

As delivered

Admiral Thomas H. Collins  
DHS HR System Town Hall Meeting  
Norfolk, VA  
10 Jun 2003

- It's a pleasure to be with you here today on such a beautiful day – I'm just as tired of the rain as I'm sure you all are! I'm glad to see we've got folks from across DHS here: TSA, ICE, CBP, FEMA, in addition to Coast Guard.
- DHS was created to stop another terrorist attack on American soil.
  - Securing our borders is a crucial aspect – if not the crucial aspect – of that mission.
- All agencies within DHS play key roles in their areas of expertise to accomplish this mission, and together, we ensure our country is safe and secure.
- Terms of HLS Act
- As you know the Homeland Security Act also directed that we build a “modern, 21st century Human Resource Management system”. This morning our goal is to describe for you the objective and process by which the new system will be achieved. Many of the design features have yet to be developed.
- The Act directed us to address personnel policies and procedures associated with
  - Pay,
  - Classification,
  - Performance management,
  - Adverse actions,
  - Appeals, and
  - Labor relations
- In addition, the Department was directed to
  - Address issues of premium pay and benefits, particularly in the law enforcement workforce.
- It is clear that the new personnel policies and procedures must support both the mission and the people charged with accomplishing that mission.
- The Act that created DHS directs that the new personnel policies and practices be developed in collaboration with DHS employees – this Town Hall Meeting is part of that process.
- We are committed to developing a system that is a model of excellence and fairness for all of the American government:
  - a system that is fair, performance-based, and flexible;
  - a system that preserves basic civil service protections;

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- one that holds people accountable for their performance; and
- a system that recognizes and rewards the hard work and dedication of our patriotic employees.
- Current system shortfalls – growing momentum for change extends beyond DHS.
- The current civilian hiring system is much too slow and cumbersome.
- Just as the Coast Guard has been challenged to quickly adjust its missions to concentrate on maritime security after 9/11, so too the human resource system must be able to quickly adjust to changing organizational needs.
- We simply must be able to attract the best America has to offer and then make them job offers quickly before they become discouraged and look elsewhere.
- Then, once they're on board, we must be able to compensate, recognize, and reward them fairly and provide them benefits that will encourage them to stay with us.
- Process:
  - Ultimately the Secretary and the Director of the OPM will issue regulations to reflect a new Human Resource Management System.
  - We anticipate these regulations will be issued in final form in early 2004.
  - To build to that decision point, we have established a Design Team representing DHS management and employees, unions, and the HR professionals to research and develop options for consideration.
  - The Design Team will present a full range of options to a Senior Review Committee in the early fall – that Committee will narrow down the options and then present them to Secretary Ridge and the Director.
  - Then the Secretary and Director will issue proposed regulations that will have a 60-day period of public comment and consultation with employee representatives.
- Design Team
  - Consists of: representatives of personnel offices, DHS line managers and employees, national and local union officials, and HR professionals from the OPM.
  - I'm happy to report that the dynamics of team are working well.
  - Continues to conduct basic research in successful and emerging personnel policies and practices – both public sector and private sector.
  - Research continues through the end of this month.

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- Town Hall and Focus Group meetings:
  - As part of their research, the Design Team is visiting 8 cities where there are significant numbers of DHS employees – this trip to Norfolk is one of those visits.
  - Purpose of these visits is two-fold:
    - To inform you of the process – to let you know how we are arriving at the decisions about a new Human Resource Management System, and
    - Equally important, we want to hear from you – both in this Town Hall Meeting and during the Focus Group Meetings later today. This is an opportunity to hear the issues that are of greatest importance to you.
  - All of you were selected to participate in this Town Hall Meeting because you have something vital to contribute to the design process:
    - You live with and work under the current system everyday and you know where the strengths and weaknesses of that system lie.
    - We have a representative sample of DHS employees from the Norfolk area – managers and both union and non-union employees
    - Thus, for example here in Norfolk, out of the 200 of you invited to this Town Hall Meeting, a fifth of you were selected by the union representatives and more come from the bargaining units of the many unions in the area.
    - There are 6 Focus Groups:
      - One will be exclusively managers, and
      - Five are exclusively rank-and-file employees, totaling 60 employees, and the union is picking 10 of those employees.
- We are particularly interested in your impressions of the strengths and weaknesses in the current personnel policies and practices and your suggestions for making our Human Resource Management System better.
- We believe that your input to the design of the new Human Resource Management System will, in the end, create a system that is a model for personnel policies and practices across the federal government.
- Thank you for your efforts on this critical work. I look forward to hearing from as many of you as possible, then seeing your results in action!