agencies that achieved high employee engagement scores, among other things.

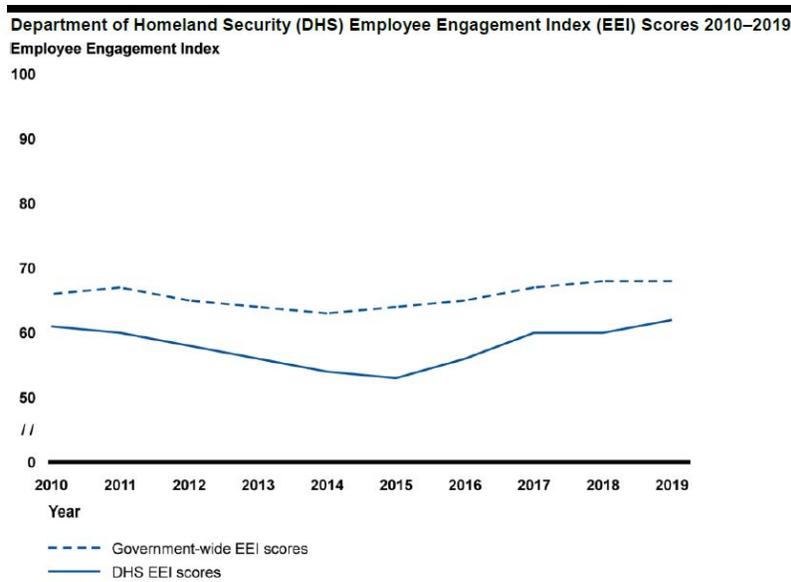
GAO provided a copy of new information in this statement to DHS for review. DHS confirmed the accuracy of this information.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY.—EMPLOYEE MORALE SURVEY SCORES
HIGHLIGHT PROGRESS AND CONTINUED CHALLENGES

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has undertaken initiatives to strengthen employee engagement through efforts at its component agencies and across the Department. For example, at the headquarters level, DHS has instituted initiatives to improve awareness and access to support programs, benefits, and resources for DHS employees and their families.

In 2019, DHS improved its employee engagement scores, as measured by the Office of Personnel Management’s Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS)—a tool that measures employees’ perceptions of whether and to what extent conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agency. As shown below, DHS increased its scores on a measure of employee engagement, the Employee Engagement Index (EEI), across 4 consecutive years, from a low of 53 percent in 2015 to 62 percent in 2019.



GAO analysis of Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data. | GAO-20-349T

While DHS has made progress in improving its scores, in 2019 it remained 6 points below the Government-wide average for the EEI. For several years, DHS and its component agencies have identified root causes for their engagement scores including concerns about leadership accountability and understaffing, among others. This statement discusses 9 recommendations related to DHS employee engagement and workforce planning. DHS implemented all but one of these recommendations—to review and correct its coding of cybersecurity positions and assess the accuracy of position descriptions. Finally, filling vacancies could help ensure continued leadership commitment across DHS’s mission areas.

Madam Chairwoman Torres Small, Ranking Member Crenshaw, and Members of the subcommittee: I am pleased to be here today to discuss the importance of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employee engagement and morale, the Department’s progress thus far, and areas where challenges remain.

DHS is the third-largest Cabinet-level department in the Federal Government, employing more than 240,000 staff in a broad range of jobs, including aviation and

border security, emergency response, cybersecurity, and critical infrastructure protection. The DHS workforce is located throughout the Nation, carrying out activities in support of DHS's missions to counter terrorism and homeland security threats, secure United States borders, secure cyber space and critical infrastructure, preserve and uphold the Nation's prosperity and economic security, strengthen preparedness and resilience, and champion the DHS workforce and strengthen the Department.

Since it began operations in 2003, DHS has faced challenges with low employee morale and engagement. Federal surveys have consistently found that DHS employees are less satisfied with their jobs than the Government-wide average of Federal employees. For example, DHS's employee satisfaction—as measured by the Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), a tool that measures employees' perceptions of whether and to what extent conditions characterizing successful organizations are present in their agency, and the Partnership for Public Service's rankings of the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*[®]—is consistently among the lowest for similarly-sized Federal agencies.

As we stated in our 2015 report on employee engagement across the Federal Government, a number of studies of private-sector entities have found that increased levels of engagement result in better individual and organizational performance including increased employee performance and productivity; higher customer service ratings; fewer safety incidents; and less absenteeism and turnover.¹ Studies of the public sector, while more limited, have shown similar benefits. For example, the Merit Systems Protection Board found that higher levels of employee engagement in Federal agencies led to improved agency performance, less absenteeism, and fewer equal employment opportunity complaints.² As we reported in 2015, across the Government, key drivers of employee morale include holding constructive performance conversations, career development and training opportunities, work-life balance, an inclusive work environment, employee involvement, and communication from management. We also identified key lessons for improving employee engagement. These key lessons include using effective management practices to implement change, looking to other sources of data in addition to the FEVS to form a complete picture of employee engagement, and recognizing that improving engagement and organizational performance takes time, which may involve several efforts with effects seen at different points in time. Engagement is one component of employee morale.

DHS employee morale and engagement concerns are one example of the challenges the Department faces in implementing its missions. In 2003, shortly after the Department was formed, we recognized that the creation of DHS was an enormous undertaking that could take years to implement. Failure to effectively address management challenges could have serious National security consequences. As a result, in 2003, shortly after the Department was formed, we designated *Implementing and Transforming DHS* as a high-risk area to the Federal Government. DHS subsequently made considerable progress in transforming its original component agencies into a single Cabinet-level department. As a result, in 2013, we narrowed the scope of the high-risk area to focus on strengthening DHS management functions, including human capital management, and changed the name of the high-risk area to *Strengthening DHS Management Functions* to reflect this focus.³ We continue to monitor DHS's work in this area—including work to address employee morale and engagement—and regularly meet with DHS to discuss progress.

My testimony today discusses our past and on-going work monitoring human capital management and employee morale at DHS and select work on employee engagement across the Government. This statement is based on products we issued from

¹ GAO, *Federal Workforce: Additional Analysis and Sharing of Promising Practices Could Improve Employee Engagement and Performance*, GAO-15-585 (Washington, DC: July 14, 2015).

² U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement* (Washington, DC: September 2008). Results were based on responses to the Merit System Protection Board's Merit Principles Survey, which asks employees about their perceptions of their jobs, work environments, supervisors and agencies and is administered approximately every 3 to 4 years.

³ The 5 management functions included in the *Strengthening DHS Management Functions* high-risk area are acquisition management, information technology management, financial management, human capital management, and management integration. The 5 criteria for removal from the high-risk list are: (1) A demonstrated strong commitment and top leadership support to address the risks; (2) the capacity—the people and other resources—to resolve the risks; (3) a corrective action plan that identifies the root causes and identifies effective solutions; (4) a program instituted to monitor and independently validate the effectiveness and sustainability of corrective measures; and (5) the ability to demonstrate progress in implementing corrective measures.

September 2012 through May 2019 as well as our on-going efforts in 2019 to monitor employee morale at DHS as part of our high-risk work.⁴ For our products we analyzed DHS strategies and other documents related to the Department's efforts to address its high-risk area, interviewed DHS officials, conducted analyses of FEVS data, and interviewed officials from other Federal agencies that achieved high employee engagement scores, among other things. We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

DHS HAS TAKEN STEPS TO IMPROVE ITS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SCORES BUT STILL FALLS BELOW THE GOVERNMENT-WIDE AVERAGE

In connection with the *Strengthening DHS Management Functions* high-risk area, we monitor DHS's progress in the area of employee morale and engagement. In 2010, we identified, and DHS agreed, that achieving 30 specific outcomes would be critical to addressing the challenges within the Department's high-risk management areas. These 30 outcomes are the criteria by which we gauge DHS's demonstrated progress. We rate each outcome on a scale of not-initiated, initiated, partially addressed, mostly addressed, or fully addressed. Several of these outcome criteria relate to human capital actions needed to improve employee morale. Specifically, we monitor DHS's progress to:

- seek employees' input on a periodic basis and demonstrate measurable progress in implementing strategies to adjust human capital approaches;
- base hiring decisions, management selections, promotions, and performance evaluations on human capital competencies and individual performance;
- enhance information technology security through improved workforce planning of the DHS cybersecurity workforce; and
- improve DHS's FEVS scores related to employee engagement.

Since we began monitoring DHS's progress on these outcomes, DHS has worked to strengthen employee engagement through several efforts both at DHS headquarters and within its component agencies. In this statement, we discuss 9 recommendations related to DHS employee engagement and workforce planning, 8 of which have been implemented by the Department. Within DHS, the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) is responsible for implementing policies and programs to recruit, hire, train, and retain DHS's workforce. As the Department-wide unit responsible for human capital issues within DHS, OCHCO also provides guidance and oversight related to morale issues to the DHS components.

Seeking employees' input and demonstrating progress to adjust human capital approaches.—DHS, OCHCO, and the components have taken action to use employees' input from the FEVS to inform and implement initiatives targeted at improving employee engagement. For example, in 2017 and 2018 DHS implemented our 2 recommendations for OCHCO and DHS components to establish metrics of success within their action plans for addressing employee satisfaction problems and to better use these plans to examine the root causes of morale challenges.⁵ DHS components have continued to develop these employee engagement action plans and several components report implementing initiatives to enhance employee engagement. For example, the U.S. Secret Service's action plan details a sponsorship program for all newly-hired and recently-relocated employees. In addition, one division of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) used FEVS survey data to identify a need for increased engagement between employees and component leadership. ICE's employee action plan includes goals with milestones, time lines, and metrics to improve this engagement through efforts such as leadership town halls and leadership site visits.

At the headquarters level, DHS and OCHCO have also established employee engagement initiatives across the Department. For example, DHS established initiatives for employees and their families that aim to increase awareness and access to support programs, benefits, and resources. Through another initiative—Human

⁴We issue an update to the High-Risk List every 2 years at the start of each new session of Congress. Our most recent update was issued in March 2019. See GAO, *High-Risk Series: Substantial Efforts Needed to Achieve Greater Progress on High-Risk Areas*, GAO-19-157SP (Washington, DC: Mar. 6, 2019).

⁵GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Taking Further Action to Better Determine Causes of Morale Problems Would Assist in Targeting Action Plans*, GAO-12-940 (Washington, DC: Sept. 28, 2012).

Resources (H.R.) Academy—DHS provides education, training, and career development opportunities to human resource professionals within the Department. DHS uses an Employee Engagement Steering Committee to guide and monitor implementation of these DHS-wide employee engagement initiatives. As a result of these steps, among other actions, we have considered this human capital outcome area fully addressed since 2018.

Basing hiring decisions and promotions on competencies and performance.—OCHCO has conducted audits to better ensure components are basing hiring decisions and promotions on human capital competencies and individual performance and we have considered this outcome fully addressed since 2017. Our past work has highlighted the importance of selecting candidates based on qualifications, as doing otherwise can negatively affect morale.⁶ Working to ensure that components' human capital decisions are based on performance and established competencies helps create a connection between individual performance and the agency's success.

Enhancing information technology security through improved workforce planning for cybersecurity positions.—In February 2018, we made 6 recommendations to DHS to take steps to identify its position and critical skill requirements among its cybersecurity workforce.⁷ Since then, DHS has implemented all 6 recommendations. For example, in fiscal year 2019, regarding its cybersecurity position identification and coding efforts, we verified that DHS had identified individuals in each component who are responsible for leading those efforts, developed procedures, established a process to review each component's procedures, and developed plans for reporting critical needs.

However, DHS has not yet implemented a recommendation we made in March 2019 to review and correct its coding of cybersecurity positions and assess the accuracy of position descriptions.⁸ Specifically, we stated that DHS had not correctly categorized its information technology/cybersecurity/cyber-related positions. We noted that having inaccurate information about the type of work performed by 28 percent of the Department's information technology/cybersecurity/cyber-related positions is a significant impediment to effectively examining the Department's cybersecurity workforce, identifying work roles of critical need, and improving workforce planning. DHS officials stated that they plan to implement this recommendation by March 2020. As a result, this outcome remains mostly addressed. Until DHS accurately categorizes its positions, its ability to effectively identify critical staffing needs will be impaired.

Improving FEVS scores on employee engagement.—Since our last High-Risk report in March 2019, DHS has demonstrated additional progress in its employee engagement scores, as measured by the FEVS Employee Engagement Index (EEI). The EEI is 1 of 3 indices OPM calculates to synthesize FEVS data.⁹ The EEI measures conditions that lead to engaged employees and is comprised of 3 sub-indices related to employees' views on leadership, supervisors, and intrinsic work experience. As a result of continued improvement on DHS's EEI score, we have moved this outcome rating from partially addressed to mostly addressed based on DHS's 2019 score. As shown in figure 1, DHS increased its EEI score across 4 consecutive years, from a low of 53 percent in 2015 to 62 percent in 2019. In particular, DHS improved its score by 2 points between 2018 and 2019 while the Government average remained constant over the same period. With its 2019 score, DHS also regained the ground that it lost during an 8-point drop between 2010 and 2015.¹⁰

⁶GAO, *U.S. Marshals Service: Additional Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Merit Promotion Process and Address Employee Perceptions of Favoritism*, GAO-18-8 (Washington, DC: Oct. 17, 2017).

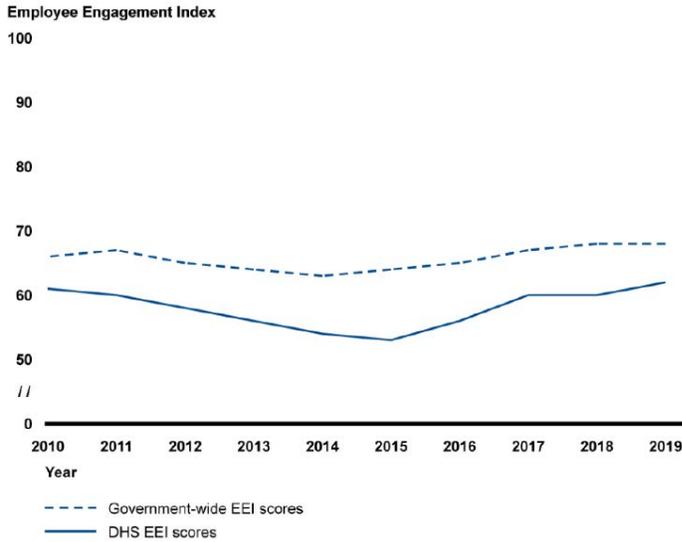
⁷GAO, *Cybersecurity Workforce: Urgent Need for DHS to Take Actions to Identify Its Position and Critical Skill Requirements*, GAO-18-175 (Washington, DC: Feb. 6, 2018).

⁸GAO, *Cybersecurity Workforce: Agencies Need to Accurately Categorize Positions to Effectively Identify Critical Staffing Needs*, GAO-19-144 (Washington, DC: Mar. 12, 2019).

⁹In addition to the EEI, OPM calculates 2 other indices. The New Inclusion Quotient, referred to as New IQ, summarizes information about inclusivity in the workplace, and Global Satisfaction is a combination of employees' satisfaction with their job, their pay, and their organization, plus their willingness to recommend their organization as a good place to work.

¹⁰In our monitoring of DHS's progress on this outcome, we established 2010 as the benchmark year when we developed and DHS agreed upon the outcomes that we monitor.

Figure 1: Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Employee Engagement Index (EEI) Scores 2010–2019



GAO analysis of Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey data. | GAO-20-349T

While DHS has made progress in improving its scores including moving toward the Government average, it remains below the Government average on the EEI and on other measures of employee morale. For example, in 2019 DHS remained 6 points below the Government-wide average for the EEI. In addition to the EEI and other indices OPM calculates, the Partnership for Public Service uses FEVS data to produce an index of the *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*[®]. The Partnership for Public Service’s analysis of FEVS data indicates low levels of employee satisfaction and commitment for DHS employees relative to other large Federal agencies. In 2019, the Partnership for Public Service ranked DHS 17th out of 17 large Federal agencies for employee satisfaction and commitment.¹¹

Across the Department, employee satisfaction scores vary by component. Some DHS components have EEI scores above the Government average and rank highly on the Partnership for Public Service’s index. For example, the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have EEI scores of 76 and 74, respectively, and rank 85th and 90th, respectively, out of 420 subcomponent agencies on the Partnership for Public Service’s index. Further, some DHS component agencies have improved their scores in recent years. The U.S. Secret Service raised its EEI score 7 points between 2018 and 2019, and it moved from the last place among all subcomponent agencies on the Partnership for Public Service’s Ranking in 2016 to 360th out of 420 subcomponent agencies in 2019. However, other DHS component agencies continue to rank among the lowest across the Federal Government in the Partnership for Public Service rankings of employee satisfaction and commitment. For example, in 2019 out of 420 subcomponent agencies across the Federal Government, the DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction office ranked 420th, the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis ranked 406th, and the Transportation Security Administration ranked 398th for employee satisfaction and commitment. As a result, continuing to increase employee engagement and morale remains important to strengthening DHS’s management functions and ability to implement its missions.

DHS employee concerns about senior leadership, among other things, is one area that negatively affects DHS’s overall employee morale scores. In 2015, we identified

¹¹ Partnership for Public Service and Boston Consulting Group, *The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*[®]. The Partnership for Public Service’s ranking cited here is composed of rankings of large agencies, defined as agencies with more than 15,000 employees.

effective management practices agencies can use to improve employee engagement across the Government.¹² One of these practices is the direct involvement of top leadership in organizational improvement efforts.¹³ When top leadership clearly and personally leads organizational improvement efforts, it provides an identifiable source for employees to rally around and helps processes stay on course. A DHS analysis of its 2012 FEVS scores indicated DHS low morale issues may persist because of employee concerns about senior leadership and supervisors, among other things, such as whether their talents were being well-used. Within the 2019 FEVS results for both DHS and Government-wide, leadership remains the lowest of the 3 sub-indices of the EEI. In addition, for several years DHS components have identified several root causes of engagement scores. For example, in 2019, the Transportation Security Administration identified the performance of managers, time constraints and understaffing, and lack of manager and leadership accountability for change as root causes of the component's engagement scores in recent years. Another component, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, identified in 2019 that the areas of leadership performance, accountability, transparency, and training and development opportunities were 2018 engagement score root causes.

We have previously reported that DHS's top leadership, including the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, have demonstrated commitment and support for addressing the Department's management challenges. Continuing to identify and address the root causes of employee engagement scores and addressing the human capital management challenges we have identified in relation to the DHS management high-risk area could help DHS maintain progress in improving employee morale. Implementing our recommendation to review and correct DHS coding of cybersecurity positions and assess the accuracy of position descriptions will assist the Department in identifying critical staffing needs. In addition, as we reported in May 2019, vacancies in top leadership positions could pose a challenge to addressing aspects of DHS's high-risk area, such as employee morale.¹⁴ There are currently acting officials serving in 10 positions requiring Senate confirmation.¹⁵ Filling vacancies—including top DHS leadership positions and the heads of operational components—with confirmed appointees, as applicable, could help ensure continued leadership commitment across DHS's mission areas.¹⁶ We will continue to monitor DHS's progress in strengthening management functions, and may identify additional actions DHS leadership could take to improve employee morale and engagement.

In conclusion, DHS has made notable progress in the area of human capital management, specifically in improving employee engagement and morale, but still falls behind other Federal agencies. It is essential for DHS to continue improving employee morale and engagement given their impact on agency performance and the importance of DHS's missions. Continued senior leadership commitment to employee engagement efforts and filling critical vacancies could assist DHS in these efforts.

Madam Chairwoman Torres Small, Ranking Member Crenshaw, and Members of the subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement, I would be happy to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you for your testimony.

I now recognize Mr. Stier to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

¹² GAO-15-585.

¹³ Other effective management practices included applying policies consistently, creating a line of sight between the agency's mission and the work of each employee, and reaching out to employees to obtain insight into their FEVS scores or to inform other improvement efforts.

¹⁴ GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Continued Leadership Is Critical to Addressing a Range of Management Challenges*, GAO-19-544T (Washington, DC: May 1, 2019).

¹⁵ Specifically, as of December 18, 2019, the following positions remained vacant: Secretary, deputy secretary, under secretary for management, under secretary for science and technology, chief financial officer, general counsel, commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

¹⁶ The DHS operational components are the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and U.S. Secret Service.

**STATEMENT OF MAX STIER, PRESIDENT AND CEO,
PARTNERSHIP FOR PUBLIC SERVICE**

Mr. STIER. Thank you so much. I can't imagine better opening statements than both your, Chairwoman Torres Small, and your, Ranking Member Crenshaw. I thought they were pitch perfect and exactly right.

Members of the committee, this is fantastic that you are having this hearing. I want to start by highlighting that I think Ms. Bailey is easily one of the best chief human capital officers across the entire Government and is doing fabulous work.

One of the most important things I can advocate for is continued focus on the good and not just the bad. If you ask root causes, one of the real challenges we have in Government is lots of infrastructure to find problems and almost no effort to find the good things that are actually answers to those problems.

So the more you can do to surface the good, the more you will actually do to address the bad. I can come back to that later. I would love to do so if that is possible.

Lots of good things are happening. Your numbers are exactly right. Ms. Bailey is correct, that since 2015 the Department on our rankings has come up 9 points. All those things need to be encouraged and reinforced.

I want to focus, though, on 10 ideas that can make it even better. So finding ways for us to move even more aggressively in some of the areas that I think would make a very big difference.

Part of it is building on things that are already there. One component that you have heard talk about already, Secret Service, I want to point to leadership there. So it turned around when Tex Alles became the director of the Secret Service. He is now the acting under secretary for management. No one better for that position. He turned around Secret Service. He is a great contributor, and I think there is a lot more that he could do.

So 10 ideas for you, if I might, beginning with Congress itself and what you might be able to focus on. It is hearings like these. You heard from Chris, it would be fantastic for you to do this on an annual basis. If there is a regular set of hearings, a regular tempo, leadership is going to expect this. They know that this is a priority from your perspective, and then they will pay more attention to that.

The normal course, it is one of the powers that you have in your oversight is to direct attention and to focus on the good things. So, yes, on the subcomponents and what is working in the different parts of Government.

No. 2 would be to hold leaders accountable. So, again, on the political side, one of the challenges is most political appointees are selected because they are policy experts and not necessarily have a lot of management expertise. In fact, having performance plans for political appointees as there are for career employees would be an example of things that you could use to help direct them to things that are management-oriented and hold them accountable.

No. 3, we need to provide continuity in the senior management ranks. That doesn't exist today. So I mentioned Tex, fantastic guy. He is the fifth, if I count correctly, fifth under secretary for management in 5 years.

It is very difficult to make forward progress on difficult management issues without continuity. There are way too many Senate-confirmed positions, way too many political appointees.

We ought to be creative here. Think about IGs. They don't turn over every administration. We could think about operational versus policy positions amongst the political ranks, and that would make a very big difference.

So I posit to you that creating continuity in the management positions would have phenomenal impact and be very powerful. If you think about GAO, they have got a 15-year term. Gene Dodaro is doing an amazing job. That is the kind of thing you need in the management positions.

No. 4, you need to provide budget stability, and both of you have worked on this issue. Shutdowns are the worst. It is craziness, burning down your own house. We have got to change that, got to prevent that. But we also don't need CRs, and that is something again in Congress' house.

No. 5, you need to support investments in leadership development. That, again, is the name of the game. The political leaders, yes. The career folks are the ones that are there day-in, day-out, and they need to be invested in in ways that don't happen very much. Coast Guard is a great example.

Now, No. 6, really fast, for the administration and DHS. There is work to do to continue to improve metrics. I think they could be doing poll surveys. One of the challenges with the FEVS is it comes real late and can be improved, I think.

No. 7, we need to ensure that those senior leaders actually have management experience. They are running huge organizations, again, often selected for policy expertise. They need to be onboarded differently.

No. 8, we need to enhance the leadership development of the career work force.

No. 9, we need to work on that culture of recognition, again, to pull up the good things. More ought to be done around that.

No. 10, I want to end on this piece, which is, you pointed this out, Congressman Crenshaw, I mean, you need to have Presidential appointee-confirmed people in place in greater numbers. Right now, DHS is the agency with the fewest number of Senate-confirmed positions in place. Even though the FEMA director was confirmed today, that created another vacancy in the organization. So they are at 41 percent.

Very, very challenging for any organization. Phenomenal people can be in those jobs, but they are the substitute teacher if they are in an acting capacity. So we need to look at that issue as well.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Stier follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MAX STIER

JANUARY 14, 2020

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Torres Small, Ranking Member Crenshaw, and Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's important hearing on morale at the Department of Homeland Security. I am Max Stier, president and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to inspire a new generation to serve and transform

the way Government works through leadership development, Government reform, and employee engagement.

I want to start by thanking you for holding this hearing on employee engagement and morale, and how they contribute to agency performance. This subcommittee has a history of bipartisan interest in the challenges facing the Department's non-partisan civil service and how Congress can help the Department accomplish its varied and difficult missions. Your inquiry today adds to that legacy and contributes to better oversight and a deeper understanding of the management challenges facing the Department of Homeland Security and the rest of our Government.

“BEST PLACES TO WORK IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT®” AND THE IMPORTANCE OF
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

The Partnership produces the annual *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government®* rankings in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). The rankings are based on the results of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) administered by the Office of Personnel Management, as well as other agency-specific surveys that are comparable to FEVS. We rank agencies by size and analyze the key drivers of employee engagement—in other words, the factors that have the biggest impact on how employees view the agencies in which they work. The rankings also shed light on how agencies fare in different categories that define the employee experience, including effective leadership, pay, training, innovation, and performance-based rewards and advancement.

Employee engagement is not just about happy employees. Higher scores in employment engagement equate to better performance and higher-quality service. According to a Gallup analysis of more than 82,000 business units spanning 230 organizations, those with improved employee engagement scores had 41 percent less absenteeism, 24 percent less turnover, 17 percent more productivity, and 70 percent fewer employee safety incidents.¹ With such an impact on the workforce it is critical for leadership at the political and career levels to be focused on engagement at the agencies they lead. The *Best Places* rankings provide a mechanism for holding agency leaders accountable for the health of their organizations, serve as early warning signs for agencies in trouble, and shine a spotlight on agency successes that can be replicated elsewhere.

The 2019 *Best Places to Work* rankings reflect the views of over 880,000 civil servants from 490 Federal agencies and their subcomponents on a wide range of workplace topics. Government-wide, 2019 saw a 0.5-point decrease from the 2018 rankings, bringing Government's overall engagement score to 61.7 out of 100. This was a modest drop despite a tumultuous time for our Nation's public servants—a time when about 800,000 of the 2 million Federal employees were affected by a lengthy Government shutdown, there were a number of critical leadership vacancies across the Government, and many agencies had to deal with a variety of political headwinds.

Despite these circumstances, the data show modest but meaningful improvements Government-wide in employee attitudes in 8 of 10 categories that measure the work experience. Government-wide employee views on training and development, and on performance-based rewards and advancement, both rose by 0.8 points. Government-wide scores on effective leadership, which encompasses employee views of their supervisors, senior leaders, fairness in the workplace and individual empowerment, rose by 0.3 points. Categories that declined Government-wide were pay, down 0.4 points, and support for diversity, which dropped 0.2 points.

The 2019 rankings also show that the Federal Government still significantly underperforms the private sector when it comes to employee engagement. In 2019, the Government's score lagged 15.3 points behind the private sector engagement score.² Only 11 of the Government's 70 large, midsize, and small agencies included in the *Best Places* rankings scored above the private sector average this year, including NASA, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Peace Corps.

2019 RANKINGS FOR DHS

Based on our methodology, the Department of Homeland Security experienced a 0.8-point decrease from the 2018 rankings (from 53.1 to 52.3 out of 100), and the Department ranks 17 out of 17 large agencies in overall engagement, maintaining

¹ Gallup, “The Relationship Between Engagement at Work and Organizational Outcomes,” 2016. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/reports/191489/q12-meta-analysis-report-2016.aspx>.

² The private-sector data is based on nearly 6.5 million employee survey responses from organizations in a wide variety of industries, gathered by the employee research firm Mercer/Sitrota.

its dubious distinction as the lowest-ranking large agency since 2012. The Department's highest score was 58.6 out of 100 in 2010, which means its 2019 score represents an overall 11 percent decline from their high mark in 2010. The Department also ranks at the bottom in all but one of 14 categories and subcategories that we measure, which include effective leadership, employee skills-mission match, pay, support for diversity, and training and development.

Some good news

Despite areas of concern, a few points of perspective give hope. The 0.8 decline is a small tick down in a survey that was conducted on the heels of a very trying time for the Department. Eighty-six percent of the Department's employees continued to work without pay throughout the 35-day Government shutdown.³ This shows the mission commitment and the resiliency of the workforce, and our Nation owes a deep gratitude to these DHS employees who kept their focus and kept our country safe despite the difficult circumstances for them and their families.

Like the Government-wide score, the 2019 DHS score is essentially a continuation of the status quo following 3 consecutive years of improvement that began in 2015. And in the 14 categories we rank, the Department did see slight improvements in all but 2—employee skills-mission-match and pay, 2 categories which traditionally, after leadership, are the major drivers of engagement. The Department also increased its score by 1.2 points in the category of effective leadership subcategory of senior leaders.

There are several subcomponent successes that should be celebrated:

- The Office of Intelligence and Analysis saw a 13.1 point increase in 2019 and the Office of the Secretary jumped 6.9 points.
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which ranks 90 of 420 subcomponents, has an index score of 72.9 of 100 and has improved 14 points from its 2005 low.
- The U.S. Coast Guard improved its score, rising 2.7 points. Of all 420 subcomponents across Government included in the rankings, the Coast Guard remains the highest-ranked DHS subcomponent—85th of 420 subcomponents.
- The U.S. Secret Service is worth highlighting for its 8.9 point jump in 2019 for an index score of 52.9 of 100, a 61 percent improvement from its 2016 low score of 32.8.
- The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has improved in 5 of the last 6 years, from 36.2 in 2013 to 51.5 in 2019.

The Department should also be commended for its Employee and Family Readiness Initiative, which is a new suite of programs to address employee needs in areas such as stress, mental health, personal relationships, and financial concerns.⁴ Many DHS employees face extremely challenging circumstances in the workplace, which can also create challenges in their personal lives. Helping both employees and their families cope with these challenges should help improve engagement and retention.

The Department is also forward-leaning in its approach to hiring, looking for smarter ways to bring in needed talent, while maintaining merit system principles and making it easier for the Department to hire veterans. This speaks directly to a major frustration heard in FEVS responses, where only 36.2 percent of DHS employees agree that their work unit is able to recruit people with the right skills, even lower than the disappointing 41.9 percent of respondents who agreed Government-wide.

Areas of concern

There is clearly much more work to be done, but progress is possible. If every DHS subcomponent in this year's rankings had reached its previous all-time high score, DHS's *Best Places to Work* score in 2019 would have been approximately 60.0 out of 100—a 15 percent improvement upon its actual score this year. DHS would have jumped up to rank 14th out of the 17 large agencies.

Explanations for why DHS morale is low include that it is a large agency, with disparate components, and with a workforce that operates under stressful conditions. These undoubtedly are all major challenges, but they can be overcome. The

³Testimony of Angie Bailey, Chief Human Capital Officer, Department of Homeland Security. Hearing on "Solutions to Improve Federal Hiring," Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management, July 30, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Bailey%20TESTIMONY1.pdf>.

⁴See Testimony of Angie Bailey, Chief Human Capital Officer, Department of Homeland Security. Hearing on "Solutions to Improve Federal Hiring," Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management, July 30, 2019.

Department of Veterans Affairs, larger than DHS, ranks 6th among large agencies in the Best Places rankings, with a score of 65.3. The Department of Commerce, also consisting of many distinct components, is the 4th-ranked large agency, with a score of 69.6. The intelligence community works under stressful conditions and claims the third spot among large agencies, with a score of 69.9.

Areas of concern for DHS in 2019 include:

- The Office of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD), which has a critical mission with no margin for error, ranks at the bottom of all subcomponents across the Government—420 out of 420, with a score of only 18.1 out of 100.
- The Office of the Inspector General declined 4.9 points, Immigration and Customs Enforcement declined 3.7 points, and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center declined 3.3 points.
- Customs and Border Protection ranks 380th among the 420 subcomponents, and its score declined 2.1 points. The score is up 9 points from its 2015 low, but is still down 22 percent from its best score of 63.3 in 2010.
- TSA's score dropped 1.1 points, from 45.7 to 44.6. TSA's score is up 9.1 points or 25.6 percent since 2016, but it has consistently struggled, never exceeding its highest score of 51.3 in 2010.

FEVS responses show that the Government, on average, struggles with performance management, and DHS struggles a little more than most. When asked if they agreed that, in their work unit, steps are taken to deal with a poor performer who cannot or will not improve, 27.3 percent at DHS agreed, compared to 30.2 percent Government-wide. Only 27.5 percent at DHS agreed that promotions in their unit are based on merit, compared to 36.2 percent Government-wide.

The Department also needs to make progress on creating a culture of innovation. The Department's score in the Best Places innovation category was up 0.9 but still last among large agencies in this category. For context, DHS lags a full 26.4 points behind NASA, the leader in this category. When asked whether innovation and creativity are rewarded, only 32.7 percent of DHS respondents agree, compared to 41.4 percent Government-wide. NASA also had the highest score on this question with 70 percent agreeing.

Also, DHS trails even further behind the Government overall on engagement in comparison to the private sector, lagging 24.7 points below the private-sector engagement score. This is troubling, given that DHS must compete with the broader labor market for specialized talent in fields such as cybersecurity.

WHY IS DHS MORALE LOW?

You have asked me to comment on why DHS has been consistently low over the entire life span of the Department. I will focus my response on 3 areas—performance metrics, Congressional stewardship, and leadership.

Data and Performance Metrics

While the FEVS is a valuable resource for leaders—from Cabinet secretaries to front-line supervisors—it is only the beginning of the conversation. The annual survey and the Best Places data highlight areas of success or concern but provide little insight into the root causes for changes in satisfaction or the preferences and motivations of a diverse and multi-generational workforce. John Kamensky of the IBM Center for the Business of Government has similarly noted that agencies have plenty of data but are “information poor,”⁵ meaning data is most helpful when it can be turned into useful insights that inform decision making.

Also, since FEVS rankings are administered annually they only capture a single snapshot of agency health. The 2019 survey was administered in 2 waves, beginning May 13 and May 20,⁶ meaning that employee responses reflect morale and views during that time and can only measure the questions asked. And agencies typically don't get their FEVS results until many months after the survey.

To fully understand the factors that contribute to employee morale and performance, agency leaders would benefit from a rich and diverse menu of data, measures and information. The FEVS is one tool, but it should be augmented with others like pulse surveys, focus groups, town halls and interviews to better understand the complexities of the employee experience behind the numbers. Exit interviews pro-

⁵Kamensky, John. “Government Is Data Rich, But Information Poor.” Editorial. Government Executive, June 12, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.govexec.com/management/2018/06/government-data-rich-information-poor/148914/>.

⁶Office of Personnel Management, “2019 Government-wide Management Report.” Retrieved from <https://www.opm.gov/fevs/reports/governmentwide-reports/governmentwide-management-report/governmentwide-report/2019/2019-governmentwide-management-report.pdf>.

vide valuable insight into the reasons people leave an organization. Measures of hiring effectiveness provide insight into whether an agency is able to recruit the talent it needs, and demographic information helps determine whether an agency is employing and retaining a diverse workforce. Customer satisfaction data are a valuable indicator of how successfully agencies are serving the public, and trends in budget and spending will reflect areas of investment and emphasis over time. All of this and more should be leveraged to provide leaders with the performance insights needed to make smart decisions for the Department and its workforce. It is also important for Congress to use data, in all its forms, to inform oversight and legislative activities.

Links between employee engagement scores and other performance metrics are not always evident to agencies, but when they are, they can be very powerful. For example, in our analysis of data from 150 VA medical centers, over a 3-year period, we found that medical centers with stronger employee engagement had higher patient satisfaction, better call-center performance and lower turnover among registered nurses.⁷ With 89.3 percent of all Federal employees, and 86.9 percent of DHS employees, believing that their work is important, it stands to bear that employee engagement and customer service are mutually reinforcing.

The VA call centers mentioned in our analysis are one of 25 Federal Government services that have been identified by the Office of Management and Budget as having a high impact on the public.⁸ DHS provides 4 of these “high-impact” services—airport security checkpoints (TSA), emergency and disaster assistance (FEMA), immigration services (USCIS) and traveler services like the Trusted Traveler Program (CBP). At the VA, strengthening employee engagement has been a critical component of their strategy to improve services to veterans, and partially due to these efforts, trust in the VA among veterans has risen dramatically over the last few years. DHS components have a similar opportunity to look holistically at a variety of data sources to understand how employee engagement scores affect other key performance measures.

In the final analysis, data are a great tool to identify areas of success or concern, and in turn this points agency leaders and Congress where attention is most needed—but data alone does not solve problems. Agencies, agency leaders and their Congressional committees need to use the data to take action. This is especially true with respect to the FEVS, where only 35.5 percent of employees at DHS believe that the survey will be used to make meaningful improvements.

CONGRESSIONAL STEWARDSHIP

Congress also has responsibility for Federal employee morale through its stewardship of Federal agencies.

Again, the overall FEVS score for DHS, with only a slight drop, shows a remarkable resiliency of the Department’s workforce in the aftermath of a shutdown. Undoubtedly, though, budget instability—shutdowns, threats of shutdowns, and continuing resolutions—are detrimental to agencies.

Since its inception, DHS has been subject to 3 shutdowns—one of 16 days in fiscal year 2014, one of 2 days in fiscal year 2018, and the 35-day shutdown in fiscal year 2019. The Department has also operated under 40 continuing resolutions over the last 10 years,⁹ many of which have come to the brink of another shutdown until Congress extended the life of the continuing resolution at the last minute.

This constant budget instability requires leaders, managers, and employees at all levels to divert attention from mission accomplishment and management priorities (including employee engagement) to contingency planning. Continuing resolutions make long-term planning impossible, and even the threat of a Government shutdown results in a huge waste of taxpayer dollars as agencies must notify grantees, partners, vendors, and their own employees to prepare.

Following the most recent Government shutdown, many lawmakers proposed or supported legislation to make Government shutdowns a thing of the past. Ideas include automatic continuing resolutions when Congress fails to pass appropriations

⁷Partnership for Public Service and BCG, “A Prescription for Better Performance: Engaging Employees at VA Medical Centers,” March 2019. Available at https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/BPTW18_VA-issue-brief.pdf.

⁸General Services Administration and the Office of Management and Budget, “Meet 25 of the nation’s highest impact service providers,” December 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.performance.gov/cx/>.

⁹See Congressional Research Service, “Continuing Resolutions: Overview of Components and Practices,” April 19, 2019, pp. 10–14, retrieved at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42647>. In addition to the continuing resolutions identified in this report, there have been 2 continuing resolutions in fiscal year 2020.

bills on time, keeping Members of Congress in Washington until appropriations bills are passed or making appropriations bills the only business in order. We encourage you in these efforts and believe that on-time appropriations and predictable funding would improve morale at the Department and encourage innovation and mission accomplishment.

The over-abundance of committees with jurisdiction over DHS also complicates the management of the Department. With over 100 committees and subcommittees having jurisdiction over the Department, its leaders often receive conflicting directives that hinder the functioning of the Department. This problem was recognized as early as the 9/11 Commission, which recommended consolidation of jurisdiction, but the oversight of the Department today remains as splintered as when its doors opened in 2003.

Leadership

Since the Best Places rankings began in 2003, one thing has been clear—leadership is the No. 1 driver of employee engagement. Good leaders motivate and advocate for their employees, build trust and create the conditions necessary for employees to perform at their best.

In 2019, the Partnership developed the Public Service Leadership Model. The model identifies the core values that leaders must prioritize and the critical competencies they must master to achieve their agencies' missions and desired impact. These include setting a vision, empowering others and being accountable for results. We were proud to create this model with a bipartisan group of distinguished leaders from the public and private sectors, and in the months to come we hope to work with Congress, the Executive branch, and others to improve and measure overall leadership effectiveness.

While the DHS *Best Places* score for effective senior leadership went up 1.2 points in 2019 (to 41.1), the Department still ranks below 13 other large agencies in that category. With a score of 49.3, the Department ranks last among its large-agency peers in overall effective leadership (an umbrella category that includes questions on senior leaders, supervisors, fairness, and empowerment).

One factor that may exacerbate the leadership challenges at DHS is the high degree of turnover in Senate-confirmed roles and the fact that many are, and have been, vacant altogether. Currently, DHS has more vacancies in Senate-confirmed positions than any other department, with only 41 percent of those positions filled by a Senate-confirmed appointee. The Department has been without a Senate-confirmed secretary for 266 days, without a Senate-confirmed deputy secretary for 640 days, and without a Senate-confirmed under secretary for management for 280 days, and there are no nominees for these positions. Other key positions that are vacant with no nominee are the general counsel, the under secretary for science and technology, and the director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Nominations for several other positions are languishing in the Senate: The chief financial officer (pending since March 2019), the director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (pending since May 2019), and the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (pending since October 2019).¹⁰

While concurrent long-standing vacancies in the Department's leadership have created a unique situation for the Department, unfilled positions are not new. For example, at the time of Jeh Johnson's nomination hearing for DHS Secretary in November 2013, there were 9 vacancies in PAS positions at DHS, including the positions of secretary and deputy secretary.¹¹ Then-nominee Johnson stated that if confirmed, his immediate priority starting on the day he took the oath would be to work with the White House and Senate to fill the vacancies in senior leadership across the Department.¹²

The reality is that acting officials—even if they are seasoned and highly regarded individuals—often lack the full perceived authority that flows from Senate confirmation. Many acting officials do not feel like it is their place to make long-term policy, operational, or management decisions that will bind their successors.

¹⁰The Senate is scheduled to consider the nomination for administrator of FEMA this week so it is possible that this position will be filled before this hearing.

¹¹"Statement of Senator Thomas R. Carper," Nomination of Hon. Jeh C. Johnson to be Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, November 13, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Opening%20Statement-Carper-2013-11-131.pdf>.

¹²"Statement of Jeh Johnson, on his nomination to serve as Secretary, Department of Homeland Security," Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, November 13, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Prepared%20Statement-Johnson-2013-11-13.pdf>.

I often make an analogy to substitute teachers here—they may be skilled professionals who have much to offer the students but they are not perceived by those around them as having the full authority of the teacher, and they do not view themselves as having the right to make decisions with long-term impact. Thad Allen, the former commandant of the Coast Guard, has said that when there is a vacancy, “people who are in an acting capacity feel they do not have the power to make long-term changes and do what they need to do.”¹³ Senior-level vacancies stymie decision making, divert attention from management issues, slow hiring decisions for other key positions, make employees feel uncertain about the future or importance of their organization, and detract from the mission as acting officials turn their focus to finding temporary replacements to act in their own positions.

The Partnership for Public Service launched the Political Appointments Tracker with the *Washington Post* in 2017 to track roughly 700 key Executive branch nominations through the confirmation process. These positions include secretaries, deputy and assistant secretaries, C-suite positions, general counsels, and other positions that require Senate confirmation. A look at DHS reveals a history of turnover in key positions, and a grab-bag of nominations submitted and withdrawn, announced but not formally submitted or waiting months for Senate action.

While there are many reasons that positions subject to Senate confirmation may be vacant, it is clear that the process for filling these critical roles has become cumbersome, complex, and politicized to the point that many jobs remain empty and talented people are reluctant to serve. Congress, in particular the Senate given its advice and consent role, has an opportunity to improve this process before the next election and we would be pleased to share ideas with the subcommittee if that would be of interest.

Vacancies are not the only leadership challenge in Government. Over the years and across the Government, political leaders often have kept their focus on policy and not the management of the agencies they lead, which means employee morale is not a top priority. Political leaders typically have shorter tenures in office which do not align to the long-term efforts needed to improve employee engagement or address management challenges.

At the same time, many senior career leaders who are tasked with management and employee engagement are technical experts in their field who lack strong management skills. Government-wide, only 41.8 percent (and only 33.8 percent at DHS) believe that leaders in their organization generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce. This underscores the importance of choosing only people who have the desire and aptitude to manage people for Executive-level management roles and equipping Federal leaders with the tools and training necessary to lead people effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Both the Department and Congress have a role to play in efforts to improve employee satisfaction.

For its part, Congress should:

- *Continue oversight.*—The subcommittee today is helping to identify long-standing problems with DHS morale and find solutions. We encourage you to make this hearing an annual occurrence. The subcommittee could follow up by holding a hearing on DHS subcomponents that are doing well with employee engagement, to help celebrate success and encourage replication. Members of Congress should also visit the Department’s offices, both in the National Capital Region and in the field, to get insight from managers and employees on the front lines.
- *Hold leaders accountable.*—In addition to holding leaders accountable through oversight, this committee may want to consider the approach taken by the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act of 2017, which requires performance plans for VA political employees.¹⁴ Performance plans for political appointees should include managing their organizations and not just implementing policy, and supporting efforts to recruit and retain highly qualified talent, develop future leaders, engage employees, and hold subordinate managers accountable for addressing performance.
- *Provide continuity in management positions.*—To help provide continuity of operations and a long-term vision for the Department, this committee should con-

¹³ Partnership for Public Service, “Government Disservice: Overcoming Washington Dysfunction to Improve Congressional Stewardship of the Executive Branch,” September 2015. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Government-Disservice.pdf>.

¹⁴ Pub. L. 115–46, VA Choice and Quality Improvement Act (Aug. 12, 2017), Section 203.

sider converting political positions responsible for overall management and operations—for example, some of the C-suite positions—to career executive positions to be filled by individuals who are experts in their field, with fixed terms and performance contracts. Another approach would be to change the expectation that certain politically-appointed positions turn over with a change in administration; inspectors general are appointed without regard to political affiliation and in general they are not asked to resign at the end of a President's term. The IGs provide a useful model for other roles where the duties are management and operations versus policy, and where sustained leadership and institutional knowledge would improve the Department's ability to implement changes over time. The position of under secretary for management is one position that might benefit from a new model. In the span of the last 5 years, the position has changed hands 5 times, as leadership has bounced from confirmed to acting leaders. A long-term position, whether by statute or expectation, to span administrations could set the expectation that the office holder is driving long-term management initiatives and should be insulated to some extent from political whirlwinds. The position of comptroller general at the Government Accountability Office is one such model.

- *Provide budget stability.*—Bipartisan legislation¹⁵ introduced by Senators James Lankford and Maggie Hassan would provide for an automatic continuing resolution at prior year spending levels when Congress and the President fail to agree on spending levels before expiration of existing appropriations. The bill would also prohibit official travel and require Congress to prioritize consideration of appropriations until new spending bills are enacted. This bill is an effective mix of carrots and sticks to avoid shutdowns. Congress should also consider other budget process reforms, such as adoption of a biennial budget resolution and multi-year appropriations, to provide more budget stability.
- *Consolidate Congressional jurisdiction over DHS.*—The leaders of the House and Senate should streamline committee jurisdiction over the Department or, at a minimum, initiate a review. A bipartisan review commission was proposed in the last Congress as part of the Department of Homeland Security Authorization Act, which did not see final passage.¹⁶
- *Modernize the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.*—The statute requiring annual employee satisfaction surveys dates to 2003.¹⁷ Congress should modernize the law to ensure that the FEVS continues, that all agencies participate in the survey and that the data is comparable across agencies and agency components. The survey itself should be easy for Federal employees to take, including employees in the field like border patrol agents and TSA screeners, and agencies should receive their data in a timely way that allows them to act on the results before the next survey is in the field.

DHS should:

- *Continue to improve data and metrics.*—In its last High-Risk update, GAO found that DHS has made progress establishing metrics of success within components' action plans for addressing employee satisfaction problems. This is never a one-and-done exercise.¹⁸ The Department will need to continue to use the data to probe frustrations with workforce processes, technology or norms, including by soliciting feedback from employees and employee organizations. Pulse surveys and exit surveys are also useful tools to supplement the FEVS. Leaders then need to work with managers and employees to translate the vision into action, with a clear and effective communications strategy. Finally, leaders must hold themselves accountable through their performance plans, and celebrate success.
- *Ensure that political leaders are focused on engagement and management.*—The Department's senior political leaders should be individuals who have experience managing large organizations and accept responsibility for the performance and operations of the Department. They should be held accountable for management, including employee engagement, in their performance plans. The Department should also maintain a robust orientation program for new political appointees—some of whom may be new to the Federal Government. This would

¹⁵S. 3009, the Prevent Government Shutdowns Act of 2019.

¹⁶The Department of Homeland Security Reauthorization Act, H.R. 2825, Title VII, 116th Congress, as reported by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Retrieved from <https://www.Congress.gov/115/crpt/srpt351/CRPT-115srpt351.pdf>.

¹⁷Pub. L. 108–136, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 (Nov. 24, 2003), Section 1128.

¹⁸Government Accountability Office, *High-Risk Series: Substantial Efforts Needed to Achieve Greater Progress on High-Risk Series* (March 2019), p. 188. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/697245.pdf>

improve political appointees' ability to increase employee engagement, improve retention, enhance performance, and work within and across agencies to achieve results.

- *Enhance career leadership development.*—DHS should be commended for its commitment to leadership development efforts such as the DHS Executive Capstone program, training for DHS executives that focuses on the development of key leadership qualities but also looks to broaden the executives' awareness of leadership decision making and their role across Government. The Partnership is proud to work with DHS in delivering the curriculum for this program. The Department should continue to strengthen and invest in leadership training at all levels to improve the skills of existing leaders and develop the next generation of leaders. These efforts should include manager and supervisor training, rotation requirements for aspiring leaders (so that they understand the Department as a whole), and other mobility opportunities that give leaders a greater depth of experience.
- *Create a culture of continual learning, reskilling, and upskilling.*—The Department's scores on training and development have been trending up since 2015, but once again this is a category where DHS ranks last among large agencies. Only 33.4 percent of DHS employees are satisfied with their opportunity to get a better job within their organization. Our recent look at reskilling and upskilling in both Government and the private sector reaffirms these efforts in the President's Management Agenda.¹⁹ Opportunities for rotations, public-private talent exchanges, and other professional development opportunities not only speak to a workforce that increasingly expects mobility in careers, but also helps break down stovepipes.

Both Executive and Legislative branches should:

- *Work to fill vacancies.*—While the President has the responsibility for making nominations, Congress should, where appropriate, convert Senate-confirmed positions to Presidential appointments not requiring confirmation, and should work to reduce the overall number of appointments. This would allow the White House to focus on the most important appointees. The Partnership has also recommended that the Senate revisit its "privileged nomination" process to make it the streamlined process it was intended to be for nominations that are not controversial, and to work with the Executive branch to streamline the paperwork required of nominees. Congress should also reexamine the Federal Vacancies Reform Act to ensure clarity in the law, including surrounding the interplay of the FVRA and agency-specific succession acts.

CONCLUSION

As recently as 2017, the Partnership recognized DHS as the most improved large agency in our rankings. With attention to the recommendations discussed today—and with the help and support of Congress—the Department could reclaim that mantle and make even further progress. Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today. I look forward to continuing to work with both the subcommittee and the Department in support of strengthening DHS employment engagement.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Wow, impeccably timed, Mr. Stier. That was well-done.

I thank all of the witnesses for their testimony.

I will remind each Member that he or she will have 5 minutes to question the panel.

I will now recognize myself for questions.

According to the "Best Places to Work" rankings produced by the Partnership for Public Service since 2012, the Department of Homeland Security has ranked last among all large Federal agencies. It also ranks, as I mentioned before, last among agencies involved in the National security space.

I want to start with Mr. Currie, and then I will go to Ms. Bailey.

What are your reactions to these rankings?

¹⁹ Partnership for Public Service and General Assembly, "Looking Inward for Talent: Retraining Employees for Tomorrow's Jobs," September 2019. Retrieved from <https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Looking-Inward-for-Talent.pdf>.

Actually, I will start with you, Ms. Bailey. What are your reactions to these rankings? Do you believe the Department suffers from low morale?

Ms. BAILEY. I appreciate the question, Chairwoman.

With regard to the rankings, it is something that absolutely that we pay attention to, as well as we pay attention to the FEVS scores in total. One of the things that we try to do is pivot off of that and look down into the root causes, get out into the field and actually talk not only to the leadership, but talk to the employees themselves.

I have gone down to the border several times. I have gone out to the FEMA installations, to TSA, to a variety of places, and sat down with the employees and really talked through with them, not so much about our—I am sorry.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Just to make sure, do you believe that DHS does suffer from low morale?

Ms. BAILEY. I believe that we certainly have room for improvement, but as far as from a morale standpoint, I think one of the other things that we also look at is the fact that—and I believe it was mentioned earlier—that 86 percent of our employees will put in the extra effort to get the job done, that they believe in the mission that they are doing.

So even despite everything that they are doing, the austere conditions, the difficult work, and sometimes thankless job that they have, they still every day come to work and try to do the very best that they possibly can.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. It is clear you have some exceptional employees, and we need to recognize that as we work to improve morale so that folks feel supported in their jobs.

Mr. Currie, Ms. Bailey mentioned a few of the reasons, the austere conditions, the difficult job. Do you feel like that is a full and complete explanation for the low morale challenges?

Mr. CURRIE. Oh, no way. I mean, I think there are a lot of agencies across Government that have extremely difficult missions and that are under intense public and Congressional scrutiny, too. So it is not enough just to chalk the reasons up to those reasons.

What we see in the root cause analysis and in the responses to the survey is there are a lot of just core management issues that come into play here, things that all of us want in a workplace that we come to every day. Do I trust my supervisor? Does management communicate with me? Is there transparency? Do I understand how I am rated? Are other employees held accountable for their performance?

I mean, these are core management issues that all agencies, private and public, face. I think DHS has made a lot of progress over the years maturing as a Department, but I think where they are with the scores now shows that they still have a long way to go.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Mr. Stier, do you have anything to add?

Mr. STIER. I think that the real issue again is leadership. We see in our research that about two-thirds of the employee engagement scores are driven by perceptions of leadership. I think that is where the biggest gain can be made here.

So, again, really important to give kudos to the good things that they have done already and to understand that we are talking

about an average when we talk about DHS, that you have got components that are exceptional and then you have ones that are struggling more. So pulling that apart is very valuable.

The other piece I would suggest is, even within those components, when you pull them apart you can actually see huge variation, and that tells you a lot about what actually is possible.

So just a mind exercise. If you took every component in DHS at their highest score over the course of the rankings we have done, they would be actually at 15 percent points higher, they would be a number at 60. So we know there is a higher ceiling there. Given other externalities, there still is a higher ceiling.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Great. So we are talking about the higher ceiling there.

Mr. Currie, in terms of the current situation about where we are, what are the risks associated with not going back to that high ceiling or finding those moments for increased morale?

Mr. CURRIE. Well, I think that this is one of the things I wanted to mention today, is that I think sometimes there tends to be a tendency to look at human capital matters and morale separately from the mission, and they are not separate. It has been proven that places that have much higher morale and employee engagements do better work, they are more productive, and they have less turnover, which is a huge problem, for example, in Customs and Border Protection with agent turnover. So morale has a huge impact on the mission.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you.

I will yield my time for now since I don't have time for another question. The Chair recognizes the Ranking Member, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Crenshaw.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Again, thank you all for being here.

I want to start with flexibility in hiring and firing. It is one of the major issues that CBP, FPS, and other components face, is their authorized strength and meeting the billets that they have. That is one reason I proposed H.R. 1609, the Anti-Border Corruption Improvement Act, which would streamline hiring in CBP by giving waivers to law enforcement and military as far as the polygraph requirement goes.

There is, of course, an issue with underperformers and how you deal with that, and how underperformers can sap the morale and energy of an organization.

So, beginning with Ms. Bailey, maybe you could address that and how that does affect morale. I will leave it to the rest of the panel as well.

Ms. BAILEY. There is no doubt that underperformers affect the morale of a work force. It is not just really a supervisor issue. It is a colleague issue as well. So it is something that we do focus our attention on.

In fact, one of the things that we just established is a disciplinary process management oversight council that I am co-chair actually with Chief Huffman out of CBP.

Every single component participates on that. We brought in our offices of professional responsibility as well as our security offices to really look at all of the allegations, look at how we are handling

those disciplinary actions, performance-based actions, and making sure that it is not just that we are consistent, but that we are actually handling those things in a timely fashion so that they are not just hanging out there.

Because nothing is worse than us not just taking the action, but then not doing it in a timely fashion. So it is something that we are pretty dogged about in making sure that we address.

Mr. CRENSHAW. If there is an action that would warrant removal of that employee, how long does it generally take to actually fire that employee?

Ms. BAILEY. We actually looked into that. It can take anywhere from 120 to 240 days to actually remove an employee.

Mr. CRENSHAW. What about hiring? Flexibility in hiring, how would that improve DHS morale?

Ms. BAILEY. Well, one of the things that we have actually introduced is the DHS Enhanced Hiring Act, and it has a two-prong approach to it that I think would actually help us to enhance our flexibility with hiring.

One is that right now there are multiple ways for veterans to be able to be hired, all kinds of different hiring authorities. What we would love to do is consolidate that down to 1 so that we could hire any veteran, whether we are at a military transition center, a university, a black hat event, wherever we are at, our ability to hire a veteran.

We have talked to our own Veteran Service Organizations, and we have talked to the National Veterans Organizations as well with regard to this, because we really think it is important that we have the ability to hire veterans as efficiently as possible.

The second prong of this is that once we maintain 20 percent or more of our veterans on board, which DHS is at almost 30 percent, that we have the ability then, through any source, to be able to hire the rest of our employees.

Mr. CRENSHAW. That is excellent.

We are going to come back to black-hat hiring, but before we do, Mr. Currie and Mr. Stier, do you have anything to add to the hiring and firing flexibility?

Mr. CURRIE. Well, I think your bill, I think one of the things it does is to allow people that we know are already vetted to not have to undergo all the vetting again. I think there is no way to argue that doesn't make sense.

The other thing I would say is hiring and firing, those are very concrete things, but I think organizations that have a strong performance culture where even if you can't fire people or it takes a year to fire someone, if they know their leaders are giving real feedback to people and they are being held accountable even within the agency, that makes a huge difference for people's morale, too.

Mr. STIER. I think that this is deeply entwined with the morale of the organization, because they are mission-based organizations, and having the right people doing the work well is fundamental to your connection to the ability to get stuff done.

So I do think these are issues that ought to be focused on. I think Ms. Bailey, the legislation she talked about is an important step in the right direction. On the hiring side, it is way, way too challenging.

On the firing side, one thing I would advocate for is—and actually in both instances—that this is, in my view, the core part of this is actually a management problem as opposed to a rule problem, that managers aren't actually either selected for their capabilities around hiring and firing people, giving good performance feedback, and they are not held accountable for it.

There are also some ways that you might do things that are easier to change the overall system. So one proposal we have had is you have a year typical probation period. After that year, you become nonprobationary. Our perspective is, why? Shouldn't there have to be an affirmative choice by a manager that you meet the qualifications necessary to stay rather than having that done by default, so managers are actually doing their job. Did they, in fact, bring the right talent on board? If you do that, you are going to have many fewer people that you are going to have to fire.

So I think there are solutions to this that are more than just, hey, let's just make this simpler to fire people faster, that get at those management issues.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Thank you. I yield back.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you.

The Chair will now recognize other Members for questions they may wish to ask the witnesses. In accordance with our committee rules, I will recognize Members who are present at the start of the hearing, based on seniority on the subcommittee, alternating between Majority and Minority. Those Members coming in later will be recognized in order of their arrival.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from California, Congresswoman Barragán.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Bailey, did you take the survey?

Ms. BAILEY. Yes.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. So the first question on the survey says: Would you recommend your organization as a good place to work?

Ms. BAILEY. Absolutely.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. The second question is: Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job, very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

Ms. BAILEY. Very satisfied.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your organization?

Ms. BAILEY. Very satisfied.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Why do you think your responses are so very different than those of your colleagues in your Department where you work, in your part of the organization, given that it ranked so low? Any idea?

Ms. BAILEY. Well, one part of this is that I think my scores are reflective of many employees within DHS. As we have said before, you have USCIS, Coast Guard, who have some of the highest-ranking component scores. We have Secret Service that has gone up by 15 points.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Ms. Bailey, I am asking specifically about DHS's Management Directorate itself, which houses the Office of Chief Human Capital Officer. Is that where you work?

Ms. BAILEY. Yes.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. It is ranked in the bottom 25 percent of Federal offices and has seen employee morale decrease over the last 2 years. So I am asking, why do you think your responses are so very different than your colleagues? Do you have any idea why that might be the case?

Ms. BAILEY. One of the things that we really need to do is dig in a little bit deeper from the management level. I will tell you that we spend a tremendous amount of our time looking at the components and seeing where they are going, addressing their root causes.

So I would say that one of the areas that I would like to focus my attention on is digging in deeper into that issue.

Why are my scores this way? Because I absolutely have fantastic leadership that supports me every step of the way, get the money that I need with regard to our Employee and Family Readiness programs. I have top-level support for what we are trying to do for the employees throughout the Department. That is the viewpoint I see.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Are those efforts that are being made now the ones you are mentioning that you want to see? Do you know if there is something being done on that to dig deeper?

Ms. BAILEY. Absolutely, I know that those programs are being deployed. They are being deployed as we speak across the Department.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK. So you testified in your opening statement that workers are simply doing their job. Do you remember saying that?

Ms. BAILEY. Yes.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Well, employees in the Department have been asked to carry out policies, some of which they don't agree with. What do you think that does to employee morale?

Ms. BAILEY. As employees of the Department of Homeland Security it is really—and as civil servants—it is our responsibility to carry out the policies of the administration.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. But do you think that carrying out a policy you don't agree with decreases employee morale?

Ms. BAILEY. I believe that there are areas in which we can work with our employees to help them better understand our policies, to ensure that they are able to carry those out to the best of their ability.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Well, then let's talk about the separation of women and children. How has the policy of separating women and children from their parents affected DHS employee morale? You just said, let's help them understand why they should do that. There is a good example of policy where we heard people did not agree with. They had to carry it out. How do you explain to that employee and say, this is why you should be doing this and this is why it is good policy?

Ms. BAILEY. One of the things that we do is—and we really do sit down with the employees and just have a conversation with regard to the policies, make sure that they are able to carry out these policies.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. I am asking a very specific question, Ms. Bailey. It is a very specific question. Do you think that employees who

have to carry out this inhumane policy to separate children from their parents, do you think that helped employee morale? It is a yes or no.

Ms. BAILEY. You know, without the data to actually look at that—

Ms. BARRAGÁN. You don't know the data about the impact that it had on children and parents and what that has done to employees?

You, yourself, mentioned, Ms. Bailey, that these employees are mothers and fathers. You don't think there was an impact, that there was an employee who has children, to see these children ripped away from their parents, as parents themselves? You don't—you want to see data on that? Really?

That is kind-of sad, because you have just got to look at parents and ask them, and your coworkers. There is not data to look at here, although there is plenty of data about the mental health impacts this has had on children and parents. So if you don't start by identifying that, then I think that is a concern.

With that, I yield back.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes for 5 minutes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam, gentlemen, thank you for appearing today. I have a couple of phases to my questions, so we are going to move rather quickly.

One is referencing the responsibility of inflammatory or vitriolic rhetoric coming out of this body directed at DHS and how that might affect morale.

Before I go there, let me ask, just yes or no across the board, have any of you ever been a member of the military or a member of, say, a paramilitary organization like a police force?

Madam.

Ms. BAILEY. No, but I was married to an Army veteran.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. Let me clarify. Outside of administration, have you worked the street or been in the field? It is not a derogatory question. We just need to clarify.

Sir.

Mr. CURRIE. No, sir.

Mr. HIGGINS. Sir.

Mr. STIER. No.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. Well, let me share with you that my experience, and I believe certainly my veteran colleagues on this committee would likely agree, morale has a tendency to be unit-specific or company-specific when measured generally. Platoon-specific, even individual-specific. That there is always that guy that is the light of the group and lends increased morale to his colleagues, his brothers and sisters that he serves with. So the vastness of the DHS and how it is structured or not structured I am going to get to.

Before I get there, let's talk about inflammatory and vitriolic statements. Members of this Congress, for example, have made accusations that DHS was intentionally killing young immigrant children, made comments that DHS exists within a culture of violence

and racism, made comments that DHS is a rogue agency operating beyond the bounds of the law, made comments that DHS is running concentration camps along the Southern U.S. Border.

On top of that, months of denial that a crisis at our Southern Border even existed, followed by months of delay to issue supplemental funding to address it.

So I ask the panel, yes or no, do you acknowledge that vitriol from elected officials has no doubt contributed to the very morale that we are discussing? Do you think demonizing rhetoric coming from Members of Congress and shared heavily by the media can have damaging effects on morale at DHS?

Ms. Bailey.

Ms. BAILEY. Yes, and I have seen the personal effects of it.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Currie.

Mr. CURRIE. Well, I don't have any way of measuring it, but I don't see how it could help.

Mr. HIGGINS. Good answer.

Mr. Stier.

Mr. STIER. Certainly public figures who denigrate civil servants, that will cause a reduction in morale.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. Thank you, madam and gentlemen.

Moving quickly to my next phase. Of the 17 agencies, Mr. Stier, that you state that DHS ranked 17 of 17, quote/unquote, large agencies in the matrix that you measure, does DHS have the dubious distinction of being the only large agency that has never been fully authorized by this Congress?

Mr. STIER. I believe that is correct.

Mr. HIGGINS. I believe you are correct in your answer, sir.

Mr. STIER. Thank you.

Mr. HIGGINS. In the 115th Congress, under Chairman McCaul, we passed a bill through this House granting full authorization for DHS which didn't go anywhere. Many Members of this Congress, my colleagues across the aisle, voted against that full authorization, and it could not get past cloture in the Senate to get to the floor vote.

So DHS in your opening statement you said operates under an overabundance of committees with jurisdiction over DHS. This is precisely what full authorization of DHS would fix, because it currently exists as a fractured agency reflective of the many agencies that existed prior to the manifestation of DHS. You have jurisdiction across 8 or 9 committees rather than focused on one central control and command and one committee, which should be this committee, Madam Chair, this committee as a whole, with oversight responsibilities for DHS.

So I would suggest to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle that we focus on fixing the problems that we know to exist, that we should function as a Congress and bring full authorization to DHS, and address the words that we use out of this body to discuss these men and women.

Madam Chair, I yield.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you very much.

We are going to do a second round of questions if folks want to stick around. I appreciate the comment, in terms of focusing on the things we can change.

With that, Mr. Stier, you mentioned in your opening comments some of the improvements that have been made through components like the Coast Guard, Cyber—CISA, as well as the Secret Service. Can you provide some highlights and some top lines for lessons learned there that might be applied more Department-wide?

Mr. STIER. Certainly. I think it again comes down to leaders who are doing great jobs. I would point to Tex Alles again, who was the—he may have been the first non-Secret Service agent to become the head of that component. I think he turned it around and did a fabulous job. He is now the acting under secretary.

It underscores another one of the recommendations, which would be if you had someone like that who was there for 5, 6, 7, 8 years in the under secretary for management position, I think you would see all kinds of great things that could happen.

It begins with the point that Chris made, which is a recognition that, fundamentally, mission is about people, that mission is about having people who are the right folks in the job, who are supported in doing what they care about.

One other I think stat that we have not yet cited which I think is so phenomenally powerful, and it is true at DHS and it is true across the entire Government, and that is that the people are there for the mission. So it is close to 94 percent of the DHS work force would go the extra mile in order to get the job done.

What is interesting is NASA is the No. 1 agency in our rankings. Those numbers are not really any fundamentally different. The mission commitment numbers are the same. It is really the leadership numbers that change.

So you asked for specific examples, and I think it begins at the top. It begins with leaders who see this as a primary part of their function, and it is about creating that relationship of trust with their work force, so that they are able to believe that their voice is being heard and being responded to in a fundamental way.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you.

Mr. STIER. So a lot of this stuff seems very straightforward and basic, but, in truth, it is and it is also not done all that often.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you, Mr. Stier.

Mr. Currie, do you have anything to add?

Mr. CURRIE. I would like to piggyback off that issue of trust. I think one of the things we have noticed in components that have increased their scores is that there has been a concerted effort by the leadership to listen to the employees, and not just listen to the employees, but actually show them how they are implementing their suggestions and implementing their feedback, because that builds trust. There are a lot of very specific things you can do to address that.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you, Mr. Currie.

Ms. Bailey, can you explain any efforts that you have on-going to listen to the employees and then show that you are responding to their feedback?

Ms. BAILEY. Yes, absolutely. I think one of them is our Employee and Family Readiness initiative actually is something I would really like to talk about, because the FEVS scores really only tell you a bit of the picture. Going down and actually sitting down with the

employees and talking to them and trying to understand what it is that really could help them not just on the job but also help them as a whole person.

So some of the things that we have really looked at is the general stress. When you are out on the border—and I have witnessed agents whose hands are shaking as they are trying to in-process a 6-year-old that they found abandoned in the desert. I have witnessed when they—I have not witnessed, but I get the suicides that come across my desk. Just today, right before I came in here, another Border Patrol agent died.

So, seeing all of these kinds of things, we know that we have to treat this issue as the whole person. So it is not just about the employee—

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I am sorry, I just want to make sure I can get specifically how you have shown that you are responding to employee feedback.

Ms. BAILEY. So in meeting with them, we know that general stress, dealing with their personal relationship issues. We have delivered training for them, mindfulness training, to help them with their general stress. We have delivered stronger bonds training to help them with their personal relationships.

We have delivered financial literacy for them to help them with their financial concerns. We have also created a mental health website to help them with their mental health as well and introduce them to employee assistance programs and dependent care as well.

So those are examples of how we have listened to them and we have deployed what they have asked for.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you, Ms. Bailey.

Just quickly, one of the main concerns that was highlighted was the failure in leadership opportunity and creating training within leadership. So can you explain any plans you have for new programs within that space?

Ms. BAILEY. Yes, absolutely.

So with regard to leadership development, it is not just about our SES. We have fantastic programs for our SES, in fact, some of the best I have seen in my 38 years.

But one of the other things that we are doing is trying to go down much deeper into the organization and provide leadership development training for all of our employees. So we have things called joint fellows programs, joint duty programs, bridges programs that help at the 7/9/11 level.

So the point is is that what we are really trying to do is create a leadership cadre with every employee, not just our leadership.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you very much.

My time has expired. I now recognize my colleague, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Crenshaw.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Thank you.

Regarding the question, assuming it was asked in good faith, about the decrease in morale because of policies needed to be implemented by the administration, it is worth pointing out the child separation policy was ended in June 2018, and yet 2019 we had a decrease in ICE and CBP morale.

I don't yell at CBP agents; I talk to them. I talk to hundreds of them. It is pretty obvious to me what worries them. The fact that people are literally attacking ICE facilities and verbally attacking them from the highest places in Government, it is pretty obvious what keeps them awake at night.

But back to what is working. I mentioned before I wanted to get to the black hat hiring. A lot of people don't realize what that is, but that involves cyber work force, which is extremely important considering what will inevitably be an increase in cyber attacks on the homeland as we engage with actors like Russia, China, Iran, and nonstate actors, and the need to protect our infrastructure and private industry.

So tell me about black hat hiring and how that is increasing our hiring flexibility and helpful toward Homeland Security.

Ms. BAILEY. Yes, Congressman.

Well, one of the things that we did—and thank you to Congress—actually is we received Title 6 authority, which gave us the authority to basically look at our cybersecurity work force and recreate everything about the way that we recruit, hire, retain, pay, compensate our cyber work force.

We have taken absolute full advantage of that, giving us the opportunity now to be able to go into some of these different conferences, hold job hiring events at that point, and be able to hire these folks on the spot. We are able to do market-sensitive pay, so that we can pay them in accordance with what they should be paid and not be tied to the antiquated GS system.

We will also eliminate the classification and the qualification. It is based on a 1929 system that doesn't work for anybody. So instead, what we are going to do, we have worked with our subject-matter experts to make sure that the capabilities that we are going to hire folks for actually match the mission in which we have a need for.

So, with that—and I have full support of CISA as well as our CIO community, and we will implement that this year.

Mr. CRENSHAW. OK. How many more employees do you expect to hire under that new program?

Ms. BAILEY. I think roughly—I am not sure it is going to be more employees. More so it is going to be that we are going to start—well, let me put it this way. We will hire probably about 150 this year, add another 350 next year.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Mostly under CISA?

Ms. BAILEY. Yes, mostly CISA. Then also our CISO community, that is our chief information security officer community, throughout the Department.

Mr. CRENSHAW. One question that has come up to me before is, thinking outside the box here and the ability of Border Patrol and ICE, there to be more flexibility between switching between Border Patrol and ICE, namely because of the locational preference.

Ms. BAILEY. Right.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Sort-of like if you think of the military on shore duty versus sea duty.

Has there been any discussion of that? Is that feasible at all and would that help morale?

Ms. BAILEY. Yes, actually, and we track all of that. So one of the things that we have done for CBP—because you are absolutely right. After serving so much time on the border, it is kind-of like a deployment, if you will. Then what we have is a rotation program in which they can then opt to go to a different location. Or we work with them. ICE has a lot of more urban locations. So that way their spouses and their families have opportunities that they might not have had on a border town. So we have a lot of these.

We also have instituted retention incentives, as well as special pay, critical pay, everything that we can think of to ensure that they are given what they need to do the job.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Excellent.

In my limited time left, recently there was I think a win for paid family leave in the Federal Government. How do you anticipate that playing out on both morale and also readiness?

Ms. BAILEY. Well, I think it goes into effect in October. So OPM will regulate it, and we will have to see with that.

But with us, I think it is just like any other flexibility. I mean, today they can use Family Medical Leave Act, they can use sick leave, annual leave, a variety of leave.

So I think we will manage it the same way we do every other flexibility. I don't anticipate that we are going to have a lot of difficulty, because we will at least be able to plan—hopefully 9 months in advance, right?—that we can plan for the readiness that we will need to address.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Excellent. Thank you.

I yield back.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you.

I now recognize for 5 minutes the gentlewoman from California, Ms. Barragán.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you.

Mr. Stier and Mr. Currie, the U.S. Secret Service is one of the departments, one of the areas that had been experiencing some negative morale, bad morale, maybe the best way to say it is a decrease in morale. For the last several years there has been a turnaround there. The U.S. Secret Service Director, Mr. Randolph Alles, was part of the turnaround and was there when that was occurring.

I want to talk a little bit about when you denigrate employees. The President of the United States was doing that with the director of the U.S. Secret Service while he was turning it around. He ridiculed him, calling him names before he fired him.

What do you think that does to employee morale?

Mr. CURRIE. Well, as I said when I answered Mr. Higgins, I don't think it can help. But I think employee morale, frankly, is a lot more complicated when you are looking at an agency across 15,000 to 20,000 people. There are just a number of factors that go into how people answer that survey.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. I understand. I am trying to ask, you don't—do you think there is a negative impact when the President of the United States is basically calling names of the director of the U.S. Secret Service who has been turning around the Secret Service to increase morale?

Mr. CURRIE. Well, ma'am, I don't have any data showing what sort of impact that has on morale across such a large organization. It certainly doesn't help morale, but I think there are so many factors that go into an individual's morale as a component and a component morale that I think it is a difficult question to answer.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Mr. Stier, do you have an opinion?

Mr. STIER. So, Congresswoman, I think there is no question that when senior leaders in any aspect of our society, but certainly ones that are actually running the Government, have negative things to say about their employees or the civil servants that are there as career merit-based employees, it is a bad thing.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you. Thank you for saying that.

Mr. STIER. We ought to have political leaders across the board and just understand that this is a problem that we have seen not just now, but it is one that we have seen for decades. I think it is a mistake, because fundamentally these are folks that are working for the American people. They are working not for any particular policy that the political leadership decides. They are working on the basis of supporting the Constitution of the United States.

So fundamentally one of the things that we do as an organization is the Service to America medals, where we try to highlight great stories of Federal employees. We would welcome—we are actually getting nominations right now—we would welcome nominations from any of you on the panel.

We need to create a culture of recognition. In my view, again, focus on the good, you are going to create more uplift than anything else that is possible to get done.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great.

Mr. Stier, there are currently 13 senior positions vacant throughout the Department from the Secretary and deputy secretary to the heads of CBP and ICE. Most of these role are filled by acting officials.

Mr. STIER. Yes.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. What effect does a lack of permanent leadership have in an organization's ability to promote that positive change you are talking about?

Mr. STIER. The metaphor for me, it is like the substitute teacher we have all experienced before. You can be an amazing educator, but if you are the substitute teacher you don't, yourself, perceive your job as the long-term difficult problems, and those on the outside, the class, the children, other teachers, don't see you as that long-term partner either. So it diminishes the ability of leadership to do their job well, and it is a mistake.

So I would say that part of the problem here is a systemic one. We have 1,200 Senate-confirmed positions. That is too many to actually get through the Senate. So one of the things we would advocate for is fewer Senate-confirmed positions. Then disaggregating them, taking the operating ones, like the under secretary for management, away from the policy ones, and trying to create long-term continuity among them.

One of the best things this committee could ever do for the Department of Homeland Security is to keep Tex Alles in the job of under secretary for management as the confirmed individual in

there for a lengthy period of time. You would see huge improvement. So creating that as a structural option would be fantastic.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great.

Thank you. I yield back.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes for 5 minutes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Bailey, would you clarify for the committee and for the American people watching the survey that we are referring to across the agencies of DHS, how exactly is that survey administered to the employees?

Ms. BAILEY. The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey?

Mr. HIGGINS. Yes.

Ms. BAILEY. It goes out by OPM to every employee who is on the rolls by, I think it is October 1.

Mr. HIGGINS. So it is on-line?

Ms. BAILEY. It is on-line.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. Is it mandatory or voluntary?

Ms. BAILEY. It is voluntary.

Mr. HIGGINS. All right. In your experiences, folks that are unhappy make a little more noise than folks that are happy?

Ms. BAILEY. We make a tremendous effort to make sure everybody fills out that Employee Viewpoint—

Mr. HIGGINS. What kind of effort? Is there a great deal of encouragement to fill out the—you said it is voluntary.

Ms. BAILEY. Yes. So sometimes we hold contests. We do different things that we have leadership really support—

Mr. HIGGINS. I see. So at the field level, there is a creative interaction—

Ms. BAILEY. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS [continuing]. Within that unit to encourage participation in the survey?

Ms. BAILEY. Yes, because it gives us valuable information that allows us to at least have a jumping-off point to—

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. Thank you. I just wanted to clarify for all of us and for those watching that this is a voluntary survey, and DHS is doing its best to force it to—to permeate it through the entire agency.

Ms. BAILEY. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS. It is quite a challenge to get everyone to fill out that survey, isn't it?

Ms. BAILEY. Well, yes, it is absolutely a challenge because not everybody has a computer. It is not Washington, DC.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank God.

Ms. BAILEY. I can tell you, pulling a TSO off the line to take this can be a little bit challenging. But we have figured out a way to do it.

Mr. HIGGINS. So let me ask your opinion about stress, Mr. Stier. Generally speaking, is it your experience that when an individual is in a period of stress they will be less satisfied with their job, especially if that is the cornerstone of what is creating the stress at their job? Would they be less satisfied with their job or more satisfied?

Mr. STIER. So I am going to just offer you a quick anecdote why I am going to give an answer that may not be what you are expecting.

When we first did the "Best Places to Work" rankings, the very first year, the Office of Management and Budget was the No. 1 ranked agency. It was before we made small, medium, and large. No. 1 overall employee engagement. They were the last on work-life balance.

The reason why they were No. 1 was they were working as hard as possible, they were working like dogs, but they knew that when they did was important and they felt important.

So I would say to you, it depends on the nature of the stress. This is a mission-oriented work force. They care about what they are doing. Sometimes stress is part and parcel of achieving mission, and then it is going to be OK. If it is stress for wrong reasons, when you don't know who your boss is going to be, when you don't have the information you need to do your job well, if you don't think you are going to get the help that you need, that kind of stress, not good for morale.

Mr. HIGGINS. In the Department of Homeland Security some of the stresses we are dealing with, a complex woven web of challenges for the men and women, on the border dealing with remote areas, difficult to have opportunities for a family there, dealing with incredible volumes of crossings on the border that we have never seen before. The types of crossings, it certainly changed over the course of the last several years.

I will leave you with this question, Mr. Stier, in my remaining time. If any reasonable person could have projected the kind of volumes of crossings that we are dealing with on the border and the totality of circumstance that DHS is dealing with, and if one would have presumed, say, 5 or 6 years ago, that the Department would still have remained not fully authorized by Congress, would a reasonable perspective from 5 or 6 years ago have projected a decline in morale, a challenged morale within the agency, based upon what we are dealing with right now?

Mr. STIER. I think it is entirely dependent upon the leadership.

So I am with you on the issue of the only recommendation from the 9/11 Commission that hasn't been enacted is the one you are describing, which is Congress should create a mirror to the Executive branch. So entirely with you that that creates a lot of trouble for the Department, to have multiple oversight bodies. There shouldn't be. There should be one.

But I would say to you that all the challenges you are describing, good leaders can manage them, and good leaders that are both political and career, that have continuity, because, again, I think it is the short-term nature of the leadership that is a source point of a lot of the challenge, would be able to manage the kinds of difficulties you are describing very well.

Mr. HIGGINS. Excellent. Very thoughtful and insightful answers.

Madam Chair, I yield, and thank you for holding this hearing.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you.

I thank all the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the Members for their questions.

Before adjourning, I ask unanimous consent to submit two statements for the record. The first is from the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents Customs and Border Protection officers. The second statement is from the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents nearly 100,000 DHS employees.

Without objection, so admitted.
[The information follows:]

STATEMENT OF ANTHONY M. REARDON, NATIONAL PRESIDENT, NATIONAL TREASURY EMPLOYEES UNION

JANUARY 14, 2020

Chairwoman Torres Small, Ranking Member Crenshaw, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. As president of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), I have the honor of leading a union that represents over 27,000 Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations (OFO) employees, including CBP Officers, Agriculture Specialists and trade enforcement personnel stationed at 328 land, sea, and air ports of entry across the United States (U.S.) and 16 Preclearance stations in Ireland, the Caribbean, Canada, and United Arab Emirates airports. CBP's OFO pursues a dual mission of safeguarding American ports, by protecting the public from dangerous people and materials, while enhancing the Nation's global and economic competitiveness by enabling legitimate trade and travel. CBP OFO employees are responsible for border security, including anti-terrorism, immigration, anti-smuggling, trade compliance, and agriculture protection at U.S. ports of entry.

CBP OFO employees at the ports of entry are the second-largest source of revenue collection for the U.S. Government. In 2018, CBP processed more than \$2.8 trillion in imports and collected approximately \$44 billion in duties, taxes, and other fees. Their role of facilitating legal trade and travel is a significant economic driver for private-sector jobs and economic growth. According to CBP, for every 1,000 CBP Officers hired there is an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$2 billion; \$642 million in opportunity costs are saved (the amount of time that a traveler could be using for purposes other than waiting in line, such as working or enjoying leisure activities); and 33,148 annual jobs are added.

In addition, according to the Joint Economic Committee (JEC), the volume of commerce crossing our borders has more than tripled in the past 25 years. Long wait times lead to delays and travel time uncertainty, which can increase supply chain and transportation costs. According to the Department of Commerce, border delays result in losses to output, wages, jobs, and tax revenue due to decreases in spending by companies, suppliers, and consumers. JEC research finds border delays cost the U.S. economy between \$90 million and \$5.8 billion each year.

ON-GOING MORALE ISSUES AT DHS

Adequate staffing at CBP ports of entry is critical to our Nation's economic vitality. In order to attract talented applicants, however, Federal agencies must also recognize the importance of employee engagement and fair treatment in their workplace. Unfortunately, low morale has been a consistent challenge at DHS. For 6 consecutive years the Partnership for Public Service (PPS) *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* ranked DHS last among large agencies surveyed. In 2019, PPS ranked CBP as 380th out of 420 component agencies surveyed with a drop of 2.1 percent from 51.6 percent in 2018 to 49.5 percent in 2019.

The *Best Places to Work* results raise serious questions about the Department's ability to recruit and retain the top-notch personnel necessary to accomplish the critical missions that keep our country safe. If the agency's goal is to build a workforce that feels both valued and respected, these results show that the agency needs to make major changes in its treatment of employees. Wide-spread dissatisfaction with DHS management and leadership creates a morale problem that affects the safety of this Nation.

Of particular concern to NTEU is the increase in suicides as the reported cause death of Federal employees. New data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in the past month shows that Federal employee suicides are at their highest level in at least 15 years, with suicides accounting for 28 percent of the 124 Federal employee job-related deaths in 2018. BLS records the event as a job-related suicide if the suicide occurred at work or if it occurred elsewhere but can be definitively

linked back to work. Since 2011, the number of self-inflicted intentional fatalities among Federal workers has more than doubled to 35, although the Federal workforce has remained approximately the same size.

Most suicides continue to involve Federal employees in work related to law enforcement, such as CBP. In 2016, 15 of the 16 reported suicides were by Federal workers employed at a National security-related agency. At CBP, more than 100 employees died by suicide between 2007 and 2018, according to the agency itself. NTEU applauds CBP for seeking additional funding for their Employee Assistance Program (EAP). We also appreciate that CBP agreed to add NTEU representatives to a CBP workgroup that is working to address the unacceptably high rate of suicides among CBP personnel and develop a "Suicide Prevention Strategy." It is vital that this workgroup continue to include rank-and-file members' input as it develops a strategy to reduce the number of job-related suicides at CBP.

NTEU also strongly supports H.R. 1433, the *DHS Morale, Recognition, Learning and Engagement Act* or the *DHS MORALE Act*. The *MORALE Act* was approved by the full House last year and is awaiting action by the Senate. The bill directs the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) to analyze Government-wide Federal workforce satisfaction surveys to inform efforts to improve morale, maintain a catalogue of available employee development opportunities, and authorize the designation of a Chief Learning and Engagement Officer to assist the CHCO on employee development.

H.R. 1433 also authorizes the establishment of an Employee Engagement Steering Committee comprised of representatives from across the Department, as well as individuals from employee labor organizations that represent DHS employees. Last, the bill authorizes the Secretary to establish an annual employee awards program to recognize non-supervisory DHS employees who have made a significant contribution to the Department. In our collective bargaining agreement with CBP, NTEU negotiated an extremely popular employee joint awards program. The Agency retains the discretion to determine how much of its budget will be allocated for awards, but 85 percent of the total awards budgeted are recommended by a joint union/management awards committee to be distributed proportionately among bargaining unit employees. NTEU recommends that DHS look at the negotiated CBP joint awards program as a model for an agency-wide program.

While a major factor contributing to low morale at CBP is insufficient staffing and resources at the ports of entry, the provisions in the *DHS MORALE Act* will help to address non-staffing issues that affect employee morale by improving front-line employee engagement and establishing a statutory annual employee award program. NTEU commends the committee and the House for approving the *DHS MORALE Act* and urges the Senate to expeditiously do the same.

Many of the sources of on-going employee morale issues at DHS are long-standing, but some are recent developments. A more recent cause is the lack of Senate-confirmed leaders at the top of the agency and among many of the components.

Between 2003, when the agency was formed, and April 2019, there have been 6 Senate-confirmed DHS Secretaries. In November, the administration named Chad Wolf as Acting Homeland Security Secretary, the third person to hold the Department's top job since April. The agency also has no official deputy secretary, and multiple components—including Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services—lack a permanent leader. As you know, without Senate confirmation, agency leaders' ability to effectively carry out the duties of a Cabinet official and component head is compromised.

Keeping an acting official in an important position can be interpreted as a signal that the administration may not care much about that agency or that the acting agency head does not have the President's full support. Morale takes a hit when senior positions go unfilled. Such conditions can lead to poor productivity and a weakened chain of command. NTEU urges Congress to insist that the administration stop the practice of filling DHS leadership vacancies with personnel operating in an "acting" capacity and send up nominations for confirmation by the Senate.

A second source of uncertainty that undermines morale at CBP are the administration's workforce proposals that roll back existing civil service protections and benefits and Executive Orders (EOs) that severely disrupt labor and employee relations in the Federal workplace.

NTEU believes in and strongly supports the Merit System Principles, which ensure that individuals are hired to work for the Federal Government based on merit, without regard to their race, age, gender, political views, or relationship with the hiring official. NTEU also fully supports the application of veteran's preference in hiring decisions as part of our obligation to help those who have worked so hard to defend our Nation and our freedom. DHS, in particular, has stated that it is com-

mitted to providing employment opportunities for our veterans and service members returning home from active duty and that it is the ideal employer to maximize the skills and training veterans have acquired while serving our country, as well as the commitment to serve and protect our Nation.

At the same time, NTEU recognizes that the process used to hire new employees can be onerous. However, in our experience, some of the things that make the process onerous are the complicated extra steps that agencies include in their hiring process due to long-standing practice or fear of future litigation rather than requirements directly tied to the statute. For example, over the years NTEU has had significant concerns about the slow pace of hiring CBP Officers, some of which was due to concerns over how the polygraph test was being administered. While CBP has been making progress in reducing CBP Officer vacancies, they still struggle with a lack of funding to address on-going staffing shortfalls.

Furthermore, despite on-going Congressional efforts to provide additional flexibilities to agencies to improve the hiring process and the time it takes to hire a new employee, agencies rarely use more than a few of the multiple tools available to them. It is critical that any effort to improve the hiring process include sustained and comprehensive training for all agency Human Resources (HR) professionals and opportunities for H.R. professionals in various agencies, not just the CHCOs, to meet with each other and experts at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and share best practices and challenges they are facing.

Proposals to ensure that hiring managers and subject-matter experts are part of the hiring process from the beginning and requiring part of a supervisor's performance evaluation to be based on personnel management, recruiting, hiring, and human capital responsibilities also have merit and can help in reducing the time to hire.

However, NTEU remains concerned with proposals to expand non-competitive eligibility and hiring authorities such as that proposed in draft legislation that DHS provided to the Hill entitled, the *Department of Homeland Security Enhanced Hiring Act*. History has shown that agencies have abused such flexibility; using these programs as the only method of hiring, which undermined veterans' preference and civil service protections. Sweeping exemptions to hiring rules and regulations are extremely concerning as it could undermine the very principles that ensures that the civil service is non-partisan, based on merit, and reflects the citizenry it serves.

Despite the challenges in on-boarding, changes to the hiring process will be of little help if the Government cannot recruit and retain talented individuals. Government shutdowns, unnecessary forced relocations and proposed agency closures, disparagement by Government leaders who refer to Federal employees as bureaucrats or swamp creatures, pay freezes, threatened cuts to employee benefits, elimination of key work-life balance benefits such as telework, and on-going efforts to roll back employee collective bargaining and due process rights and protections all make it harder to recruit a new generation of civil servants and have led talented Federal employees to leave Federal service.

Furthermore, recent OPM *Employee Viewpoint Survey* results show a drop in employee engagement scores, nearly 15 points below that of the private sector. Importantly, employee engagement is an outcome that depends on the actions of an organization, particularly the actions driven by leadership, managers, and those responsible for recruitment, on-boarding, and other human resources functions. The extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs and are committed to the organization has a direct link to the ability of agencies to recruit and retain skilled employees, improve performance, and meet their missions.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEE PAY AND BENEFITS

Federal employee pay also plays a significant role in improving morale and the Government's ability to attract and retain top talent. Unfortunately, according to the President's Pay Agent, years of below-market pay raises and pay freezes have increased the pay disparity between the Federal Government and the private sector to 32.71 percent, despite a 1990 Federal law aimed at reducing the pay gap to 5 percent. This has a significant impact. While many Federal employees believe in Government service and agency mission is often listed as the No. 1 reason they work for the Federal Government, massive pay disparities with the private sector undermine morale and efforts to recruit and retain skilled individuals who are drawn to public service.

While the President's fiscal year 2020 budget request called for another pay freeze, NTEU is pleased that the President reversed course and, that in the end Federal employees received an average 3.1 percent increase, comprised of a 2.6 percent across-the-board raise with 0.5 percent for locality pay, in the final fiscal year

2020 funding agreement. Federal employees, like all other Americans, face rising food, utility, college, and health care costs. Adding to employees' concerns over pay are the administration's proposals to slow the frequency of within grade step increases and limit the distribution of awards.

Last year, the administration also proposed plans to issue guidance to agencies to change the way they allocate performance awards so that they are given to their most critical employees with the best performance instead of to all employees, regardless of occupation, that perform outstanding work. By focusing on the "most critical employees" for pay increases, we fear that agencies will focus on high-demand skill sets, but ignore critical jobs needed to make agencies work. Employees in all jobs, at every level, are critical to an agency's success and by denying opportunities for awards and pay increases, agencies risk an increase in the number of career Federal employees who leave the Government and take their institutional knowledge with them. A pay system that limits compensation to randomly selected occupations will prohibit agencies from executing a whole-of-Government approach to operations and will threaten agency performance and adversely impact recruiting and retention.

It is important to note that when CBP was created in March 2003, it was decided that all CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialists would be placed under one compensation system both for base pay and for overtime and premium pay. The Customs Officers Pay Reform Act (COPRA) is a critical part of the CBP OFO pay system. Under COPRA, overtime hours are directed (i.e. specifically assigned) and are user fee-funded. COPRA has been extremely effective in ensuring that international ports of entry have overtime funding to staff ports during high-volume periods and where needed to ease wait time due to staffing shortages. COPRA ranks high on employee satisfaction surveys and is critical to employee morale at the ports of entry. NTEU would strongly oppose any changes to the COPRA pay system.

The administration's fiscal year 2020 budget proposal also included several proposals to cut Federal employee and retiree benefits that, if adopted, would exacerbate the existing hiring and retention challenges. Once again, Federal employees were being asked to pay for unrelated funding decisions by paying more for their benefits while simultaneously reducing the value of those benefits.

NTEU opposes proposals that would negatively impact Federal employee retirement benefits, including proposals to: (1) Significantly increase Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) employee contributions by about 1 percentage point each year until they equal the agency contribution rate, resulting in a 6 percent pay cut for most employees, (2) base future Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and FERS retirement benefits on the average of the high 5 years of salary instead of the current high 3, thereby lowering the value of the benefit, (3) eliminate the FERS supplement which approximates the value of Social Security benefits for those who retire before age 62, including for those, like CBP Officers, who must retire early due to their law enforcement work, (4) eliminate the annual cost of living adjustments (COLA) for the pensions of current and future FERS retirees and significantly reducing the COLA for the pensions of current and future CSRS retirees by about 0.5 percent annually, and (5) reduce the G Fund interest rate under the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), thereby lowering the value of this TSP option.

The average Federal employee cannot absorb the 6 to 7 percent pay cut most would receive with the increased retirement contributions and annuitants need their COLA to keep up with the cost of living when on a fixed income. Federal employees are predominantly middle-class workers who cannot afford a retirement benefit that fails to keep up with inflation and will require them to work long into their senior years.

NTEU also opposes the administration's proposal to change the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) by significantly modifying the Government contribution rate by tying it to each plan's performance rating. For many FEHBP enrollees, this would mean that the Government's overall contribution rate would be lower than it is now, requiring enrollees to pay significantly higher premiums. Such a change would force employees to drop coverage or move to cheaper plans that provide less coverage and fail to meet the health care needs of their families.

According to the 2017 OPM Federal Benefits Survey, employees expressed that their TSP, FERS/CSRS and FEHBP benefits were extremely important to them (96.1 percent, 94.2 percent and 90.6 percent of respondents respectively). In fact, not only is the availability of a retirement annuity important to employees, the benefit has been shown to play a key role in recruiting and retaining them.

The FEHBP also has a significant impact on recruitment and retention. In 2017, 71.2 percent of survey respondents reported that the availability of health insurance through the FEHBP influenced their decision to take a Federal job to a "moderate" or "great" extent, while 80.9 percent of respondents reported that the availability

of health insurance through the FEHBP influences their decision to stay with their job to a “moderate” or “great extent.”

Given the popularity of these critical retirement and health care benefits, efforts to reduce them will have a significant impact on the ability of the Federal Government to recruit and retain skilled workers at CBP and other agencies and NTEU urges Congress to oppose such efforts.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEE RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS

Another significant cause of CBP employees’ concern are recent EOs that undermine Federal employee unions and our ability to operate in Federal workplaces. These EOs are currently being implemented at the bargaining table for agencies that are engaged in negotiations with their respective unions but are being challenged in the courts. Federal law clearly states that the right of employees to organize, bargain collectively, and participate through labor organizations in decisions which affect them safeguards the public interest and contributes to the effective conduct of public business. Front-line employees and their union representatives have ideas and information that are essential to improving the delivery of quality Government services to the public. Through the collective bargaining process and the use of pre-decisional involvement, employees can have meaningful input resulting in better quality decision making, more support for decisions, timelier implementation, and better results for the American people. It is important that these rights are maintained, and employees continue to have a voice in their workplace.

However, the administration has engaged in an all-out assault on employee rights and protections—ignoring requirements to bargain in good faith, gutting collective bargaining agreements, imposing one-sided contracts, undermining employees’ rights in the grievance process, giving greater deference to agency management in disputes, and eliminating opportunities for employees to have a voice in their places of work. NTEU opposes all efforts to roll back the limited rights provided to Federal labor unions, including limits on our ability to represent employees to ensure they are treated fairly and have a voice in the workplace. Such changes eliminate opportunities for employees to feel engaged and comfortable working with their agency leaders, thereby impacting retention.

Moreover, we oppose changes to employee due process rights, such as shortening the length of certain notice and response periods, limiting the ability of the Merit Systems Protection Board to mitigate penalties, and providing agencies with additional flexibility to use longer probationary periods, making those employees essentially at-will. These efforts can be used to intimidate workers into silence out of fear of retaliation for disclosing waste, fraud, and abuse.

Imposing anti-worker policies that eliminate fair and equitable treatment and instead create a culture of fear and mistrust is no way to attract and retain talented workers. NTEU is strongly opposed to these EOs and asks that Congress move to protect Federal employee collective bargaining rights. Recently, 24 Senators introduced S. 3146, legislation that mirrors provisions in the House-passed fiscal year 2020 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill (H.R. 3351), that would prohibit agencies from implementing any collective bargaining agreement that was not mutually and voluntarily agreed to by all parties or the result of binding arbitration. NTEU strongly supports these efforts that would help address the administration’s assault on collective bargaining rights and ensure that agencies fulfill their statutorily-mandated responsibilities to bargain in good faith.

NTEU also seeks the passage of H.R. 1316, the *Federal Labor-Management Partnership Act of 2019*, which would bring front-line employee voices and representatives back to the table at Federal agencies, allowing employees and management to collaborate on workplace solutions and improvements.

CBP STAFFING SHORTAGES AT THE PORTS OF ENTRY

Finally, on-going staffing shortages at the ports of entry continue to undermine morale at CBP. NTEU was pleased that the final fiscal year 2020 funding agreement provides \$104 million for 800 new CBP OFO positions, including 610 CBP Officer and CBP Agriculture Specialist new hires to help address the fiscal year 2020 on-board staffing shortage of 2,700 CBP Officers and 721 CBP Agriculture Specialists. NTEU strongly supports the funding level for CBP OFO employees in the fiscal year 2020 DHS final funding agreement and urges Congress to increase these numbers in fiscal year 2021 to address on-going staffing shortages at the ports of entry. According to CBP on-board staffing data, even with the fiscal year 2020 funding for CBP OFO new hires, there remains a shortage of approximately 2,000 CBP Officers at the ports of entry.

Due to the on-going current staffing shortage, CBP Officers Nation-wide are working excessive overtime to maintain basic port staffing. All CBP Officers are aware that overtime assignments are an aspect of their jobs. However, long periods of overtime hours can severely disrupt an officer's family life, morale, and ultimately their job performance protecting our Nation.

The U.S. agriculture sector is a crucial component of the American economy, generating over \$1 trillion in annual economic activity. CBP Agriculture Specialists play a vital role in both trade and travel safety and prevent the introduction of harmful exotic plant pests and foreign animal diseases, and potential ag/bioterrorism into the United States. Unfortunately, even with fiscal year 2020 funding for new hires, there remains a shortage of Agriculture Specialist at the ports of entry as determined by CBP's own Agriculture Specialist Resource Allocation Model.

To address the shortage of Agriculture Specialists who protect our food supply and agricultural industries at the border, legislation has been introduced in both the House and Senate. S. 2107 and H.R. 4482, the *Protecting America's Food & Agriculture Act of 2019*, would ensure the safe and secure trade of agricultural goods across our Nation's borders by authorizing the annual hiring of 240 Agriculture Specialists and 200 Agriculture Technicians a year until the workforce shortage is filled. S. 2107 was recently approved by the full Senate and its companion bill, H.R. 4482, is awaiting House action. Because of CBP's mission to protect the Nation's agriculture from pests and disease, NTEU urges the committee to quickly consider and approve this important legislation.

NTEU RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensuring that DHS can recruit and retain the best and brightest is essential for the safety and security of all Americans. In order to achieve the long-term goal of improving employee morale and securing the proper staffing at CBP, NTEU recommends that Congress take the following actions:

- Support passage of H.R. 1316, the *Federal Labor-Management Partnership Act*, which would bring front-line employee voices and representatives back to the table at Federal agencies, allowing employees and management to collaborate on workplace solutions and improvements;
- Support legislation and other efforts to preserve collective bargaining rights for Federal employees;
- Encourage passage of H.R. 1433, the *DHS MORALE Act* by the Senate;
- Support fiscal year 2021 funding for 1,200 CBP Officer, 240 Agriculture Specialist, and additional mission support new hires at CBP OFO;
- Approve H.R. 4482 to authorize the funding of CBP Agriculture Specialist new hires up to the number specified in CBP's own Agriculture Specialist Resource Allocation Model; and
- Introduce and enact legislation to authorize the funding of CBP Officer new hires up to the number specified in CBP's own CBP Officer Workload Staffing Model.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share NTEU's views on how DHS can build the most effective workforce, attract skilled and talented individuals, and engage Federal employees throughout their careers.

STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

JANUARY 14, 2020

Chairwoman Torres Small, Ranking Member Crenshaw, and Members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE), which represents more than 700,000 Federal and District of Columbia employees who serve the American people in 70 different agencies, including the nearly 100,000 employees at agencies within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) who protect America every day, we appreciate the opportunity to submit a statement for the record on addressing morale at DHS.

Many of the DHS employees AFGE represents put their lives on the line at work every day. They also interact with the public during some of their most challenging and stressful moments. These factors make it essential that the management of DHS place a high priority on employee engagement and morale. And the best way to create engagement and high morale is to participate in effective, collaborative dispute resolution. The resultant improvement in morale would lead to excellence on the job, and a safer and more focused workforce. Every employee at DHS should go to work believing their employer has their back while they have America's back.

Unfortunately, workforce surveys have shown annually that DHS does not promote good morale, and it places a low priority on employee satisfaction or engagement.

While low morale and poor employee engagement plague DHS as a whole, there is variation among the components of the Department. Some agency-specific concerns are described below.

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA)

FEMA employees are hired through a rigorous, competitive, merit-based examination process that includes application of veteran's preference. The number of permanent full-time employees needed to carry out successful emergency management and preparedness cannot be short-changed. Our employees are over-worked, under-resourced, understaffed, and frequently deployed to disaster zones without adequate recuperation time. Permanent full-time employees are outnumbered at FEMA by non-permanent employees.

In 1988 the Stafford Act created 2 sets of non-permanent employees to be hired during disasters: These include (1) Cadre of On-Call Recovery/Response Employees (CORE) and (2) Disaster Response Workers (DRW) Temporary Workers. CORE and DRW employees are brought on using an expedited hiring process during disasters.

Stafford Act employees are used to supplement permanent employees, which too often results in vacancies for permanent full-time positions going unfilled for extensive periods of time. The agency keeps Stafford Act employees on for much longer than their 2- to 4-year contracts. Stafford Act employees should be deployed to disaster zones for a specified amount of time to respond to a specific disaster. These positions were not designed to work with or replace permanent full-time employees on non-disaster work; however, because there is such a need for permanent full-time employees at FEMA, it is not uncommon for Stafford Act employees to work outside of their job descriptions. Identifying permanent full-time vacancies and filling them would help improve FEMA emergency management and preparedness and improve morale.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (TSA)

The TSA Modernization Act, included in the Federal Aviation Authorization Act of 2018, required the TSA administrator to convene a Working Group consisting of representatives of TSA and AFGE. Its charge was to recommend reforms to TSA's personnel management system, including appeals to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). The union made proposals regarding discipline, grievance, fitness for duty and pay in an agency with virtually no workforce protections. AFGE representatives proposed that a representative of the union take part in briefings on Discipline Reform Adverse Actions recommendations. TSA declined this recommendation for engagement, stating that the Working Group was the only forum for input on this matter. When addressing reforms to Fitness for Duty, the union proposed an independent medical examination to ensure transparency. TSA simply responded that it is not needed. Most notably, the agency did not give consideration to access to MSPB or any neutral third-party review of grievances in its personnel management system, which was specifically required in the law and would greatly improve employee morale.

Undermining morale within the TSO workforce is the fact that they are not governed by title 5 U.S.C., a code that applies to most of the Federal workforce and specifies employee and management rights and responsibilities, including due process and a reasonable and fair grievance procedure. Congress should enact Chairman Thompson's H.R. 1140, the Rights for Transportation Security Officers Act, according title 5 rights to TSOs and placing them on the General Schedule (GS) pay system.

Additionally, TSA drastically changed the terms of health insurance coverage for part-time TSOs to pro-rate the employee share of the premium. TSA was granted and widely uses its authority to have a large portion of its workforce on part-time status to maximize flexibility. Making the part-time TSO workforce pay much more for health care by increasing their share of the premium does not promote good staff morale or a professional workforce. This new policy should be reversed immediately.

U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS)

USCIS has grown at a rapid rate over the past 7 years, resulting in management rushing through processes and policies often directed at short-term crises rather than long-term management needs. Even with growth, the agency has a large case backlog dating back to the 1990's, with managers requiring employees to meet higher performance numbers by working through lunch and breaks. Being rushed

through their workload leads to stress among officers who feel their charge should be National security, not meeting arbitrary benchmarks.

The agency and the union are currently engaged in contract bargaining. Management repeatedly asserts that the 14,000 employees in the bargaining unit can be easily replaced and proposes arbitrary discipline measures up to the point of termination for even small infractions.

When Acting Director Cuccinelli was appointed, one of his first acts was to tell Asylum Officers they were approving too many applications. These employees were making determinations based on their professional training and the law. Serving as an Asylum Officer is a stressful job under the best of circumstances. Being undermined by top management is a poor strategy that does not serve the workforce, the Nation's security, or the underlying values of this country. When USCIS Local 1924 Vice President Charles Tjersland was asked in an NPR radio interview whether colleagues had quit as a result of working conditions said, "We're driving away some of the brightest minds, most motivated hearts." To improve employee morale, the agency should be properly resourced and fully authorized to carry out the provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act without politically-motivated interference.

U.S. COAST GUARD (USCG)

Just last month, the full committee heard testimony from a Coast Guard officer about the race and gender discrimination and sexual harassment she endured. She publicly acknowledged others in the room, including civilian workers at USCG represented by AFGE, who reported similar discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. Fear of continued oppression and reprisal engenders the very opposite of morale in the workplace, and its reverberations are experienced throughout the agency. USCG, and the entire Department of Homeland Security should hold managers accountable for rooting out any sexual, gender, or racial discrimination and enforce a no-tolerance policy in accordance with the law.

FEDERAL PROTECTIVE SERVICE (FPS)

Federal Protective Service (FPS) agency staffing of uniformed, non-supervisory law enforcement officers is lower now than it has been since before 9/11/2001. There are only 500 operational, uniformed, non-supervisory Law Enforcement Officers in the field. This is not enough staff to effectively or safely carry out the mission of the agency. For example, in FPS Region 6, Western District, between 2015 and 2020 the number of fully-trained inspectors decreased by 75 percent from 16 to only 4 officers. This is not sufficient to carry out the job and risks the lives of officers and public safety. AFGE recommends an additional 400 operational, uniformed, non-supervisory Law Enforcement Officers be hired and stationed in the field to reach a total of at least 900 officers.

Instead of dedicating sufficient resources to staff the agency with uniformed, non-supervisory personnel, many new non-uniformed, non-law enforcement positions have been created since 2012. FPS should hire the uniformed, non-supervisory law enforcement officers needed to perform the mission of this law enforcement agency.

The Department of Homeland Security has serious failings in its management and leadership throughout its agencies, resulting in low employee morale. There are reports of sexual harassment complaints to managers; issues of low pay have not been addressed; staffing models need to be updated; hiring processes are inconsistent; unfair, unequal, and inappropriate discipline is imposed; and managers engage in reprisals against those who seek relief. Moreover, they reject opportunities for greater employee engagement.

AFGE believes that Chairman Thompson's Department of Homeland Security Morale, Recognition, Learning, and Engagement Act (DHS MORALE Act), H.R. 1433, would take significant steps to address the issues of low morale faced by the Department's workforce. Most importantly, the promotes employee involvement, including those represented by labor unions, in the decisions that affect their work, and in the case of DHS, sometimes their very lives. We commend Chairman Thompson for expressly including involvement of representatives of employee labor unions in productive employee engagement and improvement in the workplace.

AFGE hopes the committee will advance H.R. 1433 and continue in its crucial oversight of the management of the DHS workforce.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. The Members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses, and we ask that you respond expeditiously in writing to those questions. Without objection, the committee record shall be kept open for 10 days.

Having no further business, the subcommittee stands adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 3:12 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR ANGELA BAILEY

Question 1. As noted during the hearing, there are currently 12 senior positions vacant throughout the Department. Testimony from Mr. Stier indicated that acting officials filling these roles are less empowered to enact organizational change required to improve morale at DHS. Has DHS undertaken any work to identify what effect the pervasiveness of acting officials in leadership roles has on employee engagement and morale? If so, what has the Department found?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. During the hearing, you were asked about low morale within the Management Directorate. What specific actions, if any, is the Department taking to address low morale within this office?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3a. One of my first acts of this Congress was to introduce the DHS Morale, Recognition, Learning, and Engagement Act (DHS MORALE Act). Among other things, the bill would require the Department to create a committee to identify and address issues affecting morale. During your testimony, you noted the Department had recently launched an Employee and Family Readiness Council to receive and address feedback on employee concerns.

When was this effort launched?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3b. Will DHS commit to making the Council (or an entity like it) a more permanent fixture at the Department whether or not the DHS MORALE Act is signed into law?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRWOMAN XOCHITL TORRES SMALL FOR ANGELA BAILEY

Question 1a. During the hearing, the committee heard testimony regarding some of the successes seen at the Secret Service and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency with respect to improvements in employee morale.

Has the Department taken any action to review the recent successes at Secret Service or CISA? If so, what has it found?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 1b. Does the Department have any plans to use the Secret Service or CISA as a model for improving morale elsewhere at the Department?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. What is DHS Headquarters doing to monitor morale at the component level and drive action at the level to improve employee morale?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3. In 2018 and 2019, the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office (CWMD) and its predecessor—the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO)—ranked as the worst place to work in Federal Government. In 2019, CWMD had the highest response rate Government-wide (82.7 percent) indicating that low morale is prevalent throughout the agency. Previously, the morale at CWMD/DNDO had ranked in the top quartile of the Federal Government.

What is being done to improve morale at CWMD?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE DINA TITUS FOR ANGELA BAILEY

Question 1. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) ranked in the bottom quartile for employee satisfaction and morale (as was the case in 2018). In speaking to the union that represents front-line CBP officers across the Nation, 2 major grievances came to the forefront.

The first is the chronic staffing shortage that CBP continues to grapple with. Not only is a staffing shortage detrimental to an airport's ability to court new air service, it is also draining for CBP employees who are constantly asked to perform overtime with no end in sight.

The second is a lack of training for management. Officers feel that leadership does not entirely understand their work, tends to focus on the quantity of screenings rather than the quality, and possesses an underwhelming knowledge of how to work with the union. Workers say they have received multiple assurances from the top that these issues will be addressed, but year after year, they encounter many of the same issues.

How do staffing shortages and ill-equipped managers impact morale and turnover at Customs and Border Protection?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. How does the Department engage CBP officers and their union to get feedback on what policies have positive impacts on morale?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER MIKE ROGERS FOR ANGELA BAILEY

Question 1. Ms. Bailey, when did DHS begin creating action plans to address employee engagement after the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS)?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. Does your office assist components with their own component-level engagement action plans following the annual FEVS? How does the Department monitor components' adherence to their engagement action plans?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3. Do you have metrics in place to track progress or completion of employee engagement action plans for DHS-wide and individual components?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTION FROM CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR CHRIS CURRIE

Question. What benefits would the Department likely see from a dedicated steering committee responding to and addressing issues that affect employee morale?

Answer. A dedicated Department of Homeland Security (DHS) steering committee that oversees issues related to employee morale will help ensure continued Department and component leadership commitment to employee morale efforts. DHS formed an Employee Engagement Steering Committee in 2015 that has met periodically since and as recently as in fiscal year 2020. Attendees at the steering committee meetings generally include officials from the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, DHS component agencies, and at times the DHS under secretary for management. DHS uses this committee to guide and monitor implementation of DHS-wide employee engagement initiatives. In addition, during past meetings, the Employee Engagement Steering Committee has discussed the results of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) and DHS components' employee engagement action plans. It is important for DHS to maintain top leadership support and sustained commitment to the Employee Engagement Steering Committee to continue overseeing these component and DHS-wide efforts. As part of on-going work on DHS employee morale, GAO plans to obtain additional information on the role and actions of the Employee Engagement Steering Committee and its role in monitoring component efforts to improve morale and facilitate sharing best practices across the Department.

QUESTION FROM CHAIRWOMAN XOCHITL TORRES SMALL FOR CHRIS CURRIE

Question. Through GAO's on-going work, what have you found with respect to why actions taken by the Department over the years have failed to have any significant or lasting impact on employee morale?

Answer. GAO's work has identified the importance of identifying root causes to effectively target actions to address those causes. In 2012, we found that DHS's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer and DHS components had not consistently used 3 survey analysis techniques when analyzing employee survey results—comparisons of demographic groups, benchmarking against similar organizations, and linking root cause findings to action plans.¹ In response to our recommendation, in January 2018, DHS and its component agencies incorporated these 3 into their em-

¹GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Taking Further Action to Better Determine Causes of Morale Problems Would Assist in Targeting Action Plans*, GAO-12-940 (Washington, DC: Sept. 28, 2012).

ployee engagement action planning. DHS components continued to leverage root cause information in their 2019 employee engagement action plans. For example, the Transportation Security Administration identified the performance of managers, time constraints and understaffing, and lack of manager and leadership accountability for change as root causes of the component's engagement scores in recent years. Another component, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, identified in 2019 that the areas of leadership performance, accountability, transparency, and training and development opportunities were 2018 engagement score root causes. GAO has recently initiated work to examine challenges that DHS and its component agencies face with regard to employee morale. Through this work, GAO plans to discuss the key drivers of employee morale at DHS as well as actions DHS and its component agencies have taken with respect to morale and any associated effect of those actions.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE DINA TITUS FOR CHRIS CURRIE

Question 1a. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) ranks 398th out of 420 Government offices and is last in employee satisfaction on pay. The last collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between TSA and the Association of Federal Government Employees (AFGE), which represents Transportation Security Officers, expired in December.

How does the inability to bargain over basic things like pay, benefits, and grievance procedures impact TSA workers' morale?

Answer. The Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA) directs the TSA administrator to, among other things, establish the levels of compensation and other benefits for individuals employed by the Federal Government to carry out the agency's screening functions.² In general, while TSA employees have never been prohibited from joining a union, representation for the purpose of collective bargaining was not permitted, and such representation did not exist, until 2011. However, consistent with TSA's broad authority to establish a personnel system that is not bound by the provisions of Title 5, United States Code, and other Federal personnel statutes,³ the TSA administrator determined that bargaining is not permitted on topics that might affect security, such as pay, pensions, and other forms of compensation, proficiency testing, and discipline standards, among others.⁴ Some results touted by the TSA employees' union include a contract that ensures performance-rating payouts are based on a consistent assessment system, expansion of the parking subsidy program at participating airports, a nearly-doubled uniform allowance, a provision that stops TSA from denying leave without an appropriate reason or as a form of discipline, and a provision that that allows TSA supervisors to excuse tardiness for up to 30 minutes, among others. How, if at all, these results through collective bargaining have affected TSA employee morale, and what impact the inability to bargain over things like pay, benefits, and grievance procedures is beyond the scope of the work GAO has performed with regard to the TSA workforce.

Question 1b. How much does pay affect TSA employee morale?

Answer. GAO has not published any reports specifically on TSA employee morale; however, information from other Government findings suggest pay has played an important role in TSA employee satisfaction. First, the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) asks respondents how satisfied they are with their pay. In 2019, about half of TSA employees (53 percent) who responded to the FEVS reported that they were unsatisfied with their pay, compared to about 1 in 5 Federal Government employees (20 percent).⁵ Second, in March 2019, the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General reported on TSA's employee retention efforts and found that complaints about base pay, pay raises, bonuses, or the fairness of pay compared with the work performed were among the most common responses given by both full- and part-time transportation security officers (TSO)—i.e., TSA-employed screening personnel—completing a voluntary exit survey when they left the agency in fiscal years 2012–2017.⁶ Third, a May 2019 evaluation report of a Blue-Ribbon Panel on TSA's human capital service delivery found TSO pay is a key issue for the screening workforce, based on analysis of fiscal year 2018 exit survey responses and focus group discussion. According to

² See Pub. L. No. 107–71, § 111(d), 115 Stat. 597, 620 (2001); 49 U.S.C. § 44935 note.

³ 49 U.S.C. § 114(n).

⁴ Pursuant to ATSA, TSA employees are also prohibited from striking. See 49 U.S.C. § 44935(i).

⁵ Office Personnel Management, *Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey* (2019).

⁶ Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, *TSA Needs to Improve Efforts to Retain, Hire, and Train its Transportation Security Officers*, OIG–19–35 (Washington, DC: March 28, 2019).

the study, TSOs work long hours, have difficult working conditions, and their pay in some locations lags behind industry counterparts. Moreover, the panel found that TSO turnover in the first 3 years of employment—which may indicate low morale—is high, consistent with other low-wage jobs in the private sector with similar skill requirements.⁷

Question 1c. Will raising pay alone address TSA’s workplace morale challenges? What other action should TSA and DHS leadership be taking?

Answer. Although GAO has not published work on TSA workplace morale challenges, our previous work on employee morale across the Federal Government, data from FEVS, and TSA’s Blue Ribbon panel study suggest that pay is not the only factor that contributes to morale. As we stated in our recent testimony on DHS employee morale, key drivers of employee morale across the Government include holding constructive performance conversations, career development and training opportunities, work-life balance, an inclusive work environment, employee involvement, and communication from management.⁸ According to fiscal year 2019 data from FEVS, many TSA employees are unsatisfied with career development opportunities. For example, 51 percent of TSA respondents reported they did not believe that promotions in their work unit were based on merit, and 42 percent reported they were unsatisfied with their opportunity to get a better job in the agency. Similarly, in its May 2019 evaluation, the Blue-Ribbon Panel on TSA’s human capital service delivery reported that if pay problems were reduced, other issues would continue to affect morale. As a result, the Panel made recommendations to TSA in a number of areas, including some related to career development, such as recommendations to make changes to leader selection and development and the promotion process. According to TSA’s 2019 employee engagement action plan, TSA identified 3 root causes that create or exacerbate challenges to employee morale or satisfaction, based on focus groups: (1) Performance of mid-level managers related to issues such as fairness, recognition, and professional development; (2) constraints on time and other resources needed to complete tasks; and (3) lack of accountability for enforcing desired changes. As of October 2019, TSA has taken some actions designed to address these root causes. For example, TSA developed a supervisory training to improve performance feedback conversations and developed a coaching pilot to include training and coaching for leadership.

QUESTION FROM CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR MAX STIER

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QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE DINA TITUS FOR MAX STIER

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⁷ ICF Incorporated, LLC, *Final Findings and Recommendations, Blue Ribbon Panel for the Transportation Security Administration, Human Capital Service Delivery Evaluation* (Fairfax, VA: May 2019).

⁸ GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Employee Morale Survey Scores Highlight Progress and Continued Challenges*, GAO-20-349T (Washington, DC: Jan. 14, 2020).

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