



Public Service Hearing: Improving Basic Hiring Processes

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Commission:

- The Honorable Mark Gearan, Vice Chair for National and Public Service
- The Honorable Debra Wada, Vice Chair for Military Service
- Mr. Edward Allard, Commissioner
- Mr. Steve Barney, Commissioner
- The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson, Commissioner
- Ms. Jeanette James, Commissioner
- Mr. Alan Khazei, Commissioner
- Mr. Tom Kilgannon, Commissioner
- Ms. Shawn Skelly, Commissioner

Panelists:

- Ms. Melissa Bryant, Chief Policy Officer, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)
- Ms. Kimberly Holden, Deputy Associate Director, Employee Services, Talent Acquisition and Workforce Shaping, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
- Mr. Brett Hunt, Executive Director of Public Service Academy, Arizona State University (ASU)
- Ms. Jacqueline Simon, Public Policy Director, American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)
- Mr. Max Stier, President and CEO, Partnership for Public Service



OPENING STATEMENTS

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to what is the 9th hearing of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service. Thank you very much for being here this morning for what should be a really interesting and important conversation that we have, and we thank especially our panelists that are here before us and for your oral testimony that you'll deliver. And, Max, thank you most sincerely for hosting us. This is just a great venue and appropriate venue, and we thank you for all the courtesies extended to the commission.

My name is Mark Gearan, and, with Debra Wada, I serve as the Vice Chair of the commission. I'll be presiding at today's sessions. We have important conversations that we want to discuss in terms of the current civil service personnel systems. Our distinguished panel will address the challenges with the current hiring processes and discuss options. Ultimately, our goal is how to bring the next generation of talented Americans to public service. And for clarification, this hearing is primarily focused on the hiring processes. This afternoon, which I hope you'll join us for, we'll focus on how we can both attract and retain public service employees with critical and needed skills.

Our work at the commission defines public service as civilian employment in federal, state, tribal, or local governments, in a field in which the nation and the public have critical needs. Last week was Public Service Recognition Week. So our hearings today are timely and take place here at the Partnership for Public Service, and so it's appropriate for all of us on behalf of the commission to acknowledge the hard work and the dedication of government employees, who serve with their fellow Americans in our communities and our nation. Civil servants across the nation are working tirelessly and admirably each day to deliver government services to the public; some in the public side, most behind the scenes. We thank and honor them for their service.



Throughout the past year, the commission has traveled the country to listen and to learn about ways to encourage and to inspire more Americans to serve. When it involves public service, candidly, we heard how recruiting and hiring practices are significantly out of touch with the realities of the modern workforce and, effectively, insufficient to meet personnel needs. We heard that the federal hiring processes are far too slow, and that USA Jobs, virtually, does not meet anyone's needs. So, these are notable barriers for entry-level candidates and a significant deterrent to mid-level career individuals who might otherwise be seeking employment at another federal agency. To take that even further, for those of us in higher education, we also heard that young people are not well-represented in public service and the federal service in particular. Americans under the age of 35 make up 35 percent of the workforce, but only 17 percent of federal civilian employees. So, whether prepared or not, for the federal government generational change is coming. Thirty percent of civil servants, including the majority of the senior federal executives, will be eligible to retire in the next five years; a significant cohort. For those who aspire to join the civil service, making it through this hiring gauntlet is a noteworthy achievement on its own. Compounded, the lack of awareness and access present significant barriers to joining public service for even the most talented American workers, those who seek this as a career.

So, the goal of this morning's session is to hear from experts in our distinguished panel on how to ensure the current hiring processes are the best that they can be, so that these talented Americans can serve as civil servants. This will include discussing ways to improve competitive and non-competitive hiring processes, modernize civil service hiring preferences, and work to build a pipeline, a workforce pipeline, from higher education to public service. We are looking forward to it, and we hope our panelists will address these issues as directly as possible in their oral statements and their responses to the commissioners' questions.

So, let me welcome, officially, our panelists here. Melissa Bryant is the Chief Policy Officer of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. Thank you very much for joining us. Kimberly Holden is the Deputy Associate Director of Employee Services and Talent Acquisition and Workforce Shaping -- that's quite a title -- at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.



Thank you for joining us. Brett Hunt is the Executive Director of the Public Service Academy at Arizona State University. Thank you for traveling and being with us here. Jackie Simon is the Public Policy Director for the American Federation of Government Employees. Welcome, and thank you. And Max Stier is our host and President CEO of the Partnership for Public Service. So, thank you all very much for joining us.

Before we begin, let me go through some housekeeping matters. First, be sure to silence any electronic devices. I should take my own advice here. I will now explain some of the protocols and procedures for today's hearings. The commissioners have all received your written testimony and have reviewed it. We thank you for that. It will be entered into the public official record. So, what we ask today is that you summarize the highlights of your testimony in the allotted 5 minutes that we have. Before you, right there in front of you if you can believe, we have our timing system. So, when the light turns yellow, you will have approximately 1-minute remaining, and when it turns red, your time has expired. So, after all the testimony is completed, we'll move to questions from the commissioners, and each commissioner will be given 5 minutes to ask questions and to receive a response. I suspect we will go through one and possibly two and perhaps a lightning round of three depending on both the brevity of your answers or the brevity of our commissioners' questions. I cannot guarantee the latter, but we'll do our best.

And then upon completion of the commissioners' questions, we'll provide an opportunity for members of the public who are in attendance to offer comments either on specific topics addressed today or more generally on commissioners' overarching mandate. We have done this in all our hearings. It has been extremely important both for the input that we've received in our commission travels. These comments will be limited to 2 minutes. Similarly, the light will turn yellow when you have 30 seconds remaining, and red when the time has expired.

So, with that as preface and gratitude for all of your participation, we are now ready to begin with our panelists' testimony. I would like to begin with Melissa Bryant, who, as I said, is the Chief Policy Officer of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

And, Ms. Bryant, you are recognized for 5 minutes. Welcome.



Ms. Melissa Bryant

Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair. Members of the Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, IAVA, and our more than 425,000 members nationwide, worldwide, thank you for the opportunity to share our views, data, and experiences on the matter of improving basic hiring processes within the federal government. As an organization that represents Service Members in the active duty, the Reserve, Guard, as well as many veterans who have transitioned from the military to civil service, we appreciate this opportunity to address challenges within current civil service personnel systems and to discuss options to bring the next greatest generation into public service.

I am here today not only as IAVA's Chief Policy Officer, but also as a former Army captain and a combat veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I was a military intelligence officer who led men and women in combat, and upon my honorable discharge from the military, I felt it natural to continue my career as an intelligence officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency, where I became a recognized expert in partner engagement. I forged successful interagency collaborations with counterparts to develop multinational policy. I've also spearheaded work with the diverse teams of the U.S. and foreign partners, and captured lessons learned from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and replicate best practices. I believe that my story is one that is a successful transition from the military into the civil service and beyond, which is what landed me here today, through IAVA, to testify before you.

But this is often not the case for our nation's veterans. Veteran and military family stability, transition, and employment are an incredibly important part of IAVA's work. It's a key policy area, included in our policy agenda for the 116th Congress. When Service Members transition out of the military, most struggle with pairing military skills to relating civilian careers; with transferring military licensure and formal credentials into the civilian world. Because of this, many veterans report that the potential employers do not understand the value that they bring to their companies and organizations. Federal underemployment was recently well above the national average, and while it has dropped, there are still significant challenges



about long-term career success and underemployment in the veteran population. According to IAVA's latest number survey, of which you can find on our website here, we have surveyed members of the post 9/11 generation where 37 percent of respondents felt underemployed. The ability to translate military service military skills for civilian use is the third most important factor behind salary and finding meaning in their work. There was members look at when they are job hunting.

I think it's in the country's best interest to better allow for what IAVA calls the next greatest generation to continue to serve this country in the civil service. Veteran and military spouses who have jobs in a preferred career field do better work and remain in those jobs for much longer. In talking about veterans in the federal workforce, according to the Department of Labor, as of 2018, post 9/11 veterans are twice as likely to work in the public sector compared to their civilian counterparts; 26 percent and 13 percent, respectively. Among the employed, 14 percent of the post-9/11 veterans work for the federal government compared to just two percent of non-veterans according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Veterans now represent approximately 1/3, 31.1 percent of the total U.S. federal workforce, marking a 5-percentage point raise since the Hire Vets initiative was implemented in 2009. In addition to the Hire Vets initiative, the Department of Veteran's Affairs and Labor have created a veteran employment toolkit and veteran hiring toolkit, respectively, to aid employers in hiring and retaining veteran employees. Many veterans of the service connect with the disability work in the public center. As of August of 2018, 32 percent of employed veterans with a disability worked in the federal, state, or local government, compared with 18 percent of veterans with no disability and 13 percent of non-veterans. This is an incredibly important figure, as 18 years of war have left many veterans with injuries related to their combat service.

Employment's a meaningful and valuable tool in reintegrating into the civilian world and can give Soldiers, Marines, Airmen, and Sailors a sense of purpose after taking off the uniform. Ensuring that all veterans, including those with significant injuries of war, are able to live a full life must include discussion around employment. The fact that so many disabled veterans have a pathway to livelihood through federal employment is key to ensuring the long-term success of all



veterans. Within my testimony, I have a chart on the total onboarding of veterans, and while the majority of us are within DOD and VA, we are represented across the agencies. We have many ideas that are contained within our policy agenda that I'm sure we'll talk about within the Q & A in which we believe that we can bring more veterans into public service and not just into DOD and VA. That's the natural fit. Just in what we see from IAVA is that we need to be able to transfer people from military service over to federal service by streamlining USA Jobs, by being able to modernize and recruit the application processes, and we also need to be able to allow for the transition assistance program, which is performed by DOD, to be able to allow for more veterans to come from the military into civilian service.

With that, I look forward to answering your questions and sharing more of our views.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you very much, Ms. Bryant.

Ms. Holden, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. Kimberly Holden

Thank you and thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Office of Personnel Management's role in the federal hiring process to support agencies in building the federal workforce of tomorrow. As the Deputy Social Director for Talent Acquisition and Workforce Shaping at the OPM, I do appreciate the opportunity to give you an overview of the efforts that we are taking to ensure that the federal government's hiring process is agile and builds the workforce that reflects the public that we serve. The American people expect and deserve the best service from the federal government. This requires a talented, highly skilled, federal workforce that is drawn from the rich diversity of the people that we serve.



The federal government has a unique opportunity to attract talented individuals from multiple sectors to work on a variety of compelling missions. However, too often implementation, challenges and myths related to the hiring process get in the way of bringing on top talent and advancing skilled employees. The president's management agenda sets forth a long-term vision for effective government on behalf of the American people. It identifies a workforce for the 21st century as a key driver of transformation with particular emphasis on implementing targeted people strategies focused on maximizing employee engagement and performance, re-skilling and re-deploying human capital resources to align with evolving mission needs, and enabling simple and strategic hiring practices to attract top talent and keep pace with the current change.

Each agency is responsible for identifying, defining, and executing its own mission. This process includes determining the size of their workforce necessary to complete goals, balancing a restrained budgetary environment with critical aims of the agency, understanding responsible workforce allocations in order to identify populations of prospective employees in a given region, and working with existing employees in order to understand their needs and their motivations for remaining on the job. OPM recognizes these responsibilities are challenging, and as such, we have taken continual action to be able to assist agencies in building that federal workforce in a way that is fair, open, and equitable. The most common hiring barrier cited is the time that it takes to hire a new employee. OPM acknowledges this and continues to work with agencies to focus on improving agency execution on the hiring process, with particular emphasis on shortening the time required to hire and reducing the burden on applicants.

However, we also recognize that the time to hire is not a perfect measure for success. We must also look at the quality of the hire, and whether those hired have the skillsets that are fully aligned with the agency's current and projected mission needs. Past efforts have focused on reducing the time with concerted effort on attention to agencies to be able to demonstrate significant improvements with the speed of hiring. Informed by various data sources, such as management satisfaction surveys and data sources that talk about the quality of referred job applicants, OPM has also led efforts to provide broader improvements to the quality of hiring.



We continue to focus on these efforts and putting tools in place to enable the human resources professionals and hiring managers to achieve these multidimensional goals and further the administration's goals of reducing the burdens in the hiring process. Proactive measures have included investing in tools of technology to support hiring, such as more robust applicant assessment tools, developing technology for wizard-based systems for hiring managers, and also institutionalizing training for our human resources professionals and empowering hiring managers to actively participate in the process.

OPM continually encourages agencies to spotlight the value that they place on diversity and inclusion as well in the workplace. OPM is also working with agencies to examine their existing programs that raise awareness on retention tools. OPM also continues to work to improve the applicant experience. We understand the nature and concern for both applicants and Congress on the lengthy job application. On USA Jobs, OPM regularly makes improvements to USA Jobs as we receive feedback from stakeholders, which are guided by our customer feedback. We have invested in improving the design, features, and tools that make USA Jobs more user friendly. Forward thinking change is also what drove the creation of a Pathways Program, which has been in existence for over 7 years. That provides an opportunity for students and recent graduates to begin their federal careers upon graduation. Recent research tells us that recent graduates about to enter the workforce believe in public service, and they want to make a difference. We continue to establish and improve relationships with educational and academia institutions in order to provide more information.

Through some of the examples that I've been able to outline above, as well as through the work that OPM does every day, we take great steps to assist the federal government in recruiting and retaining its workforce, and I look forward to answering any questions the commission may have today.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you, Ms. Holden.



Mr. Hunt?

Mr. Brett Hunt

Vice Chairs Gearan and Wada, distinguished Members of the Commission, thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today about an issue of great national importance. My name is Brett Hunt, and I lead the Public Service Academy at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. Almost 4 years ago, we launched this bold initiative at ASU, and I'm happy to say that 11 days ago we graduated our very first class.

The Public Service Academy at ASU has the goal of engaging more young Americans in consequential service to the nation. In short, the Public Service Academy aims to train the leaders we need for the challenges that we face. Our goal is to build a model for an academy, like the military service academies and/or ROTC that would change the next generation of public service leaders. I want to be very clear right up front what this could look like at scale. We envision public service academies at public institutions in each state training thousands of future military officers and public servants annually at the undergraduate level, the military officers coming from the existing program of ROTC and the civilian public servants coming from what we have coined at Arizona State University and what we're doing on the ground at ASU, called the Next Generation Service Corps. We envision that the academy could respond as needed to the training needs of the country and of the government workforce.

For example, we'll be launching a new component called the Emergency Management Corps in the fall of 2019. The goal of the Emergency Management Corps is to train undergraduates, regardless of their major, with the skills necessary to go into a career of emergency management at the local state or federal level. Again, to repeat in short, the Public Service Academy will train the leaders we need for the challenges that we face as a nation, expanding and contracting to the needs of the government workforce and the nation. In terms of recommendations specific to the Public Service Academy, and this is in my written testimony, I humbly offer the following: First, enable ROTC to function seamlessly with their civilian



counterparts in the civilian component of the Public Service Academy in order to truly bridge the civilian-military gap; second, create more routes to national service through the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and fellowships, as well as a hiring incentive for Public Service Academy graduates; third, and most importantly, enable the expansion of Public Service Academies through some form of federal support.

Now, as context, I want to illuminate what we've learned on the ground about the next generation of our nation's leaders over the past 4 years. While many believe that this generation of young Americans are focused on their phones and social media more than the common good of their community or nation, we have found this assertion to not be correct. Annually, we bring in a diverse group of students from over 152 different academic majors, who have a mission of serving something larger than themselves. They're sophisticated, informed, and qualified, in my humble opinion, far more than many generations before. Now, it's true that they do not see service as a domain only inhabited by local, state, or federal government. They see service as working in a nonprofit, starting their own socially minded entity, or working in the private sector and leveraging the resources of the private sector to benefit the common good. What I see in our students, and this is almost most important, what we've learned on the ground is that they want to solve problems. That's what motivates them is solving problems. They want to confront issues on a very localized level where they have something truly local, like neighbors experiencing homelessness, or something broader, like human rights abuses. My assessment of this next generation of leaders is they want to know how they can solve problems. If we can demonstrate that they can solve problems in a career and public service, then they're ready to make that commitment to public service.

I see evidence of this in our graduates who passed up very attractive opportunities in the private sector, for example, to go into Teach For America, because they're passionate about equal access to great education; or a top astrophysics graduate who chose to start his professional career in the United States Army, with a plan to then go over to NASA. Another top graduate of ours is going to work for the Arizona Department of Economic Security, because in his



internship in that organization, he saw that he could help real people on the ground in his own state.

All of these emerging leaders are serving in different ways, but all of them are motivated by their ability to solve problems. In closing, I applaud this body for not meeting today's reality by creating an idealized version of the past, but rather by crafting a bold vision for the future. I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you, Mr. Hunt. Congratulations on graduation.

Mr. Brett Hunt

Thank you.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Ms. Simon.

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Although this hearing is focused on hiring, and AFGE represents people who are already hired, we have a strong interest in competitive, merit-based hiring, not only because we are firm believers in good government and in apolitical civil service, but also because federal employees don't always spend their entire careers in the same job. They apply for promotions and lateral moves within and between agencies. As such, our members are wary of many of the proposals you are considering. Our members rightly see direct hiring and noncompetitive hiring as a means of evading veterans' preference and merit principles. We hear bitter complaints from managers and contractors that hiring and firing federal employees is too hard. They want something easy come-easy go, where their mistakes



can be blamed on workers and systems; anything but their own failures to learn and utilize the immense authorities they currently have under the law to hire the most qualified and fire those who engage in misconduct or who fail to perform.

I'd like to address a couple of the specific recommendations in the staff memorandum to you all that was provided to us. The first is the proposal to adopt a modified Title 38 system for healthcare providers that was recommended by the 2016 commission on care in the VA. Please note that this proposal came from a body whose majority wanted to dismantle and privatize the VA. Part of that plan was to impose a personnel system that would facilitate the failure of the VA in order to clear the path to privatization. VA employees vehemently opposed it, because it eliminated many of their rights to collective bargaining and union representation, reduced the retirement and healthcare benefits, based pay and pay adjustments on subjective factors and thereby opened the door to favoritism, corruption, and discrimination. In so doing, it would have removed any kind of effective check on VA mismanagement or corruption of the kind that led to the waitlist scandal in Phoenix in 2014.

No one should be fooled by assurances that this kind of plan upholds merit-system principles. It does not. It may reflect current nonunion private sector practice, but the federal government should never lower its standards to that level. Please understand that the adoption of that proposal would make federal employment less attractive for healthcare employees, not more attractive. In addition, the elimination of rights and accountability from management would leave inevitably to lower quality healthcare in the VA, DOD, the Indian Health Service, and federal prisons or wherever else it might be applied.

We also strongly oppose the proposal to create any type of cafeteria-type structure for employee benefits. The federal government should provide all its employees a comprehensive benefit package. No one should have to choose between health insurance and paid time off, between paid parental leave and retirement income security, between disability insurance and dental insurance. Instead of either or, I urge the commission to recommend the addition of employer-paid parental leave, as well as disability, vision, and dental insurance. That alone



would do far more to improve hiring and make the federal government an attractive employer than all the various ideas for noncompetitive hiring that you are considering. There are also numerous proposals to eliminate or vastly reduce the benefits available under FERS. The defined benefit component of FERS is extremely modest, but it's highly valued by federal employees and is a strong inducement to federal employment both in terms of recruitment and retention. Following the private sector in the realm of retirement benefits where less than half of workers have any kind of employment-based retirement system at all and only half of those who do receive it get no employer subsidy is not only immoral, it contributes to what will be an enormous retirement income crisis in the future. People who retire from federal employment should have a dignified retirement. Their defined benefit, a retirement income they'll never outlive, is crucial to that goal.

Finally, the memorandum calls for a new government-wide personnel system. This is the wrong time for such a project. No one should trust the Trump administration with government-wide personnel reform. At the moment, federal employees are fighting a very lonely battle to defend apolitical civil service from corruption and politicization. We have an administration that's tried to all but eliminate union representation for federal employees. They keep trying to freeze pay and distort the measurement of the pay gap, cut retirement and healthcare benefits, and they're trying to drastically curtail due-process rights. They want to contract out federal jobs and abolish OPM. They're refusing to hire much needed personnel, including physicians and nurses, at VA medical facilities. And last but not least, they keep trying to politicize agencies through intimidation, questioning of political loyalties, quashing scientific findings, and forbidding federal employees from using certain technical words. Again, this is not the administration to trust with government-wide personnel reform.

This Commission's work is extremely important. We know that years of politicians denigrating public employment and the mission of government has taken its toll. Failures by federal agencies are hyped as evidence that the government itself can do nothing right, even when identical failures by private entities are understood as the result of inadvertent mistakes of the actions of a few bad apples. Let's not succumb to the simplistic notion that the structure and



roles that guarantee an apolitical, professional civil service are what stands in the way of more effective government. Let's acknowledge that difficulties in recruitment and retention are the result of low pay, low public regard, and an enormous workload due to understaffing and too few resources.

This concludes my testimony. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you, Ms. Simon.

Max?

Mr. Max Stier

Thank you very much to all of you for the extraordinary work to public service you are doing in this Commission. I can't see the lights, so I assume I have plenty of time here. I'm going to do this; 10 ideas in 5 minutes.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

We can.

Mr. Max Stier

There you go; so, 10 ideas in a little under 5 minutes.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Take your time.



Mr. Max Stier

Number one, if you thought about the system that we have today, to me the most important difference between a well-run organization and what we have in the government is that the leaders in government in the executive branch and in Congress don't fundamentally see as one of their primary responsibilities the health of the organizations they're responsible for and talent is one of the most important ingredients for the health of any knowledge-based organization today. So, I think any set of ideas you have, have to get at the question of how do you promote ownership in a leadership group around talent and management of the government?

Number two, this is focused on the hiring process. We really need two things: We need to simplify it, and we need to normalize it. The reality is that the talent market is expecting a different set of experiences than they're receiving in dealing with the government, and that has to change. There's certain specific needs that the government has, the questions of politicization that are unique, and those can be accounted for in ways that don't require the ornate, difficult, long process that exists today.

Number three, the most important way you're going to address getting entry talent coming in is to, again, do what every other organization outside of the federal government does, and that is use student internships as their primary mechanism for generating entry-level talent. It's most important, because it gives you the best way of assessing your talent. By in large in the federal government, students' intern programs are friends and family programs. They're not seen as a critical part of the talent pipeline coming in.

Number four, agencies absolutely need to build better relationships with the talent providers at colleges and universities. We have to understand that historically public service was seen as being government service, and today it's not seen as being government service at all. And what we need are universities stepping up to the plate, understanding that public service does have a broader set of opportunities for people; nonprofits, your partnership an example of one of them. But in order for people to go into government, it will require universities to invest



more heavily in educating their students about those opportunities than they would have otherwise. My metaphor is if you have a left hook when you bowl, you got to take a step over. You got to accommodate for the propensities that exist, and in today's talent market they know nothing about it. You have to educate them more.

Number five, we need to create additional channels into government. The reality is that most talent today doesn't envision themselves going for a career in any organization or institution. Some may very well do that, but we need to see a better flow of talent between sectors. We need to see opportunities that are shorter term. The United States Digital Service is an example of what the last administration did. Cyber talent initiative is something that we are launching, which is for the entry side, which is akin to that; to your fellowship and to government for cyber. We think those kinds of things are really important, as are public-private exchanges, and we need to see a passport. So right now, the law allows someone who's a federal employee to go out and get experience in the private sector to come back at the same level they left at rather than the level at which they should be given the additional experience. That ought to change.

Number six, we need the pay system reformed. The reality today is that we have a pay system from 1949 designed when we had a clerical workforce. The pay system is not market sensitive. It needs to be. That's the way that you're going to be able to compete effectively for talent.

Number seven, we need to improve the federal workforce experience. I know this is hiring process focused, but it's the same thing. Recruiting and retention are two sides of the same coin. We need to make sure that the experience of federal employees is better. Half the attrition that occurs today occurs within the first 2 years that people are in the federal government. We need to create a culture of recognition. Only half of employees believe their good work is recognized today. We need to invest in the development of employees. More often than not, talent wants to see how they can make a difference, and that they can make a difference for themselves and their skills and capabilities. The military does a much better job. They see talent



as an asset, and civilian-side talent is viewed as a cost. And we need to provide public servants with the tools that they expect. Their Sunday technology can't be different from their Monday technology.

Number eight, we need to end shutdowns and crisis budgeting. No organization can actually work effectively when it has no idea what its resources are. And no one's going to stick around if they're mission driven and they're told they can't do their job because they're shut out of their job. That's a killer. So that has to end and change. That's really Congress' responsibility, and it's a big deal and fundamental to hiring as well.

Number nine, we need to address these issues collectively by and large in government. Everything that should happen is happening someplace, but not in very many places. We need to see this as an enterprise effort, especially when it deals with talent acquisition.

And last, we need to improve the brand of government. Axios just did a survey of 100 whatever brands. The government's bottom, and that has to change. Part of it's going to be actually allowing government to invest in making a case for why service is a good thing.

There we go.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Well done, Max; on time, sort of. But all very much appreciated. Thank you.

So, we now turn to an opportunity for commissioner questions. Each commissioner, similarly, will have 5 minutes to question our witnesses, and I will begin. And perhaps, to Ms. Holden, we could have a conversation. Your testimony is appreciated and your expertise in these matters is well known for its dazzling comprehensiveness, so we appreciate that.

One of the issues that comes up frequently is that agencies must use competitive examining for new positions. And yet, what has been observed to us is how that is failing for agencies that are not able to bring in the kind of quality candidates that they want. I would be



interested in what actions or recommendations you would commend to us as we formulate our recommendations to the Congress and the President next year.

Ms. Kimberly Holden

Okay. Thank you for your question. The agencies actually have the ability. I mean, competitive examining is the main route in which we would like to see agencies recruit their talent and hire their talent, but they also have other options that are available to them, to include recruiting from internally within their own workforce. They can utilize the competitive service. They can utilize noncompetitive appointments, such as, for 30 percent, disabled veterans, military spouses. They do have a wide variety of options available to them, and when they actually recruit, they can recruit in that way to open up the occupations where there are openings to the general public, which would give them the group of all those different types of applicants, to include persons with disabilities. It is complex, and we understand the system's not flexible. But it is rooted in the foundation with regard to the merit-system principles and making sure that we do have a fair and open, competitive process.

Some of the improvements that I think could possibly be made, which are some of the things that OPM is currently working on; we do have a list of legislative proposals that have been made public that are going through the process, one of which Mr. Stier has already mentioned, with regard to talent that has left the federal government that may go into the private sector, and when they're able to be reinstated. They can be reinstated in a grade that they currently qualify for in the competitive process versus the grade that they were when they left. And so that allows us to bring that rich talent back and utilize them for other types of positions that are needed in the federal government.

And making sure that we have a flexible system that addresses the needs of the current workforce; no one wants to come in anymore and work a 35-year career that I have, when I came in at 17 years old. That's not something that applicants are looking for today. And we know that we also need to make improvements, and we are making necessary improvements to the USA



Jobs, which is the face of the federal government as far as hiring is concerned. So, we're making those changes necessary so that applicants understand if I am a student, then I should be looking at Pathways or looking at internships. If I am an internal candidate, I should be looking for open opportunities and looking at detailed opportunities. So, we have created these streams so that applicants understand the ways in which they should come into government. And I hope I've answered your question, but there are other things.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Yes, ma'am.

Do other panelists want to reflect on this question? Ms. Simon?

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

Yes, thank you. I would just say that, you know, our organization, we represent about 700,000 federal employees, and we often hear that today's entry-level employees or applicants for jobs aren't interested in career employment anymore. That was what their parents were interested in. Nothing could be further from the truth. The kinds of proposals that are the most discouraging and sort of inspire the most outrage and anger from our membership are, for example, one of the elements of the President's management agenda to turn, basically, most federal employees into term or temps, who will be used for a few years and then, you know, used and abused and discarded and replaced. This idea of gig employment in the federal government, I think it's probably the worst idea that's come up for a lot of reasons. Among them, it divests agencies of the kind of institutional capacity and memory that is really necessary for an era like the one we're in, where every institution of our democracy and our government is under such severe attack. Thank God we have career civil servants who are apolitical and devoted to the mission of their agencies, despite the continual attacks that they're under. And if every administration could replace the workforce every 4 years, every 7 years, we'd be in a lot worse position. People still want career employment. Of course, they do. They want stability. They



want economic security, and they want fair pay. That's what they want. They don't want a short-term gig.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you.

Ms. Wada?

The Honorable Debra Wada

Thank you, Mark.

The commission has gone out, and we've heard a lot from agency heads, actually individuals, a lot about the veterans' preference within the competitive examining and how either the perception is that it prohibits them from being able to be considered; they don't understand the process; there's confusion. So, this is actually for all, I think, the panelists. I would imagine that you all have had some exposure to this. We're trying to get to what is really going on in terms of veterans' preference.

So, if we could start with Ms. Bryant. Could you share with us?

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Sure. Veterans' preference is an incredibly useful tool for veterans to transition over to civil service, just as I explained in my own background. We would like to actually see the expansion of the VRA from 3 years to 10 years, because that's something where if you go and use your GI Bill after your transition, maybe you don't want to still be the same person that you were when you were in the military, and you want to learn a new skill; a new trade. We've found that there's a lot of success with using the apprenticeships and with using other tools that are



within the new GI Bill that allow for veterans to be able to make successful transitions. So, we want to be able to allow time for that.

I have to respectfully disagree in terms of the analogy in that it's not so much that the full term employment, and this is a part of, also, veterans' preference too, and what we see in the tread lines with veterans who go to civil service, is that it's not that they don't want or that they necessarily want to be career civil servants. What they want to see is that they're being treated as people and as talent. And I'll also respectfully disagree with Mr. Stier in that the military isn't always as great at talent management either. And that's kind of the bottom line is that the veteran feeling is that we're disposable, and when you have leadership that reflect those kinds of feelings, then that's what you're seeing in tread lines of people who leave. People don't leave bad jobs. They leave bad bosses. And that's the challenge that you have within the military when we've been deployed and the quality of life has been upended; for our spouses, the same thing. And then when that goes into civil service, it's not that you're a term employee, it's that you're not being fully utilized for your talent while you're there. So, again, this is a leadership problem, not so much the talent problem. But you need to keep the veterans' preference, because that is something that is a valuable tool for us to be able to come into civil service, because it's not always exactly translatable from your military skills to your civilian skillset.

The Honorable Debra Wada

We have heard some that would say in some cases, because of the way that the current process is structured, we may be putting veterans in a position that they might not necessarily be highly qualified for, and it may not be in their best interests in terms of long-term success that because of the preference they got there, they don't have the necessary skill level that's needed for success at that job.

Do you think that that is true, or do you think that that's just an urban legend?



Ms. Melissa Bryant

I wouldn't say it's an urban legend. I'd say that that's something I've seen across the entire civil service. You're seeing people who were not as competent or up to task to take their jobs. And then also I'll say very candidly that we've also seen what we colloquially call in the DOD the, "No Colonel Left Behind," program, where you transfer immediately from taking off the uniform because you were a senior officer and then you came over into a GS-15 job that maybe you don't have the experience for, simply because you came from the military. There's still cultural changes that you need to adapt to. So, it's not a panacea in any remedy for that. There is no panacea for that. I think that you're going to have a few bad apples no matter where you go and no matter how they came into a government agency.

The Honorable Debra Wada

Does anyone else have a comment?

Ms. Kimberly Holden

Yes, I'd actually like to comment. Thank you for that question. It is a question and a complaint that we get that we hear from agencies across the board with regard to veterans' preference, and even the comment about veterans not being highly qualified for the positions that they may apply for. One of the things that OPM stresses highly for agencies and what agencies are actually required to do is make sure that they have a means to access their applicants. And assessment has to go beyond this self-rated occupational questionnaire, where everyone can check E or D to say that they're an expert in everything just to get their foot in the door to get an interview. What we have found is that the use of an effective validated assessment tool will help agencies and help hiring managers to be able to identify those highly qualified candidates, an assessment tool that gets to their actual skills, and sometimes it can be a proctored, writing sample. OPM has established assessments from USA Hire that actually are occupation based, and so that way once an applicant meets minimum qualifications, the next step is to take the



assessment battery. That will actually bring the most highly qualified people up to the top. We value the skills and the experience that veterans bring to the federal government, and we know that what they learn in the military and transitioning that we have some very highly effective and highly qualified veterans. But we want to make sure across the board. Our responsibility is to make sure that every candidate that comes into the government is qualified, and so that way, putting processes in place in order to determine effective qualifications and skills are things that we need to do. So, in addition to assessments and stressing the use of subject matter experts working alongside with the HR professional to determine; if you're looking for a biomedical engineer, the normal HR specialist will not know what skills to look for. But if you have a biomedical engineer sitting next to you looking for the right skills, then those are the types of measures that agencies are putting in place to make sure that they are able to bring the most highly qualified candidates in.

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

I think veterans' preference is a form of affirmative action. And, like affirmative action of all types, it's going to be controversial, and people will question the capacity and quality of candidates who are beneficiaries of an affirmative action principle, whatever it may be. I would just urge you to consider every one of the noncompetitive hiring proposals that's currently before you in that same frame. We see these preferences being given to graduates of certain colleges where federal jobs are only advertised at one university or in one region. And, you know, a veteran who's in a position that would like to apply for a lateral move can suddenly find that job already promised to somebody through the Pathways program. So, the college degree from a particular institution trumped his or her military service. There's all kinds of special hiring preferences that are either proposed to be established, are currently established, and I think it's worthwhile for all of us to consider, you know, what's worthy of a preference; military service versus attendance at a particular university or having a particular kind of degree? I think it's very important to be very explicit about that, because in each one of these noncompetitive hiring proposals you're looking at, you're talking about giving preferences to one group.



The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you.

Commissioner Barney?

Mr. Steve Barney

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is going to be directed to Mr. Stier, Ms. Simon, and Ms. Holden, and it's on the issue of effective methods of assessing employee applicant qualifications. What we've heard as we've traveled around, for folks who have interacted, for example, with the USA Jobs program that there's some significant issues in terms of how they can best represent the skills, the talent, and the experience that they bring, and how to do it within the construct of the system as it's currently designed. I wondered, how can we encourage hiring managers to incorporate the most effective methods to assess applicants, and is there an area of agreement between federal hiring managers on the one hand and the collective bargaining organizations that represent the hardworking federal work force on to best assess those kinds of applicant skills?

May I start with you, Ms. Holden?

Ms. Kimberly Holden

Sure, and thank you for your question. Back to my previous response, the best way to assess the qualifications, there are some very common, promising practices that we encourage agencies to use, number one, are making sure that you have a job opportunity announcement that is very clear, concise, and clearly defines the type of skills that you are actually looking for, which can be defined in the specialized experience. Making sure that if you're going to use that occupational questionnaire where I have to self-rate myself that the questions are clear. And they're not just multiple choice but they're detailed enough to determine my writing skills, my



communication skills, my technical skills but also using another validating assessment tool. And then also using subject matter experts and using structured interviews to really drill down to determine the qualifications of the candidate, but also making sure you have a recruitment plan or outreach plan. Where are you going to find the candidates?

Quite often we see that hiring managers will throw the announcement to their HR shop and say please advertise this for me with no input, no involvement, and to me that is one of the most important responsibilities of a hiring manager is to be involved in the actual announcement and to be involved in the process. And through the work that OPM has done in 2016 with hiring excellence and promoting the collaboration with your HR specialist, knowing where your applicant pool will come from, and making sure do you really need to cast such a wide net, which gets to some of Ms. Simon's concerns about the internal candidates. If you are looking for an industry economist and that industry economist will come from a wide sector, then you advertise that way. If you're looking for a program analyst to work on a particular project that would only be structured or could only be found internal to that agency, then you can restrict your hiring. And so I think that that would also relieve some of the frustration of applicants who think that agencies will post announcements just for the sake of seeing who all is out there when they really may not have the budget or the real intent to hire from casting that hiring net.

Mr. Steve Barney

Thanks. With my limited time, I'd like to go to Ms. Simon and give her an opportunity, please.

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

I don't want to evade your question, but hiring is a classic example of a management responsibility.



Mr. Steve Barney

Yes, it is.

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

And our responsibility is if there's no good evidence that the employee has failed to perform to defend that employee's job. I think that the worst way of hiding mistakes in hiring and failures to do an adequate job in screening applicants to make sure that they're actually qualified is to take away any rights employees have to defend their job, or else have what's, in effect, a perpetual probationary period of 3 and 4 years, when you turn everybody into a renewable term or temp employee, which is where I think this administration would like to take us; take away anybody's right to defend their job, to appeal a firing or an adverse action, and thereby to cover up mistakes in hiring.

Mr. Steve Barney

Thank you.

Mr. Stier, I just have a few seconds that are left on my time.

Mr. Max Stier

Sure. I'm going to gaslight really quickly three things on the entry side.

Mr. Steve Barney

Yes, please.



Mr. Max Stier

To come back to the student internship, the best way to assess talent is to have an opportunity to work with someone over a period of time, and every other organization that works well anywhere else does that as the primary mechanism of getting entry talent. So that would be the first point is we need to see better assessment through actually using student interns on the entry side.

The second point that Kim made, we have to have the norm be that hiring managers are involved directly. That they see that as their primary responsibility. You can't assess if you don't have the ability to know what good looks like. Those of the people that do that isn't the norm.

Number three, GAO is a very good model for how to do this right. One of the things that they do is they actually have their senior leaders responsible for recruiting and not only are they assessed on how many people they get in but how those people do while they're actually in the organization. So that responsibility actually is focused on the outcome that you want, which is really great employees that stick around.

Mr. Steve Barney

Thank you, to each of you.

Thank you, sir.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you, Commissioner Barney.

Commissioner Ed Allard?



Mr. Edward Allard

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank all of the panelists for being here today. This has been very, very helpful, at least for this poor, old commissioner. I want to also ask a question of someone who is, like me, west of the Mississippi. So, we're in the minority here.

Mr. Hunt let me ask you. Congratulations, by the way, on the graduation. I know you must be very proud. How do you recommend that the federal government partner with colleges and universities to expand and strengthen the pipeline to public service?

Mr. Brett Hunt

Thank you, sir, for the question. There are multiple things already on the table, which have been discussed by other members of the panel. I believe, and of course we're doing the work on the ground at ASU that having a cohort of students who are identified during their 4 years or, in the case of a transfer student, their 2 years at the university who are that pipeline in public service, into federal service, is the most effective way to utilize resources to bring in a diverse population into public service, because you have, for lack of a better term, an identified, captive audience that can be trained to the standard necessary for public service in different agencies that is pointed in that direction. I think it's a better use of resources than going out and trying to do a more diffuse operation, where you have recruiters and other elements. Of course, that will always be necessary, but the greatest use of your resources would be to have that population that's identified early.

One of the concepts that we've had with the Public Service Academy at ASU, and we would champion as it expands, to be actually as we're doing at the Emergency Management Corps, to have specific cohorts within the corps that are training for specific federal service. So the idea that, to use the military example, if you are going into the Navy, there's a point in your third and fourth year of training where you identify if you're going to be surface warfare, submarine, aviation, *et cetera*, that there would be some type of element of that. You would have



2 years of your baseline training in the Public Service Academy for civilian public service, and then in your final 2 years you would specialize. And, again, that could be going into the department of agriculture. The focus could be going into an international-type programs, in the Foreign Service, USAID, *et cetera*. And so our opinion and what we've again seen from our work over the past 4 years is having that dedicated cohort driving in that direction is the most effective use of resources to solve for this, and as I said in my oral statement, the scale would be meeting much of what the federal government needs, if you did scale this to other universities around the country. Just like land grant, we can look back at history and see some different ways that we've met the needs of the nation. The Public Service Academy could be the way that we meet much of that need.

Mr. Edward Allard

Excellent. Thank you. And forgive me for not being familiar with the curriculum, but do you have -- and this is kind of stimulated by Mr. Stier's comment about internship -- as a part of your curriculum, do you have an internship segment?

Mr. Brett Hunt

Great question, sir. So, within the Public Service Academy, the different elements are ROTC, and there is the Next Generation Service Corps. So, to focus on the Next Generation Service Corps, which is what we're already stood up within the Public Service Academy, they're required to do internships in the public, private, and nonprofit sector. So even if you say, "Hey, Brett, I'm going to go be an accountant for KBMG," that's great. We still want you to do an internship in the public sector and the nonprofit sector, the goal of which is to develop an understanding of the decision making, hierarchy, and culture of the different types of organizations. And what we've found through those internships oftentimes, again, as Ms. Bryant said, is that people leave bad bosses not bad jobs. We see that folks get into organizations and really like the culture of the organization, and that will often lead them toward staying in that organization once they graduate. I'll give you an example of our student who is at the



Department of Economic Security in the state of Arizona; not often thought of as a young person as a really exciting place to go but he found exciting work there because he got to do an internship there. And he's going to do that as his first job.

Thank you.

Mr. Edward Allard

Thank you, Mr. Hunt.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you, Commissioner.

Commissioner James?

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I echo my colleagues thanks to the panel this morning for sharing your time and your expertise with us. Mr. Stier, you talked about, as one of your ten goals, you talked about internship. And we've talked about it a little bit. My question is, from what we've heard as we've gone and talked with folks across the country, is that some agencies use the internship program very well. Some agencies don't use it very well. Some agencies shy away from it altogether. So, from your perspective, why are some agencies successful, some agencies not, and to your point of increasing the use of internships, what are the challenges that you see for increasing across the federal agencies using internships?



Mr. Max Stier

Great. So, thank you for the question, because it seems like a very basic issue here, and yet it's fundamental, I think, to the health of our government. And it represents again a process that pretty much every knowledge-based organization I'm familiar with uses. I think the barriers are in two different camps.

First, there are some structural barriers that can be addressed. For example, there are ways in which you can convert interns into full time employees if they are viewed as having been successful as interns, but those conversion opportunities are limited or nonexistent if those interns are hired by third parties, even if they're paid for by the government. So, an organization, like HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities) and Annikis, an organization that really drives a lot of great talent, bringing them into government -- they can't when they bring an intern cohort into the government, when the government hires them to do this. Those people are not actually eligible for conversion.

And the second is that if they're volunteers. So, if they're not being actually paid, and there's a good question about what opportunities; they also have more limited conversion of opportunities. So, there's some rules that I think could be changed that would make it easier to do it. But more fundamentally, I think there's a cultural issue at state here, because, today, agencies could do this. And as you note, there's a lot of unevenness, and yet they don't. And part of this is I think there isn't that leadership ownership, and there's not a drive from the top to make this the norm. And any change is always difficult, and I think this becomes one of the clear opportunities for you here where you can beat the drum about how this would be a way for you to improve the capability of our government, to drive new talent into the government, and allow the government to assess that talent more effectively by using a commonly available tool that everybody else does.

I think part of it will require more transparency, so there's knowledge about what agencies are actually using this and using it effectively. So how do you know what you manage?



You can't measure with no measure, but what you measure actually drives your management, so I think making sure that there's transparency and availability of information about what agencies are using internships, how many of them are using them to actually generate talent, how that talent is doing, those are kinds of things that if they were broadly available, I think they would drive change. Part of it will, again, be focusing on leaders seeing this at part in parcel of their core responsibilities.

Ms. Jeanette James

So to continue, those agencies that don't use interns, is that because their leadership doesn't know about using interns or they've had a bad experience or they think it's too difficult; some of the challenges that you talked about early on, some of the things that could change?

Mr. Max Stier

So, when we talk leaders, I would bet that most leaders have no idea where their talent is coming from. I'm a, as my wife says, fallen lawyer. The Department of Justice has their honors program, which is widely respected across the legal profession and yet pretty much all agencies have lawyers and very few of them have robust programs like the Department of Justice does. Some of it, if you talk to people inside, will say it's a budgeting issue. They don't know what their long-term resources are. They're not sure how much commitment they can make to people a couple of years out. I don't think that that actually really explains the full set of issues that are going on here. I think, again, it's, to me, a demonstration of the lack of prioritization and focus by leaders. And so, I think the way that you're going to have to change that is by setting an expectation for those leaders to actually be focused on this as a particular issue and providing a method of transparency, of accountability, to see whether they're actually doing it. My experience has been when agencies have actually done this that you can see a very large and big positive culture change in the organization. Unfortunately, there really aren't that many that do this. We struggle with even understanding who is using these authorities right now, because that information is harder to come by than it ought to be.



Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Melissa Bryant

May I quickly add on to that, just from the veteran perspective?

I wholeheartedly agree with Mr. Stier's comments. Just to give you a bit more illustration of where it works and doesn't work for veterans, within the VA, for example, they use the internship program and because you have military who are transitioning from a position, particularly within your medics and your corpsmen who come in into the healthcare positions, they see a great opportunity at least in coming in as interns and being able to come into the VA as civil servants, whereas in DOD, not only is it inertia, cultural issues, it's also classified information and needing a clearance for many of the jobs there. That is an impediment to interns coming in, in DOD. And so that could be something, especially for transitioning veterans that would be great, especially if they held over their clearances coming over from the military, if it's applicable. But there's needs to be agency focus on that.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Commissioner Khazei?



Mr. Alan Khazei

Thank you. And I also want to thank you all for your public service and joining us today. I want to pick up on what my colleague, Commissioner Allard, asked of you, Mr. Hunt, and again, congratulations on your first graduating class. That's really inspiring.

In terms of encouraging more public service academies; I love the fact that you guys developed this at ASU, and we want other people to replicate it. So, I have a, I guess, two-part question. One is having you had other universities come and is there interest and what does it cost, basically, to establish one of these at a university? I noticed in your testimony you said that you guys did this, because you just believe in public service and you funded it all but maybe there's a role for the federal government or state and local governments to say, well, maybe put up some matching funds or an incentive program or a startup program. So, if a university wanted to start a public service academy, and say have 500 students the way you did, what would that cost somebody?

Mr. Brett Hunt

Well thank you for the question, Mr. Khazei. ASU chose to go out and do this, because it's hard, right? This has been talked about since the establishment of West Point. It was also the idea that we should have an academy where we train the civil servants, right? And it hasn't happened, because it's incredibly difficult. So, we chose to go out and upfront the difficult elements, including the cost of launching this Public Service Academy. We have had interest from other universities. I won't name names, but we've had great interest from other universities. What the impediment is, is having this tied to something that is a path to federal job career, you know, then what? I was an Army officer and ROTC cadet. When I signed on the dotted line, I knew that part of my agreement was a job at the end of that line, once I finished my training. And so that was a great incentive for me to go into public service.



So, enabling the Public Service Academy to, one, be something that is a value add to a university, not something that is just taking resources from the university without a direct path for those graduates, enabling that to happen on the federal level is key. I talked about it a little bit in my written testimony, which is enabling ROTC to fully integrate and work with the civilian students to meet that goal of bridging the civilian-military gap. Enabling some type of funding mechanism on the federal level, of course, would be an incredible way to unleash the potential that we have for the Public Service Academy. One of the things that we've been asked before is this idea should there be a West Point somewhere here and of course it's been talked about for many years and many of you have been around the table on this. I think it's a yes, and we can meet scale rapidly by doing this at state universities around the country.

There also could be a federal academy here somewhere proximate, where those folks are trained. Of course, it all comes back to the money. At ASU, the way that we're doing it, and I don't have an exact number for you, but I'd be happy to get that back to you. The way that we're doing it is leveraging every resource at the university. So, I run our organization of 556 students with a staff of 4, today. The way that I do that is I leverage the university, the academic units of the university in order to be able to go out and teach our courses within the Watts College of Public Service Community Solutions. I utilized change makers, some of the Ashoka U components at the university in order for us to do our service. I leveraged the Pat Tillman Veterans Center, which is a world-class student veterans' center at ASU, in order to do service with our veterans' program, the Veterans Scholar Program. So, I talk about our organization as existing within an ecosystem, where we leverage different components of the university in order to meet that mission. And in doing that, we're able to do it in an incredibly thrifty way if you will, because we're leveraging existing resources at the university.

And so that would be the model that we want to export to other universities. You don't need to build, spend one hundred million dollars building a new facility with ivory columns. Rather, you need to integrate this into the work that's going on at the university with a final end, which is a route into a career in public service.



Mr. Alan Khazei

Thank you very much. If I understand it correctly, there's both cost but also if the federal government said if you successfully graduate from a public service academy with a pathway toward federal service; you've actually taken courses that sort of prepare you, then we will guarantee you the job for two years or whatever?

Mr. Brett Hunt

Correct.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Great. Thank you very much.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Commissioner Kilgannon.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Well, thank you all for being here today, and, Max, thank you to you and your team for your generous hospitality. It's a beautiful facility, and this is fantastic.

Mr. Hunt, I wanted to follow up on Mr. Khazei's line of questioning, please. With regard to the Public Service Academy, you outlined why the students are engaging in that and going into the program. For those students who are not participating in the program, do you have an understanding as to why they don't; what objections or obstacles they have to it?



Mr. Brett Hunt

So just to understand your question, sir, so folks that are not choosing to enter our programs?

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Correct.

Mr. Brett Hunt

So, the average student at ASU?

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Correct.

Mr. Brett Hunt

That's a tough question. Let me tell you about the students we do have in the program, and maybe that will help illuminate this question. The students that are coming into the program oftentimes are coming from families of service. We have a high percentage of folks that are military dependents or parents have served at some point in the military. We have a lot of folks that come from a faith perspective, who have done service growing up. It's part and parcel of who they are, and they want to continue doing that. And we have quite a few people who, I believe, want a career in public service, but are not bound to the military and don't want to go into the military, right? And they see our organization as an opportunity to expose themselves to that. All of that is kind of within this group of everybody's a problem solver. We have the mandate from our president, Dr. Michael Crow, to match what the university looks like within our program. So, I do have the students in my program who went to the right parochial schools



that have done incredible work and did, you know, the summer project in Costa Rica. I also have students who are helping raise their siblings and who are getting the younger siblings off to school in the morning and coming to the university and then going to work at Target in the evening. So, we have that whole variety of students within our organization.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

And there's probably some students who would like to come in to the program, but they're being told by parents and influencers that the reason for going to college is so that you can get a job in investment banking, make millions of dollars, or take care of your parents when you're out of school. What's the value proposition to those people who might offer resistance to people who want to come in?

Mr. Brett Hunt

Developing as character-driven leaders with the courage to cross sectors, connect networks, and ignite action for the greater good. Let me unpack that. That's how we market this to folks coming into the organization, saying character-driven leaders are the ones that are going to solve our most vexing problems as a nation and internationally and if you're among that group of folks who want to come in and do that, and not necessarily in the public, private, or nonprofit sector but rather as a character-driven leader on a trajectory to solve a problem that may take you into public service. And then it may take you into a nonprofit, and then down the road may bring you back into an administration. We want to develop those character-driven leaders.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

I understand you're at the beginning stages of this, but assuming it's going to be successful, and it will be, do you think that there's an opportunity for something like this in community colleges or technical specialty schools?



Mr. Brett Hunt

Yes, sir. And I'm getting on my soapbox here, so stop me as I go along here. Yes, we talk about this pathway of service, right? There's a spectrum of service. The spectrum of service starts when you're a young person that may come from your parents. It may come from your church. It may come from boy scouts, girl scouts; a variety of organizations. We want to be that next step when people come to the university. Whether they're going to the community college for two years, there should be an existing component there, and then coming to us, which we accept transfer students for 2 years in the university. And then the question then, we can build that, is what do they do then? What's that next step in the pathway to service? For some, it's going to be the military. For some, it's going to be public service. That's that spectrum of service that we see ourselves a key component of at the university level.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Real quick, last question; are you engaged at the state and local level with partners at the state and local level?

Mr. Brett Hunt

We are engaged at state and local levels through internships, through community impact labs, where we actually work in the community on real projects. So yes, sir.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Thank you.



Ms. Melissa Bryant

Sir, if I could just add to that very quickly, I think there's some lessons learned from the military that you can draw to build upon Mr. Hunt's comments. One, DOD has influencers' data from parents, from others who are within. I think we're familiar with jammers, and so that's something where they've actually been able to drill down into what gives you the propensity to serve. And a lot of times, it's because of the community that we're in, just like, I think, within the military, where you studied from last year that speaks to you. We're increasingly a family business. We're increasingly coming from -- I'm a third-generation military officer, for example, and that same type of influence data tracks with what you see in public service as well. And so, as you're speaking about the propensity to serve and why are more not involved, it's because it's something where it's almost ingrained into you from the point of childhood, and that's what DOD has learned in the military. And I think that's something also that can inform how do you change that within the public discussion for those who are not coming from public service families.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you.

Commissioner Skelly.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you. I'd like to take the conversation maybe up a level from some of the specifics to the character, the composition of the workforce. I'm a big believer that the people that serve America probably best serve America when they look as much like America as possible. You can call it diversity or what have you, and there's some pure science on how to perceive matters inside organizations and changes that are for the better.



I'd like to start with you, Ms. Bryant. I'd like to see if I can make my way down to ask several of you. I was struck in your testimony, I've heard it before and was struck, 31 percent of the federal workforce are veterans. And I immediately went, "I don't know the number of veterans in the civilian workforce in relation to that off the top of my head." It's about 8 percent of people in America over the age of 18 are veterans. What's your feelings on how veterans contribute to the diversity within the federal workforce, seeing as they make up so much of it disproportionate to society?

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Diversity inclusion is something that we very much promote within IAVA and showing that the next greatest generation needs to be reflected by society. Women veterans, for example, are the fastest growing demographic within our population, and so that's something that does get reflected as we transfer over into civil service, because we do have the propensity to continue to serve. And that really is what is ingrained within veterans who transition. But we do have a problem. Geographically, just the few studies I've sited is exactly where it shows for DOD, we have a problem. We're going to have the same problem in public service if we're leaning on veterans, and that is we're increasingly demographically from the Midwest and the Southeast, so there's a propensity for group think and for cultural norms that are acceptable in those areas. We have a huge recruiting problem within the military coming the coast and to a degree in which some, reportedly, high schools don't let recruiters come in.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

And we're all about that. We've been on it. And that's tomorrow.

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Yes, yes. And so, I won't take over or try to steal the thunder from tomorrow's hearing, but yes. You're going to see that same type of demographic coming in from the military over to



civil service, and that's the biggest challenge. And that's where there's a national level conversation that needs to take place on propensity to serve, and why it's good to serve your country in any capacity.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you.

I'm going to skip over quickly to Mr. Hunt. How does academia in college public service academies or just colleges and universities, how can they help ensure that the workforce looks like America?

Mr. Brett Hunt

By in large, especially if you take in the community college population, the transfer population at a given university, it's by in large a reflection of the state. And in the state of Arizona, Arizona State University, that is our goal. It is to reflect the state of Arizona. So, if each unit, let's just say the Public Service Academy, is reflecting that within their state, we can get in the direction of solving for this problem. There's no question, and, again, your information on the peer review data that doesn't endorse that the more diverse we are, the stronger we are as a unit, as a nation, *et cetera*. And so, if each of those universities, which state universities by in large do, reflect the diversity of their given state, I think we get in the direction of solving for this problem.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you.

Ms. Holden, how does the federal government deal with it?



Ms. Kimberly Holden

I think that the requests that we get from agencies, I mean, of course, as Ms. Bryant said, 31 percent of the federal sector is veterans. But what we do find, because of the demographics and where we see a large number of veterans coming from, the agency is filled but there's a lack of diversity with regard to diversity of thought, as well as the makeup of the veterans that are coming into the workforce. A lot of agencies will come to us and make a request for direct-hire authority because they know that, of course, that does not require them to hire veterans because they're looking for diverse candidates and not necessarily the skills base but the people that can bring in different sets of values and also different sets of diversity of thought. Because there's some workforces that all look alike, walk alike, and talk alike, and so they are looking for other ways to be able to enhance diversity and continuing to go out to colleges and universities, to the Hispanic serving institutions of the minorities, serving institutions, to see if they can recruit from those ranks to bring the type of diversity that they need in their organization. So, I think that over all you will see that there is an issue. Because we have so many Service Members that are going back to school, getting degrees, and transitioning into the federal service, I think that you will see from research that there is an issue, especially with the area of diversity of thought and making sure that they have a widely diverse population.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you. I appreciate you adding that element to refer to experience.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Well, we have some time for a second round for our panel to take advantage of the expertise of our panelists, so thank you for that.



I would like to, Max, bring you into a conversation, as Ms. Bryant gave us a good soundbite this morning when she said that people don't leave bad jobs; they leave bad bosses, an admonishment to bosses out there. And you also said that within 2 years a substantial amount of the federal workforce changes through attrition. Do you agree with that? What kind of recommendations would you have? I mean, part of it is if they run this gauntlet and actually get into this federal service, and then if there is this attrition issue; some natural, some perhaps a kind of training or sensitivity or that might lead people to leave; do you have some reflections on that?

Mr. Max Stier

Absolutely. I always have reflections. On that particular question though, to be very clear, if half the attrition that takes place occurs within the first 2 years, the government by in large has a lower attrition rate than other organizations, and certainly large organizations outside of the public sector. No doubt I think that's exactly spot on. People leave their bosses; they don't leave the organization. And I think one of the very important tools that we have in the federal government is the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. And so, we have the voice of the employee. We have data that you can take down to, essentially, every equivalent of the top, you know, senior executive service person. It's not used as much as it ought to be as a management tool. And what the data will tell you is that, by in large, the federal government is a remarkable institution in the mission commitment of the people that are there. And so, 95 to 96 percent across the board will say they'll go the extra mile to get the job done, and that's going to be a good 14 plus points above what you'd see in the private sector. But on most everything else, you are not seeing numbers that are better than the private sector, and it's largely around leadership. The most important factor where the government underperforms and is providing its workforce with great leaders who are going to enable those people to do what they want to do, which is to serve the public.

And so how do we change this? First of all, we use the data, and we make sure, again, back to the transparency point, my view is you should be holding the senior leaders accountable



for what that data says. And that would be a very powerful driver in terms of ensuring that you have the right focus of leaders on providing opportunities for their workforce to get good work done. And you need to invest more. I take your point that no organization is terrific. I will tell you that speaking in broad generalizations that the military just invests more in leadership development. They see that in career progression, and, you know, you get good and bad in both places. But I think as a model, one of my favorite examples is when General Powell went over to the state department, you saw a very big change in their employee engagement numbers, and he began by investing in training and development of the workforce. So to the extent that you can press for that kind of investment in leadership development that you can press for management and measurement tools that hold leaders accountable for those kinds of investments and payoffs, I think that kind of stuff will turn the ship around more than anything else. I think that that's actually where the game's at.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Ms. Simon, do you have any reflection on that?

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

I think that the importance of high-quality managers who are trained to utilize all the flexibilities they have and who, in our case, understand the collective bargaining agreement goes a long, long way toward making a workplace where conflict, which is inevitable, can be resolved in a constructive way. And I know I sound like a broken record, but that's what's under attack right now. Without the collective bargaining agreement, when conflict arises there's only one option; for the employee to leave. When you have a collective bargaining agreement that has a process for a constructive resolution of agreements, then you have an opportunity not to lose your investment in employees who've trained, who've been part of the organization, and you can move forward. But right now, it's, "You're fired." Just like their boss became famous for that phrase that seems to be the management philosophy that we currently have with this administration; my way or the highway. That's certainly not a kind of management philosophy



that is going to produce high-morale, high-productivity, any kind of ability to retain the highest quality employees.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

I just have a little time left.

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Sure. I just want to clarify my point. It's that when I've been talking about talent, particularly within the military, the military knows they have a problem with talent management. And that's not so much leadership development. That's not ROTC. We're a leadership factory when it comes to that, but it's a matter of talent management once you go beyond the entry level and you get to the mid-career level. And I'll be very frank, when you're someone like me, both in the military and at the Defense Intelligence Agency at the Pentagon, I left when I saw, well, I don't really see a pathway for me to continue to advance in a true meritocracy. And that's why you have an attrition rate, because you have people who are highly talented; I'm not being conceited in saying that, I'm speaking more broadly; but I'm saying that you have people who see, "I have a career path. I could be someone who could be a senior executive. I could be someone who could be going further beyond." But because of the inertia, in the cultural inertia, I should say, that's spoke of in the military and also in the civil service, that's where you see people leave. It's because there's a bottleneck of talent management, and only the few are able to crack through that in order to be able to become part of what they feel is a true meritocracy.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you.

Vice Chair Wada.



The Honorable Debra Wada

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

When we've gone across country, we've heard from young Americans, and, obviously, the ones that are propensed that have been exposed to service in general, obviously, have the wherewithal, the information from their parents, their immediate family members, to be able to navigate the system. What we've heard from a lot of young Americans who have an interest because they do want to do something that solves a problem and they see the problems that this country is facing and yet they come to USA Jobs or they go to whatever agency that is closest to them and they try to navigate a system that they don't understand. That is not responsive. That's not transparent, and from what I'm hearing though is we've done these fixes where we think we've made a problem. So where is the disconnect? I'm trying to figure out where should we focus our attention to fix where this disconnect is between where the general public believes we are and where we as institutions believe we are? And I open this up for anybody on this panel to take a shot at it.

Ms. Holden?

Ms. Kimberly Holden

Yes, okay. Thank you for your question, and it is one of the biggest challenges that we see. From OPM's standpoint, we are out on the road educating, talking to students, talking to universities, working with career counselors to help them understand that there's a benefit for their students to come into the public sector. We want the talent. We need the talent just to make sure that we have the workforce for the future. I think the disconnect is also on some of the sides of the agencies. We have several agencies that do a phenomenal job that actually have people placed on campuses to talk to young people to help them understand the benefits of coming to their agency, but not all agencies are funded or resourced in the same way. And so not all agencies have the ability to have separate recruitment teams that do nothing but go out and talk



about the brand of the agency, the mission of the agency, and actually to go out and recruit and do the outreach for themselves. They rely heavily on either USA Jobs, or they rely heavily on their internal agency websites to be able to take the place of actually going out and having a voice in the community.

When I worked for the Food and Drug Administration, the FDA is in every single state. We always promoted that we were in every single community and making sure that we had the actual employees and workers out talking to colleges and doing the recruitment was very effective. And I think that that's the one thing that's missing OPM can do, what we can do from a global standpoint, but there's also making sure that we have many more agencies out there with us making sure that we can promote the impact that being in public service brings to any community and to any person.

The Honorable Debra Wada

But does that mean that we need to look then at the structure of how, particularly at the entry level, how we structure how agencies recruit individuals, so that as a whole government approach as opposed to relying on individual agencies based on their resources?

Ms. Kimberly Holden

Well I think, Ma'am, that we have given agencies a pathway through the Pathways program. We've given them vehicles in which to hire entry-level talent. As with any program, there are challenges with that program. We have done a lot of work to make improvements to allow agencies to bring entry-level talent in. There is a wholesale mechanism for agencies to bring in talent, it's just a matter of each agency being able to do their work or just plain determining where they want their talent to come from. And if you have 3 GS-15 positions or 13 positions that become vacant, do you necessarily need to bring in that GS-13 or GS-15? Think about bringing in entry-level talent and do some workforce planning and start growing your



talent internally. And those are some of the things that agencies have the ability to do and they're delegated to do that and it's not necessarily incumbent upon OPM to do that for them.

The Honorable Debra Wada

I know that I only have a little time left. But I'm trying to drill down into this problem, because we hear it everywhere, we go across this country, and it has not changed. So even in my previous job, the Pathways program, whether it is true or not, is there a data by agencies that we can point to that we can put on a website that has some transparency to the American public of what is really going on, so that we might be able to break down some of these; whether it's myth, whether, what they say, that there's always a grain of truth in every stereotype? How do we break this down so that people understand what truly is going on? Does the government collect that data that we can share?

Ms. Kimberly Holden

We do have data that we collect annually on the use of the Pathways program. OPM has also done a study of the Pathways program. I believe it was 2016, OPM actually did a study of the use of the Pathways program and to highlight some of the best practices of agencies that are used in the program and using it well. I have to say that I believe that over the past few years, funding has probably been an issue, as well as just the government shutdown has also impacted some agencies' ability to bring in interns and bring in entry-level talent. There are any number of factors as to why agencies are not using that program. I noticed that the data shows that the numbers of interns that are being hired has significantly decreased, not only in the internship and recent grads program, but also the PMF program. We've noticed that all of those programs are decreasing for some reason, and until the peel back the onion and figure out what the actual issues are and probably do some additional studying to look at the data, we really need to be able to figure out what the issues are and why agencies are not using those programs effectively.



Ms. Melissa Bryant

Very quickly?

The Honorable Mark Gearan

I see some pent-up demand here, and I see the red light. But it's a very good conversation, so do you want to continue into your third round of questions right now, Debra? I'll reset the time, and this is effectively your third round? It's kind of cheating, but we're allowed.

Let's keep this going. So, we'll redo the time.

The Honorable Debra Wada

My third round.

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Okay, very quickly, I one hundred percent agree with Ms. Holden in that the sequestration and shutdowns have been problematic. There's definitely been a burden that DOD and VA especially felt for bringing on new talent. On the VA side, it's why advocacy groups like IAVA and others fought really hard to at least end the shutdown of 2013, which I was a govie still at that time and lived through, and, you know, furloughing employees but then also continuing to operate under the budget caps and sequestration is still harming your top agencies that are impacted, or at least have veterans that are coming in as recruiters. But to your point, again, I'll go back to talent management is really the problem, and for a lot of veterans, we're not coming in necessarily as entry level. We're coming in as mid-career. And so if you're coming in as mid-career; and many of us come in competitively, even though we advocate for non-competitive means and for veterans' preferences, things like that; for your folks who have a



higher level of experience and are coming in at a higher level, they need to know that they're not going to be stuck there. They're not going to be stuck between 11 and 13. They need to know that there's opportunities to be part of management and to be a change within the system.

That's why the problem solvers idea that Mr. Hunt has brought to the table that's so important. And that's a part of the problem solving when you feel like, "I can't change this system. I can't do anything to bring forth innovative ideas in order to move things forward." And so in order to address that publicly, there's some agencies that have had best practices with rank in place, in which they're evaluating you as an individual and not necessarily you applying for a job for promotion, where you are assessed as you are now qualified to move to 14. You are now qualified to move to GS-15, but then at that point, you then go and find the position within the agency in order to do that. So, we need greater ease of being able to move to both lateral and promotions and showing that pathway from mid-level to the senior level, because that's where we're seeing the attrition and that's where you see it across the board.

Mr. Brett Hunt

I would just add to this, and maybe it's repetitive, but increasing the number of on-ramps to public service, to federal service is critical. We've talked about the internships. We've talked about the different fellowship programs. The larger number of those that exist within each of these organizations, the more we're going to be able to acquaint folks who wouldn't otherwise have exposure to the public sector, to these organizations. Another model that I think is incredibly effective is the diplomatic residence program through the U.S. Department of State, where there's actually former either ambassadors or in charge of affairs who are on the ground and have an appointment at the university for a period of time. They're not only there to provide academic support and topical support to the unit, but also to recruit foreign service officers, as well as for other components of the U.S. State Department. I know not every agency -- I'm not naïve; I know not every agency can make that type of commitment, but something along those lines, because for a university, having somebody come along side you and be an asset to the



organization really compels the university to be a lot more engaged in focusing folks on careers in those areas.

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

I would like to address this. Although several of the people here have made reference to sequestration and government shutdowns, I would add to that the hiring freeze at the beginning of the Trump administration. Politics in general seems to be the elephant in this room, and at the Department of Veterans Affairs in particular, there have been about fifty thousand vacancies now for going on three years; unfilled vacancies. And it's not that they can't hire people, but there is another overriding policy going on, which is to gradually rather than immediately dismantle the Department of Veterans Affairs and privatize the Department of Veterans Affairs. And the Mission Act has now, under the authority of the Mission Act, the department has issued access standards that pretty much let anybody who can claim traffic jams in their general area permission to use the private sector for healthcare. And it's not just really permission, because there isn't going to be adequate staff within VA medical facilities; they'll have to go outside and to the private sector. And you've got a vicious cycle of understaffing, un-staffing, and eliminating the capacity of the VA. So, they've got these authorized FTEs that they're not filling, about fifty thousand, which in itself could alleviate all these wait times for appointments but they're not going to do it because there's a policy going on of privatization.

The VA is the worst-case scenario, but there are a number of agencies that are currently not popular politically; the Environmental Protection Agency, the Interior Department, the Department of Energy. A lot of these agencies right now whose missions are not particularly supported by the current administration are not hiring deliberately, because they don't want people in positions to carry out the mission of an agency that they object to. That can't be underestimated.



The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you.

I see the light is red. I'm sure Commissioner Barney is generous with his time. I don't know if we should go into the fourth round. So, let me recognize Commissioner Barney.

Mr. Steve Barney

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, but this is such an important issue, and I wondered, Mr. Stier, would you like to comment? I'd like to really continue this discussion; it's really important to us. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Max Stier

You're very generous, and I'll try to be very quick. I want to come back to Commissioner Skelly's point about the importance of diversity, which I fully concur with. We're lacking generational diversity in the government, and that's fundamental to the health of the government right now and for the future. I also think it presents challenges in the ability to actually recruit and hold talent when you don't have a critical mass of young people in many organizations. Many of the recruiting issues that take place are really about a preponderance to focusing on prior experience rather than capability, and I think that's a cultural issue that will have to be addressed.

Commissioner Wada, you also raised a question about what could be done government wide. I think that was a very important question. There are tools out there. There's something called a Competitive Services Act, which permits agencies to actually share a search. I think there are opportunities in high-demand talent areas, like cyber talent, which ought to be viewed collectively, and that would improve the experience. But to me, the most fundamental insight that you had to offer is that there is this disconnect, and what we're losing sight of is the



customer. By in large in the government, I think that move toward better customer focus is going to be vital to the health of the institution. It senses that customer from the perspective of the talent market. We need that data to be readily available. We need leaders in government to be held accountable for what the customer perspective is on whether they can come into the jobs more easily and want to stay. And so that's something that I'd like your notion about; in my view, I'd call it something like a scorecard that's associated with leaders rather than organizations, because at the end of the day, there's got to be a person that's held accountable and responsible. And they have to be a senior level and they have to be not the HR function, but they have to be actually the executive function.

Mr. Steve Barney

Thank you.

With the other key issue that we've been talking about here, and I know that some of my other colleagues will want to talk on, is this whole issue with the Veterans Departments. Ms. Simon, in your earlier testimony, you described, I think articulated very well, the fact that there are other issues that are out there where people in groups would advocate for other types of preferences. We need to avoid, of course, a government where everything, every hiring decision is based on preference, because then we have no preferences at all. So I wonder if you could help us to understand how, at the policy making level, how should our nation balance the importance of recognizing the contribution of honorable service by people who serve and are veterans with the need to be able to bring in generations, new generations of people in the workforce who can contribute to the diversity?

Mr. Stier, could you pick up with that one for us?

Mr. Max Stier

I'd be happy to. I think that there's a clear, important public policy perspective that our country has gotten behind, which is the importance of supporting our veterans, and that



employment in the federal government is a critical way of demonstrating that support. I think the issue comes down to three different key points.

The first, as a practical matter, the challenge from an operations perspective has two parts to it, and that is that oftentimes the application, not the existence, but the application of veterans' preference causes a process difficulty, meaning that it becomes much more difficult for the hiring process to happen in a speedy and effective fashion. It doesn't need to be, but I think that's where things get tripped up.

The second piece comes back, the assessment question, which is oftentimes the assessment processes are bad such that hiring managers are given a veteran, there's nothing bad about them being a veteran, but they are not qualified actually for the job. And what you see then are asserts that are being thrown back in, not because someone's a veteran, but because they're not actually getting the talent that they think they need to get the job done. So, I think we have to go at the problems there, which are the process difficulties as well as the assessment parts.

And then the third element, which has already been flagged, which I think is important and the one you've raised here, is the balance issue; to recognize that there are balances and you do see differences in the veteran population from other things. So one example of that is yes, women are one of the largest groups of increases amongst veterans, but it's still the case they're not as large as men and, by in large, when you see more veteran hiring, you sometimes see that gender difference becoming problematic in terms of diversity in the federal government. So, keeping an eye on that, understanding the data, some of the things that I think we need to move towards in the government is less focus on front and process and more focus on backend accountability. We try to prevent all risk and problem from happening on the front end, and that creates, oftentimes, more harm and damage than anything else that the original problem it was intended to stop. But you can get at it by ensuring that people are addressed on the backend around accountability.



Mr. Steve Barney

Great.

I notice my time is about to expire. I know other colleagues would like very much to look into this, so I'm going to yield back.

I actually yield back no time.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Noted.

Mr. Allard?

Mr. Edward Allard

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This question is really for Ms. Holden and Mr. Stagmier.

Mr. Max Stier

It's, "Stier," but that's okay. My kids call me worse, so it's okay.

Mr. Edward Allard

Stier, I'm sorry. I won't get into what my kids call me.

As we've traveled, we've found that the application process to USA Jobs is extremely long, very tedious, and oftentimes people just absolutely give up. What recommendation do you have that we may be able to share as a commission that would improve this process? Because it's



a death nail. If you can't get in the front door, then how in the world can you apply for a job with the federal service?

Ms. Kimberly Holden

Thank you for your question. I think over the years, OPM has made significant strides on streamlining USA Jobs, making it more understandable for applicants. Our 2010 hiring reform effort was really geared toward applicants, making it easier for them to apply, not having to address the long essay questions, and then also being able to submit a streamline resume. And we're still moving in that direction. We're creating hiring paths so that if you're a military spouse, you can simply click on military spouse, and then jobs will populate so that you understand that these are the opportunities that are available to you. It's not perfect by any means, but I think it is dramatically better. But I think that what will help address the issue and what we have found is that people don't -- again, it gets back to providing information to help people actually understand the hiring process. USA Jobs is the face, so when I'm entering looking for a position, I go into USA Jobs. But behind that are the other talent acquisition systems, which are not all alike. As much as possible, OPM works with each one of them to help standardize so that the experience is the same from one applicant to the other or from one system to the other. But another thing is making sure that, you know, educating the public on the actual process; making sure that agencies take their responsibility with notifying the applicants. The one biggest complaint that we hear in addition to the time that it takes is, "I've completed a hundred applications, and I hear nothing," and so, "My application has gone into a black hole, and I may hear something 6 months, maybe a year later to say that I was found qualified, but I was not selected. And I may have been referred to the selecting officials." So OPM continually reinforces to agencies their requirement, based on the 2010 hiring reform presidential memorandum that was issued under the previous administration, they're responsible for notifying applicants. We understand that not all private sector companies notify their applicants, nor do they have a responsibility to, but we know we have required our agencies to do that. So we continue to enforce that, but I think understanding the process from an applicant perspective, making sure that there's enough information, enough means for an applicant to be able to reach



out to an agency and understand, “What do you need from me in order for me to apply for this position? What are you looking for?” And I think that that’s where sometimes things fall short is the availability of people to be able to explain what the hiring process is all about. Our system, our website is very detailed. It goes into what to do. There are videos. There are webinars that applicants can lean on or can refer to, to help walk them through the process. But again, our efforts to continue to streamline have not ended, because we also collect feedback from applicants who abandon the process, because they see it as too complicated. So, we continue to use that feedback to make improvements to our system.

Mr. Edward Allard

Okay, thank you.

Mr. Stier?

Mr. Max Stier

Great. And I did want to alert you to the fact that I am from Iowa, so west of the Mississippi as well, here. So, I do think this is a really important question, and Kim has really, I think, addressed the issues around the actual USA Jobs website. I think, fundamentally, we have to normalize our process. We have a set of expectations that the larger private market is setting, and we have to make sure that the federal government, understanding it has some specific difference constraints, has to get as close to providing best-in-class experience that now talent expect from the private sector. And part of it begins, again, back with the student internship piece, because you don’t have to go through all that process. You actually know somebody who could help you understand the system.

Kim, I think, is a hundred percent right that a lot of this has to do with the individual agency responsibility in the experience that people felt. And I think maybe, again, back to your thought, which is can we create that scorecard on agencies that actually looks at what that experience is like. Clearly one of the things is not simply are you told that you did or did not get



the job, but are you told where you are in the process? I mean, that uncertainty is something that is much more difficult for people to deal with. They'll take longer time periods if they understand how long it's actually going to be. But I think it's connecting that customer service data to accountable individuals that are of seniority and individual agencies, creating competition amongst agencies in terms of creating best experience and benchmarking that against best in class and the private sector and then creating alternative pathways that, you know, student interns, *et cetera* and then asking for from universities and other institutions on the outside additional support. Because it's certainly where we are, today. It requires that support from the outside to be able to make your way through the system effectively.

Mr. Edward Allard

Okay, thank you very much, and I lived in Quad City for 3 years.

Mr. Max Stier

There you go.

Mr. Edward Allard

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Great. Thank you, Commissioner.

Commissioner James.



Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to continue with my colleagues' discussion of noncompetitive preference, whether it be veterans' preference. We also have had recommendations that we include other groups that would be given hiring preference; folks that have completed federal internships or have worked in some of the national service programs. So, I don't want to focus solely on the veterans' preference, although that is the one that I think most people know about. I know there's a recommendation to extend the time that veterans' preference can be used to 10 years instead of 2 years; Ms. Bryant, you mentioned that. And I certainly appreciate your rationale for that, so that if somebody does want to use their GI Bill, then they have some time afterwards to be able to explore federal service.

However, as we've traveled around the country, and we've talked to both federal employees or people who are interested in becoming federal employees, one of the consistent themes that we've heard; and my colleagues have mentioned this before; is if you're not a veteran, you essentially can't get into the federal government as a new individual who wants to come into the government. So, one of the suggestions that we've heard from folks in some of the places across the country is that individuals who have a preference, who are afforded the opportunity of having a preference, should only be allowed to use it once; so for the initial job application. And then once they're in the federal government, they lose that opportunity to use it again.

So, my question, and I'll ask all of you. I would like everyone's perspective on this. If there was a recommendation to extend the period of time that veterans' preference can be used or a noncompetitive preference can be used after coming out of whatever it was that then gives them that opportunity, but only once, what are your views on that? I'll start with Ms. Bryant on that end of the table.



Ms. Melissa Bryant

Sure. I'm going to try to say, succinctly, my answer to that is I think that that's a reasonable solution. It shouldn't be something that's used over and over again. And this is my personal opinion, not the view of IAVA, but in the matter of where if you're coming into the system, you don't want to have barriers to coming into the system, especially as a veteran where you can see transition being more of a natural fit for you in certain areas of the civil service. So, it's fair to then say that then it's a one-time use, and that would be appropriate for bringing people in.

But I want to also very quickly address an underlying cultural issue that we've talked about throughout this panel that I think will eliminate some of the issues that you have and that gets after it. Just as we see in the military after 18 years of war that they're failing to meet recruiting rates in some of the services and having to fudge the math a little bit to show when they are making recruiting quotas, what we're also seeing the same for the new generations coming into federal service is that, again, I know I sound probably like a broken record at this point; it's not about getting in. It's about what do you do after that, and the talent management is the problem. It's a problem in the military. It's a problem in civil service. You need to be able to be a person who's in their mid-thirties to forties, who can see a pathway to senior management. And that's really where we're lacking right now. It's because of poor morale across many agencies. It's because of the hiring freezes, the pay freezes that federal workers endured for 3 years under the previous administration. It's due to political influence. And I concur with a lot of the statements that are happening within the VA that Ms. Simon already spoke to, particularly with the dearth of mental health employees within the VA, but that's also a microcosm of what's happening across the country wide. And that is of those fifty thousand vacancies, forty-nine thousand to be exact, about thirty thousand of them are related to mental health, behavioral health. You don't have that many providers within the country. So that's a part of the problem. It's that you're not pulling in people, young people, into the jobs we need into this future, in our future society. And knowing that mental health is one of those areas across the board that's



something where you can influence recruiting at a much lower level in bringing people in. But there's a lot of this that has to do with harmful policy that starts in the military, transitions over to the public sector, and it's a reason for why people either are reticent to join, or don't stay.

And then lastly, also, back to your point, Ms. James, of people who feel as though they can't get in, from the military perspective, it's because they see -- and again, I know derisively it's a term, "no Colonel left behind," but that's because if you are senior enlisted if you are junior officer but there's an O-5 or O-6 who's retiring and they want to just take off the uniform and go into the same job, they get the preference before you do. That's a problem.

Ms. Jeanette James

Mr. Chairman, could I use my round three?

The Honorable Mark Gearan

We have invoked a lot of exemptions on time. If we could reset the time, we'll begin your third round during the second round.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

Ms. Holden?

Ms. Kimberly Holden

Yes, and thank you for your question. This is a question that OPM gets all the time. We can tell from the numbers of applicants that have accounts on USA Jobs, which is over twenty-one million, that there's truly an interest of a wide variety of people within the population who



want to come into federal service. With regard to veterans' preference, I believe that there has been some legislation proposed by DOD under one of the NDAA's to allow what they refer to as one bite of the apple, and that if you are a veteran and you have preference and you use that preference to get into the federal service, once you're in a career or career-conditional position, then you're not allowed to use your preference anymore. And then that opens up the door to allow other persons to come into the government. That is something any recommendation that the commission would make with regard to easing how veterans' preference is used, of course, would take changes in law, but I think that OPM would be open to standing by to assist and consider any other recommendations. But we know that this is an issue, and we are open to assisting.

Ms. Jeanette James

Mr. Hunt?

Mr. Brett Hunt

I'll just speak briefly. I'll take off my ASU hat and put on my veteran hat, and I think it's perfectly fair. I think the main time that a veteran needs to utilize that veterans' preference in order to acquire a job in the federal government is upon transition, as Ms. Bryant was talking about. I think that's a perfectly fair thing, and I think that most veterans would, you know, kind of see it in that same perspective.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

Ms. Simon?



Ms. Jacqueline Simon

We aren't a veteran service organization, but a third of our membership are veterans. I think that they would not be very happy about that idea, and I base that on how much opposition there is to a policy that was adopted in an NDAA a couple of years ago, 3 years ago, I guess, that reduced the importance of veterans' status in the context of RIF. Its elevated performance ratings and lowered the importance of being a veteran or length of service. It's something that's very controversial.

The only thing I would really like to say to your question is that veterans' preference is pretty much the only preference in federal hiring that is recognized as a preference. It's great that we're having this conversation, because I don't think that most people recognize the Pathways program, its predecessor, the president's Management Intern Program that was found by a court to be in violation of veterans' preference; there's so many of these kinds of these pipeline things that exclude and go against the notion of open competition. Only veterans' preference gets acknowledged as a preference and resented for that reason. So, I would think very carefully about only focusing on veterans' preference as something that needs to be reevaluated while you expand all kinds of other effective preferences.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

Mr. Stier?

Mr. Max Stier

Thank you very much. Again, I think for most of the panel, the notion of a single bite of the apple is one that seems a reasonable balance given the other things we've talked about, and we would hold the same here at the partnership. What I would also point out very quickly; I had



a colleague here, an amazing gentlemen who knew the system better than anyone else I've ever seen, and he would always stop me whenever I talked about intern conversion as being noncompetitive and say, "No, it's not that it's not competitive. It's actually even better rules on competition, because you actually can assess these people way better than any test or interview could possible give you. And that is you have an opportunity to work with them." So, the real issue on the intern conversion isn't that you're giving someone a preference. What you're doing is offering the agency that they might go to an opportunity to assess them in a much deeper way than any other tool can provide, and you're likely also to get a broader set of talent willing to take that gamble of what a summer internship or an in-year internship might look like to check out public service. So again, I think these are different kinds of issues, and if anything, the opportunity to get better assessment is fundamental in this process.

Ms. Jeanette James

Thank you.

I yield back the rest of my round three.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Commissioner Khazei.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Thank you. I want to build on the conversation about getting more people, especially younger people, into federal service. We are, for the first time, the Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, which is very exciting that Congress decided, "Well, let's sit all three of these under one umbrella." So, the question is, and this is for Max and Ms. Bryant and Mr. Hunt and if all of you want to comment; how and how much should the federal government be encouraging this sort of cross-sector service. So, for example, it's great that we have veterans going into federal service, and we had some great testimony about how to improve that, how to



make it better. We have a preference for Peace Corps alumni and VISTA alumni, but other AmeriCorps alumni don't have that. Should they have that? We've heard from folks at FEMA Corps, that FEMA Corps was originally designed to get young people, you know, to expand national service opportunities, but one of the unanticipated benefits has been that then a lot of those folks who do that year in FEMA Corps then end up joining FEMA, they're younger. They're more diverse. So, I guess the question is, what could, and should we be doing to encourage more cross-stream -- and also federal government employees may want to go and do a term of national service after their federal service.

So, what could we be doing, what ideas to encourage sort of this cross-sector, especially getting young people who've done service period into federal service. I guess we'll start with Ms. Bryant and then go to Max and then, Ms. Simon and Ms. Holden, if you want to comment as well.

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Sure. I think that there was a really great initiative that was started by General McChrystal called Service Year Alliance. And so in getting young people to, after high school, using that gap year and then going into some service in some capacity, whether it's with Peace Corps, Teach For America, *et cetera*, those likely were successful pipelines and I'm afraid I don't have that data but I could always reach back to colleagues there and point out how successful it's been. But I know that their goal is to get at least one million high school graduates into a service program, and then that can beget further federal service.

The other thing has to do with, again, it has to do with culture and policy of what you need to remedy in order to allow for more service. Some things you just can't fix. For example, I was an intelligence officer. I can't go to Peace Corps, and that's something that I would have loved to do. But that's something that you -- you're barred from doing that. But in terms of advocating for the cross-governmental service, if you will; the cross-federal service is very much complimentary to leveraging what we've learned within the military, taking those lessons



learned. I will say to Ms. Simon's point that resentment is real of veterans coming in, especially vis-à-vis preference, and that's because we're only one percent of the country now. That's because we have a country that's disconnected after 18 years of war who just don't even know what's still happening. So that's the problem in our greater American society of when you think that we're a monolithic group and that we're all coming in with the same ways of thinking. And when you want to increase that diversity, and to Mr. Stier's point of women being the fastest growing demographic but still not being reflected in the applicant pool that's because historically there have been barriers to women and minorities and especially if you happened to be a woman minority, then there are barriers to advancement in the military. And so, you're going to face barriers to advancement within the federal government as well if you didn't achieve the same ranks as white, male counterparts did within the government service.

Mr. Max Stier

Kudos to you for all the work you've done with service here and everything around that. It's phenomenal, and I think, to your point, I think it's terrific that this commission is looking at this not in silos, but as a collective set of opportunities. And there are a lot, obviously, of things that could and should be done. And I think it's even more important in today's world, where no sector owns all the experience and knowledge that it needs, and all sectors actually need to work together to be able to deal with our most pressing problems. So, I think one of the challenges we honestly have now in the federal government itself is that there's very little mobility. People are very insular in terms of their experience. They rarely do have cross-sector experience. An example, we haven't talked about this, but at the leadership ranks in government 92 percent of the SES come from within government. Only eight percent of them actually move agencies once they become SES members. And so, they're not actually exposed to either cross-sector or even cross-governmental capabilities, relationships, problem-solving techniques, *et cetera*.

So, we need to see much, much more of that if we're going to have a more robust government, and it's something that talent wants. So I think creating opportunities like the



passport program we talked about, where you can come out of government, do something, skill yourself up, and come back in at the level that you deserve rather than the level that you left would be one example. In my view, we should actually have requirements for people who are going to be coming to the SES that they actually have to have had experience in multi-sectors, multi-levels, or government or multiple agencies, and we should be promoting in a positive way the ability for young people to come in for shorter tours of duty. Some people may want to stay, but I think knowing that there is a fellowship opportunity, where they're treated very well, would be a good way of doing it. That's what we're trying to do in our cyber-talent initiative.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Thank you. And how do you feel about expanding what Peace Corps and Vista now have, that noncompetitive hiring, to other AmeriCorps alumni?

Mr. Max Stier

I honestly think that would be a good thing to do. Again, my view is that you have an opportunity to be able to assess these people in a different way, because they've actually demonstrated, in a service environment, capabilities. Obviously, managers still need to make good choices about who they're actually hiring, whether it's direct hire or not. So, I think it's still the case that even though Peace Corps, you know, has the preference that a lot of agencies don't even know about it, don't even use it, and we need to change that cultural norm as well.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Mr. Hunt?



Mr. Brett Hunt

So, one of the things that we've really tried to do with our work is to reimagine what we mean by public service. So, you know, when somebody says, "Thank you for your service," that that shouldn't be something that's solely for the military. That should be for anybody who's giving of themselves to something larger than themselves. Another focus that we've had is cross-sector collaborations. So, the six courses that our students take are in cross-sector collaboration. They get a certificate in cross-sector collaboration and leadership. And so, when we talk sectors, we're talking public, private, nonprofit, and in some cases the military sector. We're not necessarily talking about the FDA versus USDA versus Interior. And so what I think would be a benefit, and I'll leave it to smarter people than me like Kim to design what this would actually look like on the ground, but it's that somebody could envision for themselves a career where they could start in AmeriCorps, which would then lead to a job in a federal agency, which may then lead them to a foundation, a nonprofit, but then would not preclude them from, down the road, being qualified to come back into government service. Again, with that direction that I want to impact this in my life, and I'm going to do that in a cross-sector way that will touch various, again, public, private, nonprofit sectors.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Thank you.

I know, Mr. Chairman, that I'm a little over time, but if Ms. Simon or Ms. Holden want to comment.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

We will extend the allotted James extension.



Ms. Kimberly Holden

Thank for your question with regard to noncompetitive eligibility. I know that OPM and federal sector does value the experience that people gain through national service, and we do consider that a part of public service. Some efforts some years ago, with regard to expanding national service, we made sure that agencies understood that if you have applicants that have completed national service, then just like volunteer service that is something that can be used to qualify them for any position that they're applying for. So, we had a huge effort underway to train hiring managers, to train supervisors than when you see AmeriCorps or you see VISTA Corps, FEMA Corps on someone's resume that is true experience that they've gained. They've gained leadership values and leadership competencies and technical training that could be fitting and qualify them for entering public service. And so, we do value that.

With regard to extending noncompetitive eligibilities or expanding noncompetitive eligibilities, this question is posed to OPM many times, but our concern is also creating preferences for different groups versus making sure that there is fair and open competition across all sectors. But, again, we would be willing to review and consider any recommendations from this commission in that regard.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Thank you.

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

If we still have time, I have something I'd like to say. One of the biggest fights that we're in right now is defending federal employees' due process rights and collective bargaining rights. The more you have direct hiring and hiring based on preferences, you, in theory anyway, are not necessarily getting the most qualified candidate. You're getting the candidate, the employee, who, with a combination of the preference and their capabilities, got the job. And that in turn



gives rise to arguments for, well then, if it's going to be easier to hire, then it's going to have to be easier to fire. And it's harder to justify the due process rights that federal employees have to defend their jobs. Now people aren't only fired for poor performance or misconduct. Sometimes they're fired for bad reasons, and when you take away due process rights, then you take away the ability to defend the apolitical civil service, defend against corruption, defend against bad reasons for people being hired or fired. And that's why I would caution you all, before you start extending more preferences and expanding direct hire, which is already very expansive, think about that because as soon as you do that, you'll have managers screaming that we need to be able to get rid of them quickly because we had to hire damaged goods or people who only got the job through preference. And that's not our attitude, but that's the kind of thing we hear all the time.

Mr. Alan Khazei

Thank you.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Commissioner Kilgannon.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Ms. Bryant, I wanted to come back to the question of veterans' preferences. I can understand why it's being raised. When we're talking about this in the context of the duration with which a veteran can invoke the veterans' preference or after which they cannot, or the one bite at the apple; if those kinds of changes are going to be considered, should there be a caveat or accommodations for combat veterans, the wounded veterans, who are coming home with injuries that are of such a nature that it makes it difficult to get employment or stay employed? As you well know, many of those who have these combat injuries, it might be 5 or 10 years before they're at a point where they're able to get back into the workforce, or PTS-anxiety issues make



it difficult to commute to work on a crowded Metro. Should we be considering accommodations for them in this context if we go down that road?

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Absolutely. Those who have service-connected disabilities; going into federal service, being able to contribute to what they believe in and something greater than themselves that's the type of attitude that we bring into military service that veterans bring into civil service. And that's something where you should have consideration. Now I'll caveat that with saying with combat veteran, service-connected disabled, things like that, I don't have exact data on it, but you're not really remedying a problem there of extending to 10 years. And the reason why is because there's so many of us who are now combat veterans, and so many of us now who are service connected, me included. And so when you factor that in, your Venn diagram becomes a bit wider of your pool of applicants who are going to come in who would need that type of accommodation, but extending from 3 to 10 years will allow, at least, for the types of transitions that you're talking about. You have many wounded warriors who come back who are perfectly capable to serve but are not ready right at that point. And so, giving them time to, let's say, reenter within the civilian world, get themselves together and then coming over with, even if one bite at the apple, but having an extension and doing that. If there are extenuating circumstances for more than 10 years, I can only think of maybe a small percentage who would need more than a decade in order to be further acclimated into the civilian world, but there may be special exceptions there. And so, for that case, for that small percentage, then it might make sense to go beyond 10 years.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

And I assume that you would agree that employment is a part of that rehabilitation.



Ms. Melissa Bryant

Absolutely.

Mr. Tom Kilgannon

An important part, and you are more articulate on it than I am, if you want to explain that a little bit.

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Absolutely, and that's something I put within my written testimony as well. But, again, being a part of community, being a part of being able to work and still contribute to society that helps us in going against the broken vet narrative, which is so prevalent within our society and, unfortunately, probably contributes to resentment of veterans coming in because there're people who still think that this is Vietnam. There's still political influences. There's a lot that's going on of people who don't realize the burdens that we have born after nearly 20 years of war. And so, we're essentially considered not to be as effective or we're somehow battle damaged or in some other way not capable of doing the same jobs. And it's become a popular refrain to think of us as, you know, group thinkers and we're not bringing diversity of thought. But what you see in this generation that's come up post 9/11 is that there is a great diversity of thought. There is a great diversity of ideas, and part of the reason why you may leave military service may simply be because you wanted to be able to express that more. And I completely agree with the continuum of service throughout your career, probably as an exemplar of it, and that is going from military to civil service to nonprofit and then maybe going back to federal government, and that's something that you need to leave on the table in terms of veterans and seeing that continuum of service to the country.



Mr. Tom Kilgannon

I wanted to give Ms. Holden a chance, if you wanted to weigh in on the first part of the question, the service connected and accommodation for those.

Ms. Kimberly Holden

I think that from an OPM standpoint that we have hiring authorities in place specifically for service-connected or disabled veterans, which agencies utilize to a great extent. And I think that continuing to honor that type of preference for disabled veterans is something noble that we need to continue to do.

Ms. Jacqueline Simon

If I may, the VA Accountability Act, which was passed by Congress a few years ago, makes it easy to fire employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs. About 80 percent of the several thousand who have been fired under that law were service-connected disabled veterans in very low-level positions. So, there's very little accommodation for the special needs of that work population in, of all places, the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Ms. Melissa Bryant

And if I could, just to ducktail on your point, agree in terms of the statistics that she cited. We haven't seen as many higher managers leaving under the VA Accountability Act, and that's also a problem too. And so, I'd say in the case of the VA, it's particularly politicized when you're looking at these issues. I think you could view everything through that context. The VA right now is in the crosshairs of a major political fight that's happening right now, as Ms. Simon has articulated throughout this panel.



Mr. Tom Kilgannon

Thank you.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Commissioner Skelly.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair. I'd just like to say from this end of the table, the Wada-James exception looks like an entitlement.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

It's a preference, actually.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

I would like my piece of the pie. What I'd like to do is, you know, we're from the federal government, and we're to help. And we've been talking in depth to an incredibly informative level about the federal civil service, but when we go on the road, we're talking to people at the state, local, and even in tribal governments and organizations. So, I'd like to walk that dog just a little bit here, if I could with Mr. Stier, Ms. Bryant, and Mr. Hunt.

Mr. Stier, what's your perspective; what's the partnership's perspective on how these factors with regard to talent and propensity? How applicable are they at the lower levels of government in the nation? What's your appreciation?



Mr. Max Stier

So, my sense is that issues are largely the same. I think that there's some really interesting programming that I've seen on the nonprofit side of organizations trying to get leaders to go back to their communities and work in state and local government, which is terrific to see. I think that this comes back to a point that Alan was raising earlier about the opportunity to connect all those dots, which your question is driving us towards, and I think that we would benefit from more intergovernmental flow of talent. So much of the way the system actually works is not separate entities, but rather a need for all those various levels of government, as well as the nonprofit sector.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

When something really happens, they're all sitting right alongside one another.

Mr. Max Stier

Absolutely. Well, and when something happens certainly, absolutely, and disaster response is an example of that. But I think in point of fact we're actually doing work now on the West Coast. We've started a Partnership West, and it's really driven by this perspective that so much of what the federal government actually has to do is intergovernmental and work effectively with state and local government to address problems that are in a community. And, bluntly, there's not enough attention paid to that. So, we're working, as an example, with five federal agencies that are responsible for disaster preparedness and response, helping them to collaborate in themselves better together and with their colleagues from state and local government in the private sector. And at the end of the day, it's always about talent. It's always about relationships, people, learning capabilities together. And so, the more we can see flow of talent, the more mobility you have, I think you will actually create more capability and outcome for the public. So, I think this is the same set of issues. There are more opportunities for more



collaboration, and there ought to be, even in place, more effort to create relationship between the different levels of government, if that's answering your question.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

It does. Thank you.

Ms. Bryant, how are veterans doing from IAVA's perspective at other levels of government?

Ms. Melissa Bryant

Which levels of government are we referring to?

Ms. Shawn Skelly

State level, nonfederal.

Ms. Melissa Bryant

State level they're doing quite well, and what we see in our membership is that they do go into state and local, and in fact, our advocacy model then is exactly that; to go back into the community, whether it's through advocacies as a nonprofit or going to state and local that's absolutely a focus of IAVA, as well as the veterans community as a whole. You also have members in staff who've left from IAVA, but particularly are veteran transition managers who are masters-level case managers, social workers, *et cetera*, to where they're able to then go to the VA afterward and to serve in that capacity, particularly within behavioral health as I mentioned, where there is a need. But I completely agree with the comments made by several on the panel that continuous workflow of that interagency connectivity is vital to being able to show that both up and down between federal to the local level and then also across; build those relationships to



work towards a common goal. For example, right now we have a public health crisis with suicide, and it is exacerbated within the veteran community, where we lose 20 souls a day to suicide. And so, in understanding that problem, it's a whole-of-government, whole-of-community solution. Yes, it's VA's job primarily, and they're in charge of the taskforce to move quickly on it. But it's something where all of our advocacy groups, all of the nonprofits, all of the medical associations. Your American Psychological, Psychiatric Associations, all of these groups are now coming together to work with government in order to solve this problem of suicide. And with that, you're going to see these relationships in that community bubble continue to widen, and as an individual then, for veterans, you're able to then move within that space. And that's something that can create more opportunity for veterans coming into federal service.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you.

Mr. Hunt, your program, early days; you just graduated your first class. What's your appreciation as to are there any differences in getting people into, and the hunger for talent at the state and local level, especially since you're a state university?

Mr. Brett Hunt

Yes, thank you, Commissioner Skelly. So, I've got a couple different boxes to unwrap here. The first one being we run a veteran's program as part of the Public Service Academy. We identified a need, then we talked about how we can expand or retract based on needs. In our university, we identified that we needed a veteran's program within the organization. What we really talk about with our veterans while they're at the university is how can you be useful to your community. So, you served your country, you're here at the university getting your degree, advancing yourself; how can you then be useful to your community? And I think that gets to this idea of being able to move between federal service, nonprofit service, state-level service, county-



level service, running for the city council, right? This whole variety of ways that you can continue being a civic asset to your community to the nation. So, I think there's a tenor and tone component to that, a story telling component to that that could be really important specifically for veterans. Your service is not done, it just is transitioning to a different part of our society.

The second thing is we, again, really focus with our students at the undergraduate level on this idea of developing character-driven leaders with the courage to cross sectors, connect networks, and ignite action for the greater good. To unpack that, courage to cross sectors, that's really hard, right? If you're in the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, working with one of the nonprofits, the VSOs that's not a natural thing. We kind of are in our silos. I work for the state government. This is what I do. This is what I can't do. This is what I can do. But in the state of Arizona, they've done a really incredible job of passing information back and forth, of being able to be an asset to each other. So, I think, again, it comes to this idea of, one, having the mechanisms for that to be possible policy-wise within the organization, and then also this mindset, right? This mindset that I'm a VA employee. I can only work up and down within my organization, but rather this mindset that I can work left and right. And we really try to instill that in our students at the undergraduate level through exercises where they have to go through this and say, "Who's the stakeholder on homelessness in the private sector? Who's the stakeholder in the public sector? Who's the stakeholder in the nonprofit sector," and pull those different pieces together.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thanks. I'm going to quick follow up with you, sir. I believe you mentioned your place, early days again, but predominantly folks who are moving towards state and local work in your program so far; do you have any feel that those state and local governments are looking for people markedly different than at the federal level that those same factors apply with regard to talent?



Mr. Brett Hunt

That's a great question. I think, by in large, they are looking for the same talent. There are so many more on-ramps to state and local service for somebody on the ground in Tempe, Arizona or San Diego, California, *et cetera*. There are so many more on-ramps that that's the natural place for folks to go. The internships are there. The fellowships are there, and there's a direct pathway already established. So, I believe that's why that's happening. If there were more of those internships, if there were more internships with the Bureau of Land Management, which is a huge footprint in the state of Arizona, I think we would have more folks going into BLM and some of these other agencies, because there would be more on-ramps for them.

Ms. Shawn Skelly

Thank you.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you, Commissioner.

Any other last-minute questions from the commissioners?

Mr. Edward Allard

I do have one quickly if I may, Mr. Chairman.

It strikes me; I'm trying to make a marriage between Mr. Stier and Mr. Hunt and you, Ms. Holden; interns, you have an outstanding program. You have a track. We have OPM. Has there been any discussion between OPM and Arizona State University, a MoU or? I mean, it seems to be a possibility.



Ms. Kimberly Holden

So, we just met this morning. We have had minimal conversation, but I am intrigued by the type of program that he has established at Arizona State, and it's something that I think there are some agencies that establish similar types of programs, but from a corporate perspective, enterprise perspective from where OPM sits, these are the types of programs that we could certainly look into and advocate. We did have a similar type of partnership with Cal State Fullerton and a couple of the other Cal State colleges in California a few years ago. And agencies were interested in forming those types of partnerships and mainly to help provide an education and entry point of just interest for students to get them to understand that there is opportunity in the federal service. And so, we will definitely talk and be exchanging information.

Mr. Edward Allard

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Any other questions from the commissioners?

Mr. Steve Barney

Quick one, if I may. We've heard a great interest about the idea of permeability between like the private sector and government both for people who serve in the military as well as people in public service. Very short question; I'm going to go to you, Ms. Holden, on this one. Is there currently any authorities that allow for people who are in public service to actually leave a public service position to go into the military, I don't mean as a reservist being brought on active duty, but to actually go into the military for a period of time or to go into national service for a



period of time and be able to return to public service? And after your very short answer on whether there are authorities, I would say to Ms. Simon, if there was a kind of protection to allow people to do that for the purposes of expanding their careers, would that be a good thing for the federal workforce?

Ms. Kimberly Holden

There is. One of our legislative proposals is for the private-public partnership for the STEM community. It's an exchange; and exchange program that would allow person from the federal sector to go into the private sector and vice versa in order to exchange ideas, exchange knowledge and experience. So that is one of the proposals that is being floated right now.

Mr. Steve Barney

Right, but is that kind of authority currently in place that would allow people who are currently in the public service sector to go into national service or into military service and then return? I think the answer is no.

Ms. Kimberly Holden

The answer is no.

Mr. Steve Barney

So then I would, just very briefly to Ms. Simon, recognizing that people who have earned and have performed well in public service, if they were to do this, if they could have some sort of protections that allow them to reenter public service, would this be a good thing for the federal workforce?



Ms. Jacqueline Simon

Well, you're asking me if it would be a good thing for the federal workforce. I'll answer that I don't think it would be a good thing for the federal government. We have entertained these kinds of proposals for decades now. It's been proposed over and over and over again. We often refer to it as an opportunity to case the joint. What happens when these kinds of things are tried are that contractors come in and they see which parts of the federal operation are profitable and that they could take over. The agency would then divest itself, and the contractor could start earning some money off of it. We think government should be performed on a not-for-profit basis in house, and we're not really interested in facilitating outsourcing. And that's what, however well-intentioned that kind of thing is with the idea of, "Okay, I can learn something from you, and you can learn something from me," what it ends up being is an opportunity to see what are the juicy parts that can ben outsourced.

Mr. Steve Barney

Thank you.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Let me just close with a question to you, Max, perhaps. I guess my reflection as a college president for 18 years and in higher education talking to loads of students; they want to do this. They want to be able to go to the federal government and state and local, but the timing's all off. All of their contemporaries, particularly undergraduates, in the private sector have offers fall. Early spring, recruiters come to campus. We've heard how -- the paucity of federal. So, what do you say to them to inspire, or what would you observe to us? There's fundamentally a very different timing sequence, and it then leaves hopeful undergraduates in a position of waiting or whatever. And you hear it particularly and pointedly from first gen students, who would say, "Look, I've been advantaged by this educational opportunity, and the pressure now is to,



obviously, make a difference for my family, which has prepared me and formed me for this newly minted college degree.” So, what would you observe to them and to us?

Mr. Max Stier

Well, so I think your observation is spot-on. By in large, the federal government doesn’t recruit, and there are clear exceptions to this. You’ve got the Diplomatic Residence Program. Peace Corps has folks in a whole bunch of different ones.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

But it’s small.

Mr. Max Stier

Yeah, it’s small; exactly right. Absolutely right, but I want to be clear that there are corners of the government that do this right. But they are not operating with the best in class approaches that other organizations are doing, and therefore they lose out on talent that we all get hurt by. Your question though is to the talent itself. What do you communicate to them? My view is you communicate with the value of the job itself. There is no substitute for government service. You’re working for our most important institution, a core part of our democracy that has the imprimatur of the public and taxpayer resources behind it, and it’s all about solving our most difficult problems. There’s no bigger state, no more important stage to use your talents for the good of the world. So that’s the value proposition, and we know that the workforce today is incredibly mission committed. Those are the people that are actually coming to serve. We should not be in a world, however, that the talent has to go through all the hurdles that it currently does to actually get there.

And that is my hope for this operation, which is that you will make it better and you will come up with not only in the here and now set of recommendations and to see them through, but



we also need a government that is more agile. The world is changing faster. It seems trite to say it, but what we need is a government that is not racing to keep up with the past, and that's in many ways what we have right now. We need a government that can actually be agile and flexible and move to the future on a continuous basis. And that would be my argument for why there are risks to some of the exchanges we talk about, but we need to see more of that for that reason. We need a government that has the refreshed ideas. It no longer sets the norm across all sorts of different areas.

Anyway, the key point, I think, is they need to be introduced to it. My bigger worry is not so much that people have an informed decision that they've made that it's too difficult. I don't think most people even think about it at all. That's what our research has shown. And this is maybe jumping to your end piece, but my takeaway from this is the incredible experience you have all had talking to people across the country, and we need to make sure that that voice that you've heard is now part and parcel of the process that we use in government to get talent. To me, that is one of the more fundamental opportunities for the work you're doing.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Well, I thank you for that charge and benediction rolled into one and for your hospitality here. And certainly, to Ms. Simon, Mr. Hunt, Ms. Holden, and Ms. Bryant, we thank you for your prepared testimony and for this great conversation today. We officially dismiss this panel. We invite you, certainly, to take seats in the front row while we now turn to providing an opportunity for our public guests here to provide any comments.

The commission is committed to transparency and openness with the public. In keeping with these principles, the commission intends to provide the public with an opportunity to deliver public comments during our hearings. As a reminder, in order to provide the greatest opportunity



for as many participants to offer a comment as you would like, public comment is limited here to a two-minute period per person. As noted on our website, sign up for public comment took place between the opening of registration and the start of this hearing. When you signed up, you received a numbered ticket. To ensure fairness, tickets were randomly drawn. We will call out some ticket numbers at a time and ask that when your number is called you come forward and make a line behind the microphone right here in the center of the audience and provide your comment, and we will proceed in the ticket number orders. If time does not permit, and I think certainly it will, for you to offer your oral comment, we encourage any members of the public to submit your written comments to our website, which is www.inspire2serve.gov, and that is the numeral 2. Additionally, if you have any written statements that you would like to submit for the record, we offer and encourage you to please provide them to our staff colleagues at the registration desk.

So, with that, I now invite the following ticketed individuals to provide comments: 075, 076, and 074; 75, 76, 74. Mystery numbers? Maybe we've got some guests here? Terrific. Welcome.

Public Member

Excuse me, I don't have a ticket. Can I testify?

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Sure. Yes, let's go through these, and then we'll roll. We'll invoke the Wada-James exception.

Public Comment #1

Good morning. My name is Bill Galvin, and I'm the counseling coordinator at the Center on Conscience and War. As you all know from previous hearings, there are millions of men who now cannot apply for any federal job, or almost any federal job, because they have not registered



with selective service. Now many of them, probably, were just unaware of the registration at the time, but there are people of conscience, who, you know, a conscientious objector under U.S. law is somebody who, because of their values, is opposed to participation in war of any form. Some of those view registering in the selective service as a form of participating in war, and so these folks are then permanently barred from any of these employment jobs that we've been talking about, trying to find ways to get people in.

So, one way, of course, to further that cause would be to either end the registration or certainly end these penalties for people who have not registered. If the government extends this to women, then we're going to double the number of folks who cannot apply for any of these jobs we've been talking about this morning. And I want to tell you about somebody who called us last year. He was an immigrant. He migrated here when he was in his 20s, before he turned 26, but he turned 26 before he knew about the selective service registration. He was hired as a temp in the state of Florida, which is one of the states that doesn't allow you to get a job there if you haven't registered. And so, he's continued as a temp for a number of years. He's a good employee. He's trained a number of people who have become permanent employees and advanced up the ladder, yet he is stuck at this entry-level temp position, because of this. So, this is something that this commission could address with the proper kind of recommendations. So, thank you.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Great. Thank you. Thank you for obliging our time limit.

I will direct all our public commenters to the light system here. When it goes yellow, that's 30 seconds remaining, and then it goes to red.

Public Comment #2

I'm Peter Jesella, a Vietnam-era veteran, and I joined the Air Force rather than being drafted. At the hearings in Los Angeles, I spoke and submitted a detailed information about a



House bill for 1979 that outlined significant changes to the selective service system, very similar to the commission's mandate. My verbal focus was on the proposal to move registration to the 17th birthday for an on and off 1-year discussion on what being patriotic means, especially in the voluntary performance in its many forms and activities, such as military, AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, contracted service, or local community volunteers. Since most youth would still be in high school, the intention was for federal law that provided the basic framework and resource information. However, local high schools' education logistics in every zip code across the nation would design their own syllabus and help include other youth not in high school. They both could then share the label of government boogeymen.

In January, I was very disappointed to review the interim report and not read any reference to this catalyst or thinking conversation on patriotic contributions to the civic society. I hope my presence here today will more strongly impress on you the importance of this highly cost-effective youth wake-up call to citizen service. Since 1979, I've asked leaders, professionals, institutions, and various disciplines to become aware of this nuance of this bill's intentions, with a specific reference to the proposal of moving initial registration to the 17th birthday for this 1-year discussion both that provided leave us the 1 percent feedback; a great mystery to me. I hope that this commission can request feedback from educators, national security, economics, social studies, *et cetera*, experts in institutions to provide a more detailed model indication of why not moving where registration to the 17th birthday for every zip code conversation.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you, sir.

We've gone through 075; 076, 074? You're recognized for 2 minutes.



Public Comment #3

Thank you for the opener. My name is Li Yun. I'm a PhD and economist, but I've been really busy as a genuine former activist, I've been giving publishers for the Citizen Times, Freedom Times about a hundred episodes for each. But my concern is that I am now here just like a dead man crusading, because I am treated like a dead man everywhere, I go, including my S.S. property or identification; my petition. When I'd worked in government, first in the Department of Health and Human Services, I had an immense project. And my project was reviewed by outside professional as the best in their 7 years of service. So, I was promoted to the intermural there, this National Center for Health Services, and I discovered their data was wrong, fraudulent, and the patient was not treated right. So, all these problems now, I followed these, and I got the Supreme Court, an appeal to them up and down, and it took decades of time. So, all we found out from the beginning, improper processing or complaint, so that means it's included in the Department of Justice, Health, and he or she -- them, in a sense. And the judicial system doesn't help us a little. They're taking everything. So, I hope that to help improve our services, we must follow those complaint procedures. Where's it's going wrong, we've got to fix them. And now we have that PPP that's the most serious fraud and crime information and network operation that includes local to financial over every sector, every agency. This where nowadays, you can see it everywhere. Every hearing, you hear that PPP, because they are promoted. They profit over government. So please, I have submitted my avadavat before and the attachment before, please read it. Every word means something. I will help you to investigate those.

The Honorable Mark Gearan

Thank you very much and thank you for your testimony. Again, I want to thank all of our panelists for providing their testimony today, and for all of those of the audience who took the time to join us at these hearings. We look forward to our afternoon session, as well as tomorrow, certainly, and to gather the kind of input that this commission so prizes. So, with no further business before the commission, this hearing is adjourned.

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