

# The Federal Manager



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## PRESIDENT'S PAGE



*FMA National President  
Patricia Niehaus*

### FMA Active and Energized Across the U.S.A.

Hello, Team FMA!

It has been a busy summer. In June, I testified before a Senate subcommittee at the invitation of Senators Akaka and Voinovich on the topic of the transition out of NSPS and its impact on FMA's DOD members. My testimony is available for your review on our Website. I wish I could tell our members impacted by pay retention, as an unintended consequence of excelling under NSPS, that Congress has found a solution for them. Unfortunately, it looks like our best avenue to follow will involve pursuing reclassification of

many of the positions held by our impacted members. You can be confident that we will continue to work on this issue with the Department of Defense, the Office of Personnel Management, Congress and our members.

I also had the opportunity to visit three FMA chapters this summer – something I love doing. In June, I visited Chicago for Chapter 191's 30th anniversary (Railroad Retirement Board). Pat Spade, the newly-elected Region 3 Director, attended this celebration as well. Its theme was "Pearls of Wisdom." One of my favorite "pearls" is a quote from a Catholic nun, Sister Mary Lauretta, "To be successful, the first thing to do is fall in love with your work." I have definitely fallen in love with FMA and I am thrilled to be the first woman to lead this incredible organization. I have the opportunity to meet all kinds of wonderful people and I am constantly learning! I believe our members demonstrate the mission and commitment of FMA – advocating excellence in public service – everyday, and I applaud you for it.

While I was in Chicago, George Smith, Region 2 Director, attended a planning meeting for a conference DOD is holding to begin working collaboratively with management and the unions to craft a new performance management system. FMA will be sending three people to the conference in September, including myself. Thanks, George, for spending three days on this project!

In July, Department of Defense Dependents Schools (Overseas DODDS), FMA Chapter 135, met in Los Angeles during the Department of Defense Education Activity Conference. The Chapter hosted a happy hour for its members and I was able to meet many of them. I arrived on the fourth day of their conference and they had already added 18 new members. What a tribute to the message of FMA!

Later in July, I traveled to Beale Air Force Base (AFB) in California for Chapter 381's monthly meeting. Its theme was, "What does an FMA Membership do for You?" We discussed FMA's legislative accomplishments and current efforts. Leonard Lew, Region 4 Director, and I carpooled to this meeting so I had a chance to catch up with him, too. The next day, Travis AFB, Chapter 167, hosted its Annual Membership Appreciation Lunch at the base museum. Sixty people attended (in spite of several conflicting meetings) and enjoyed the food while capitalizing on the chance to sit down and visit with fellow members and several Base Commanders.

I also made two trips to Washington, D.C., for National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations meetings as well as other meetings the National Office staff arranged for me. They keep me pretty busy whenever I am in town! Finally, in mid-August, I traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, to present on a performance management panel at the Blacks In Government (BIG) Conference.

One of the best parts of my trips to D.C. is the chance to spend time with our National Office staff. For those of you who have not had the opportunity to meet them, I want to tell you what a wonderful, hard working group they are! The more I see of them, the more impressed I am by how much they accomplish on our behalf. We are truly blessed to have these talented individuals working for our Association. ■

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**Contributor**

Karl Gruss

**Editorial Board**

Patricia A. Spade

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Latorea Wilson

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1641 Prince Street

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All materials submitted to *The Federal Manager* should pertain to public service managers. Copy should be double-spaced, no longer than 10 pages.

High resolution color photographs, charts, or other illustrations should be included if possible. Text should be submitted on compact disc, labeled with type of software and name of file. Also include a biography of the author.

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# Empowering Federal Managers

A Message from  
the Office of Personnel  
Management Director

# Empowering Federal Managers



By John Berry

Federal managers and workers accomplish great things for the American people every day. But at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), we know you can do even better.

How? By harnessing new authorities, enhancing performance management training, and employing new technologies to transform the way we work. In the last couple decades, government has fallen behind leading companies and non-profits in empowering our people and getting the most from them. Now, we have the leaders and the strategy we need to catch up.

Leadership starts at the top. President Obama called on all of us to generate new ideas from the bottom up, be pragmatic, and focus on results. When he asked me to fix federal personnel policy, I knew it would be a challenge. But I also knew that under his leadership and with the support of great people at OPM, we could do it.

The President's spirit of openness and inclusion drove the creation of our veterans' employment, hiring reform, and

labor-management partnership initiatives, and has led us to try more flexible performance management strategies and adopt innovative business technologies.

Now that President Obama has signed the orders launching these initiatives, the ball is in your court. We at OPM will do all we can to help, but implementation will succeed or fail based largely on the efforts of federal managers.

We at OPM are counting on you to use these tools to build your workforce and accomplish your agency's mission. We are going to teach you how to use them. If something is not working, let us know. We are committed to making these reforms work for you and your workforce.

You now have the freedom to hire the best people and hire them quickly, to engage productively with your employees, and to shove distractions aside and focus on results. Let me give you the details.

## HIRING THE BEST PEOPLE QUICKLY

The ability to hire the best people

quickly comes from two Obama presidential initiatives, the May 2010 Presidential Memorandum, *Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process*, and Executive Order 13518, *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government*, signed in November 2009.

Listening to managers around government, I heard a few messages loud and clear: the hiring process takes too long; we are not getting the applicants we need; we do not get to look at enough candidates; and, we do not have enough control over the process.

All of that is coming to an end. Let us look at these one at a time.

**Problem:** The hiring process is too long.

**Solution:** Make it shorter.

We have launched shared registers for 14 of the most commonly hired jobs. We now pre-screen the candidates so you can interview and hire without delay. This alone can save up to five weeks.

We are helping agencies analyze their entire hiring process and eliminate needless signatures, steps, and other red tape. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has been a leader in this arena, mapping out a strategy to cut their 139-day hiring process in half for most jobs.

**Problem:** Managers are not getting the best qualified applicants.

**Solution:** Make applying easier, and then get the best qualified Americans to apply.

Two of the biggest deterrents to potential applicants were Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA) essays and an aging *USAJOBS.gov* Website. KSA essays as an initial screening tool will be fully eliminated by November 1, and many new job announcements already reflect

this change.

Starting in November, job seekers can apply with just a resume and cover letter, and agencies can experiment with publicly-available assessment tools to find the best qualified people in the resume pool. Additional assessments can be used later in the hiring process if needed.

We also completely rebuilt [USAJOBS.gov](http://USAJOBS.gov). If you have not visited lately, check it out and spread the word. It has a simple, clean new interface, the capability to upload multiple resumes, easy ways to share interesting jobs with friends and family, and lots of other improvements. OPM's USAJOBS team is working on more improvements every day.

These improvements make it easier for the busiest and best-qualified graduating students and job seekers to find the jobs they are most qualified for and apply to them quickly. That means a better selection for our hiring managers.

**Problem:** You do not get to look at enough candidates.

**Solution:** Category rating.

We have eliminated the "rule of three" so that you can view even more applicants.

**Problem:** Managers do not have enough control.

**Solution:** Guidance, training, and accountability that give you more control.

While human resources staff has an important role in managing the hiring process and protecting the merit principles, the front-line supervisors are in the lead. You know the needs of the jobs you are hiring for best, you are accountable for results, and we are making it clear to everyone that you are in the lead. Simply put, we are empowering you, and holding you accountable for results.

No discussion of hiring the best people quickly is complete without talking about America's veterans – especially, the men and women currently returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. They are unique in America's history. They share the dedication and love of country that have

motivated every generation to serve. They are highly trained by the military and many have college degrees. Yet the unemployment rate for younger veterans is above 21 percent.

We have invested in our men and women in uniform. They are team players with skills we need. Our initiative is designed to match veterans with jobs where they will thrive and deliver great value to their new employer.

Outside of our national security agencies and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the federal government has done a poor job of seeking out veterans. But now that is changing. The Council on Veterans Employment was created by the Executive Order and is chaired by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki and Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis. I serve as Vice-Chair and Chief Operating Officer, and the 24 major departments and agencies have top-level representation.

Through the Council, all 24 have established Veterans Employment Program Offices with full-time staff. The agencies have also established goals for hiring veterans based on a tiered hiring percentage model. Agencies starting with lower vets hiring percentages are setting higher goals. We need every manager to embrace these goals.

Visit our ground-breaking Website, [www.FedsHireVets.gov](http://www.FedsHireVets.gov), to hear from other managers about their experience with vets and learn how to get involved. Since its launch early this year, the site has logged over 1.1 million visitors.

## ENGAGING YOUR WORKERS PRODUCTIVELY

The vast majority of federal employees, managers and workers alike, are motivated by the desire to serve the American people. You can help build on this common ground to motivate your

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*Empowering Federal Managers*  
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employees and engage them in solving the problems your team faces.

President Obama has called on front-line managers and workers to share their ideas. Whether it is cutting costs, improving service, or advancing your agency's mission in another way, we can get more done by working together.

That is why the President signed Executive Order 13522, *Creating Labor-Management Forums to Improve Delivery of Government Services*, last December. The order creates new spaces for collaboration and cooperation between federal workers and managers.

The Executive Order established the National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations, an advisory body featuring senior government officials, managers and labor representatives, specifically including the President of the Federal Managers Association. Working together, the Council is finding ways to improve government's services and products, cut costs, and improve productivity and worker morale.

Each agency is also establishing Labor-Management Forum implementation plans, and agencies with representatives on the National Council (OPM, DOD, DHS, VA, Labor and Treasury) have volunteered to test expanded bargaining in a series of pilot projects.

At OPM, for instance, I chair our internal Labor-Management Transformation Forum, along with the presidents of two of our local unions. My management team is committed to discussing all workplace matters within the forum and is open to expanded scope of bargaining projects that cover numbers, types and grades of employees as well as the methods and means of doing work.

OPM's Forum meets twice monthly for two hours. This open, frequent, high-level

communication has built trust, raised morale and produced tangible results. For instance, it was instrumental in developing and smoothly executing a much-needed reorganization of the agency. We have also agreed to create a team to review career development and mentoring opportunities for employees, as well as to review the diversity of our workforce at the higher grades.

When we come together to discuss issues in our forum, we check our titles at the door. This did not happen overnight, but as we continued to discuss the issues, we found we were all just OPM employees working together to make the agency better.

With this same spirit, the National Council has made great strides. Since its initial meeting in April, the National Council on Federal-Labor Management Relations has agreed on a set of guiding principles, approved implementation plans for the creation of Labor-Management Forums in fifty agencies across the government, established a framework for expanded scope of bargaining pilot projects, and is developing a set of recommended metrics to measure progress.

While the National Council has encouraged agency leadership to directly engage with union leadership, relationships between union stewards and front-line managers will determine the success of this approach. We will evaluate this effort based on whether or not we improve in agency mission accomplishment, overall employee satisfaction, and labor-management relations.

We hope you will take an active interest in building good relations with your workers and engaging them in making your team even better. When you make a sustained effort, I think you will see your results improve.

Visit [www.lmrcouncil.gov](http://www.lmrcouncil.gov) to learn more.

## FOCUSING ON RESULTS

The next area we want to help you with, as federal managers, is focusing on results. Start by asking yourself these questions: How do I know my team's work is getting done? How can my team do our work if our office is closed? How would I manage my team if it were created today from scratch, with all the mobility and communications tools at my disposal today?

"Because I see employees at their desks," is rarely a good answer to the first question. While security and information desks need to be covered, if that is your answer, I encourage you to think about how you are measuring performance. The best way is to set clear goals with your workers, and then give them the freedom to accomplish those goals, when and where they want.

If you do this, a snow day or other emergency will hardly slow you down, and my second question will answer itself. Then, if you are like many managers, the more you think about the third question, the more you will realize that your team can work anywhere. Fixating on where and when your employees work is not part of getting results; in fact, it is actually a distraction.

As my friend Martha Johnson, the head of U.S. General Services Administration, likes to say, "Work isn't where you are, it's what you do."

At OPM, we are working to help you free your team to focus on results. We are working with CultureRx, the creators of a management system called the Results-Only Work Environment, to see if it can increase productivity in a federal workplace, and we have hired Deloitte to independently assess the results.

The pilot runs through the end of this year and includes over 400 OPM staff. More than half are bargaining unit employees, they are in different divisions



both inside and outside the National Capital Region, and range from GS-5 to Senior Executives. I am also participating along with the entire Office of the Director. It is a pilot group that looks like the federal government.

Enabling mobility is important to results-focused management, and it is essential to continuity and resilience. Those are among the reasons why the Obama administration is working to greatly increase the use of telework.

We have set a High Priority Performance Goal of increasing the number of eligible employees who telework by 50 percent by the end of 2011. Looking beyond the number of people with telework agreements, OPM will ask agencies to analyze the work done by their employees to see where telework fits into a flexible management strategy that increases productivity and improves their ability to serve the public during emergencies.

## PARTNERING WITH YOU

I know that not everyone will immediately support everything I have just described, but I encourage every manager to keep an open mind. We have collaborated with managers, workers, senior leaders and other stakeholders to develop all of these initiatives. We have used proven strategies and I am confident we will succeed if all parties make a sustained effort at implementation.

OPM's strategic goals are hiring the best, respecting the workforce, expecting the best, and honoring service. I appreciate the input of FMA and its members in our initiatives to meet these goals, and we will continue to partner with you going forward.

For more information on the initiatives discussed in this article, please visit: [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov). ■

*John Berry is the Federal Government's Chief People Person. As the Director of the United States Office of Personnel Management, he is responsible for recruiting, hiring, and setting benefits policies for 1.9 million federal civilian employees. With over twenty years of experience in the federal government, Berry is a passionate and aggressive advocate for public service and federal workers. He first developed expertise in federal employee and retirement issues during ten years as Legislative Director for Congressman Steny Hoyer of Maryland, now the House Majority Leader. During the Clinton administration, Berry served as Deputy Assistant Secretary and Acting Assistant Secretary for Law Enforcement at the Department of the Treasury, where he had direct-line authority over 40 percent of the federal law enforcement community. He then served as Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget at the Department of the Interior. From 2001 to 2008, Berry pursued his interest in conservation as Director of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and then as Director of the National Zoo.*