

Statement by

Marta Brito Pérez

Chief Human Capital Officer

Department of Homeland Security

Before the

House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Management, Investigations and Oversight

Hearing on

Addressing the Department of Homeland Security's Morale Crisis

April 19, 2007

Canon House Office Building

Room 311

10:00am

Thank you, Chairman Carney, Representative Rogers and Members of the Subcommittee. It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss current and planned Department of Homeland Security (DHS) human capital initiatives and programs.

I was appointed as the Department's Chief Human Capital Officer on September 18, 2006. Prior to joining DHS, I headed the Human Capital Leadership and Merit System Accountability Division with the Office of Personnel Management. In this capacity, I led the government-wide effort to transform human management so that agencies are held accountable for managing their workforce effectively and efficiently. I was the architect of the Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework, a set of standards and measures designed to evaluate human capital management practices in the federal government. I have also had the opportunity to work in labor negotiations and have trained domestic and international law enforcement professionals.

As the Department's Chief Human Capital Officer, I provide direction and oversight for all elements of the Department's human resources management programs. In my six months serving the Department, I believe I have gained a sound understanding of the complexities of the organization and the challenges we face in ensuring we have the high-quality workforce needed to achieve our critical mission.

I have had the opportunity to meet with and observe the hard work and dedication of employees across the Department of Homeland Security. I have also observed that our ability to deliver on our critical mission depends upon the hard work, knowledge, diligence and insights of these employees.

My office plays an important role in ensuring and supporting DHS' capacity to build and sustain a high-performing workforce and provide programs to give employees at all levels the knowledge and tools they need to drive mission success.

Organizational Transformation

When DHS was created it was one of the largest "mergers" to ever take place in the Federal government. GAO, in a report released this past February, stated that "successful transformations of large organizations, even those faced with less strenuous reorganizations than DHS, can take five to seven years to achieve." We also know from the research that mergers create a great deal of anxiety for the workforce and that initial resistance is common. DHS is only four years into this journey. While we are making great progress, it will take time to become a fully-integrated organization. We understand that this work is on-going and provides us the opportunity to achieve our goals. I do not want to minimize the excellent progress that has been made. Just last week I spent three days with our employees on the border discussing how the various legacy organizations have integrated. We have much of which to be proud.

Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS)

Although the general results of the Federal Human Capital Survey were disappointing we are encouraged by the fact that DHS employees have a strong passion for our mission. 89% percent of employees report that they believe the work they do is important, and 80% percent like the

work that they do. We also need to be mindful that the survey is only one source of data, which reflects the attitudes of our workforce at a single point in time. It is important information that we are taking seriously, but should be considered with other data. Our employees' passion for their jobs provides a strong foundation for future improvement.

The survey did show that DHS faces many challenges. Addressing the issues raised in the Federal Human Capital Survey, and similar issues raised by the Homeland Security Culture Task Force, is one of the highest priorities of the Secretary and the entire DHS leadership team is committed to this end. And make no mistake; we recognize that moving the needle in the Federal Human Capital Survey is a leadership responsibility. Many of these challenges are being addressed through a number of initiatives, including the 2007 – 2008 Human Capital Operational Plan.

The Plan supports the DHS mission, DHS Strategic Plan and the Secretary's goals and serves as a roadmap for our efforts to integrate the Department's human resources management programs. It allows DHS to adjust to new and changing priorities while maintaining focus on five key priorities:

1. Hiring and retaining a talented and diverse workforce
2. Creating a DHS-wide culture of performance – *Team DHS*
3. Creating high-quality learning and development programs
4. Implementing a DHS-wide integrated leadership service
5. Becoming a model of human capital service excellence

These five priorities signal an evolution in the areas of emphasis in DHS human resource programs. We have discontinued the use of the term MAX^{HR}. However, we continue to deploy the more employee-centric performance management program and we are exploring with OPM labor relations flexibilities and will work with employee representatives as appropriate in the implementation of changes to our program.

Our response to the Federal Human Capital Survey is two-pronged, with ongoing data analysis and action planning taking place at both the enterprise and the component level. I am meeting with employee representatives and visiting employees in field offices where more than 85% of our employees work. We will conduct focus groups with employees from across the Department in order to learn more and act on their concerns on key issues such as leadership and communication. Our components will hold focus groups as well. These focus groups will represent a cross-section of the Department and will be vital in obtaining information to better understand the results of the survey. Information obtained during these sessions will be further analyzed. We are also leveraging best practices from the components across the Department. Finally, my office will track and report on the progress made across the Department toward executing activities identified in action plans.

Even before the focus groups take place, we are taking steps to improve communications, leadership and performance. Some examples include:

- Increasing accountability by incorporating in the performance plans of executives and managers key DHS skills/values – Integrity, Leadership, Communications, Diversity, Performance, Innovation, Collaboration and Stewardship of the public resources;

- Enhancing DHS websites; and
- Offering a DHS 101 module that explains DHS, what it does, who is in it, the Secretary's priorities and how each organization relates to them.

To enhance leadership capacity and facilitate integration, we are:

- Delivering new leadership training programs to focus on core skills identified in the survey;
- Incorporating rotational assignments and mentoring in our leadership program; and
- Creating a Speakers Bureau made up of the best and brightest leaders from across the Department.

With regard to our new Performance Management Program:

- We have trained over 14,000 managers and supervisors on sound performance management principles;
- We are expanding coverage and enhancing our tools; and
- Ensuring employees in the new performance system understand what is expected of them.

It is equally important to acknowledge that our components have been very active in their own organizations in addressing communications, leadership and performance issues. We are confident through these coordinated efforts we are addressing the areas for improvement identified by the survey throughout the Department.

Finding, Hiring and Keeping a Qualified, Diverse Workforce

Another area which we believe to be of critical importance is continuing to recruit and retain the right talent. The Department is focused on hiring and retaining a talented and diverse workforce. We are improving our hiring processes by educating our hiring managers and human resource officials on existing hiring flexibilities, as well as implementing an enterprise e-Recruitment system to facilitate the recruiting process. We have also established a corporate branding initiative to fill mission support vacancies that cross component lines in areas such as information technology, acquisition and human resources. We are also working with the Partnership for Public Service to improve our vacancy announcements to make our jobs sound more appealing.

We are committed to ensuring that the DHS talent pool is representative of our Nation as a whole and are implementing Department and component recruitment strategies designed to find, hire and keep a qualified, diverse workforce.

To this end, we are working closely with the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Examples of our partnership include a recently held Recruitment Summit to which the Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and I invited leaders of national organizations serving minorities and women to meet and discuss strategies for recruitment; and our joint meetings with DHS component heads to discuss employment and capacity building for minority serving institutions.

Learning and Development Strategy

Building on the HCOP, a Learning and Development Strategy for establishing a Department of Homeland Security University System, sets the course for how the Department will support a DHS-wide community of learning to develop our employees. The DHS University System supports program-specific skill development while also fostering a core set of homeland security preparedness, managerial and leadership skills.

Implementation of the DHS University System will foster a single, unified DHS and help to create a “Team DHS” culture.

Conclusion

We believe that the programs we have initiated and the action plans we are developing will have a significant impact on improving employee morale, sustaining a high-performing workforce and providing DHS employees with the knowledge and tools they need to be successful. We are laying the foundation but it will require a significant investment not only in DHS employees but also in the human capital programs that support these goals, as reflected in the President's '08 Budget request.

Thank you for your leadership and your continued support of the Department of Homeland Security and the programs that support our employees. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

##