

**CLOSING THE LANGUAGE GAP:  
IMPROVING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,  
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

JULY 29, 2010

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**THURSDAY, JULY 29, 2010**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT  
MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE,  
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:38 p.m., in Room SD-342, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senator Akaka.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR AKAKA**

Senator AKAKA. I call this hearing of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia to order.

I want to welcome our witnesses. Aloha and thank you so much for being here today.

Today's hearing will examine the Federal Government's foreign language capabilities and needs, particularly at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Defense (DOD). We will examine these Departments' language efforts and explore how best to help meet the challenges of strengthening foreign language skills.

Foreign language skills are necessary to provide vital services to people with limited English abilities. Because of the rich cultural and linguistic diversity in my home State of Hawaii, I understand well the need to communicate about disaster relief, social services, and other government programs in a variety of languages.

Understanding foreign languages is also vital to our economic security as Americans compete in the global marketplace. According to the Committee for Economic Development, American companies can lose an estimated \$2 billion each year due to inadequate cross-cultural skills.

Moreover, foreign language proficiency and cultural understanding are essential to protecting our national security. Threats to our national security are becoming more complex, interconnected, and unconventional. These evolving threats have increased

Federal agencies' needs for employees proficient in foreign languages.

More agencies are coordinating and collaborating with other countries to advance their missions abroad. Both the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense partner with other nations to share information or conduct joint operations. The Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Proliferation and Terrorism as well as the Project on National Security Reform have concluded that foreign language proficiency is essential to protecting our Nation.

The shortage of language-proficient Federal workers, as well as Americans overall, is not a new phenomenon. More than three decades ago, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies recognized it was a serious and growing problem.

Over the years, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has released several reports revealing language shortfalls that harm government effectiveness and undermine national security.

In 2002, GAO reported that several key national security agencies had shortages in translators and interpreters, as well as diplomats and intelligence specialists with critical foreign language skills. GAO found that shortages in language speakers at the FBI hindered criminal prosecutions. Additionally, diplomatic and intelligence officials' inadequate language skills weakened the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking and resulted in less effective representation of U.S. interests abroad.

In June 2009, GAO found that the DOD had made progress on increasing its language capabilities, but lacked a comprehensive strategic plan and standardized methodology to identify language requirements, which made it difficult for DOD to assess the risk to its ability to conduct operations.

Additionally, this Subcommittee held a hearing on a 2009 GAO report finding that almost one-third of all State Department positions abroad are filled by Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) who do not meet the job's language requirements. What troubles me is that 73 percent of FSOs serving in Afghanistan and 57 percent serving in Iraq do not meet the language proficiency requirements of their positions.

Today, GAO is releasing a report<sup>1</sup> that finds that the DHS has done little to understand its foreign language capabilities. DHS cannot identify its language shortfalls and does not know how these shortfalls impact its ability to meet the Department's mission.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, Congress and the Administration took action to address language shortages. I fear that these efforts, while helpful, are not enough to meet this pressing need, and that we are failing to create a long-term solution to the Nation's foreign language demands.

I firmly believe that without sustained leadership and a coordinated effort among Federal agencies, State and local governments, the private sector, and academia, language shortfalls will continue to undermine our country's national security, economic growth, and

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<sup>1</sup>The GAO report referenced by Senator Akaka appears on page 121.

other priorities. We need to be more proactive in addressing this issue.

I introduced the National Foreign Language Coordination Act to implement key recommendations from the 2004 National Language Conference. This bill would establish a National Foreign Language Coordination Council, chaired by a national language adviser, to develop a national foreign language strategy that is comprehensive, integrated across agencies, and addresses both long-term and short-term needs. This council would provide the sustained leadership needed to address foreign language shortfalls in government as well as academia and the private sector.

The Bush Administration's National Security Language Initiative was a good first step toward coordinating efforts among the Departments of Defense, Education, and State, and the intelligence community to address our national security language needs. However, we must do more and expand this effort.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense are addressing their language needs and exploring short-term and long-term solutions to increase the number of foreign language speakers in the Federal Government.

I again would like to welcome our first panel to the Subcommittee today: David Maurer, Director of the Homeland Security and Justice Team at the Government Accountability Office; Jeffrey Neal, Chief Human Capital Officer at the Department of Homeland Security; and Nancy Weaver, Director of the Defense Language Office at the Department of Defense.

As you know it is the custom of the Subcommittee to swear in all witnesses, and I would ask you to stand and raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you are about to give to the Subcommittee is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Mr. MAURER. I do.

Mr. NEAL. I do.

Ms. WEAVER. I do.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. Let the record note that our panelists answered in the affirmative.

Before we start, I want you to know that your full statements will be placed in the record.

Mr. Maurer, will you please begin with your statement?

**TESTIMONY OF DAVID C. MAURER,<sup>1</sup> DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE ISSUES, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE**

Mr. MAURER. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be here today to discuss our recently completed work on improving the Federal Government's foreign language capabilities.

As you know, foreign language capabilities are a key element to the success of diplomatic, military, law enforcement, and intelligence missions. Over the past several years, GAO has completed nearly two dozen reports and testimonies on the Federal Government's efforts to enhance its foreign language capabilities. My

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Maurer appears in the Appendix on page 29.

statement today summarizes the findings from our recent reviews of foreign language programs at the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, and the State Department. While the specifics of each review varied, a key theme that emerged was the importance of assessing needs, assessing capabilities, and addressing shortfalls.

I will start with DHS. Today we are issuing our report on DHS to you and Senator Voinovich. We found that the men and women of DHS encounter a wide array of languages and dialects under sometimes difficult and dangerous circumstances. DHS is literally on our Nation's borders, so ensuring the Department has the necessary foreign language skills to carry out its various missions is crucial.

What we found during our review was not encouraging. On the plus side, DHS has a variety of foreign language programs and activities. For example, new Border Patrol agents are required to learn rudimentary Spanish, and the Coast Guard has conducted a series of foreign language needs assessments. However, on the whole, we found that DHS has taken limited action to assess its foreign language needs and capabilities and identify potential shortfalls. There is no department-wide guidance, no mention of foreign language in the first Quadrennial Homeland Security Review, and no reference to foreign language in the Department's strategic human capital plan. DHS has not comprehensively assessed its foreign language needs and capabilities and does not know whether its current array of programs adequately addresses the Department's various mission needs. In its response to our report, DHS agreed with our findings and has actions underway to address these deficiencies.

I will now briefly summarize the findings from our work at the Department of Defense and the State Department. Over the past few years, DOD has placed greater emphasis on improving the foreign language proficiency of U.S. forces. DOD views foreign language capabilities as a mission enabler and an important element of its broader counterinsurgency strategy. In June 2009, we reported that DOD had made progress in transforming its language capabilities but lacked a comprehensive strategic plan to guide its efforts. Some of the Department's foreign language objectives are not measurable, linkages between goals and funding priorities are not clear, and DOD has not identified the total cost of its planned efforts. DOD also lacked a complete inventory of its foreign language capabilities and a common approach for determining requirements. Since our report, DOD has made some progress, but has not completed its efforts to address our recommendations.

In September 2009, we found that the State Department's ongoing efforts to meet its foreign language requirements have yielded some results, but have not closed persistent gaps in foreign language-proficient staff. As you noted, we found that 31 percent of Foreign Service officers did not meet the foreign language requirements for their overseas positions, with even higher shortfalls in such key languages as Arabic and Chinese. State has several initiatives underway to address the shortfalls, including language training and pay incentives, but has been unable to close these gaps, in part due to the lack of a comprehensive strategic approach. Since

our report, State has made progress but still lacks a plan with measurable goals, objectives, and milestones.

Looking across all three Departments, there are some common lessons that can help guide ongoing efforts to improve foreign language capabilities across the Federal Government: First, comprehensively assess foreign language needs and capabilities; second, align and, where appropriate, develop foreign language programs to address shortfalls; third, ensure that plans are linked to resources and strategic and workforce planning processes; and, finally, develop mechanisms for measuring progress along the way. These efforts will help Federal agencies enhance their foreign language capabilities and more efficiently and effectively carry out their missions in an increasingly interdependent world.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Maurer.

Mr. Neal, will you please proceed with your statement?

**TESTIMONY OF JEFFREY R. NEAL,<sup>1</sup> CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICER, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Mr. NEAL. Chairman Akaka, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you regarding the Department of Homeland Security's efforts related to the foreign language needs of the workforce. My name is Jeff Neal, and I am the Chief Human Capital Officer for DHS. It is a pleasure to appear before you again, and I continue to appreciate your leadership on this and other human capital matters.

DHS has a variety of foreign language needs, from providing emergency response services to persons with limited English proficiency, to leading investigations overseas, and interviewing foreign nationals on interdicted vessels. The Department's mission touches many individuals in the United States who may lack English language skills. In addition, DHS has some 2,200 employees stationed abroad; as such, the ability to communicate effectively is a topic of vital importance to us. Our operating and support components determine their foreign language needs, requirements, and capabilities and have taken actions to address gaps in order to meet the many mission needs of DHS. This issue, like the balanced workforce issue we discussed in the hearing you conducted in May, reinforces the need for a consistent and repeatable process for workforce planning, assessment, and oversight at the Department level.

While each component is best situated to identify its operational requirements for foreign languages on a regular basis, the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer can help by coordinating the overall strategy, providing oversight, and identifying best practices.

Certain components, such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection, do require proficiency in foreign language, most frequently Spanish. These components screen candidates for employment for their proficiency in, or ability to learn, languages. At the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), foreign language ability is considered a collateral duty for transportation security officers, and

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Neal appears in the Appendix on page 41.

employees self-certify their proficiency in language other than English.

Beyond workforce planning, there have been a number of other department-wide efforts pertaining to foreign language capabilities. The DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL), enforces the provisions of Executive Order 13166, which requires Federal agencies to examine the services they provide and implement a system by which people with limited English proficiency can meaningfully access services, without unduly burdening the fundamental mission of the agency. Far from burdening the DHS mission, language access for those with limited proficiency advances homeland security, enabling, for example, more effective and efficient screening and immigration processing at our Nation's ports of entry and fair administration of customs rules and citizenship benefits. It is also essential in areas such as detention and asylum adjudication. CRCL provides technical assistance to DHS offices and components on fulfilling the language access requirements.

I understand the importance of identifying language requirements and tracking capabilities as outlined in the GAO report. Going forward, the Department will make the following actions:

First, I will ensure that DHS-wide language policies and processes are incorporated into our Human Capital Strategic Plan. Secretary Janet Napolitano directed a complete revision of the Human Capital Strategic Plan several weeks ago, and we anticipate publishing it in early fall.

Second, my staff will work with the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis to identify best practices and to ensure the coordination of our intelligence community responsibilities for the management of DHS foreign language capabilities.

And, finally, I will work with CRCL to establish a DHS Joint Language Task Force. The task force will identify component language requirements and assess the necessary skills; recommend a system so that the Department can track, monitor, record, and report language capabilities; and identify the functional office responsible for managing DHS-wide language capabilities.

This is an overview of the status of our foreign language capabilities, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Neal.

Ms. Weaver, will you please proceed with your statement?

**TESTIMONY OF NANCY WEAVER,<sup>1</sup> DIRECTOR, DEFENSE  
LANGUAGE OFFICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Ms. WEAVER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak with you today on this very important topic.

The Department is building a force with the language and regional proficiency needed to meet the challenges of a complex security environment. Experience has proven that the ability to communicate and understand local populations, allies, and coalition partners while demonstrating respect for their cultures are key enabling factors for mission success.

The 2005 Defense Language Transformation Roadmap began a department-wide effort to expand and develop these capabilities.

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Ms. Weaver appears in the Appendix on page 44.

Through specific actions, we have improved the oversight and management of the Defense Language Program, created policies and programs to increase language capability and enhance training. We have now moved beyond the roadmap. Today we are finalizing our strategic direction, redefining processes for generating language and regional requirements, and adapting policies and programs to ensure we have the right mix of language and regional skills.

Currently the Department is reviewing a comprehensive strategic plan that provides a systematic way ahead for identifying, developing, and sustaining, language and regional capabilities. The plan builds on the transformational direction and the priorities laid out with the language roadmap.

One further effort now underway is a capabilities-based assessment which will provide improved and standardized processes Combatant Commands can use to determine and prioritize their language and regional requirements. Knowing these requirements relative to our existing capability allows the Department to identify gaps and leverage programs and resources to fill those gaps. The current efforts span the entire human capital management system and include heritage recruiting initiatives, Service Academy and ROTC language training and immersion programs, monetary incentives, and increased pre-deployment and sustainment training opportunities for the language professional as well as the general purpose forces.

We are also looking beyond the Department of Defense for creative solutions to build a more language-enabled workforce. Representatives from the Departments of State, Defense, and Education and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence meet routinely to share information on new initiatives and best practices.

Our ongoing challenge is that language and regional proficiency take time to develop and to sustain. And even when we devote that time, the next threat to security will likely require different languages and cultural knowledge in an entirely different region of the world. While we might not be able to predict with a high degree of accuracy where we will be and what languages we will need, we are preparing by building a program that is flexible and adaptable to meet tomorrow's challenges as well as today's requirements.

Thank you for your continued support.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Ms. Weaver.

Mr. Neal, as you know, I have been concerned about DHS's overall progress on your comprehensive management integration. Your statement notes that the Department is considering implementing a broader, more consolidated approach to assessing and planning for the Department's language needs. Would you provide more detail about your plans?

Mr. NEAL. Mr. Chairman, what we are doing right now is revising our overall Human Capital Strategic Plan. The document that we have is a rather voluminous document. It is about 50 pages, which I do not know if everyone had actually even read who might be interested in human capital issues in the Department. A lot of folks view it was a very long document that is long on words and short on action. So what Secretary Napolitano has directed is a complete revision of the plan. She wants it reduced to a much more

concise document. She wants to highlight several key areas that are of great interest to her. And rather than having this plan be a document that is signed by the Chief Human Capital Officer, she wants to put her name on it and the strength and authority of her office behind that Human Capital Plan.

One aspect of it will be foreign language proficiency and a requirement to do a number of things to improve our oversight ability and our planning ability regarding language proficiency.

You may recall from our discussion in May regarding a balanced workforce strategy that what we perceived as an overall weakness in the Department is workforce planning. We really do not have the capacity department-wide for workforce planning that we need, and this will also be an aspect of this Human Capital Strategic Plan.

As I said, I think we will issue this plan at the latest in early fall. We may even be able to have the plan published under the Secretary's signature in late summer. So I think we are going to be making some progress there.

We are also attaching specific metrics to the plan, so we will have a set of measures that we will be looking at on a regular basis and reporting to the Secretary on a quarterly basis.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you, Mr. Neal. In your testimony you stated that you would work with the Department's Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Office to establish a DHS Language Task Force to identify language requirements and assess the Department's language capability. Would you please tell us more about this task force, including the timeline for setting it up?

Mr. NEAL. The task force has not been established yet. Margo Schlanger, our Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and I are going to be establishing it within the next few weeks, and we will be giving them a charter to actually identify component language requirements and the skills and to see how we should manage this issue from a department-wide basis. Right now, as I said, it is really managed at the component level, and we do not necessarily think that we need to be changing where we identify the requirements, but how we track them needs to be more consistent. We need to have some process in place where we are able to determine what requirements we have and who actually has those language proficiencies. Right now, if you said identify who can speak Spanish in the Department of Homeland Security, I could not do that except by going to components and having them go out and ask people questions. And that is not really a good way to do this.

So that is going to be a part of what we will look at with this task force. How do we manage this? How do we keep track of it? And when we need to identify who has what language proficiency, how do we do that quickly and efficiently? Right now, I do not think we have the capacity to do that.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Maurer, DOD has officials designated as senior language authorities within the Office of the Secretary, its military services, and other DOD components to provide senior-level guidance regarding the Department's language transformation effort. Do you think it would be beneficial to have similar language officials at DHS and within its components?

Mr. MAURER. Mr. Chairman, I think the most important thing for DHS is to ensure that they have the capability at the Department level to monitor and assess and bring some coherence to the capabilities and the needs assessments that are being conducted at the component or the office level. Whether that takes the shape of the kind of system that DOD has in place I am a bit agnostic on, but I think the most important thing is to make sure that there is accountability built into whatever structure that DHS is going to be providing, and that this accountability is grounded in a clear understanding of the Department's needs as well as what its capabilities are.

If you are going to have accountability, you have to have a clear understanding of what you have accountability over.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Weaver, despite the numerous challenges faced by DOD to improve its language proficiency and the challenges that remain, I am pleased by the efforts the Department has taken and the importance it has placed on this problem.

One area I am interested in learning more about is DOD's efforts to coordinate with other agencies. Can you provide an update on DOD's coordination efforts with other agencies?

Ms. WEAVER. There is a formal working group that has been established with representatives from the Departments of Defense, Education, State, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. They meet routinely, and they have come up with goals and objectives that they want to work together with to push forward this year. There are five objectives, and that is, to coordinate reporting on outcomes in a single annual report; develop mechanisms for reporting student participation; share outreach of programs; resume collaborative efforts from the National Security Language Initiative; and develop a research agenda.

By keeping this communication open, we can keep the initiatives that we started together previously going and add new initiatives, and this collaboration, we think, is very important.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. As you know, Ms. Weaver, one of the key recommendations that came from the 2004 National Language Conference was to establish a council that could facilitate coordination and collaboration among all sectors. Through the National Security Language Initiative, DOD has experienced this on a smaller scale. Has DOD found coordination and collaboration with the Departments of State and Education, and the intelligence community beneficial to increase the number of language speakers?

Ms. WEAVER. The initiatives that we have worked together and independently on have increased the number of high level language speakers that are available to all government agencies. Two programs that we have participated in is the Flagship Program, which is a program that increases the level of proficiency level taught among the colleges and universities. Our goal was to increase participation to 2,000. We think we are going to make that goal by the end of this academic year.

The other initiative was the National Service Language Corps, which is an all-Federal Government initiative. We have a test program that we completed. The initial program was to set up 500 participants. We are close to 1,400 participants. These are Americans with a high level of language proficiency and cultural back-

ground that have volunteered to serve the Nation in natural disasters, humanitarian reasons, and when their country calls.

We have already done test programs with the Citizens Development Corps (CDC) and have deployed people to the Pacific Command (PACOM), as well as volunteers who have participated in the disaster at the Gulf Coast, and it is working well.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Neal, are you familiar with DOD's coordination activities with the Departments of State, Education, and the intelligence community? And do you believe the Department could benefit from being part of it?

Mr. NEAL. Mr. Chairman, I am not familiar with that, and so I really could not answer whether it would be beneficial to be a part or not.

Senator AKAKA. And, of course, the whole idea is to get other agencies and departments together in dealing with this language process.

Mr. Maurer, the White Paper from the 2004 National Language Conference laid out the critical steps needed to address the Nation's language skills shortfall. The first recommendation calls for strong and comprehensive leadership. Specifically, it called for a national language director to develop and implement a national language strategy and a coordination council to assist with implementing the strategy.

To what extent do you see Federal agencies coordinating with each other to address the shortfall in languages? And in what way can this coordination be improved?

Mr. MAURER. Mr. Chairman, in the field work that we conducted for the report that is being issued today on DHS foreign language, I am pleased to report we saw many good examples at the field level of ongoing coordination in the day-to-day functions and operations of different components within DHS and across DHS and other departments. In doing our work at seven different locations within the United States, we saw that people who were working for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), if they knew a foreign language, and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) or someplace else needed that person's help in an ongoing investigation or a mission, they would contact that person. They would work it out at the local level. So it seems to be functioning at that level, the day-to-day mission responsibilities.

Once you get into the higher level, you are talking about working across departments and agencies in Washington, we have not formally assessed whether or not those coordination mechanisms are adequate or not. But generally speaking, there does not seem to be as developed or rich coordination mechanisms in this particular field as you see in other areas of interagency coordination. And it is certainly something that bears some additional review.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Maurer, the GAO report on Limited English Proficiency (LEP) access to Federal programs found that the Federal interagency working group on LEP provides opportunities to enhance collaborative efforts among agencies. Would you please elaborate on how collaboration among the participating agencies has resulted in more efficient methods for ensuring that LEP persons have access to Federal programs?

Mr. MAURER. Sure. I think one example is disaster relief initiatives. That is an area where Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) within DHS has the lead. Before disasters happen, there is ongoing collaboration between FEMA and the Small Business Administration, and to some extent IRS as well, to make sure that they have collaborated and talked to one another on the plans and the best way to implement those plans in time of a natural disaster or some other emergency response initiative.

Having those discussions in advance of a disaster has really enhanced their ability to respond on the ground in times of need. So, for example, in our work we found cases where the Small Business Administration (SBA) and FEMA were able to deploy more quickly and be able to reach out to the various limited English-proficiency customers during their times of need, and that is critically important.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Weaver, I am just trying to find out whether there is anyone else that is working on this issue. The 2004 National Language Conference called for a national language adviser in the Federal Government to lead efforts to address our Nation's language shortfalls. Is there anyone in the current Administration who is leading the Federal Government's language efforts?

Ms. WEAVER. No, sir, I am not aware of anyone.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Weaver, the Department provides language pay incentives to its military personnel. Do you believe language pay is an effective tool to encourage personnel to identify, improve, and sustain language capabilities?

Ms. WEAVER. The Department of Defense pays foreign language proficiency pay to both military and civilian, and we have found this to be a very effective initiative to get individuals to identify their language capabilities, including those that do not work in positions that require a language. It is also an incentive to allow individuals to increase or sustain their language capabilities.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Neal, as you know, through the Foreign Language Award Program, DHS provides language pay incentives for its Customs and Border Protection officers and agriculture specialists. The Department's fiscal year 2011 budget request seeks to reduce funding for this program in order to hire additional staff. While I support this goal, I oppose cutting language pay funding to do so.

Given GAO's assessment that DHS could better assess its language programs and activities, could you please explain the Administration's reason for cutting Foreign Language Award Program funding in its budget request?

Mr. NEAL. There was a reduction in that program in the 2011 budget request. I think that what CBP was trying to do at the time it formulated that budget request was balance the need for additional personnel and the need for language proficiency. A lot of CBP positions require basic language proficiency in another language—usually in Spanish—Border Patrol agents, Customs and Border Protection Officers (CBPOs), and agricultural specialists. And so I think their thinking at the time was that they needed additional personnel; this was a way to get resources for additional personnel. And their thinking was that it would not be adversely affecting the language capabilities because so many of the jobs ac-

tually require them as a fundamental part of qualifications for the job. And the basic language instruction is carried out at the academies, and so they were thinking that would be a way to get additional resources for staff.

Senator AKAKA. This question is for both Mr. Maurer and Mr. Neal. Foreign Language Award Programs vary by components at DHS and are limited in ways that do not necessarily relate to needed language skills. For instance, GAO used the example of ICE where award payments are limited by statute to employees who meet the definition of law enforcement officer. Therefore, for example, intelligence research specialists in ICE are not eligible to receive award payments for their language skills.

How does this affect the components' ability to meet agency needs? Mr. Maurer.

Mr. MAURER. Well, Mr. Chairman, I think absent an assessment of the foreign language needs and the foreign language capabilities, it is difficult to say what impact the Foreign Language Award Program has on the Department's overall ability to perform its mission. In the course of our audit work and doing this report, we heard a lot of demand for that kind of pay program in other parts of the Department. But we were not in a position to assess whether or not the existing program was adequate or whether or not it should be expanded or be reduced because we did not have a sense of what the Department actually needs in terms of its foreign language capabilities.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Neal.

Mr. NEAL. I have to agree with Mr. Maurer on this, that absent more structure in the assessment process and a better ability to identify what specific language requirements we have, it is hard to assess whether or not Foreign Language Award Programs are highly effective in meeting the requirements or not because we do not have a good handle on all those requirements.

We do know that in the places where this program has been used, it does appear to incentivize maintaining language proficiency, and as Ms. Weaver said, with DOD it incentivizes folks to actually disclose fluency in languages that they might not necessarily do because it would not be a requirement for their everyday work.

But I think that the workforce planning part of this and knowing as quickly as possible what we need will help us tailor incentive programs to meet the requirements that we identify. But we have to identify them first.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Maurer, GAO has recommended that both the Departments of Defense and State develop a comprehensive strategic plan with measurable goals and objectives to meet their foreign language requirements. What are the challenges to developing comprehensive strategic plans? And what recommendations would you make on developing strategic plans to meet agencies' language requirements?

Mr. MAURER. Well, I think the first challenge for the Defense Department is the size and the breadth of the Department itself. DOD also has a warfighting mission as its primary mission, as well as a number of other missions and responsibility. So trying to get

their arms around just the scope of what they do is a significant challenge.

The State Department faces similar challenges, but one of the advantages that they have is they have had a longstanding process in place for building foreign language capabilities into their workforce planning needs, and that goes back many decades, because foreign language capability is absolutely essential to the conduct of foreign diplomacy. So they have the ability to do that.

In terms of developing a strategic plan, I think one of the most challenging things is developing outcome-based metrics. In other words, how do you assess whether or not different aspects of the programs in place are actually working? It is easy to measure how much money you are spending on foreign language award pay programs, for example. It is much more difficult to come up with ways of measuring how effective those programs are at pursuing the overall objectives of enhancing foreign language capabilities. So I would encourage any department or agency to give a lot of thought of how are you going to measure that in the end.

The other thing it needs to be tied into, of course, is the core mission. What are the most important core missions of the agency or department? And how are you going to structure foreign languages to help carry out those missions? One of the things we found in doing the work at DHS and other departments is that foreign language capabilities are not a separate entity in and of themselves, but they are, rather, a way to help enhance departments to carry out their key missions and responsibilities. So they should not be viewed in isolation.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Weaver, you stated that DOD has drafted a strategic plan for its language and regional proficiency transformation, which is undergoing review and approval. Additionally, the different services within the Department have completed or are in the process of completing their own strategic plans.

How is the Department integrating the Department's strategic plan with its component parts?

Ms. WEAVER. The services built their strategic plans based on the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap. Using the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap as their starting document as well as strategic guidance, defense strategic guidance that supports the national guidance, security guidance, we walked backwards working collaboratively with the services to describe the end state the entire Department needed as far as language and cultural and regional capabilities. And then we built the defense plan.

The services will go in and always modify their plans during their review process, and it is an ongoing iterative process to keep the plans supporting one another.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you.

Mr. Maurer, over the years GAO has reviewed many Federal agencies' language capabilities. You have addressed some of these, but I want to give you a final opportunity. What are the common recurring challenges that Federal agencies face? And what are your key recommendations on how to address them?

Mr. MAURER. I think the fundamental challenge that the departments face is that, on the one hand, it is an increasingly interdependent, globalized world. There is an increasing need to have

foreign language-capable staff across the breadth of the Federal Government. They need this capability to do a better job of delivering their services or carry out their missions.

However, at the same time, they all have pretty tremendous operational responsibilities, and they are facing increasingly tight fiscal constraints. So trying to balance all of these things is going to be an increasingly difficult challenge going forward.

So what we would suggest at GAO is that departments and agencies get their arms around their core mission needs for foreign language and get a good understanding of that, compare that with the actual capabilities that exist already within the departments, develop programs that are going to help address whatever gaps may exist, and then ensure that you have some kind of mechanism at the end of the day to know whether or not the programs are successful.

I think another key element is enhancing collaboration and coordination both within departments as well as across departments. You are starting to see some sharing of foreign language translation capabilities within the intelligence community as a way to make the most of a scarce resource. There may be room for that in other parts of the foreign language realm as well as across the Federal Government. That is worth exploring.

So at the end of the day, it is really understanding what do you need, what do you have, and how you are going to fill the gaps.

Senator AKAKA. Well, I want to thank the first panel of witnesses for their responses, and for trying to improve foreign language proficiency in the Federal Government. Without question, we all agree that there is a huge need to improve this area. We need to have more Americans proficient in other languages. I urge you to continue to improve foreign language capabilities at your agencies. I just want you to know that we stand ready to work with you. If we can do something legislatively that can help, we will work together to move forward. Thank you very much.

Now I would like to welcome the second panel of witnesses. I would like to welcome the Hon. David Chu—it is so good to see you again—former Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness at the Department of Defense.

Also, Richard Brecht, Executive Director, Center for Advanced Study of Language, University of Maryland.

And Dan Davidson, President of the American Councils for International Education, and elected president of the Joint National Committee for Languages.

As you know, it is the custom of the Subcommittee to swear in all witnesses, so will you please rise and raise your right hand? Do you swear that the testimony you are about to give this Subcommittee is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Mr. CHU. I do.

Mr. BRECHT. I do.

Mr. DAVIDSON. I do.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much. Let the record note that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

I would like you to know that your full statements will be placed in the record. So, Dr. Chu, will you please proceed with your statement?

**TESTIMONY OF THE HON. DAVID S. CHU,<sup>1</sup> FORMER UNDER SECRETARY FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Mr. CHU. Mr. Chairman, it is a great privilege to appear before you again as a witness, and I want to thank you for your leadership on this important issue and the leadership of your Subcommittee. I am appearing, I should emphasize, in my personal capacity, attempting to speak from my experience at the Department of Defense on the ingredients that might argue for success in this arena. I should emphasize, therefore, that neither the Department of Defense nor my present institution necessarily share the views I am about to espouse in this hearing.

I do believe if you look at the Department of Defense experience as a potential model for how more broadly the Federal Government might improve its language capabilities, there are three key ingredients.

First of all, in defense, the top leadership set the goal. It was the personal goal of the Secretary of Defense, and the personal goal of his Deputy. They mandated that we develop a roadmap for how we might change the Department's stance in this regard. They also provided the resources—a key ingredient, as I know you would agree. And they had appointed senior language authorities to ensure the Department could act in this domain—had a set of career leaders who were able to carry out the specific provisions of the roadmap to make sure we actually reach those goals.

The second ingredient in defense success, in my judgment, was the willingness to think about new tools, new kinds of programs with which to enhance the Department's language capabilities. Most important, perhaps, was the commitment to recruiting native and heritage speakers of the so-called less commonly taught languages. The Army initiated a program to recruiting reserve status heritage speakers, the so-called 09 Lima program, very successful in enhancing its Arabic capacity specifically. The Army also opened the door on other individuals legally residents in the United States, the so-called Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program, which has allowed it to recruit across a series of important languages.

And the Department mobilized civil talent through the National Language Service Corps about which you heard in the earlier panel. I do think the willingness to think about new ways with which to secure language capacity is very important if there is to be broader Federal success.

I think the third ingredient in the success of the Defense Department in enhancing its language capability was the fact that the notion of change, the notion of language as an important tool to military success was embraced by respected members of the career force, both military and civil. Four-star officers of the military services spoke up on the importance of language skill. The U.S. Marine

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Chu appears in the Appendix on page 58.

Corps, for example, has now, as you know, assigned to every new entrant in its ranks a region of the world, expecting members of its corps to gain some cultural knowledge and perhaps some linguistic capacity.

If one thinks about expanding to the Federal Government as a whole the kind of success the Defense Department has enjoyed, I do think it will be essential—and the Defense Department recognized this essentiality—to consider a national effort, not just a Federal effort, to engage the State and local communities, particularly because it is through K–12 language instruction that I believe the country can build a much better base for superior linguistic success.

I do wonder whether it would be useful to include language as a specific objective, a specific element in the so-called Race to the Top grants that are now being awarded.

And I also believe that it will be helpful to emulate what the Congress encouraged the Department to do with the construction of State roadmaps. Congress provided funds that DOD used that allowed three States—Oregon, Ohio, and Texas—to construct State roadmaps that gave the States some view of how they might improve their situation, why was language important, how might they do better. And I was very interested that Utah under then-Governor Huntman’s leadership, emulated this practice at his instigation.

I endorse, Mr. Chairman, the notion that you have advanced in your legislative proposal that, consistent with the 2004 conference, a Federal council to coordinate Federal efforts would be an essential ingredient if the Federal Government as a whole is to do a better job preparing our Nation for the future linguistic challenges it will face. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Dr. Chu.

Dr. Brecht, will you please proceed with your statement?

**TESTIMONY OF RICHARD D. BRECHT,<sup>1</sup> EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
CENTER FOR ADVANCED STUDY OF LANGUAGE, UNIVERSITY  
OF MARYLAND**

Mr. BRECHT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my privilege to be here and speak in my personal capacity but based on over half a century of work in the government and in academe on behalf of language.

One frequently hears it is too hard for government organizations with critical language requirements to fully succeed in a world with thousands of languages and changing requirements by the day. This testimony is aimed at undermining this ready assumption, and as illustration, I would like to envision a future scenario that I would argue is realistic and within reach.

A major earthquake rocks San Francisco and the surrounding area. Buildings are destroyed, power and water supply systems are damaged, people are panicked, emergency responders are overextended. Massive State and Federal assistance is deployed, from DHS—that is, FEMA, TSA, Coast Guard—DOD (National Guard and Military Reserves, even hospital ships). Adding to this crisis is

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Brecht appears in the Appendix on page 62.

the fact that intelligence sources have uncovered recent communications indicating a terrorist plot linked to the Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines to attack major transportation and communication channels.

At the San Francisco and Oakland docks are recently arrived cargo ships and tankers from the Philippines, from Liberia, and Mexico. In addition, major drug traffickers are taking advantage of the situation and dramatically increasing activity along the Mexican Border, which, of course, brings government organizations to bear, including National Security Agency (NSA), National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Customs and Border Patrol. I ask excuse for the alphabet soup.

Communication challenges arise on all sides. The National Foreign Language Coordinating Council Office in the Nation's capital has direct contact with the Federal senior language authorities and immediately alerts all elements to stand by for support and deployment. In collaboration with California State and local fusion centers, the office receives requirements from the affected areas and identifies language resources across the United States Government (USG), as well as in academe, industry, and heritage communities.

Deployed are core language capabilities in DHS, DOD, Department of Justice (DOJ), Intelligence Community (IC), and other Federal components, all operating under comprehensive department- and agency-wide strategic plans that have identified requirements and have built organic capabilities in languages and cultures of anticipated high and surge requirements, on demand. Thus, FEMA has designated the San Andreas Fault as one of the areas eminently prone to natural disasters and has identified the languages that populations in the Bay area speak. In addition, permanent employees of the relevant DHS components have been trained and certified to proficiency levels required by the professional tasks they perform.

Capabilities are shared. Each department's and agency's strategic plan and second language acquisition office has specific procedures to share resources within and across departments and agencies. The DOD is able to direct the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center in Monterey to provide language cadres of its qualified students to the area to assist speakers of Mandarin and any of the other two dozen languages taught at that institution. Watch List and other IC elements coordinate with TSA and Customs and Border Patrol, sharing language capabilities in Filipino, Illocano, Cebuano, in efforts to determine identities and track communications of new arrivals in San Francisco who are possible Abu Sayyaf members.

Warehoused capabilities are drawn upon. The National Language Service Corps provides professionals across a range of disciplines with languages of San Francisco's smaller populations, like Hindi, Russian, Filipino, Korean, as well as even Samoan and Chamorro. The National Virtual Translation Center is tasked to provide translations of documents and announcements directed specifically at local non-English-speaking populations in the area who are in need of, or able to provide, assistance.

Capabilities are outsourced. Language Line Services, Inc., a private company based in Monterey, is contracted to provide online interpretation for emergency hotlines in the dozens of languages spoken in the city.

Reach-back capabilities are brought to bear. The University of California-Berkeley National Heritage Language Resource Center is contacted by the National Council Office for advice on the heritage communities in the San Francisco area, their languages, available resources, and leadership.

Such a scenario as this is within the realm of possibility, I would argue, and the capabilities it presupposes are largely available and within reach, if and only if, however, they can be brought to bear in the time of an emergency.

Finally, a key player in this scenario, I would argue, is a national coordinated entity like the National Foreign Language Coordinating Council, which you have proposed. I believe that is a key element to bring these resources together in a national emergency.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you, Dr. Brecht.

Dr. Davidson, will you please proceed with your statement?

**TESTIMONY OF DAN E. DAVIDSON,<sup>1</sup> PRESIDENT, AMERICAN COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: ACTR/ACCELS, AND ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE JOINT NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR LANGUAGES (JNCL)**

Mr. DAVIDSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today and present views, experiences, and research results on the current state of foreign language learning in the United States and on improving the Federal Government's foreign language capabilities in the year 2010.

As President of American Councils for International Education, I oversee programs focused on advanced and professional-level language acquisition at overseas universities and immersion centers funded both by the U.S. Department of State and the National Security Education Program of DOD, which contribute to the preparation today of more than 1,750 Americans annually at the school, undergraduate, and graduate levels through programs sponsored by the State Department and the flagship DOD programs. These include work in languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Indonesia, Japanese, Korean, Turkic languages, Persian, Hindi, Russian, Swahili, Yoruba, and other languages. These are important programs, and they have been the target of research, which is reflected in two referee journal articles which I would take the liberty of leaving with you and your staff today so that I do not have to reiterate their contents right now but, rather, with your permission, I would like to turn directly to the research results and the recommendations that flow from that.

The research has shown that language learning in the overseas immersion environment holds enormous potential for meeting the linguistic and cultural training needs for the government workforce of the 21st Century. But to function effectively, it must be properly integrated into K-12 and undergraduate curricula and adequately supported by faculties, administrators, policymakers, and funders.

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Davidson appears in the Appendix on page 82.

A sustained effort across government and the academy in support of world languages and cultures will necessitate a commitment at once to overseas language immersion as well as a strong focus on our domestic training capacity. The research data which I make available today makes it clear that a concerted effort in this area, first, is possible and, second, it can succeed and it is succeeding. That is the good news, and from that I would like to turn to the recommendations that flow from these two studies.

The second study is the first-ever census of K–12 programs in the United States—not a survey, an actual census with a 91.8-percent return rate. We established that there are 3,500 K–12 programs in the United States as of May 2009 focused on the critical languages alone. That number exceeds by twice what experts in the field believed was the case, and, hence, I turn to the recommendations that flow from that research.

The latest research provides us stronger and I think more optimistic assumptions about the role that U.S. education can play and should play in addressing the language gap in the Federal Government workforce capability:

One, the assumption that Americans, in fact, are achieving professional-level proficiency—ILR-3 or higher in multiple skills—in these languages thanks to the National Security Education Program Flagship Program and its several feeder programs funded by more than one agency.

Two, that young Americans are interested as never before in learning the critical languages, as is evidenced by the notable growth in K–12 programs that is documented here, especially in Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Russian, and Korean across the 50 States and the District of Columbia; and a corollary to that, that entering university freshmen are more internationally connected than ever before and have been reported in the College Board American Council on Education (ACE) Survey of 2008 of having quite robust expectations of learning a foreign language, studying overseas, and pursuing an internationally focused career. What is needed then is a mechanism for growing greater public attention to the successes and proof of concept for U.S. success in this area which now exists. More U.S. students in institutions of all kinds can pursue long-term study of world languages, just as their counterparts do, as you mentioned earlier, Mr. Chairman, whenever you go overseas, just as other nations are investing in the same thing. That mechanism is both informational and also financial.

The general lack of knowledge, unfortunately, at the State and local levels of how to plan and implement these programs needs to be addressed.

The need for Federal support of proven models of long-term language proficiency also need to be addressed, such as the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) complex of programs.

And continued increased Federal support is necessary for essential overseas immersion.

Your own legislation calling for the creation of a National Coordinating Council would be a robust and effective way of addressing that, as would be recent legislation that is being drafted by Congressmen Holt, Chu, and Tonko on the House side looking at a new reauthorization for the ESEA.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to respond to your questions later.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Dr. Davidson.

Dr. Chu, the GAO report revealed that the Department of Homeland Security has not taken steps department-wide to address its language capabilities. In your testimony you stated that one of the valuable lessons learned from DOD's experience is that change requires strong leadership from the top.

What recommendations would you make to Federal agencies like DHS on what is required to sustain and institutionalize continued leadership in language education?

Mr. CHU. Mr. Chairman, I do believe, as you suggest, that it is critical that the Cabinet Secretary speak personally to this issue, not simply once but repeatedly, to make clear both publicly and inside the agency that this is a goal of importance to him or her.

I further believe that it is important that he or she hold appropriate sub-Cabinet officers responsible for developing a specific plan of action, against which, of course, Cabinet resources must be applied.

I think those three steps together will change the outcomes in any agency.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. I appreciate that we have three panelists here who have extensive knowledge and experience on this issue and can probably give us the best answers as to how we should proceed.

Dr. Chu, it is well known that effectuating change across a large Department like DOD is difficult. I am sure that during the time you served at DOD there were some challenges in pushing for increased foreign language, cultural awareness, and regional expertise capabilities. DOD has made great strides over the past several years, and yet there is still much to be done.

What recommendations do you have for agencies that face similar challenges?

Mr. CHU. I do believe, Mr. Chairman, that being flexible about how you achieve these goals will enhance the chances for success. Simply expanding existing programs may not be the best way to proceed, and certainly that was our conclusion at Defense—that we needed both some new program and some new ways of applying old programs.

To take a specific example, the Department had long had a fine language instruction facility, the Defense Language Institute (DLI), but we found with demands post-September 11, 2001, that simply ensuring a good flow of students to that institute was not enough, that we needed to take training to units, that DLI needed to help us make training portable, so to speak. So we brought the training to the soldiers, the marines, etc., who would need it. It is both improving or changing the nature of existing programs that will be helpful, in my judgment, as well as being willing to imagine new programs, different ways of achieving the same ends. I particularly praise the U.S. Army for its flexibility in finding new ways to recruit native and heritage speakers.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Brecht, you paint a vivid and optimistic picture of what Federal language skills should be. In your testimony you envision a globalized workforce as the end state for the Federal

workforce and discussed how this workforce should be comprised. How do we engage other Federal leaders to make them better aware of the importance of language and cultural proficiency and be willing to work toward this globalized workforce?

Mr. BRECHT. Optimism is in my nature, Mr. Chairman. Fifty years of work in this area, though, does not exactly encourage optimism. But I believe we have reached a point where making arguments for the need for language basically is old-fashioned.

The Department of Defense did not launch the transformation roadmap out of a sense of altruism or a belief in languages for the good of all. It was a pragmatic decision based on clear needs that they did that. And, frankly, looking at the Department of Homeland Security, I view it the same way.

If you actually stand back and ask each component to look at what its language requirements are, how do you do a language audit—and industry, by the way, has different models for doing audits of major industry corporations. If you actually look at your language requirements and you look at what your capabilities are and you saw that delta, and any leader looking at a rigorous way to assess the requirements and the capabilities and looking at that delta, it does not make much sense to me to stand back and say we have to make an argument for that. A leader has to recognize that. And in this case, I do not know very many elements of the U.S. Government, State and local included, that do not see the need for language. What I fear is they often view it as difficult or impossible to address, and that is a prioritization issue, to be sure, but in my view, if you just look at the requirements and you look at them carefully, the notion that, for instance, the African command in the Department of Defense, when they look at 2,000 languages in Africa, they look at what they have to address in areas of counterterrorism or humanitarian assistance or professionalization of security forces and so on, if you talk to the commander of the African command, he will tell you, “My language needs are incredible.” He does not have to be hit on the head with it at this stage. And so it is, for example, with the Department of Justice and across the Federal Government. It is clear that need has emerged now in this century. English is not the answer. Most people understand that. English is an immense capability. It is not the answer.

And so what I would like to be candid about is your legislation: Putting all of the departments in one room so that the people who clearly see and have made this assessment can share that vision or at least the methodology to arrive at that vision, I think that is exactly the right way to go.

Senator AKAKA. Well, since I have asked that question, let me ask Dr. Chu whether he would want to comment on how to engage other Federal leaders as well. And I will ask Dr. Davidson as well. Dr. Chu.

Mr. CHU. I think as Dr. Brecht has suggested, there is enormous interest at different levels in each agency in improving our language capacity. The challenge is how to get the agencies together to provide a forum. As you heard from the previous panel, there are some informal mechanisms, but it is very helpful to have a

more formal mechanism, especially one endorsed by senior levels of the Federal Government.

You, sir, in your opening statement praised the National Security Language Initiative of the last Administration. I do think, as Ms. Weaver indicated, it would be terrific to give that new impetus and energy. I think the fact that you are holding this hearing is succeeding in connecting the Department of Homeland Security with the Defense Department and those that are already its partners.

I do believe, however, some formal convening of Federal agencies, whether a few, as the National Security Language Initiative sought to do, or many, as your Coordinating Council would imply, would be very powerful in improving the Federal effort as a whole.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Davidson, any comments?

Mr. DAVIDSON. Yes. The need to mobilize support across government agencies is really very evident, even beyond those that you have discussed here today. In particular, if one looks at the statement of President Obama reflected in the important National Security Strategy document released at the end of May 2010, as well as Secretary Duncan's statements in the Education Department on the importance of language, there is a sense almost of disconnect between the rhetorical direction of our President's National Security Strategy, which is very consistent with the National Security Language Initiative we have been discussing here today, and the actual implementation and fair share in all of this that our own Department of Education should be playing.

There are some important programs like Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP). They are quite small compared to what other agencies have done, and we are distressed, for example, that in the President's version of the reauthorization of elementary and secondary education, we see language again shunted off a bit like others here today as sort of a well-rounded—something you might have for a well-rounded education along with other frills, but not as something core and central to American national security going forward, our competitiveness and our ability to communicate with one another.

So I think there is a need for a strong voice here that would bring on the implementation level the work of the Department of Education with what clearly the President, I think, envisions.

Senator AKAKA. As you know, the National Foreign Language Coordination Act, which I originally introduced in 2005, is based on the recommendations that came out of the 2004 National Language Conference, and some of you have commented on my bill. I would like to hear more about your views on that bill, in particular any changes that you would recommend be made. Dr. Brecht.

Mr. BRECHT. Yes, I would like to take the opportunity in that regard. Dr. Davidson made it very clear that the future of our language capabilities in the Federal Government at this stage seem to be envisioned as the responsibility of those agencies. In fact, the future of language capability in the United States is a responsibility of education, K-12 and higher education. And so it is very clear to me that education itself and academe have to be included in any coordination.

I will say also that some of the finest technologies, some of the finest language preparation materials and so on, industry is

honing. And so I believe as well that industry should be represented in any coordination effort. It has to take all of us together, and so the only thing I would respectfully submit is that having all the Federal agencies represented is excellent, but some way to bring in the academic enterprise as well as industry would make—it would make it even a stronger initiative.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Chu.

Mr. CHU. Mr. Chairman, I would raise two issues that you may wish to consider to strengthen the bill.

First, are there any authorities that you want to give the council besides the general responsibility of coordination across Federal agencies, whether that is authority to review, authority to approve certain initiatives, etc.?

Second, I think it would be very useful, without necessarily specifying in the law what the metrics are, to insist that metrics be established against which to measure progress. I think certainly if I look to the Defense experience, that was very powerful in the roadmap that the Deputy Secretary directed be prepared, that we had benchmarks we had to meet, timelines, quantitative outcomes we had to achieve. And I think that will help drive progress further—simply, for example, inviting the council or the President to establish those metrics may be sufficient in the bill that you are proposing.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Davidson.

Mr. DAVIDSON. I wholeheartedly concur with what my colleagues have said. In my written testimony I do offer five possible areas where the national strategy might be elaborated somewhat more. I think the direction is exactly the right way and that a national strategy is exactly what is called for here. I think I will leave it at that and just refer to the five points I make in the written testimony.

Senator AKAKA. I want to ask the panel to respond. As you know well, one of the key recommendations that came from the conference recommended that a national language authority be appointed by the President to serve as a principal adviser and coordinator in the Federal Government and to collaborate with the public and private sectors. My bill would place the national language adviser in the White House to facilitate this type of coordination and collaboration.

Could you address why a coordinator who is able to reach across the government and work with all sectors is needed?

Mr. CHU. Mr. Chairman, my colleagues have, I think, eloquently emphasized—and certainly that is the experience of Defense—that if we are going to make major progress, we need to address the degree of language effort at the K–12 level. And I think that is really the issue that you are inviting be confronted by proposing a national language authority. It is not just a Federal function. In fact, in some respects, it is not even principally a Federal function. It is a national necessity that we do better on this front, and only with the partnership of State and local authorities in my judgment are we likely to succeed. So my view of the vision you have outlined is that where we are very powerful is in mobilizing that national constituency.

I do think in doing so this notion of roadmaps that the States construct could be a very helpful particular step, and so one possible function for a national language authority would be to encourage the preparation of such roadmaps and to provide a forum in which the progress against the goals they set could be reviewed.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Brecht

Mr. BRECHT. I think there is a nice model, the Office of Science and Technology Policy in the White House. Its mandate, it seems to me, is broader. Now, I will not testify to its efficiency because I am not entirely sure how the science community views it, but the fact that it is a bully pulpit, first, is very important; the fact that it has education as part of its mandate; the fact that research itself is part of its mandate, together with how the U.S. Government adopts and how technology transfer takes place—all of that strikes me as a very broad mandate. And if I were in power, an Office of Language and Global Communications with the same power and mandate would be a very fine thing.

Again, though, your council strikes me as an implementation of that, and then the national language coordinator is the science adviser, the equivalent of the science adviser.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Davidson.

Mr. DAVIDSON. I strongly agree with that. I think in looking at the way that John Holdren functions as National Science Adviser, you see a strong voice and a mobilizing factor there that does reach across private, public, and various sectors. The difference, I think, is that science on some level has a face validity across the country. It is not hard to get up in front of a local board of education and argue that we need to strengthen science and technology. Every businessperson in the room would rise. But with language, we have a tougher argument because of America's long-time landlocked status that outside the Beltway, once we get beyond the foreign affairs international community, we have a somewhat different discourse to deal with. And the sort of level of public awareness is not as sharp for language as it is for science and math. So I think that there is a strong public awareness factor that we have to bring in. In Hawaii, it is not a problem for obvious reasons, but in other parts of the country, we have a lot of work to do.

Senator AKAKA. Yes. Dr. Davidson, let me ask you, what suggestions do you have for what the Federal Government can do to encourage foreign language education at all levels?

Mr. DAVIDSON. A strategy for foreign language education that includes two things that has a strong informational component, as we have just been speaking, so that people understand better on the local level and on State levels, too, and on the institutional level how a foreign language learning career might look. Just as we might have an understanding of what a well-defined mathematics education might look like, we need something similar for foreign language, which, in fact, is known by specialists but less understood locally. So the first Federal role is most certainly to disseminate an information model.

The second one, I think, is a strong model for support of those key junctures in an educational career where the need to get overseas, the need to experience the other culture firsthand in an emer-

gent setting, particularly at an early age, can be critical in shaping that career in a successful way.

Again, we know the models. They are multiple. They work well. The practices are well defined. They are not well known. But there is a role for Federal intervention here, both on the information side and on the funding side. The Flagship Program exists right now only on about 22 campuses across the country, including Hawaii, Ohio, Michigan, Texas, and so forth. We have no more than two programs per campus, most of them fewer than that. And yet those programs are already producing right now people who go—65 percent of whom go right into government service with three level qualifications or better.

So even as the educational system is retooling and getting stronger, we have a mechanism in place that will make sure that the government also has qualified people this year and next year and then the year after that. And the problem is it is a tiny model of 22 institutions that could easily be scaled up, at least to the size of Title VI, and give us the numbers we need now.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Brecht.

Mr. BRECHT. May I comment on that question?

Senator AKAKA. Yes, go ahead.

Mr. BRECHT. If I may. That is exactly right. The Flagship Program is doing amazing things in higher education. It is sad that this is a Department of Defense initiative and not a Department of Education initiative. And so the first thing that has to be done is that language has to become part of the education mandate, not national security mandate. And right now, frankly, language is a national security issue not an education issue.

The second point I would make is that Secretary Riley and President Clinton—Secretary Riley in the last few months of his tenure recognized dual language immersion programs as one of the most remarkable things that could happen in this country. If we have schools, elementary schools where children are learning in English for half the day and Hawaiian for the second half the day, and half the students have a native language in English and, God willing, even in Hawaiian, if we have dual language immersion programs across the country to demonstrate that children actually can learn a language, they can learn a language effectively, you do not have to add language teachers, you simply have to find teachers who teach elementary education who know language—if we launched that in 50 States with \$40, \$50 million and showed that it can be done, that is a way to feed into the flagship programs where they could even do better.

And so there are models out there, though it does require that education be the home of language in the United States.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. If there were only three things that we could accomplish this Congress that would address the Nation's overall language needs as well as Federal agencies' language shortfall, what should those three things be? This will be the final question. [Laughter.]

Mr. BRECHT. That is a good final question.

Mr. CHU. We get three wishes.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Chu.

Mr. CHU. I do think bringing your bill to a successful conclusion would be one of them.

Second, I think, as my colleagues have implied, funding K–12 so-called pipeline programs as an education initiative would be a second element.

Third, I think the Federal Government would help the country if it signaled in some fashion the importance of high-level language accomplishment as a national goal. And perhaps the establishment of some prizes that identified successful Americans of the types that Dr. Davidson and Dr. Brecht have described might be one way to send to the Nation the kind of message that you are attempting to impart.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much. Dr. Brecht.

Mr. BRECHT. It is kind of a difficult question. I am going to have to go with the notion that if the Federal Government had a bully pulpit at a coordinating council, that would be a major statement—that had education and industry on it, that would be a major statement to the country, where real needs are present and recognizable.

The second thing—and I am afraid it is going to sound rather repetitious—is we have to do something to get the Department of Education to fund major programs, preferably at the K–12 level, and I frankly think dual language immersion is one of the most remarkable things we could do.

And, third, I will say in education, again, the Flagship Program of the National Security Education Program is one of the most remarkable things I have ever seen because it is accountable, it is reaching levels that we have never reached before, and it is getting language into the hands of professionals, not just language and literature majors. That is an amazing statement to the higher education and education in general and very much needed by this country.

So those are my three wishes.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Dr. Brecht. Dr. Davidson.

Mr. DAVIDSON. I am afraid we sound a little similar here, but the research would similarly point to something like this, that the innovation in language draft legislation that Congressman Holt and Congressman Chu from California and Paul Tonko from New York have put together reflects some of the best thinking in the field right now in terms of what the language component of a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act might look like. As Dr. Brecht and Dr. Chu have said, it is not terribly pricey, but it would address in a fundamental way the K–12 issue, including dual immersion. And we have to do something in any event there.

Second, I think a scale-up of Flagship that would enable our undergraduate programs to begin to refocus their training in anticipation of the new flows of K–12 students coming in and not starting language all over again in college but, in fact, would begin their work at the advanced level and move up from there. And I think that is what I mean by a scale-up of Flagship. Move it to a number that meets government needs.

And, third, enact the Senator Akaka bill for a national strategy and coordination so that the whole thing would be managed and coordinated as necessary. I think that is all you need to do.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much for your responses. As I said, we are so fortunate to have this panel of witnesses who have the experience in this area. I want to thank you immensely for your responses.

It is clear that the Federal Government cannot resolve its need for employees proficient in critical foreign languages on its own. We need a coordinated effort among all levels of government, private sector, and academia to address our language needs. We have a lot of work to do in this area, and I remain committed to this issue.

The hearing record will be open for one week for additional statements or questions other Members may have. This is a critical issue and I want to tell you that for me your responses have been valuable, and it is going to help us move forward.

Mr. CHU. Thank you.

Mr. BRECHT. Thank you.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Thank you.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:16 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]



# A P P E N D I X

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**GAO**

United States Government Accountability Office

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

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## FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES

### Departments of Homeland Security, Defense, and State Could Better Assess Their Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities and Address Shortfalls

Statement of David C. Maurer, Director  
Homeland Security and Justice Issues



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GAO-10-715T

July 29, 2010

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES

**Departments of Homeland Security, Defense, and State Could Better Assess Their Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities and Address Shortfalls**

**Highlights**

Highlights of GAO-10-715T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

**Why GAO Did This Study**

Foreign language skills are an increasingly key element to the success of diplomatic efforts; military, counterterrorism, law enforcement and intelligence missions, and to ensure access to federal programs and services to Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations within the United States. GAO has issued reports evaluating foreign language capabilities at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Defense (DOD), and the State Department (State). This testimony is based on these reports, issued from June 2009 through June 2010, and addresses the extent to which (1) DHS has assessed its foreign language needs and existing capabilities, identified any potential shortfalls, and developed programs and activities to address potential shortfalls; (2) the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has conducted a needs assessment to help ensure access to its services for LEP persons; and (3) DOD and State have developed comprehensive approaches to address their foreign language capability challenges.

**What GAO Recommends**

GAO is not making any new recommendations; however, GAO made recommendations in prior reports to help DHS, DOD, and State better assess their foreign language capabilities and address potential shortfalls. All three agencies generally concurred with GAO's recommendations and have taken some actions.

View GAO-10-715T or key components. For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or [maurerd@gao.gov](mailto:maurerd@gao.gov).

**What GAO Found**

In June 2010, we reported that DHS had taken limited actions to assess its foreign language needs and existing capabilities, and to identify potential shortfalls. For example, while two of three DHS components included in GAO's review had conducted foreign language assessments, these assessments were not comprehensive, as GAO's prior work on strategic workforce planning recommends. In addition, while all three DHS components GAO reviewed had various lists of employees with foreign language capabilities, DHS had no systematic method for assessing its existing capabilities. In addition, DHS and its components had not taken actions to identify potential foreign language shortfalls. Further, DHS and its components established a variety of foreign language programs and activities, but had not assessed the extent to which these programs and activities address potential shortfalls. The Department's ability to use them to address potential shortfalls varied and GAO recommended that DHS comprehensively assess its foreign language needs and capabilities, and any resulting shortfalls; and ensure these assessments are incorporated into future strategic planning. DHS generally concurred with these recommendations, and officials stated that the Department has actions planned to address them.

In April 2010, we reported that FEMA had developed a national needs assessment to identify its LEP customer base and how frequently it interacted with LEP persons. Using this assessment, FEMA officials reported that the agency had identified 13 of the most frequently encountered languages spoken by LEP communities. Locally, in response to a disaster, FEMA conducts a needs assessment by collecting information from the U.S. Census Bureau and data from local sources to help determine the amount of funding required to ensure proper communication with affected LEP communities.

In June 2009, GAO reported that DOD had taken steps to transform its language and regional proficiency capabilities, but it had not developed a comprehensive strategic plan to guide its efforts and lacked a complete inventory and validated requirements to identify gaps and assess related risks. GAO recommended that DOD develop a comprehensive strategic plan for its language and regional proficiency efforts, establish a mechanism to assess the regional proficiency skills of its personnel, and develop a methodology to identify its language and regional proficiency requirements. DOD concurred with these recommendations; however, as of June 2010, officials stated that related actions are underway, but have not been completed. Furthermore, GAO reported in September 2009 that State's efforts to meet its foreign language requirements had yielded some results but had not closed persistent gaps in foreign-language proficient staff and reflected, in part, a lack of a comprehensive, strategic approach. GAO recommended that State develop a comprehensive strategic plan with measurable goals, objectives, milestones, and feedback mechanisms that links all of State's efforts to meet its foreign language requirements. State generally agreed with GAO's recommendations and is working to address them.

United States Government Accountability Office

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our work assessing the federal government's foreign language capabilities.<sup>1</sup> Foreign language skills are vital to effectively communicate and overcome language barriers encountered during critical operations and are an increasingly key element to the success of diplomatic efforts, military operations, counterterrorism, law enforcement and intelligence missions, as well as to ensure access to federal programs and services to Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations within the United States. My testimony today focuses on our work evaluating the foreign language capabilities at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Defense (DOD) and the State Department (State).<sup>2</sup> The findings and recommendations from this body of work can help inform decision making about foreign language programs and activities across the federal government.

DHS staff encounter a wide array of languages and dialects, under sometimes difficult and unpredictable circumstances, such as making arrests, conducting surveillance, and interviewing individuals. Thus, ensuring DHS staff have the necessary foreign language skills to carry out these duties is crucial. Further, changes in the security environment and ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have prompted DOD to place greater emphasis on improving the foreign language proficiency of U.S. forces. Moreover, we have previously reported on the challenges State faces in ensuring it has staff with necessary foreign language skills in its mission critical positions throughout the world.

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<sup>1</sup>In this testimony, foreign language capabilities include a range of language skills and language resources to conduct operations involving foreign language related to diplomatic efforts, military operations, law enforcement, counterterrorism and intelligence, including services to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) persons (e.g., language proficient staff, language services obtained through contracts, and inter- and intra-agreements between federal agencies).

<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: DHS Needs to Comprehensively Assess Its Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities, and Identify Shortfalls*, GAO-10-714 (Washington, D.C.: June 22, 2010); *Language Access: Selected Agencies Can Improve Services to Limited English Proficient Persons*, GAO-10-91 (Washington, D.C.: April 26, 2010); *Department of State: Comprehensive Plan Needed to Address Persistent Foreign Language Shortfalls*, GAO-09-955 (Washington, D.C.: September 17, 2009); *Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-09-568 (Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2009).

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Since 2002, we have issued a series of reports on two key aspects of foreign language capabilities across the federal government—(1) the use of foreign language skills, and (2) the nature and impact of foreign language shortages at federal agencies, particularly those that play a central role in national security. We and the Office of Personnel Management have developed strategic workforce planning guidance that has formed the basis for these reviews. We reported that the lack of foreign language capability at some agencies, including DOD and State, have resulted in backlogs in translation of intelligence documents and other information, and adversely affected agency operations and hindered U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence, counterterrorism, and diplomatic efforts. We recommended that these agencies adopt a strategic, results-oriented approach to manage foreign language capabilities, including setting a strategic direction, assessing agency gaps in foreign language skills, and taking actions to help ensure that foreign language capabilities are available when needed, among other things.<sup>3</sup> These agencies concurred with our recommendations and are taking steps to address them.

My comments today are based on GAO reports issued from June 2009 through June 2010 regarding foreign language capabilities at DHS, DOD, and State and selected updates made in June through July 2010. These reports include our assessment of DHS's efforts to assess its foreign language capabilities and address potential shortfalls in three of its largest components—U.S. Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); and our assessment of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) efforts to deliver services to LEP persons; as well as our reports and congressional testimony on DOD's and State's efforts to develop foreign language capabilities.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, my statement addresses the extent to which (1) DHS has assessed its foreign language needs and existing capabilities, identified any potential shortfalls, and developed foreign language programs and activities to address potential shortfalls; (2) FEMA has

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<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-09-568 (Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2009); *Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls*, GAO-02-375 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2002).

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *Military Training: Continued Actions Needed to Guide DOD's Efforts to Improve Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-10-879T (Washington, D.C.: June 29, 2010); GAO-10-714, GAO-10-91, GAO-09-568, and GAO-09-955.

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conducted a needs assessment to help ensure access to its services for LEP persons; and (3) DOD and State have developed comprehensive approaches to address their foreign language capability challenges.

To analyze foreign language needs, capabilities, and shortfalls at DHS, we reviewed operations in three DHS components and seven offices. We selected the U.S. Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE because they constitute a broad representation of program areas and their missions include law enforcement and intelligence responsibilities. We selected San Antonio and Laredo, Texas; Artesia, New Mexico; New York and Buffalo, New York; Miami, Florida; and San Juan, Puerto Rico to visit, identify and observe foreign language use at select DHS components. We also examined documentation on foreign language needs and capabilities, including DHS's Strategic and Human Capital Plans; and Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report.<sup>5</sup> Further, we interviewed knowledgeable DHS officials in DHS's Chief Human Capital Office (CHCO) and conducted interviews with component officials and officers for all the locations we visited to obtain information on existing capabilities and potential foreign language capability shortfalls. As part of our review of FEMA, we examined the extent to which it implemented Executive Order 13166 consistent with the Department of Justice's guidance, which includes assessing the needs of the LEP populations that agencies serve.<sup>6</sup> To review DOD's plans for addressing its foreign language challenges, we analyzed DOD's Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, reviewed the military services' strategies for transforming language and regional proficiency capabilities, and assessed the range of efforts intended to help identify potential gaps. To assess State Department's foreign language proficiency challenges and measures to address them, we analyzed data on State's overseas language-designated positions as of October 2008, reviewed strategic planning and budgetary documents, interviewed State officials, and reviewed operations in China, Egypt, India, Tunisia, and Turkey. In June 2010 we also met with DOD and State officials to obtain updated information on their efforts to address our recommendations. Finally, in July 2010, we obtained updated information from FEMA

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<sup>5</sup>DHS, Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report: A Strategic Framework for a Secure Homeland, (Washington D.C.: Feb. 2010).

<sup>6</sup>Executive Order 13166 (August 11, 2000) directs each federal agency to improve access to federal programs and services for persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). Using guidance issued by DOJ, agencies are generally required to develop recipient guidance and/or an LEP plan outlining steps for ensuring that LEP persons can access federal services and programs.

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officials on their efforts to identify Limited English Proficient populations. More detailed information about our scope and methodology is included in our published reports. We conducted this work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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### **DHS Could Better Assess Its Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities and the Extent to Which Its Programs and Activities Address Potential Shortfalls**

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#### **DHS Has Taken Limited Action to Assess Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities, and Identify Resulting Shortfalls**

In our June 2010 report on DHS's foreign language capabilities, we identified challenges related to the Department's efforts to assess their needs and capabilities and identify potential shortfalls.<sup>7</sup> Our key findings include:

- DHS has no systematic method for assessing its foreign language needs and does not address foreign language needs in its Human Capital Strategic Plan. DHS components' efforts to assess foreign language needs vary. For example, the Coast Guard has conducted multiple assessments, CBP's assessments have primarily focused on Spanish-language needs, and ICE has not conducted any assessments. By conducting a comprehensive assessment DHS would be better positioned to capture information on all of its needs and could use this to inform future strategic planning.
- DHS has no systematic method for assessing its existing foreign language capabilities and has not conducted a comprehensive capabilities assessment. DHS components have various lists of foreign language capabilities that are available in some offices, primarily those that include a foreign language award program for qualified

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<sup>7</sup>GAO-10-714.

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employees. Conducting an assessment of all of its foreign language capabilities would better position DHS to effectively manage its resources.

- DHS and its components have not taken actions to identify potential foreign language shortfalls. DHS officials stated that shortfalls can impact mission goals and officer safety. By using the results of needs and capabilities assessments to identify shortfalls, DHS would be better positioned to develop actions to mitigate shortfalls, execute its various missions that involve foreign language speakers, and enhance the safety of its officers and agents.

We and the Office of Personnel Management have developed strategic workforce guidance that recommends, among other things, that agencies (1) assess workforce needs, such as foreign language needs; (2) assess current competency skills; and (3) compare workforce needs against available skills. DHS efforts could be strengthened by conducting a comprehensive assessment of its foreign language needs and capabilities, and using the results of this assessment to identify any potential shortfalls. By doing so, DHS could better position itself to manage its foreign language workforce needs to help fulfill its organizational missions. We recommended that DHS comprehensively assess its foreign language needs and capabilities, and any resulting shortfalls and ensure these assessments are incorporated into future strategic planning. DHS agreed with our recommendation and officials stated that the Department is planning to take action to address it.

**DHS Has Developed a Variety of Foreign Language Programs, but the Extent to Which They Address Foreign Language Shortfalls Is Not Known**

In June 2010, we also reported that DHS and its components had established a variety of foreign language programs and activities, but had not assessed the extent to which they address potential shortfalls.<sup>8</sup> Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE established foreign language programs and activities, which include foreign language training and monetary awards.<sup>9</sup> Although foreign language programs and activities at these components contributed to the development of DHS's foreign language capabilities, the Department's ability to use them to address potential foreign language shortfalls varies. For example, foreign language training programs generally do not include languages other than Spanish. Furthermore, these programs and activities are managed by individual components or offices within components. According to several Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE officials, they manage their foreign language programs and activities as they did prior to the formation of DHS. At the Department level and within the components, many of the officials we spoke with were generally unaware of the foreign language programs or activities maintained by other DHS components. Given this variation and decentralization, conducting a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which its program and activities address shortfalls could strengthen DHS's ability to manage its foreign language programs and activities and to adjust them, if necessary. DHS agreed with our recommendation and officials stated that the Department is planning to take action to address it.

**FEMA Has Developed a National Needs Assessment to Identify the Limited English Proficient Populations It Serves**

In April 2010, we reported that FEMA had developed a national needs assessment to identify its LEP customer base and how frequently it interacts with LEP persons.<sup>10</sup> We reported that in developing this needs assessment, FEMA combines census data, data from FEMA's National Processing Service Center on the most commonly encountered languages used by individuals applying for disaster assistance sources, literacy and poverty rates, and FEMA's historical data on the geographic areas most prone to disasters. Furthermore, practices identified by other federal and state agencies as well as practitioners in the translation industry are reviewed and used in preparing this assessment. Through its needs

<sup>8</sup>GAO-10-714.

<sup>9</sup>Foreign language award pay is a discretionary monetary award that is in addition to basic pay and does not increase an employee's base salary.

<sup>10</sup>GAO-10-31.

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assessment, FEMA officials reported that FEMA has identified 13 of the most frequently encountered languages spoken by LEP communities.

Locally, in response to a disaster, FEMA conducts a needs assessment by collecting information from the U.S. Census Bureau, data from local school districts, and information from foreign language media outlets in the area to help determine the amount of funding required to ensure proper communication with affected LEP communities. In the spring of 2009, FEMA established new procedures to identify LEP communities at the local level. While the agency's national needs assessment provides a starting point to identify LEP communities across the country, the assessment does not fully ensure that FEMA identifies the existence and location of LEP populations in small communities within states and counties. To that end, officials from FEMA's Multilingual Function developed a common set of procedures for identifying the location and size of LEP populations at the local level. The new procedures, which were initiated as a pilot program, include collecting data from national, state, and local sources, and creating a profile of community language needs, local support organizations, and local media outlets. FEMA initiated this pilot program while responding to a flood affecting North Dakota and Minnesota in the spring of 2009; the program enabled FEMA officials to develop communication strategies targeted to 12 different LEP communities including Bosnian, Farsi, Kirundi, and Somali. FEMA officials stated that they plan to use these procedures in responding to future presidentially declared disasters. According to FEMA officials, it has incorporated the pilot program procedures for identifying local LEP populations into its Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). According to FEMA, it has distributed the revised SOP to FEMA Disaster Assistance and Disaster Operations staff in headquarters, FEMA's 10 regions, and joint field offices.

During its recovery operations, FEMA has several staffing options to augment its permanent staff. FEMA officials explained that staff from FEMA's reserve corps, whose language capabilities are recorded in an automated deployment database, can be temporarily assigned to recovery operations. When FEMA lacks enough permanent and temporary staff with the appropriate foreign language skills, it hires individuals from within the affected area to fill unmet multilingual needs. For example, in 2008, FEMA used local hires who spoke Vietnamese in the recovery operations for Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in Galveston and Austin, Texas. FEMA officials stated that these local hires are especially useful during recovery efforts because they have relevant language capabilities as well as knowledge of the disaster area and established relationships with the

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affected communities. Additionally, when disaster assistance employees and local hires are unavailable, FEMA can use contractors to provide translation and interpretation services. To ensure that the agency has the capacity to handle different levels of disasters, an official stated that FEMA is awarding a 4-year contract of up to \$9.9 million to support language access and related activities.

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### DOD and State Need to Take Additional Actions to Comprehensively Address Their Foreign Language Challenges

#### DOD Has Taken Steps to Improve Its Foreign Language Capabilities, but Still Needs a Comprehensive Strategic Plan, a Complete Inventory, and a Validated Requirements Methodology

DOD has taken some steps to transform its language and regional proficiency capabilities, but additional actions are needed to guide its efforts and provide the information it needs to assess gaps in capabilities and assess related risks. In June 2009, we reported that DOD had designated senior language authorities at the Department-wide level, and in the military services as well as other components.<sup>11</sup> It had also established a governance structure and a Defense Language Transformation Roadmap. At that time, the military services either had developed or were in the process of developing strategies and programs to improve language and regional proficiency. While these steps moved the Department in a positive direction, we concluded that some key elements were still missing. For example, while the Roadmap contained goals and objectives, not all objectives were measurable and linkages between these goals and DOD's funding priorities were unclear. Furthermore, DOD had not identified the total cost of its transformation efforts. Additionally, we reported that DOD had developed an inventory of its language capabilities. In contrast, it did not have an inventory of its regional proficiency

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<sup>11</sup>GAO, *Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-09-568 (Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2009).

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capabilities due to the lack of an agreed upon way to assess and validate these skills. DOD also lacked a standard, transparent, and validated methodology to aid its components in identifying language and regional proficiency requirements. In the absence of such a methodology, components used different approaches to develop requirements and their estimates varied widely. Therefore, we recommended that DOD (1) develop a comprehensive strategic plan for its language and regional proficiency transformation, (2) establish a mechanism to assess the regional proficiency skills of its military and civilian personnel, and (3) develop a methodology to identify its language and regional proficiency requirements.

At the time, DOD generally agreed with our recommendations and responded it had related actions underway. Based on recent discussions with DOD officials, these actions are still in various stages. Specifically, DOD officials stated that it has a draft strategic plan currently undergoing final review and approval. We understand from officials that this plan includes goals, objectives, and a linkage between goals and DOD's funding priorities, and that an implementation plan with metrics for measuring progress will be published at a later date. DOD officials also stated that they are working to determine a suitable approach to measuring regional proficiency because it is more difficult than originally expected. Lastly, DOD officials stated that, while DOD has completed the assessments intended to produce a standardized methodology to help geographic commanders identify language and regional proficiency requirements, the standardized methodology has not yet been approved. In recent congressional testimony, DOD officials stated the standardized methodology would be implemented later this year. Without a comprehensive strategic plan and until a validated methodology to identify gaps in capabilities is implemented, it will be difficult for DOD to assess risk, guide the military services as they develop their approaches to language and regional proficiency transformation, and make informed investment decisions. Furthermore, it will be difficult for DOD and Congress to assess progress toward a successful transformation.

**State Has Efforts Underway to Identify Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities, but Persistent Shortfalls in Foreign Language-Proficient Staff Highlight the Need for a Comprehensive, Strategic Approach**

In September 2009, we reported that State continued to face persistent, notable gaps in its foreign language capabilities, which could hinder U.S. overseas operations.<sup>12</sup> We reported that State had undertaken a number of initiatives to meet its foreign language requirements, including an annual review process to determine the number of positions requiring a foreign language, providing language training, recruiting staff with skills in certain languages, and offering incentive pay to officers to continue learning and maintaining language skills. However, we noted that these efforts had not closed the persistent gaps and reflected, in part, a lack of a comprehensive, strategic approach.

Although State officials said that the Department's plan for meeting its foreign language requirements is spread throughout a number of documents that address these needs, these documents were not linked to each other and did not contain measurable goals, objectives, or milestones for reducing the foreign language gaps. Because these gaps have persisted over several years despite staffing increases, a more comprehensive, strategic approach would help State to more effectively guide its efforts and assess its progress in meeting its foreign language requirements. We therefore recommended that the Secretary of State develop a comprehensive strategic plan with measurable goals, objectives, milestones, and feedback mechanisms that links all of State's efforts to meet its foreign language requirements. We also recommended that the Secretary of State revise the Department's methodology for measuring and reporting on the extent that positions are filled with officers who meet the language requirements of the position. State generally agreed with our findings, conclusions, and recommendations and described several initiatives to address these recommendations. For example, State convened an inter-bureau language working group to focus on and develop an action plan to address our recommendations.

Since our report, State has revised its methodology for measuring and reporting on the extent that positions are filled with officers who meet the language requirements of the position. State officials also told us that they have begun developing a more strategic approach for addressing foreign language shortfalls, but have not developed a strategic plan with measurable goals, objectives, milestones, and feedback mechanisms.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you or other members of the committee may have.

<sup>12</sup>GAO-09-955.

**TESTIMONY OF  
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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
BEFORE  
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL  
AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE  
FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**JUNE 17, 2010**

I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's foreign language capabilities. DHS has a variety of foreign language needs: from providing emergency response services to persons with limited English proficiency, to leading investigations overseas, to interviewing foreign nationals on interdicted vessels. The Department's mission touches many individuals in the United States who may lack English language skills, and in addition, has some 2,200 employees stationed abroad; as such, the ability to communicate effectively is a topic of vital importance to DHS. Our operating and support components determine their foreign language needs, requirements, and capabilities and have taken actions to address gaps in order to meet the many mission needs of DHS; however, even more coordination and oversight at the department level as well as a comprehensive assessment would be beneficial.

In general, DHS manages its human resource capabilities through its Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO). OCHCO is responsible for Department-wide human capital policy development, and human resource program planning and implementation. Specifically, OCHCO establishes DHS-wide policies and processes and works with the components to ensure the best approach for the Department's human capital initiatives. Additionally, OCHCO provides strategic human capital direction to and certification of Departmental programs and initiatives. While each component is best situated to identify its individual needs, OCHCO can help by identifying best practices, providing oversight and coordinating an overall strategy.

Components and offices are expected to continually analyze their foreign language capabilities and needs and to assess their workforce, as well as to identify available contract services such as interpreters, translation, and training services. At this time we do not have an overall, departmental foreign language program. Certain components, such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), do require proficiency in foreign language, most frequently Spanish, and these components screen candidates for employment for their proficiency in, or ability to learn, languages. For example, applicants for the position of CBP Officer must take either an Artificial Language Test or a Spanish Language Proficiency Test. These tests measure current proficiency in Spanish or ability to learn Spanish. For Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), foreign language ability is considered a collateral duty and employees self-certify their proficiency in languages other than English. As to personnel assigned abroad, when the position or the U.S. Ambassador has required foreign language skills, DHS Components and offices select officers who already possess the foreign

language capability and/or have provided officers with foreign language training. Generally, the components are fulfilling their language needs internally, through their own hiring or training programs, or through contract arrangements. A more consistent Department-wide approach, however, could prove beneficial.

In the past, OCHCO has conducted limited surveys of the components with respect to practices and programs involving foreign language capabilities, but is presently considering the implementation of a broader, more consolidated approach to the Department's diverse foreign language needs, beginning with a language needs assessment. An effective program must be dynamic and responsive to changing situations. In this regard, such a program would be reliant both on a continuous assessment by components of their particular language requirements, and on their cooperative work with us.

Beyond workforce planning, there have been other Department-wide efforts pertaining to foreign language capabilities. The DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) has delegated authority to enforce Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency" (August 11, 2000), which requires federal agencies to examine the services they provide and develop and implement a system by which limited English proficiency (LEP) persons can meaningfully access those services, without unduly burdening the fundamental mission of the agency. Far from burdening DHS' mission, language access for those with limited proficiency advances homeland security, enabling, for example, more effective and efficient screening and immigration processing at our nation's ports of entry and fair administration of customs rules and citizenship benefits. It is also essential in areas such as detention and asylum adjudication.

Language access can be created any number of ways – by multi-lingual personnel, by contracts for written translation and oral interpretation services (live or by a telephone language line), and sometimes simply by use of universal signage that does not require English proficiency. Which method is chosen depends on the circumstances. Under established federal practice, the decision about what language access services to offer depends on a four-part test, which examines:

1. The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee;
2. The frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with the program;
3. The nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives; and
4. The resources available to the grantee/recipient and costs.

Executive Order 13166 also requires that federal agencies prepare a plan to improve access to their own programs and activities by eligible LEP persons. CRCL currently leads the Department in finalizing the Department's LEP plan. In addition, CRCL surveyed departmental offices and components in 2008 concerning their programs, LEP populations, and types of language assistance provided and formed a Department-wide Language Assistance Working Group to share information, resources and best practices among offices. CRCL also provides technical assistance to DHS offices and components on fulfilling the language access requirements. For example, CRCL has worked on language access issues with U.S. Immigration

and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in immigration detention, and with the Office of Public Affairs on the Department's response to the H1N1 epidemic. It is currently working with the U.S. Coast Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on language access issues related to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, ensuring that communities like Vietnamese shrimpers receive the meaningful access to Department programs to which they are entitled by providing training, policy advice and technical assistance.

CRCL ensures that its own programs (such as complaint investigation) are accessible by using a combination of multi-lingual personnel (in Spanish, Vietnamese, and Arabic) and a contract for written translation and oral interpretation services. The office also is working to improve the availability of on-demand telephonic interpretation.

In addition, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations imposes similar obligations on recipients of federal financial assistance; entities that receive support from DHS are forbidden to conduct their programs in a way that has the effect of subjecting persons to discrimination because of their race, color, or national origin. CRCL is the office within DHS that administers Title VI. Long-standing interpretations of the law and regulations mandate offering reasonable steps to offer foreign language assistance if necessary to provide meaningful access to LEP persons. DHS guidance on these requirements, for entities that receive grant or other support, was sent to the Federal Register earlier this week, for publication today, for a 30-day public comment period. Once the guidance is finalized following public comment, CRCL will be moving promptly to improve the technical assistance.

To further increase language proficiency within the Department and our partner agencies, CRCL and the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, in partnership with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, sponsor a National Security Internship (NSI) program—an intensive nine-week, full immersion summer program that combines Arabic language, homeland security, intelligence and area studies, and on-the-job-training experience at DHS or FBI Headquarters. The goal of the NSI program is to create a direct career path for DHS and FBI to some of America's best and brightest undergraduate and graduate college students who speak or study Arabic. The NSI is open to qualified applicants who are able to meet the requirements to be granted a Top-Secret clearance. In FY 2009, the NSI program received over 300 applicants for ten positions. The objective of this program is not to develop a cadre of translators, but rather to build a national security workforce of individuals who possess a higher degree of cultural competency.

I understand the importance of identifying language requirements and tracking capabilities. Going forward, the Department will take the following actions:

- I will ensure that DHS-wide language policies and processes are incorporated into our Human Capital Strategic Plan;
- My staff will work with the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis to identify best practices and to ensure the coordination of our intelligence community responsibilities for the management of DHS language requirements; and
- I will work with CRCL to establish a DHS Joint Language Task Force consisting of those components and offices which have language needs in order to identify requirements and assess the necessary skills; recommend a system so that the Department can track, monitor, record, and report language capabilities; and identify the functional office responsible for managing DHS-wide language capabilities. This work will include the Office of International Affairs with respect to the foreign language skills required by DHS personnel stationed abroad.

This is an overview of the status of our foreign language capability. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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**Prepared Statement  
Of  
Ms. Nancy Weaver  
Director  
Defense Language Office**

**Before the**

**Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Federal  
Workforce and the District of Columbia  
United States Senate**

**“Closing the Language Gap: Improving the Federal Government’s  
Foreign Language Capabilities”**

**July 29, 2010**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Akaka, and members of this distinguished subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on this very important topic which is a priority for the Department of Defense.

The Department is moving forward to build and maintain a Total Force with skills in foreign languages of strategic importance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These capabilities are needed to ensure our personnel have the skills they need for success in today's missions and to support national initiatives.

The military operations in which our forces are engaged require that they understand the languages and cultures of the regional population. How the indigenous population perceives our presence and our work will influence our success. Being able to communicate with them in their language is a strategic and tactical enabling factor. However, acquiring the necessary language and cultural skills is a time intensive process. Once gained, these skills tend to deteriorate rapidly if not used frequently. Just as importantly, these skills do not translate easily from region to region. We have made great progress in providing basic language and cultural training to our deploying personnel, but still are working to build a better foundational capability that provides more individuals with true expertise, professional-level language skills, and advanced levels of regional expertise.

**LANGUAGE CAPABILITY SHORTFALLS**

The Department recognized the gap in foreign language skills during operations immediately after the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001. The Total Force did not have the personnel with foreign language skills needed for Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and

ENDURING FREEDOM in Iraq and Afghanistan. Based on studies, which validated these shortfalls, the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (DLTR) was published in early 2005 to transform how the Department valued language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities. This document marked the Department's first steps to comprehensively build and manage key enabling capabilities and it laid the foundation for our efforts. Its four goals and 43 tasks addressed (1) the need for a foundational language and regional area expertise, including our ability to identify requirements and assets on hand; (2) the capacity to surge our capabilities to meet operational needs, (3) the formation of a cadre of language professionals who possess language proficiency in reading, listening and speaking at the professional level, and (4) a process to track the accession, separation, and promotion rates of military personnel with language skills.

The DLTR marked the Department's first step to take specific action to transform the force to meet the challenges of the future. For the past five years, the Department has been aggressively executing the roadmap to build and improve our language capabilities to support our vast global missions. We are implementing initiatives and programs to deliver the necessary language and cultural training to our Forces whenever and wherever needed. Our efforts are not just limited to training, but also include recruiting initiatives and special incentive pay.

#### **ADDRESSING THE SHORTFALLS**

The Department recognizes that execution of the President's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan is its highest priority. Successful counterinsurgency operations are required for immediate and long-term success in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region. Language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capability are vital enablers for the conduct of these operations

and are considered by our senior commanders in the region to be as important as other basic combat skills. We have moved aggressively and with much success to build these capabilities. Our initiatives include recruiting programs that focus on accessing heritage language personnel or personnel with advanced language skills, pre-accession foreign language training, standardized pre-deployment training, foreign language proficiency bonuses and pay, foreign language study at the Academies, incentives for ROTC students to study foreign languages, expanding the role of civilians through the civilian expeditionary workforce, and creation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands Program, which will generate a cadre of experts specially trained and equipped to repeatedly deploy to that region.

**Afghanistan Pakistan Hands Program**

The Afghanistan Pakistan Hands (APH) program was launched in August 2009 to create greater continuity, focus, and persistent engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan by developing a cadre of experts who speak the local language, are culturally capable, and focused on regional issues for an extended period of time. These experts enhance the region's engagement and communications, which are essential for strategic success. APH personnel rotate between positions in-theater and out-of-theater that directly influence the U.S. strategy in the region. As of May 2010, 86 APH have deployed and 103 are in training. The most recent graduating class demonstrated outstanding results. More than 78 percent of graduates achieved the elementary level proficiency of 1/1 (out of a 4/4 scale) or higher on the Interagency Language Roundtable scale of the Defense Language Proficiency Test. The Commander International Security Assistance Force US Forces – Afghanistan identified level 1/1 as the goal for this training. The Department's use of Language Training Detachments, which are our onsite foreign language training schools, are a factor in achieving these results.

**Language Training Detachments**

Demand for language training to meet warfighter requirements, for the general purpose forces (GPF) and language professionals, has grown beyond what can be provided through the traditional brick-and-mortar, language institute methods. To meet the need, the Department has committed to an innovative, locally-provided, life-long learning approach, through the use of Multi-purpose Language Training Detachments, and dedicated highly specialized Language Training Detachments for the recurring special needs of the Afghanistan Pakistan Hands program. The Department is investing \$33 million to fund ten language training detachments to improve the language and cultural capabilities of the general purpose forces which will minimize travel costs, and reduces the member's (or employee's) time away from family and the unit. The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center currently operates 23 Language Training Detachments (LTD) in 21 different locations. Three APH general purpose forces LTDs have been activated at Forts Campbell, Carson, and Drum that train service members in Afghanistan/Pakistan language and culture.

The Department needs individuals with advanced and native or near-native level language skills. Since advanced and near native level language skills traditionally take years of study, the Services have created heritage recruiting plans so they can surge their capabilities by accessing these skilled personnel when needed. Two particularly successful recruiting efforts are the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest pilot program, and the Army's 09L Interpreter/Translator program.

**Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest Pilot Program**

The Army, Air Force, and Navy recruit native and heritage speakers through the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest Pilot Program. The program was launched in February 2009 to recruit legal non-citizens with critical foreign language and culture skills as well as licensed healthcare professionals. Recruits receive expedited U.S. citizenship processing, similar to that received by other non-citizen military personnel, in return for their service. The Army, for example, has accessed 792 personnel with critical language skills and 143 healthcare professionals (most of whom also speak a critical language). Recruiting for the initial one-year pilot program ended December 31, 2009. A two-month interim extension authorized the Army 120 additional positions. Two subsequent interim extensions were approved, the last ending June 30, 2010. The Department is continuing to review, examine, and evaluate initiatives like this as creative solutions to build these new skills into the Total Force.

**Army 09L Interpreter/Translator Program**

The Army has recruited native speakers as interpreters into the 09L Military Occupational Specialty since 2003. To date, approximately 1,000 Soldiers have graduated from Advanced Individual Training, and all were mobilized immediately following graduation and served (or are serving) in Iraq or Afghanistan. Originally focused on Iraq, the Army expanded its program for Afghanistan. The Army is undertaking a pilot program with United States Africa Command and United States Pacific Command to generate interpreter-translators fluent in languages found in these geographic regions.

**Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center**

The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) is the Department's premier language training school. Originally organized and structured to provide specialized training to a small number of intelligence professionals and Foreign Area Officers, it has transitioned from a small school with a single focus to an agile team that meets increasingly complex language instruction, distance learning, and instructional material needs around the world. From Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 to FY 2010, the Foreign Language Center taught nearly 8,500 students in nonresident language training and nearly 43,000 students in language familiarization training. Within three days of the recent earthquake in Haiti, troops involved in the humanitarian relief operations received over 20,000 Language Survival Kits. More than 65,000 Language Survival Kits were shipped in support of the relief efforts. Within just a few days, the Haitian-Creole Language Survival Kit was available for download on the DLIFLC website. These tools proved to be successful in facilitating communication between the Haitians and our Service men and women supporting operation unified response.

**CHALLENGES**

The Department has encountered challenges in providing the language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities requested by the Combatant Commands. The current requirements system does not provide a clear demand signal for future foreign language needs so that our force providers can generate the capabilities we need. Based on several capabilities based reviews, which drive the development of the DoD Strategic Language List, we have greater clarity of our current and long-term future foreign language needs. We are building a strategic plan which will provide the steps needed to achieve and institutionalize these skills. Additionally, the Department undertook a capabilities-based assessment to determine the process

that will convert prioritized Combatant Command capability requirements into validated, prioritized, actionable demand signals apportioned among the force providers. The force providers will act on these demand signals to meet these requirements through recruiting, training, professional education, and other career development or personnel management means. Once we have clear demand signals, we can begin addressing shortfalls.

### **Training**

As mentioned earlier, because language skills take years to acquire and are highly perishable, the Department has placed special emphasis on pre-accession training for cadets and midshipmen, especially in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). In June 2009, the U.S. Army Cadet Command established a goal to increase the number of cadets completing at least two semesters of the same foreign language to at least 75 percent of graduates. We are expanding opportunities for ROTC cadets to gain exposure to critical languages and cultures. While the Department of Defense cannot mandate that civilian universities develop programs in less commonly taught languages, it encourages them to do so with the "Project Global Officer" grant program and now offers a Language Skill Proficiency Bonus as authorized in the FY 2009 National Defense Authorization Act to encourage ROTC students to take foreign language and culture studies relevant to U.S. strategic needs. Qualified ROTC cadets and midshipmen may receive up to \$3,000 per year to undertake such studies. This program was initiated in the latter part of Fiscal Year 2009. During that first partial year of execution, 29 students were paid the Skill Proficiency Bonus in FY 2009, and an additional 237 students began receiving the bonus as first time enrollees in the program. As expected for a new program, particularly one started late in the Fiscal Year, the numbers of participants in FY 2009 are relatively modest; however, they are expected to increase in FY 2010, when students begin the new academic year.

Every future officer who enters Air Force ROTC is encouraged to gain proficiency in a foreign language and participate in a cultural immersion program or study abroad. The Foreign Language Express Scholarship is a three and a half year foreign language scholarship for study of languages the Air Force considers critical. The Air Force is expanding scholarships to cadets in Foreign Area Studies who are required to take at least 21 semester hours in a foreign language. Non-technical scholarship cadets must take a minimum of 12 semester hours of foreign language to retain their scholarship.

The Navy requires one semester of language or culture in addition to a normal course load and expects that every ROTC midshipman opting for Naval service will complete three semesters hours of world culture and regional studies.

In addition to ROTC programs, our Service Academies are providing foreign language and cultural instruction for cadets and midshipmen. Graduates leave these Academies with increased language and cultural capabilities as well as life-changing experiences that provide the necessary preparation for effective leadership in today's global environment.

The United States Military Academy (USMA) encourages cadets to participate in foreign language and culture programs. All cadets must complete a minimum of two semesters of foreign language study. Humanities and Social Science majors, which account for approximately half of the student body, are required to take four semesters of foreign language. Of the 4,439 cadets enrolled at West Point in the spring 2010 semester, 1,865 cadets took some language instruction. Of these, 877 cadets were enrolled in first-year, 5-day-a-week language classes; 417 cadets participated in either the Semester Abroad program (148) or other short-term (spring or summer) immersion experiences (269); 57 cadets took part in the Foreign Academy Exchange Program – a separate spring break immersion (7-10 days) at one of thirty foreign

military academies. These programs are providing the cadets with heightened language and culture capabilities.

The United States Naval Academy (USNA) similarly provides numerous language opportunities for its midshipmen. The Naval Academy provides Semester Study Abroad, Foreign Academy Exchange, and summer foreign language immersion opportunities. Additionally, this year the Academy added Chinese Mandarin and Arabic to their majors; minors are also provided in one of the Academy's seven languages. Every year, a significant number of USNA graduates complete a minor in a foreign language. These ensigns have significant proficiency in the language studied, and are capable of putting their language to immediate use in the fleet. In 2009, 139 graduates, including 54 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors, graduated with foreign language minors. These included 15 minors in Arabic, 20 in Chinese, 12 in French, 8 in German, 19 in Japanese, 4 in Russian, and 61 in Spanish. These figures represent a dramatic increase from spring 2004, when graduates included 99 foreign language minors, with only 20 in critical languages.

The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) has also been strengthening its language and culture programs. Beginning with the class of 2011, all cadets must study at least two semesters of a foreign language. Cadets who are pursuing non-technical degrees are required to study at least four semesters of a foreign language. The USAFA expanded its study abroad opportunities and 751 of 4,400 cadets participated in a Semester Aboard, Language and Cultural Immersion, or Foreign Academy Exchange program during the 2009-2010 academic year. Furthermore, approximately 23% of the class of 2009 (241 graduates), earned a minor in a foreign language. The Air Force Academy instills language and cultural relevance within its cadets.

**Meeting Demands for Advanced Skills**

The DoD Foreign Area Officer (FAO) program continues to develop and expand its population. Over 1,860 officers currently hold the FAO designation – an increase of 90 from FY 08. The Services plan to recruit and train more than 190 a year, with almost 1,150 new FAOs entering the program by 2015. Sustainment training is a key area that requires attention for our FAO population. In the 2007 DoD Annual FAO Report, dated April 2008, sustainment training was mentioned as an area that needed focused attention. It was noted that there was no joint, comprehensive sustainment training and education program available for FAOs to maintain and/or enhance their professional level language and regional expertise. Therefore, The Joint FAO Skill Sustainment Program was developed to address this gap. This three-year pilot was approved by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in December 2008 with a goal of finding innovative ways to provide foreign language and regional sustainment training and education for seasoned FAOs to enable them to meet growing joint mission requirements. This pilot program utilizes advanced, innovative delivery techniques such as short-term classroom training and distance learning modules delivered thru a newly developed FAOweb. FAOweb is an internet portal designed to provide distance learning and community networking to FAOs within DoD. FAOweb was officially launched in February 2010. To date, two courses have been offered – Latin America and Europe/Eurasia – with participants from the Active and Reserve Component FAOs as well as civilians doing FAO-like assignments. The next resident course is in June and will focus on Asia. The goal is to offer at least one resident seminar for a particular region per quarter. A program review will be conducted in the Spring of 2011 to decide whether the pilot results warrant transition to a permanent program.

**Risk Assessment**

Knowing the requirements allows the Department to assess the risk it is willing to take in regard to developing language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities. The Language Readiness Index (LRI) as part of the Defense Readiness Reporting System (DRRS). The LRI is a strategic, near real-time web-based tool that compares language capability inventory against requirements for Component missions and roles to identify the gaps in the Total Force. Senior leaders can use this tool to make informed decisions, develop risk assessments, examine risk mitigation measures, and shape the future force. The LRI has achieved initial operational capability in the DRRS framework and continues to progress toward full operational capability status. The next phase of development is underway and will include additional data; awareness, familiarization, and technical training to stakeholders; an automated quarterly report for the Quarterly Balanced Scorecard; and upon approval of the Language, Regional Expertise and Associated Culture (LREC) Capabilities-Based Assessment requirements, update the LRI to accept LREC requirements. The LRI is now the tool of choice for inputting language requirements. The Combatant Commands are now uploading data for the LRI directly into DRRS using the LRI requirements input tool.

**Coordinating a Stronger Future**

The Department of Defense and the University of Maryland co-sponsored, in June 2004, an unprecedented *National Language Conference*, involving leaders in foreign language education across the federal government, academic and the private sectors. This conference was prompted by the greater need for U.S. citizens with foreign language competence to help respond to

requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and national security interests, the increasing globalization of industry, and the need to provide government services to a diverse and multi-lingual population in the United States. As a result of this conference, a White Paper, *Call to Action*, was published in August 2004 articulating a vision for the United States as a “stronger global leader through proficiency in foreign languages and understanding of the cultures of the world.”

The Department of Defense efforts to support this vision was through two programs – the Language Flagship and the National Language Service Corps (NLSC). Flagships focus on building higher education models that graduate students at professional levels of proficiency in critical languages. The goal of the Flagship effort was to enroll 2,000 students by the end of 2010. The Language Flagship currently offers programs in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Hindi-Urdu, Persian, Russian, Swahili, and Yoruba. Based on projections, we expect to reach our target in the 2010-11 academic year. . The Flagship also supports K-12 Flagship Programs at public schools in Ohio, Oregon, and Michigan. These pilot programs are intended to serve as a national model for articulated K-12 language instruction in the U.S.

The NLSC represents a pilot effort to establish an entirely new organization built on the extraordinary language capabilities of the American population. The NLSC is designed to provide surge language capacity to the federal government during times of emergency and national need. The NLSC is a pool of individuals who possess skills essential to the capacity of the federal sector to respond to national and international needs, particularly those that arise during national and international threats, emergencies, and disasters. The NLSC has successfully completed activation exercises with the Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Pacific Command and the Defense Intelligence Agency, and has successfully deployed members overseas.

Coordination across Government agencies is vital in order for the United States to build and sustain the foreign language skills and understanding of the cultures needed to meet the challenges of a complex, dynamic changing world environment. Therefore, a inter governmental working group comprised of representatives from Secretary of State, the Departments of Defense and Education and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence meets regularly to identify opportunities to share information on new initiatives and best practices.

We have made great progress in improving our foreign language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capabilities to meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century national security challenges. Although we have achieved much success, we acknowledge that more work remains. Our vision and strategy are strong. We are seeking creative solutions and have found that our efforts have been successful. Commanders' lessons learned validate the successes gained by having a Total Force with the required language skill, regional expertise, and cultural capability, where and when needed. Thank you for your continued support of language and culture programs.

**Testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on  
Oversight of Government Management, the Federal  
Workforce, and the District of Columbia**

**on**

**Closing the Language Gap: Improving the Federal  
Government's Foreign Language Capabilities**

**by**

**Dr. David S. C. Chu**

**29 July 2010**

The opinions in this draft reflect solely the views of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by either IDA or the Department of Defense

**Creating a National Language Capacity:  
Lessons from the Department of Defense Experience**

David S. C. Chu  
29 July 2010

Senator Akaka, Senator Voinovich and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the invitation to appear as part of this distinguished panel. It is a privilege to offer my testimony on enhancing federal language capacity, which I do in my personal capacity, based on my previous service in government.

In my judgment, success begins by specifying the outcomes desired. For the American military, these were outlined in the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap directed by Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld, issued February 2005. The Roadmap benefitted from both Secretary Rumsfeld's longstanding interest in global language preparation, and the sharpened understanding of the need for such preparation after the attacks of September 11, 2001. The Roadmap identified three principal goals:

- Create foundational language and regional area expertise
- Create the capacity to surge
- Establish a cadre of advanced language professionals

Because the Deputy Secretary had earlier established Senior Language Authorities (March 2004), the Department had in place the leaders needed to effect change. They were empowered by the clear direction provided by the Secretary and his Deputy, together with the substantial additional resources the Department provided in the President's Budget Request, which the Congress authorized and appropriated. Sustaining those resources in the years ahead will be critical to achieving the goals so many share for the Department's linguistic capacity.

The success in enlarging the Department's language capacity importantly depended on creating new tools with which to address the military's needs. These included opening new avenues for the recruitment of heritage speakers, establishing and enhancing the incentives for military personnel to acquire and sustain linguistic excellence, and creating a Civilian Linguistic Reserve Corps (now the National Language Service Corps) to provide an on-call cadre of high-proficiency civilian language professionals to support the nation's evolving demands.

Some of the elements of success were quite straightforward—for example, requiring all military personnel to report the languages they could speak (inviting civilian employees to do the same), or requiring added language opportunities (especially immersion opportunities) at the

military academies. Others were much more ambitious—for example, seeking to change the national supply of linguists.

The Department benefitted enormously from the rich suggestions it received from civil society, starting with the National Language Conference convened in partnership with the Center for the Advanced Study of Languages at the University of Maryland in June 2004. The conference findings, together with the substantial academic literature on language learning, helped identify the steps the Department needed to take.

It was that literature that reinforced the merits of recruiting heritage speakers, the benefit of providing immersion experiences, and the need to begin language learning in elementary school (if not earlier). The Department felt privileged to be a charter member of President Bush's National Security Language Initiative, which envisaged federal encouragement to K-12 "pipeline" language programs. Indeed, DoD funded the first three.

The emphasis on elementary school as the starting point led DoD to employ additional funding provided by the Congress to underwrite the first three state language roadmaps (Ohio, Oregon, Texas). Governor Hunt of Utah (now America's ambassador to China) picked up this idea and led the creation of a similar roadmap for Utah. These roadmaps recognize the reality that if we are to improve national language capacity, including that of the federal government, we must involve state and local government in the effort.

While there is still much to be done to reach the language capacity the Department of Defense needs, its capacity today is importantly stronger in the languages of interest than it was ten years ago. Perhaps most significant, language competence is now embraced by many senior leaders as a military skill equal in importance to the skills traditionally emphasized. And it is my impression that this is welcomed by the young men and women who wear America's uniform. Given the Department's emphasis on language competence, and the response from its young volunteers—officer and enlisted—I look forward to the day when America's military will be noted for the fluency of its leadership, who will be able to explain America's policies and objectives to foreign audiences in their own tongues, both at the tactical level, and strategically in whatever media are then the standard of communication.

That is not to say that the Department of Defense has yet put in place all the steps necessary to reach this goal. Indeed, the House Armed Services Committee notes correctly that the Department still needs to specify more carefully where it needs language capacity, so that it sends the correct "demand" signals to those who recruit and train its people. It will also need to improve its ability to assign linguistically capable personnel quickly to deploying forces. But it has begun.

As Defense thinks about specifying its language needs, it may be time abandon the usual model, which builds the force against a specific set of billets. Reflecting the uncertain location of future operations, perhaps DoD should shift to a “build to inventory” principle, for both the military and the civil servants who are so important to ultimate success. For the civil service, especially, this will require both new authorities and a new philosophical outlook.

Looking to the challenges faced by other federal agencies, I believe the DoD experience offers valuable lessons:

- Change requires strong leadership from the top—and resources
- It requires clear articulation of the goals, and identification of the path to their realization (i.e., a roadmap)
- It may well require new tools, processes or programs, some of which will challenge institutional preconceptions about how business is done
- And it will require relying on the larger national capacities if it is to have a reasonable chance of large-scale success

In looking at the need to take a national perspective, I believe a recommendation of the June 2004 National Language Conference may well merit a second look: That is, the formation of a federal council to coordinate the actions and investments of the several federal agencies. I also believe the encouragement of state roadmaps provides a productive way to marshal state and local participation. And I hope that the present administration will take a look at what might be done to restart the National Security Language Initiative of its predecessor, especially the provision of K-12 “pipeline” programs as part of the “Race to the Top” awards. The National Security Education Program of the Department of Defense already provides a new paradigm for advanced language education through its Language Flagship. Can we now provide a broader foundation from which it builds?

An immediate opportunity for federal cooperation is available in the National Language Service Corps. It is now constituted to serve all federal needs—and it is my understanding that it has begun to do so in a limited way. It may be sufficient simply to ensure all federal agencies know the Corps exists, and are encouraged to use it. But it may also be that strengthening its structure and funding need to be considered.

Not all steps that could quickly improve federal capacity are costly. Some involve removing barriers to action. The military, for example, benefits from being able to enlist anyone who is eligible for regular employment in the United States (i.e., holds a “green card”). Should similar authorities for civilian recruitment be available in areas where linguistically competent individuals are needed?

In short, while there are always programs that could benefit a specific agency and its needs, in the end our national success will depend on a national effort. It is my hope that this hearing can be one step in energizing that start.

**“Coordinated, Comprehensive, Cohesive, and Collaborative  
Federal Language Capabilities”**

**By**

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**Testimony before**

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,**

**the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia**

**on**

***“Closing the Language Gap: Improving the Federal Government’s Foreign Language  
Capabilities.”***

**Thursday, July 29, 2010**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

Senator Akaka, Senator Voinovich and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the invitation to appear here with my distinguished colleagues, Drs. Chu and Davidson. It is a privilege to offer my testimony on enhancing federal language and culture capabilities, which I do in my personal capacity, based on my half century career in academe and government language service.

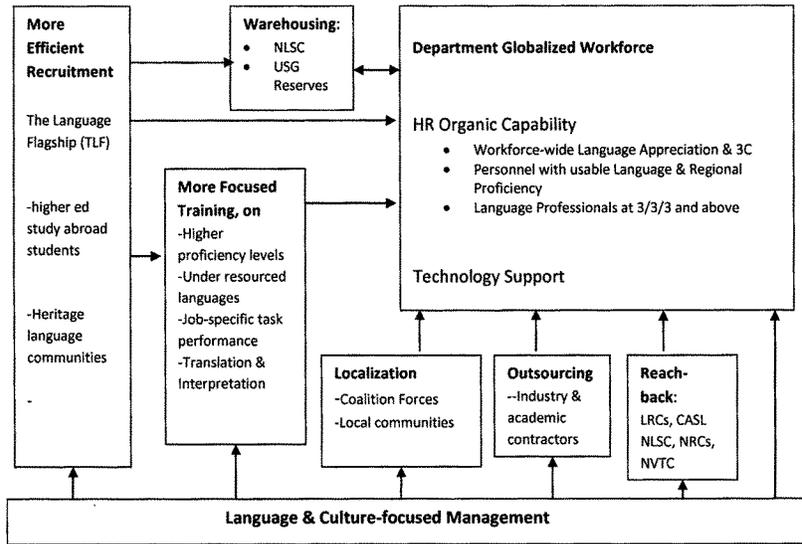
#### **Introduction**

One frequently hears that it's too hard for government organizations with critical language requirements to fully succeed in a world with thousands of languages and constantly changing needs. This testimony is aimed at undermining this all too ready assumption.

The language needs of the U.S. are massive and growing, critical, and complex. While various parts of the federal government are making significant strides in addressing these needs, the efforts can be improved by broader policies and plans that seek comprehensive, collaborative, and cohesive solutions. The capabilities required far outstrip the capabilities of any one agency to meet, and the costs entailed call for a more coordinated approach.

More specifically, building the government's language capacity should be guided by policies that require a permanent workforce assembled by targeted recruitment, professionalized through cutting-edge training, strategically maintained by consistent warehousing, and made maximally effective through informed management. In addition, however, this core capability has to be buttressed by force multipliers in the form of shared, outsourced, localized, and reach-back capabilities. An overview of this USG capacity is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1



In the Defense Language Transformation Roadmap (DLTR), the Department of Defense (DoD) laid out an unprecedented, comprehensive plan to meet the language needs of the nation's military and has made impressive progress in implementing that plan. The Department of State, likewise, has a strategic plan for advancing the language capabilities of the department ("Beyond Three"). (Recent reports, however, make clear that there is still much to be done in these departments.<sup>1</sup>) Intelligence Community components too have been aggressive in laying out plans and policies to address language and cultural needs.

While the DoD, DoS, and IC are tasked primarily with meeting global threats, a recent GAO report, *Language Access: Selected Agencies Can Improve Services to Limited English Proficient Persons*, has highlighted the domestic side of federal language requirements. There is a clear mandate to meet domestic needs, as federal, state and local governments must serve a significant part of the U.S. population, citizens and residents whose native language is not English.

This domestic need provokes several questions that I will attempt to respond to in this testimony. First, what is the envisioned end state for language capabilities across the USG to address responsibilities toward these domestic communities as well as towards the USG's global mission? Second, how can needed capabilities be built in the most effective and cost-efficient manner? Third, how would these capabilities be effectively deployed in time of need.

#### **Envisioned Future Scenario**

A "perfect storm" of natural disaster, terrorist threat, and criminal behavior endangers hundreds of thousands of urban residents. Charged with providing relief and protection are dozens of USG civilian, military and intelligence departments, agencies, offices, services, directorates, components, and centers. And between them and their mission are hundreds of linguistic and cultural challenges.

A major earthquake rocks San Francisco and the surrounding area. Buildings are destroyed, power and water supply systems are damaged, people are panicked, emergency responders are able to function only at a minimum. Massive state and federal assistance is deployed; DHS (FEMA, TSA, Coast Guard), DOD (National Guard & Military Reserves, hospital ships, etc.), and other federal and state assets are responding. Assistance is offered by other states and cities (e.g. NYPD), as well as by disaster relief

elements from Asian, European, and Latin American countries. Adding to the crisis is the fact that intelligence sources have uncovered recent communications indicating a terrorist plan linked either to the Abu Sayyaf or Jemaah Islamiyah group in the Philippines to attack major transportation and communication channels, while at the SF and Oakland docks are recently arrived cargo ships and tankers from the Philippines, Liberia, and Mexico. In addition, major drug traffickers, taking advantage of the situation, have dramatically increased activity along the nation's southwest boarder. These developments bring other government organizations to bear: NSA, NCTC, FBI, DEA, CPB, DEA.

Communication challenges arise on all sides and are met by the following capabilities:

- The National Foreign Language Coordinating Committee Office in the nation's capital has direct contact virtually with all Senior Language Authorities of the federal government and immediately alerts all elements to stand by for support and deployment. In collaboration with CA state and local fusion centers, the office receives requirements from the affected areas and identifies language resources across the USG, as well as academe and industry and heritage communities, to ensure that all are mustered and deployed on-demand, whether organic, shared, warehoused, outsourced, or reach-back.
- Organic Capabilities. Core or organic language capabilities in DHS, DoD, DoJ, IC and other USG components, operate under comprehensive department- and agency-wide strategic plans that have identified requirements and have built core capabilities in languages and cultures of expected high demand. Thus, FEMA has designated the San Andreas Fault line as one of the areas eminently prone to natural disasters and identified the languages that populations in the SF areas speak, among them Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese) In addition, permanent employees of the relevant DHS components (e.g. USCG, FEMA, OHA, OIA, OOC), for example, have been trained and certified to proficiency levels required by the professional tasks they perform.
- Shared capabilities: Each department's and agency's strategic plan and SLA office has specific procedures to share resources within and across departments and agencies. FEMA, SBA, and IRS share language resources and information in concerted recovery efforts in SF. The DoD is able to direct the DLIFLC in Monterey, CA to provide language cadres of its qualified students to the area to assist speakers of Mandarin and any of the other two dozen languages taught at the institution. Watch List and other IC elements coordinate with TSA and CBP and sharing language capabilities in Phillipino, Ilocano, Cebuano, in efforts to determine identities and track

communications of new arrivals in SF who are possible Abu Sayyaf or Jemaah Islamiyah members.

- **Warehoused capabilities:** The National Language Service Corps provides professionals across a range of disciplines with languages of SF's smaller populations, like Hindi, Russian, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, as well as even Samoan and Chamorro. The National Virtual Translation Center (NVTC) is tasked to provide translations of documents and announcements directed specifically at local non-English speaking populations in the SF area who are in need of, or able to provide, assistance.
- **Outsourced capabilities:** Language Line Services, Inc., a private company based in Monterey, CA, is contracted to provide on-line interpretation for emergency hot lines in the dozens of language spoken in the city. In Annapolis, Maryland, Voxtec, Inc. provides to deployed guardsmen the third generation of the "Phraselator" programmed for the language of emergency response requirements and the local communities.
- **Reach-back capabilities:** The UC Berkeley NHLRC is contacted by the National Foreign Language Coordinating Council Office for advice on the heritage communities in the SF area, their languages, available resources, and leadership. The NYPD provides assistance in establishing community contacts in order to protect against terrorist attacks during the emergency when other resources are sorely taxed. IC and DHS contact the NSA/CSS and University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language for language identification tool availability in SE Asian, African, and Mexican Indian languages.

Such a scenario is within the realm of possibility, and the capabilities it presupposes are largely available or within reach, if and only if they can be brought to bear in case of emergency.

#### **The Problem**

The problem of defining and implementing a major "transformation" in DoD doctrine and program was particularly difficult, given the fact that the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* envisioned a future dominated by global "uncertainty" and "unpredictability" and focused on "capabilities and agility" more than specific threats from specific countries." In my view, the DoD set an impressive example of how institutional change can be accomplished across a large organization on a difficult problem. While DoD's work is not done<sup>h</sup>, DHS is now facing a similar challenge, as its language challenge is certainly one of criticality, unpredictability, and widening scope. DHS must provide a broad and disparate range of services to domestic populations numbering in the tens of millions across the U.S.,

while it addresses global language issues inherent in the mission of components like CBP, CIS, and ICE.<sup>iii</sup> (The same could be said, for example, of DOJ and other departments, agencies, and offices of the federal government.)

**The End State: A “Globalized USG Workforce”**

The lessons learned over the past two decades by the DoD have made clear that language expertise and cultural competence must be a workforce-wide capability not limited to specialized cadres for occasional missions. Accordingly, the end state we seek is a “globalized workforce” in which leadership and the workforce across the federal government understand the linguistic and cultural challenges in dealing with political/military, social, and economic issues globally and domestically and are prepared to deal with them. I would suggest that a globalized workforce in departments like DoD and DHS would comprise: 1. a broad personnel base with cross-cultural competence (“3C” in DoD parlance) and an understanding of the role of language in their mission; 2. a sub-set of this total workforce with linguistic, cultural, and regional skills at appropriate proficiency levels and in all relevant occupations; 3. a cadre of language and regional specialists capable of performing at the highest levels; and, 4. a set of “force multipliers” available and accessible on demand. Targeting “capabilities and agility” to meet “uncertainty” and “unpredictability” assumes that all levels of the workforce have a globalized mindset, communications management skills, and the language, culture, and region resource arsenal available on demand.

*A. Communications Management Skills.* The Defense Language Transformation Roadmap has as one of its goals that “...the total force understands and values the tactical, operational, and strategic asset inherent in regional expertise and language.” It is not only the fact that “...the total force understand and value...,” but it must be able to use the “...tactical, operational, and strategic asset....” Whether or not the personnel on the ground themselves have the necessary language skills or adequate cultural knowledge, training must ensure that all personnel have the skills to manage communications, which means that they have some basic knowledge of when human and/or technology-based language capabilities are needed and what value they bring, what resources are available and where they can be obtained, and whether the language and culture resources put against the problem are sufficient. Essentially, members of a globalized workforce must be armed with the ability to pose and answer the questions: Do we need language, culture (“3C”), and regional capabilities? What specifically do we

need? Where and how soon can we get the necessary resources, human or technological? Are they working, and how do we know?

This kind of communications management training that is assumed here, to the best of my knowledge, is not available. At the most basic level, current cultural and diversity training, cultural briefings, and short targeted language courses and programs, while certainly needed, are not sufficient to equip the total workforce to deal with the range of language and culture issues USG employees will face in their professional lives unless they understand when and how these skills are to be deployed. (The proactive correlate of “every soldier a sensor” would be “all cohorts’ communicators,” i.e. able to employ the language and cultural capabilities they have or can call upon.) However, before such training can be developed and implemented, a picture of all language capabilities available to a unit must be drawn, an access network must be developed that is capable of deploying the appropriate resources on demand, and a coordinating capability has to bring all this effort together.

*B. Organic Linguistic, Cultural, and Regional Skills*

Strategic planning of the Department of Defense as well as the Intelligence Community, the Department of Homeland Security, and other relevant entities, must engage in what industry refers to as “language audits”:

The primary objective of a language or ‘linguistic’ audit is to help the management of a firm identify the strengths and weaknesses of their organization in terms of communication in foreign languages. It will map the current capability of departments, functions, and people against the identified need. It will establish that need at the strategic level, at the process (or operational/departmental) level and at that of the individual postholders. It should also indicate what it will cost in time, human resources, training and finance to improve the system, so that the resource implications can be fed back into strategic and financial planning.<sup>iv</sup>

In Language Readiness Index (LRI) terms, which languages, levels of proficiency and performance (from basic to sophisticated), skills, and tasks missions require, the percentage of missions adequately resourced, as well as the number of language and culturally-competent personnel and technological assets that have to be developed and deployed.

Given the domestic and global involvement of DHS elements, for example, as well as the number of languages spoken by millions of people in the United States, the inevitable first question that arises is: Which languages and dialects are to be included in the core capabilities of each department element, in light of the fact that there are approximately 7,000 languages in the world, with tens of thousands of dialects—many hundreds of which are spoken in this country? The current approach in some agencies of identifying and projecting “Immediate Investment” and future “Stronghold” language needs is very reasonable, given the enormity of the task. The question, however, is: How can or should more languages, even dialects, be included in the end state? Clearly, building a workforce in each department or agency that is competent in hundreds, not to say, thousands of languages is not feasible.

The solution, I would propose, lies in a coordinated system of strategically planned, core language capabilities (both human and technological) augmented with procedures and mechanisms for shared, outsourced, localized, and reach-back capabilities. The core language capabilities have to be carefully constructed against what might be called “language futures,” that is, an investment in language and culture future capabilities based on:

- an analysis of issues projected to be critical to the well-being of the national in the next decade;
- the geographical areas in the U.S. and around the globe that these issues imply; and,
- which languages and dialects will be in use by which populations in ten and twenty years in these areas, including *lingua franca* and pidgin as well as the multi-lingual capabilities widespread among relevant sub-populations and sub-regions?

Once the needs are established, the investments have to be determined depending on the level of confidence one has in the projected issues and areas:

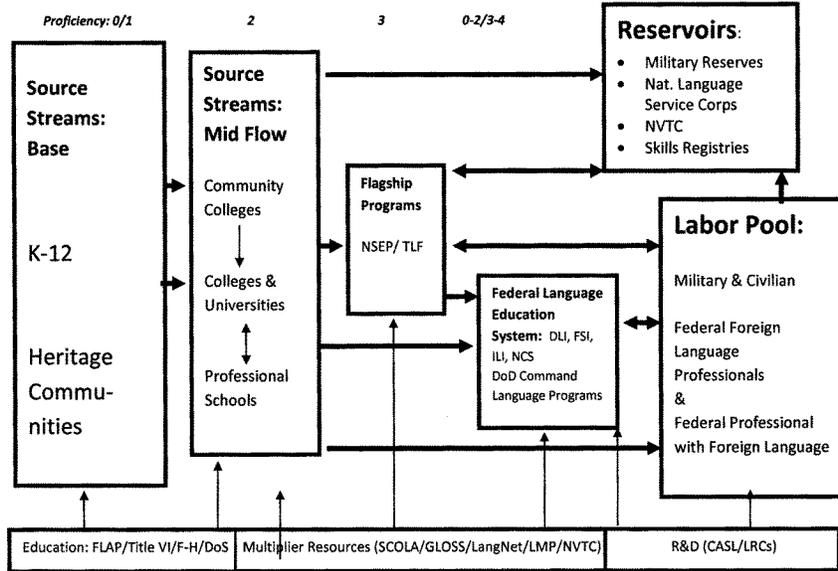
|                     | High                                            | Medium | Low |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------|-----|
| <b>Programs</b>     | USG & Academe                                   |        |     |
| <b>Architecture</b> | Academic field building (base & infrastructure) |        |     |
| <b>Data</b>         | Corpora & language documentation                |        |     |

Once targets like these have been identified, one has to determine how to build this carefully projected organic capability? Clearly, the USG language training programs will remain the primary provider of human resources to federal agencies, with schools like the DLIFLC, FSI, NCS, and ILI in the lead. However, it is possible that, in the long term, these school houses will be able to hone their on-campus mission to higher levels skills in critical languages by drawing from a recruitment pool enriched by better language programs in schools, community colleges and universities as well as in heritage community language schools. Figure 2 represents a map of the national pipelines in language education and training is sketched out.

Figure 2 Abbreviations:

CLPs: Command Language Programs; CASL: University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language; DLIFLC: Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center; DoS: Department of State; FLAP: Foreign Language Assistance Program; GLOSS: Global Language Online at the DLI; K-12: Kindergarten through twelfth grade; LangNet: The Language Network; UCLA's LMP: Language Materials Project; NLRCs: National Language Resource Centers; NSEP: National Security Education Program; TLF: The Language Flagship; NLSC: National Language Service Corps; NVTC: National Virtual Translation Center; SCOLA; Title VI/F-H: Title VI of the Higher Education Act, Fulbright-Hays.

Figure 2  
**Government Language Talent Source Stream Architecture: Pipelines & Reservoirs:**



As a constant required investment in this capacity, language sustainment and enhancement capabilities are and will be more and more in demand across the USG for more sophisticated job performance. On-the-job training will have to be targeted to job performance with life-cycle language and culture education available across the workforce, through more effective and efficient programs informed by research in cognitive neuroscience research and supported by advances in technology. Life-cycle training means that language learning is an ever-present, career-long endeavor. Not to be lost sight of, in this system management must focus on employing these skills appropriately to keep them from atrophying. All this constitutes the organic capability of departments like the DoD and DHS.

Once these critical (language, culture, regional) skills and professional experience are acquired, they should be "warehoused" in data bases that are accessible on demand, in military reserve elements, and in the National Language Service Corps (NLSC), all to be available in time of need. The NSLC's core function is to maintain a large reserve of language skilled and certified individuals across a wide range of languages and cultures that are readily accessible to the entire Federal as well as to state and local governments. It was created to provide a surge capacity for contingency planning in the most cost-effective manner. This critical national resource can and should draw upon the best academic language programs in the United States, like The Language Flagship and other high achieving programs as documented in CASL's *LinguaVista* system, to maintain and enhance its members' language and culture skills, thereby supporting programs that fight for existence in the face of low student demand.

Human Language Technology (HLT), specifically machine translation (MT), came into its own when it acknowledged its limitations and targeted its strengths. To this observer, the ability of Human Language Technology (HLT) to match human expertise in processing complex texts is a long way off. Nevertheless, HLT has a definite role to play in the end state; in fact it is critical to it. Processing large volumes of information at relatively low levels of sophistication is its strength. In the field, hand-held language technology has a role in low level tasks, like vehicular traffic control and the like.<sup>v</sup> However, the future globalized workforce must be armed with the knowledge of what the language task is, what the capabilities of available technology are, and how the delta, if it exists, has to be filled by human expertise. This has to be part of communications management training as well as strategic planning and capacity building from the start.

### C. Force Multipliers

However, given the number of languages, the multiple levels of linguistic, cultural, and regional proficiencies, and the range of missions and professional tasks involved, such an organic capacity has to be supplemented by force multipliers, including the following:

*Sharing.* The ability to share language resources among USG components depends upon strategic planning and policy, common standards for human resources and technology, and coordinating bodies. If, in a surge situation, like the scenario described above, where DHS for example would need speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese, and probably other languages of China, it must know where available resources are located and who has the authority to make temporary assignments when needed on its behalf. Each department and agency should plan for such a contingency, but a USG coordinating focal point would ensure that all relevant components participate and that uniform standards apply that would make collaboration and sharing possible and effective.<sup>vi</sup>

*Outsourcing.* Clearly, some reliance on industry and academic contractors for language services across the board will continue, even as each department or agency builds core staff. However, the varying nature of these outsourced capabilities requires standards and evaluation procedures and processes be developed that ensure the quality of contractor performance. Again, such standards, at some level, could be the responsibility of a USG-wide coordinating body that would take advantage of the various accrediting organizations working in the language field, like the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) and the International Standards Organization (ISO).<sup>vii</sup>

*Localization.* The advantages and challenges of hiring local populace translators and interpreters are not universally well known or appreciated. The language abilities of our coalition partners for DoD, or of heritage communities for DHS, are an important source of rare linguistic and cultural expertise in surge or operational situations. Here again, standards must be brought to bear, as part of the communications management of all personnel deployed abroad or serving domestic heritage communities. In addition, language and literature departments in our nation's colleges and universities should include translation and interpretation courses as part of their curricula, just as professional degree programs should be established in this area. As in outsourcing, the importance of standards in localization efforts cannot be overestimated and again could be the responsibility of a USG-wide coordinating body.<sup>viii</sup>

*Reach-back:* There are many language and culture capabilities that cannot be deployed in the field but can be accessed on demand in time of need, but only if their availability and usefulness are known across the USG and procedures for bring them to bear and coordinating their usage are developed. Such *reach-back* may be seen to comprise a number of services, including translation, interpretation, cultural behavior advising and training, as well as research on immediate and long-term problems in language training, performance, and assessment. Many of these assets already are supported by the federal government and, as such, are directly relevant to security, social, and economic concerns. For example, the National Virtual Translation Center—staffed by professionals including many academics and graduate students—can provide just-in-time active field services as well as translation and interpretation. Similarly, the reach-back capabilities of Human Terrain Teams in the field might be extended to include experts in regions and areas of the world from Title VI National Resource Centers.

A critical reach-back capability is research and development. As Director of the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), a DoD-funded University Affiliated Research Center (UARC), I would be remiss if I neglected to stress the role that research can, does, and must play in building, deploying, and evaluating the linguistic, cultural, and regional capabilities put against the challenges facing the nation. For example, the cognitive and neuroscience research being conducted at CASL has the potential to dramatically improve the ability to acquire language as well as to improve the process of analysis. Research in human language technology can greatly expand our ability to process the exponentially expanding information requirements across government. Federal laboratories as well as academic research centers have much to contribute to linguistic, cultural, and regional expertise.

#### **COORDINATION**

##### *At the Departmental Level*

Such a comprehensive, collaborative, and cohesive system described here depends critically on coordination and planning. Each department and agency must have a strategic plan for current and future needs assessment and capacity building, to include organic capacity (HR & HLT) and force multipliers. We note that a series of GAO reports on DoD, DoS, and DHS calls for just such a strategic plan.<sup>ix</sup> Each department plan should answer to a departmental Senior Language Authority with the responsibility and authority to ensure that the plan is developed and implemented through core workforce recruitment, training, warehousing, and management, as well as through resource sharing, outsourcing, localization, and reach-back. Each department should conduct a language audit to

establish explicit requirements and capabilities, as well as plan to build and coordinate needed capacity. Staff and leadership should be liable to incentives and accountability, and management should be such that the language and culture skills developed be deployed and used rather than be left to atrophy.

*At the National Level*

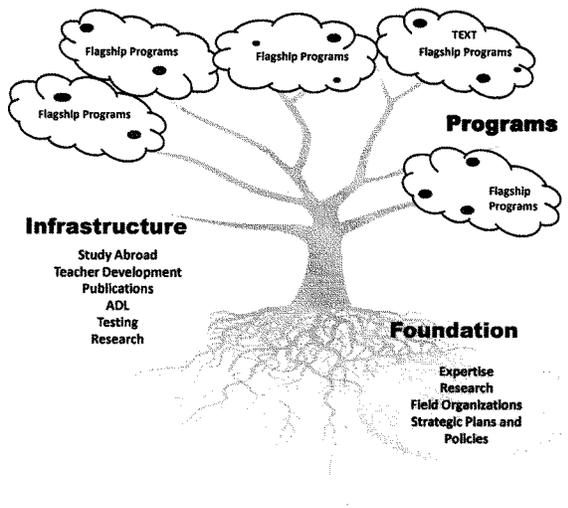
While each department and agency has this responsibility within its domain of responsibility, it is clear that effectiveness, efficiency, and cost management can be greatly facilitated if these departments and agencies could affect the same synergies among themselves as they demand of their components. To support this kind of collaboration, a vehicle for government-wide coordination is required like that proposed by Senator Akaka in Senate Bill 1010, which establishes a National Foreign Language Coordinating Council in the Executive Office of the President, chaired by the National Language Advisor. This council could be a major force in building a national capacity for the USG. The coordination called for here will not be easy, but it likely will never happen without a mechanism of this kind. We note that the creation of collaborative organizations and mechanisms is very much in accord with the testimony of John H. Pendleton, GAO's Director, Defense Capabilities and Management, before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, Committee on Armed Services.<sup>x</sup>

As I hope I have made clear to this point, it is however imperative that federal coordination efforts involve not only federal programs. Essentially, the national capacity in language comprises 4 principal sectors: academic, federal, heritage, and industry. As can be seen from the envisioned scenario above, in addition to the federal, the other three sectors (academe, industry, and heritage) are critical players in outsourcing, localization, and reach-back and should be included in every capabilities roadmap. In particular, it should be clear that much of federal language capacity depends on the academic sector maintaining the infrastructure that produces the expertise, programs, and teachers in languages of all regions of the world. (See Figure 2 above.) In fact, academe, as opposed to government and industry, is best positioned to address unforeseen requirements by extending and maintaining expertise in all areas of the world without having to justify its practical application. Indeed, the strength of academe lies in its "knowledge for knowledge sake" approach.

Because of its importance, it is necessary to appreciate the nature of the academic infrastructure underlying the nation's language capacity. Essentially, the core of our ability to develop and maintain expertise is the *language field*, which can be analyzed as comprising, for any given language or language

area, *foundational elements* (expertise base, research, national organization, strategic planning, national resource centers), *infrastructure* (teacher training programs, in-country immersion programs, publications outlets, assessment instruments, etc.), as well as *exemplary programs*. See Figure 3.

Figure 3



This field architecture, supported principally on the federal side by Title VI/Fulbright-Hays of the Higher Education Act, The Language Flagship program of the NSEP, and DoD and other federally supported research, is critical to all aspects of the federal language enterprise. This is particularly true given the fact that academic language fields as a rule pay attention to a broad range of languages in their area, devoting graduate and undergraduate education to critical linguistic and cultural aspects of the discipline unavailable anywhere else. Finally, let me add here that Translation and Interpretation (T&I), as an academic field critical to national needs, should become a focus of federal and academic support in the United States.

#### **Conclusion**

Departments and agencies responsible for national security across the federal government have made significant improvements in language, culture, and regional skills along common lines: a Senior Language Authority office, more or less defined requirements, clear incentives, improved management, and focused leadership. As now departments and agencies responsible for homeland security are joining these efforts, they need to profit from this experience. As recent GAO studies have made clear, a comprehensive strategic plan must guide procedures and structures in order to ensure that each unit can operate at maximum effectiveness and efficiency. However, this kind of planning and implementation requires an integration and coordination that has thus far eluded most efforts—once again as argued in recent GAO testimony. We have argued here that plans, processes and structures be coordinated and integrated both within and across departments, agencies, and sectors. This is, no doubt, a significant challenge burdened by inevitable skepticism drawn from past experience. However, for such vital coordination to happen on its own is an even more obvious fool's errand. Without question, the ideal solution to the nation's language needs is integration of language and culture study into all levels of education, ultimately answering the government's need for a "globalized total workforce." Given that such an end state is a long way off, we have little choice but to take the middle ground advocated here of building what we can and maximizing the use of what we build.

#### **Recommendations:**

At the national level:

- Establish a national coordinating entity capable of ensuring that language capacity building and deployment across the federal government are comprehensive, collaborative, and cohesive. Senator Akaka's Senate Bill S-1010 proposes to establish such an entity.<sup>xi</sup> There is a somewhat

similar—although certainly not at the same level—effort in the Department of Justice focused on collaborative practices, the Federal Interagency Working Group on LEP [Limited English Proficiency], “...a network of federal agencies established in 2002 by DOJ to help foster government wide collaboration for serving LEP communities.”<sup>xiii</sup> It is, however, recommended that academe be represented in this coordination effort, so that much of its foundation and infrastructure building capacity be available to support the core and multiplier capabilities described above. (Including industry here depends on whether a language trade council could be established and be empowered to represent the industry in a fair and non-conflicted manner.)

- The strategic success of federal language policies depends in the long run on the education system of the United States, where efforts at the higher education and, especially, at the K-12 level have to be strengthened.<sup>xiii</sup> The recently drafted "Excellence and Innovation in Language Learning Act," sponsored by Representatives Holt & Tonko is an important step in the right direction.
- Develop a strategy in the USED to develop and strengthen translation and interpretation skills in the United States.
- Standards should be adopted that apply across all organic, outsourced, localized, and reach-back capabilities, so that resources can be freely shared and brought in from outside.
- Each department should consider building a network-based language, culture, and region resource access system capable of identifying, locating and providing appropriate human and technological resources anytime and anywhere, leveraging the extensive USG investments in language and culture as well the resources of academe, industry, and the nation’s heritage communities.
- A network-based resource documenting the latest research on problems challenging the USG in the area of language and culture should be developed as well, with the goal of fostering innovation, collaboration, and elimination of costly duplication.

At the agency level:

- DoD: Hard won ground must not be lost; the significant investment made by the Department in language and culture must be protected and built upon. The end state for the DoD is a “globalized total force.” The Defense Language Transformation Roadmap must be fully implemented, and its funding and programs must be maintained as the core to this capability.

At least in part, the way forward in part is outlined in the recent GAO report: *Military Training: DoD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*. Washington, D.C.: June 2009 and in recent testimony before the HASC.<sup>xiv</sup>

- DHS should establish an office of the Senior Language Authority, where standards, requirements, incentives, and policies on language are coordinated department-wide. The first task would be to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for the department that covers language and culture needs and capacity, both domestically and globally and initiative language audits across the department's components.

Again, I wish to thank Senator Akaka, Senator Voinovich and the Members of the Subcommittee for the privilege of testifying before you on the critical issue. The process of building the federal language capabilities are well begun, but only half done. Congressional hearings like this are vital to being able to finish the job.

<sup>i</sup> Department of State: *Comprehensive Plan Needed to Address Persistent Foreign Language Shortfalls*. Washington, D.C. September 2009; *Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*. Washington, D.C. June 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. testimony by the DoD SLA before the HASC in June, 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Medha Tare. 2006. Assessing the Foreign Language Needs of the Department of Homeland Security. *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, Article 5.

<sup>iv</sup> Nigel Reeves and Colin Wright. 1996. *Linguistic Auditing: A Guide to Identifying Foreign Language Communication Needs in Corporations*. Multilingual Matters, LTD.

<sup>v</sup> Cf. the Army's Sequoyah Foreign Language Translation System.

<sup>vi</sup> The 2010 GAO report: *Language Access: Selected Agencies Can Improve Services to Limited English Proficient Persons cites several instances of sharing among DHS components*. There are instances of this type of behavior, but resource sharing is hardly common among USG institutions.

<sup>vii</sup> Existing ASTM language standards: F15.34 on Language Interpreting F2089-01(2007) Standard Guide for Language Interpretation Services; F15.35 on Use Oriented Foreign Language Instruction F1562-95(2005) Standard Guide for Use-Oriented Foreign Language Instruction; F15.48 on Translation Services ASTM F2575 - 06 Standard Guide for Quality Assurance in Translation; F15.64 on Proficiency Assessment Standard Practice under development; Main ASTM Committee on FL Services & Products pending final approval. Currently the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has begun an initiative on language training in non-formal environments.

<sup>viii</sup> It is particularly noteworthy that industry is very involved in standards for the effective conduct of global business. One of the principal industry organizations in this area is the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA.)

<sup>b</sup> Department of State: Comprehensive Plan Needed to Address Persistent Foreign Language Shortfalls. Washington, D.C. September 2009; Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency. Washington, D.C. June 2009.

<sup>x</sup> June 9, 2010. "Key Challenges and Solutions to Strengthen Interagency Collaboration."

<sup>xi</sup> Cf. R. Brecht, "The End State of Language Capability for the U.S. Department of Defense: The Country's First 'Globalized' Workforce." Prepared Statement before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, July 9, 2008. R. Brecht, "A Comprehensive, Collaborative, and Cohesive Federal Architecture for Language & National Security." Prepared Statement before the House Permanent Select Committee On Intelligence, 13 May 2004.

<sup>xii</sup> GAO-10-91, April 2010. "Language Access: Selected Agencies Can Improve Services to Limited English Proficient Persons."

<sup>xiii</sup> Brecht, Richard D. 2007. National Language Educational Policy in the Nation's Interest: Why? How? Who is Responsible for What? The Modern Language Journal 91, ii, 264-265. June 17, 2010

<sup>xiv</sup> Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives: "Military Training: Continued Actions Needed to Guide DOD's Efforts to Improve Language Skills and Regional Proficiency." Statement of Sharon L. Pickup, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management, GAO.

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**STATEMENT**

*FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN THE ACADEMIC AND EDUCATIONAL SECTOR:  
PRODUCING THE EXPERTISE, TEACHERS, AND PROGRAMS FOR WORLD  
LANGUAGES*

by

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to the

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,  
and the District of Columbia  
on

*"Closing the Language Gap: Improving the Federal Government's  
Foreign Language Capabilities."*

Thursday, July 29, 2010  
2:30pm  
342 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC

Senator Akaka, Senator Voinovich, and Members of the Subcommittee: I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today to present my views, experiences, and research results on the current state of foreign language learning in the U.S., and on improving the Federal Government's Foreign Language Capabilities in the year 2010.

Following summary remarks based on a more detailed report of research and survey results, which I would ask permission to introduce into the formal record of these hearings, I would welcome any questions or comments.

For the past 30 years, I have worked extensively in research, training, and assessment of the foreign language skills of Americans at key junctures in our educational system, including the evaluation of K-12 programs, at college entrance testing,, and the assessment of language gains connected with overseas immersion learning of a large number of university-level students preparing to enter careers in government, teaching or academic fields. Most of my work has focused on the study and teaching of Russian, but over the past six years, I have worked extensively with colleagues in Arabic, African, Chinese, Persian, and Turkic languages with similar interests and responsibilities.

Currently, I serve as elected president of the Joint National Committee for Languages (JNCL), an umbrella organization composed of 75 different national, regional, and state-level professional associations with combined memberships of more than a quarter of a million professionals at all levels of the educational system. I also serve as a member of the K-16 Foreign Language Standards Collaborative, the World Languages Committee of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the College Board Academic Advisory Committee for World Languages, and as immediate past chair of the Council of Language Flagship Directors.

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As President of American Councils, I oversee programs focused on advanced and professional-level language acquisition at overseas universities and immersion centers funded by the U. S. Department of State and the National Security Education Program of DOD, which contribute to the preparation of more than 1,500 Americans annually at the school (NSLI-Y/State Department), undergraduate overseas summer institutes (CLS/State Department) and undergraduate/graduate DOS/Title VIII, USED Fulbright-Hays, and DOD NSEP“Flagship” Overseas Programs in Arabic, Chinese, Indonesia, Japanese, Turkic languages, Persian, Russian, Swahili, Yoruba, and several others. Concurrently, smaller but critical investments in teacher training in these languages, including overseas immersion training, is made possible by federal support through DOS (ISLI, TCLP), ODNI (Startalk), and the USED/s FLAP and Fulbright-Hays (GPA) programs. Private sector teacher development initiatives supported by Asia Society and the College Board for the study of Chinese, in particular, are also contributing to the development of the nation’s K-12 teaching capacity and infrastructure.

Many of the participants in the above programs, probably more than half, select study in these demanding training programs because they expect to enter into government service upon completion of their studies. Because students combine their professional level language and cultural proficiency with concurrent study in other majors (international relations, government, business, security studies, engineering, or economics), they are well positioned to go on to a broad range of positions in government, including DHS, DOD, ODNI, State, Commerce, Justice, Energy, EPA, branches of the military, and now also in the National Language Service Corps.

And that brings me to the first observation I would like to share with you today: to the extent that Americans undertake the study of the major world languages in extended course and

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program sequences that provide adequate opportunities for overseas immersion study (preferably at younger ages, as well as in the university), **they may now expect to attain full professional level proficiency in those languages, and the real possibility of using their language knowledge to enhance their study and future career in an increasingly globalized U.S. workforce.**

By contrast, in my generation, it was extremely rare to find professionals outside academia and a small number of positions in government with comparable levels of language. Most of us began our study of critical languages at a relatively late stage, and had little if any opportunity for critical overseas immersion study and regular language maintenance support.

The major shift in preparing U.S. citizens in world languages has begun only recently, but its effects are clear and measurable – and cannot be overstated. A longitudinal study, appearing in the current issue of the refereed journal *Foreign Language Annals* (Spring 2010), addresses the issue of the foreign language learning career of American learners of Russian, taking into account the relative contribution of K-12 study, summer, semester, and year-long immersion programming, as well as a range of individual learner variables. The subjects for the study include (for the first time) participants in the NSEP Language Flagships, as well as at-large students supported at the Flagship level by the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays programs.

This paradigm shift dates from 2004-2005/ Policy decisions taken by the U.S. government, discussed previously at the 2003 Maryland Conference on Language and DOD's Language Roadmap, both produced under the leadership of former Undersecretary of Defense Dr. David Chu, who is present here today, officially raised the bar for federal employees in language-specific positions to ILR Level 3, or ACTFL "Superior" level or higher. DOS has

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also called for training beyond level 3 for critical diplomatic postings. Similar high expectations of language and cultural competency are increasingly present today in both the academic and business worlds, as well. DOD's landmark initiative became the model for the most important cross-agency language training effort since NDEA – the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), launched formally by the White House in January of 2006.

In addition to providing much-needed support to teachers in U.S. domestic programs at the K-12 level, NSLI offers essential overseas immersion opportunities for American learners of the critical languages at key junctures in the educational system through the (NSLI-Youth) for secondary school students; the Critical Language Scholarships (CLS), an intensive summer institutes overseas program for university students; supplementary language training for Fulbright scholars; and the Language Flagship Program, with its year-long overseas capstone program designed to bring students from ILR Level 2 (advanced) to Level 3 (professional/superior) or higher.

#### **MEASURED OUTCOMES FROM OVERSEAS IMMERSION**

Domestic study alone has rarely been shown to produce professional-level linguistic and cultural competence in a foreign language in the U. S. educational system. As a result, it is relevant for policymakers and educators alike to be familiar with the research on the impact on language gain of different durations and levels of overseas immersion training. The relative contribution of overseas immersion at different points along the language learning career to language proficiency development for Americans is the subject of the 2010 FLA study, noted above. The research addresses to what extent duration of immersion affects language gain in the overseas setting? How does the impact of a semester or year of study for a student with pre-program proficiencies in the Advanced range compare with the same duration of

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immersion for a student whose starting point is in the Intermediate range? Do multiple immersion experiences contribute to overall language gain?

To respond to these and related questions, American Councils has maintained records over the past 25 years pertaining to the general academic and in-country language performance of more than five thousand American undergraduate and graduate students who have undertaken summer, semester, or academic year language training programs in Russia under its auspices.

The population is significant for today's discussions because it represents the leading edge of American college graduates who go on to enter government service. Over the past 15 years, the average age of participants has dropped very slightly from 22.2 years to 21.9, while the level of undergraduate student participation has gradually increased to 78 percent of the total subject population, along with increasing numbers of non-majors or double-majors taking part. Women now account for 60.1 percent of the total population of American Councils participants; approximately 22.5 percent of the subjects began their study of Russian in high school.

The present analysis is based on data relating to 1,881 students who studied in two-month, four-month, and nine-month AC programs in Russia beginning with the fall semesters of 1994 through the spring semester of 2009, including five consecutive Flagship groups who studied under AC auspices at St. Petersburg University, beginning in 2004-5. The participants represent 226 American colleges and universities, ranging from small private liberal arts institutions to large public research universities, with no single institution accounting for more than five percent of the total participant population.

#### **I. PREDICTORS OF GAIN IN SEMESTER AND ACADEMIC YEAR PROGRAMS: RESULTS**

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Of particular note in the analysis are the clear relationships between second language gains and other variables such as program duration, initial level of proficiency, listening comprehension, previous immersion, early learning, and control of language structure. Listening proficiency emerges as a critical predictor variable for speaking gain at the Advanced and Superior levels, the academic year and Flagship programs. It stands to reason that students at these levels must be able to comprehend clearly and monitor effectively the feedback they receive from native speakers in the form of re-castings and informal corrections in daily discourse, if they are to raise their oral proficiency to the next level. Unfortunately, the research also indicates that listening comprehension is the least developed linguistic skill of those who begin their study of languages at the college level. For those who start at the K-12 level, listening comprehension, by contrast, is likely to be more highly developed.

Learner control and awareness of language structure prior to study abroad is correlated positively with second language gain in all modalities during study abroad. Moreover, language structure re-emerges at the Advanced and Superior levels as salient for effective communication and appropriate levels of rapport-building with native speakers at those levels. AC students regularly report surprise at being held to a higher standard of language production and performance as they approach the Advanced/High and Superior levels, even by their long-time contacts and professional associates overseas. Improper word choices or inappropriate collocations, which would not have attracted notice at the 1+ or 2- level, become salient for native speakers at higher levels (Fedchak, 2007). Structural errors can undercut confidence and undermine trust among native speakers for the non-native speaker operating at or near the professional level.

It is noteworthy that gender has receded for students at the Intermediate High level and

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above as a predictor of gain on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), unlike the findings of Brecht, Davidson, Ginsberg (1995). The reasons for this shift may lie in the gradual changes that have taken place in gender roles in Russian society since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also in dedicated training in self-management and strategy selection provided by AC to its departing groups with special attention to female participants, particularly those who elect to spend the full year in Russia. Clearly, more work in this area remains to be done, especially for female students at the early intermediate levels of study.

Effective study-abroad programs make use of both linguistically supported and unsheltered activities in tandem with improved metacognitive learner and teacher preparation in self-managed learning, learning strategies, and "identity competence" (Pellegrino, 2005, p. 150).

High school instruction, it should be noted, in light of the fact that 27.8 percent of the informants had studied Russian in high school emerges as significant statistically as a predictor of reading and listening gain, and approaches significance as a predictor of speaking gain for the academic year and Flagship models. As noted above, listening competence, in turn, is critical for the development of professional-level speaking proficiency.

Initial level of proficiency also has an impact on gain within the study-abroad environment (see Brecht & Robinson, 1995). For example, of those participants entering the academic year program with 2-level reading skills, 81 percent crossed the threshold to 3-level proficiency in reading, as compared to 44 percent of those in the semester program, and 39 percent of those in the summer program.

The development of speaking proficiency is most often cited by study-abroad students as their primary motivation for studying language overseas. Students with an initial oral

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proficiency of 2 (Advanced) have about an equal chance of remaining at the 2 level after one year of study, of advancing to the 2+ level, or of attaining the 3 (Superior) level of proficiency. Chances of attaining level 3 in the course of a single semester, by comparison, are approximately seven percent. What is also clear is that students aspiring to attain the highest levels of oral proficiency should take advantage of every opportunity, stateside and overseas, to develop proficiency in the language prior to the critical long term of study-abroad instruction.

An exception to this pattern is represented by the Overseas Language Flagship program in Russian at St. Petersburg University, which accepts students on a selective basis for a highly intensive program of immersion study focused on the full development of professional language skills. With weekly contact hours and direct language utilization measured at 65-70 hours per week (and higher), the nine-month Flagship program has produced six graduating classes of U.S. students with post-program proficiencies at 3, 3+, and 4 (in both the ILR and European Union [CEF] frameworks) in three skills, which are increasingly the expected outcomes for Flagship participants.

Comparable outcomes have been measured using multiple systems of language assessment by the Arabic Overseas Flagship Programs in Alexandria (Egypt) and Damascus (Syria), the Chinese Flagship in Nanjing, and the Persian Program in Dushanbe (Tajikistan).

Obviously, existing language skill measures should not be seen as exhaustive statements of cross-cultural competence, but they represent nonetheless a good level of consensus across government and academia regarding constructs viewed as important for operating effectively in a professional environment in a second language and culture. Multiple studies of the long-term impact on personal lives and professional careers of overseas immersion learning of critical languages provide considerably further validation of study-

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abroad learning (Davidson & Lehmann, 2005).

Research has shown that language learning in the overseas immersion environment holds enormous potential for meeting the linguistic and cultural training needs for the government work force in the 21st century. But to function effectively, it must be properly integrated into K-12 and undergraduate curricula and adequately supported by faculties, administrators, policymakers, and funders. In short, a sustained effort across government and the academy in support of world languages and cultures will necessitate a concomitant approach to overseas language immersion study, as well. The above data make it clear that such a concerted effort is possible and can succeed, but the commitment required of students, universities, and society at large is great. I would like to present some key elements of the highly successful Flagship programs:

- Articulated school-to-college proficiency-based programs and curricular sequencing e.g., the K-16 outcomes-based standards for foreign languages in the U.S.;\*\*
- Dedicated programs for heritage language learners at the school and college level;
- Internet-based language learning (through LangNet and other sources) available to support language students from the professional schools, heritage learners, and students requiring content-based approaches to foreign language learning;
- Intensive summer immersion institutes (stateside) for non-beginning students engaged in developing language skills beyond 0+, 1, and 1+ levels;
- Effectively supported study abroad immersion language programs for non-beginning students engaged in developing language skills beyond 1, 1+, 2, and 2+ levels; and
- Stateside university-based advanced level and content-based courses, taught in the target language, to support language maintenance and language development at or near

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the 3 level for learners returning from substantial study abroad programs and/or previously trained heritage speakers.

Flagship programs exist today for many of the critical modern languages. Most are housed within major research universities (Arizona State, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, Texas, Wisconsin); others within smaller institutions that have made particular commitments of resources and faculties over time to advanced language study, such as Bryn Mawr College (Pennsylvania) and Howard University (Washington, DC).

## **II. CENSUS OF LESS COMMONLY TAUGHT LANGUAGES IN U.S. SCHOOLS IN 2009**

Critical to this discussion of U.S. national capacity in the critical languages is a discussion of the state of language instruction in American schools. Currently, there are 3,500 high schools in the U.S. that offer instruction in the less commonly taught languages. I cannot emphasize enough the critical importance of developing a pipeline of young students who begin foreign language instruction at an early age. It is important that the funding that is invested in language programs, such as the Language Flagship, is invested early – from the stateside FLAP and overseas NSLI-Y programs to the Language Flagship – so that we have an established system in place that produces foreign language speakers at the highest levels of achievement, at levels 3, 3+, and 4. As a result of these programs, we are indeed producing speakers that do achieve at these high professional levels.

American Councils has conducted a nationwide survey of less commonly taught language instruction in U.S. high schools to identify those schools, and to collect basic data on instruction in order to support ongoing efforts to strengthen critical foreign language education.

The survey was sponsored by the National Security Education Program/The Language Flagship and American Councils for International Education. Data collection was conducted

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by the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center, Washington State University. Data from this survey were supplemented and cross-checked against information obtained from the Asia Society, Center for Applied Linguistics, and the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota.

The response rate for the survey of U.S. high schools was 91.8 percent. I would like to present several findings our survey for Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Turkish, and Persian:

**Chinese:** The results of the survey indicate that Chinese language instruction is quite widespread within school systems in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. We identified approximately 1,962 schools and school districts offering Chinese classes, with an estimated enrollment of over 117,300 students. We estimate that over 2,000 full- and part-time teachers of Chinese – of whom 62 percent are full-time, and 38 percent are part-time teachers – are currently engaged in K-12 school systems across the country. The majority of schools (60 percent) offer between one to three levels of Chinese, and another 16 percent offer up to four levels. The number of years of Chinese language instruction offered by high schools was spread over four years. Slightly over one quarter (27 percent) offered two years of Chinese.

**Russian:** We estimate that as many as 16,000 students are enrolled in Russian classes throughout the U.S. K-12 school system, with up to 400 full- and part-time Russian teachers. We identified about 539 schools and schools districts offering Russian in 46 states, although about half of these districts have five or less schools.

**Arabic:** We estimate that 17,350 students are enrolled in Arabic classes in high schools in 47 states, as well as community and mosque-based schools, with an estimated number of up to 500

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full- and part-time teachers of Arabic. Only 14 states were identified as having more than ten schools offering Arabic classes.

**Japanese:** Japanese language instruction is widespread across the nation, where we have identified 1,013 schools in 47 states and the District of Columbia.

**Korean:** In 48 schools across 17 states, we estimate that about 3,700 students are enrolled in Korean language classes. Slightly less than half of these schools (23 schools or 48 percent) are located in California.

**Turkish:** We identified 16 schools in 11 states that offer Turkish language classes, with about 600 students. Most of these students are located in Ohio, with 47 percent of students, and California with 25 percent, and where we have two and three schools, respectively.

**Persian:** We identified a total of 118 students of Persian located in eight states and 13 schools. New York and California had three schools each; the remaining states reported only one program. About two-thirds of these schools reported that they offer afterschool and Saturday classes, while approximately 30 percent reported that they offered year-round classes.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The latest research on critical language acquisition provides support for several basic assumptions underlying the formation of policy regarding the present “language gap” in the federal government’s foreign language capabilities:

A. Americans are now achieving professional-level proficiency (ILR-3 or higher in multiple skills) in these languages thanks to the NSEP Flagship Program and its many feeders.

B. Americans are interested, as never before, in learning the critical languages, as is evidenced by the notable growth of K-12 programs in Chinese, Arabic, Japanese and Russian

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across the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

What is needed, then, is a mechanism for drawing greater public attention to the successes and proof of concept for US success in this area that now exists, so that more students in institutions of all kinds can pursue long-term study of world languages, just as their counterparts in other parts of the world are doing in unprecedented numbers. That mechanism, both informational and financial, would address:

- 1) The general lack of knowledge, particularly at state and local levels, of how to plan and implement language training careers from early childhood through tertiary levels of the educational system that will larger numbers of our citizens to the 3-level, and also enable them to maintain that language through their professional lives;
- 2) The need for increased federal support of proven models of long-term language proficiency development on the level of ESEA, as well as through specific programs activities with proven track records, such as FLAP, the “NSLI” complex of programs inaugurated during the past decade; the support of high quality pre- and in-service teacher professional development for those with responsibility for world languages at all levels; and the availability of standards-based assessments at grades 4, 8, 12 (such as AP) and 16 to permit learners and their teachers to demonstrate measureable progress in world language study.
- 3) Continued or increased funding to support essential overseas immersion programs for students and teachers at the high school, undergraduate, and Flagship levels of training on site in the target country and culture where the language is native;
- 4) The need for more “content-based” course offerings at the university levels to bring greater diversity of content and access to target-language materials in a range of disciplines in

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connection with a gradual re-focusing of college-level language training toward the advanced and superior levels, as increasing numbers of undergraduate students, including heritage speakers, demonstrate capability of pursuing work at the advanced level;

- 5) The support of continued research in the field of world languages and language acquisition, particularly the need for greater understanding of the processes of adult second language acquisition and the assessment of language competencies at the advanced- and superior levels of proficiency

Currently, students who participate in the Flagship Programs, whether or not they have had the opportunity to study the language in school, have the real possibility of attaining 3-level proficiency by the time they are ready to enter the workforce upon graduation. This is clearly a model that should be disseminated generally, for it guarantees a capacity and an on-going source of well-educated US speakers of all the major critical languages, even while the larger educational system is adjusting to meet the new demands for high-level linguistic competence in virtually all government agencies and professional fields. Unfortunately, Flagship programs are available only on 22 American campuses at the present time, usually in no more than one or two languages per campus. The Flagship model, which serves government language capacity directly, should now be expanded, at least to the size of Title VI, which has provided the building blocks of language and area expertise at our major research universities, that has made the Flagship programs of recent years possible. In this respect, Senator Akaka's legislation (S 2010) in support of a National Foreign Language Coordination Council would provide a much needed national strategy that would advance much that has been recommended above.

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Moreover, the newly drafted “Excellence and Innovation in Language Learning Act, sponsored by Representatives Chu, Holt, and Tonko, represents an important further step in the consolidation of policy and support for world languages at the K-12 level.

This concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions.

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**BACKGROUND**  
**CLOSING THE LANGUAGE GAP: IMPROVING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S**  
**FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES**  
**JULY 29, 2010**

**Background**

Changing threats to U.S. national security, the increasing globalization of the U.S. economy, and immigration to the U.S. have greatly increased federal agencies' needs for personnel proficient in foreign languages. In 2002, GAO reported that federal agencies had shortages in translators and interpreters and an overall shortfall in the language proficiency levels needed to carry out agency missions. According to this report, agency officials stated that these shortfalls had adversely affected agency operations and hindered U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence, counterterrorism, and diplomatic efforts.<sup>1</sup>

*U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Foreign Language Capabilities*

Foreign language skills are essential to DHS's operations; however, DHS has taken limited action to understand its foreign language capabilities. DHS personnel need foreign language skills to effectively carry out Department operations, especially during critical law enforcement and intelligence activities. However, a DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) report revealed that DHS staff serving in non-English speaking countries generally receives little or no foreign language instruction, and the OIG encountered language deficits in four of the five countries examined. Poor foreign language skills diminished these DHS employees' ability to operate professionally and in their personal lives.<sup>2</sup>

DHS has provided its components the discretion to establish programs and activities to develop, improve, and maintain their language capabilities. There are five types of language programs used within the components:

- Language training: language training programs consist of 6-8 weeks of basic Spanish.
- Proficiency testing: there are a variety of proficiency tests used by the components.
- Contract services: like many other departments and agencies, DHS contract services for interpreters and translators.
- Interagency agreements: interagency agreements establish relations with other federal, state, and local agencies that carry out joint operations.
- Foreign language award pay: some components provide foreign language award pay for personnel that are proficient in a qualified foreign language and meet certain program requirements.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls*, January 2002, GAO-02-375, <<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02375.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *Management of Department of Homeland Security International Activities and Interests*, OIG-08-71, June 2008, pp. 68-69, <[http://www.dhs.gov/xoig/assets/mgmttrpts/OIG\\_08-71\\_Jun08.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xoig/assets/mgmttrpts/OIG_08-71_Jun08.pdf)>.

At the hearing, GAO will release its report on DHS's foreign language capabilities, which focuses on capabilities and shortfalls at three of its largest law enforcement and intelligence agencies: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). According to GAO's report, DHS has done very little to address its foreign language capabilities. GAO found that DHS has no systematic method for assessing its foreign language needs and existing capabilities, and its components have not identified potential foreign language shortfalls. Furthermore, DHS has not addressed foreign language needs in its Human Capital Strategic Plan nor in its Quadrennial Homeland Security Review. Thus, GAO recommended that DHS conduct a comprehensive assessment of its foreign language needs and capabilities; identify potential shortfalls; assess the extent to which existing foreign language programs are addressing foreign language shortfalls; and ensure that assessments are included in future strategic planning.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, GAO recently conducted a review of agencies' efforts to help ensure that limited English proficient populations (LEP) can access federal programs and services.<sup>4</sup> On August 11, 2000, President Clinton issued Executive Order 13166, which directed each federal agency to improve access to federal programs and services for LEP persons. Using guidance issued by the Department of Justice (DOJ), agencies are required to develop recipient guidance and/or an LEP plan outlining steps on how to improve accessibility. GAO examined three agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), to determine the extent to which these agencies have implemented the Executive Order. GAO found that FEMA has identified LEP populations and provides services in different languages during disasters, but lacks the structure to monitor these services. GAO recommended that FEMA make available general and key disaster information in commonly spoken languages, as well as develop ways to monitor and evaluate services provided to LEP persons. GAO also recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security finalize and issue the department's LEP plan and recipient guidance.

#### *Foreign Language Initiatives at the U.S. Department of Defense*

Foreign language skills are vital to DoD's operations, such as its counterinsurgency and stability operations, and to building international partnerships. To build the capabilities needed to address current and future threats and effectively meet the Department's mission, DoD began assessments of its language capabilities in 2002. DoD directed all military departments and defense agencies to review their language requirements; conducted a formal review of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center to determine whether the Center was meeting the needs of the Department; commissioned a study of five language functions; and assembled a Defense Language Transformation Team to form recommended actions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Department of Homeland Security: DHS Needs to Comprehensively Assess its Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities and Identify Shortfalls*, GAO-10-714, June 2010.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Language Access: Selected Agencies Can Improve Services to Limited English Proficient Persons*, GAO-10-91, April 26, 2010, <<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1091.pdf>>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, January 2005, pp.1-2, <[http://www.uscg.mil/hr/cgi/downloads/DOD\\_roadmap.pdf](http://www.uscg.mil/hr/cgi/downloads/DOD_roadmap.pdf)>.

In 2004, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to appoint a Senior Language Authority (SLA) and also directed defense departments and agencies to appoint an SLA representative. The SLAs are responsible for assessing the organization's language needs. Additionally, DoD established the Defense Language Steering Committee, comprised of the SLAs, to provide senior-level oversight of the development of the Department's language capabilities.

In 2005, DoD published the Language Transformation Roadmap, which guides implementation of the language and regional proficiency transformation. The Roadmap set four goals and 43 tasks: (1) create foundational language and regional area expertise; (2) build a surge capacity for language and cultural resources; (3) establish a cadre of language specialists with advanced proficiency; and (4) track and promote personnel with language skills and regional expertise. The DoD Strategic Planning Guidance (SPG) for Fiscal Years 2006-2011 included the key goals of the Roadmap.<sup>6</sup>

To implement the guidance, DoD has developed several language initiatives. In order for the Department to conduct risk assessments, DoD established the Language Readiness Index to equip senior level decision-makers with the information necessary to assess DoD's language capabilities and take appropriate action. To encourage uniformed members to identify, improve, and sustain language capabilities, DoD implemented the Foreign Language Proficiency Bonus policy, where uniformed members can receive up to a \$1,000 bonus per month. Civilians assigned to non-intelligence positions may receive Foreign Language Proficiency pay of up to five percent of an employee's salary when duties require proficiency in a foreign language. To institutionalize the Department's commitment to language transformation, DoD established the Defense Language Office (DLO), which supports the SLA and oversees policy regarding the development and maintenance of language capabilities.<sup>7</sup> Despite the establishment of the DLO, responsibility for developing and maintaining language and regional proficiency capabilities is shared among DoD components. As of April 2009, the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps have developed or in the process of developing strategic plans intended to guide efforts to develop language and cultural awareness skills within their components.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, DoD facilitates language learning through the National Security Education Program (NSEP).<sup>9</sup> NSEP provides undergraduate scholarships and graduate school fellowships, as well as other language programs, based on language needs of federal agencies. Students who

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Written Statement of Gail H. McGinn, Hearing on Transforming the U.S. Military's Foreign Language Skills, Cultural Awareness, and Regional Expertise Capabilities: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., September 10, 2008, <[http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/O1091008/McGinn\\_Testimony091008.pdf](http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/O1091008/McGinn_Testimony091008.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Language Access: Selected Agencies Can Improve Services to Limited English Proficient Persons*, GAO-10-91, April 26, 2010, p. 4, <<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1091.pdf>>.

<sup>9</sup> Note: The National Security Education Program (NSEP) was established by the David L. Boren National Security Education Act (Title VII of P.L. 102-183, the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1992) and was the result of lessons learned from the 1991 post-Desert Storm Congressional hearings. NSEP's mission has expanded over the years. In 2000, the Language Flagship Program began as a pilot project to challenge American colleges and universities to develop curriculums and models for advanced study of languages. In 2006 and 2007, the English for Heritage Language Speakers and National Language Service Corps programs were established to build capacity and address surge capacity needs. All three programs are major components of DoD's language transformation plan.

receive support from NSEP commit to subsequent periods of employment in national and homeland security agencies.

NSEP consists of five initiatives:

- David L. Boren Scholarships: provides funding to undergraduate students to study critical languages and cultures in foreign countries.
- David L. Boren Fellowships: provides grants to graduate students to study abroad or in the U.S. in critical foreign languages, disciplines, and area studies.
- The Language Flagship: provides grants to institutions of higher education to establish or operate programs in critical foreign language and area studies.
- English for Heritage Language Speakers: provides intense classroom instruction, interaction with government and private business experts, and other training to improve the English proficiency of professional-level speakers of critical foreign languages
- National Language Service Corps (NLSC): formerly known as the Civilian Linguist Reserve Corps, the NLSC is a group of people that speak more than one language and have the opportunity to participate in national and state efforts, particularly in times of emergency or crisis.<sup>10</sup>

GAO has reviewed DoD's language initiatives on two occasions since 2008. In a June 2009 report, GAO found that DoD made progress in increasing its language and regional proficiency capabilities over the last five years, but lacked a comprehensive strategic plan to guide its transformation, a comprehensive regional proficiency inventory to identify gaps and assess risks, and validated language and regional proficiency requirements to assess skills. GAO recommended that DoD develop a comprehensive strategic plan for its language and regional proficiency, develop a methodology to identify its language and regional proficiency requirements, and establish a mechanism to assess the regional proficiency skills of its personnel.<sup>11</sup>

In June 2010, GAO reviewed DoD's progress in implementing its recommendations. GAO found that DoD had developed a strategic plan that is undergoing final review and approval, and is expected to be completed later this year. Also, DoD had developed a methodology for identifying requirements, which is being reviewed by senior leaders. However, DoD had not established a mechanism to assess regional proficiency skills. GAO reemphasized its 2009 recommendations.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> National Security Education Program website, <<http://www.nsep.gov>>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Training: DoD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-09-568, June 19, 2009, <<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09568.pdf>>.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Military Training: Continued Actions Needed to Guide DoD's Efforts to Improve Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-10-879T, June 29, 2010, <<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10879t.pdf>>.

*Current and Previous Language Initiatives*

*1. National Security Language Initiative<sup>13</sup>*

On January 5, 2006, President George W. Bush announced the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), which aimed at increasing the number of Americans learning, speaking, and teaching critical foreign languages. The Initiative is an inter-agency effort carried out by the Secretaries of State, Education, and Defense, and the Director of National Intelligence and coordinated by the White House that focuses on language education during the early years of a child's schooling and continues throughout their formal education as well as into the workplace.

NSLI includes three goals:

- To increase the availability of critical foreign languages to younger Americans.
- To increase the number of advanced-level speakers of foreign languages, particularly critical needs languages.
- To increase the number of teachers of foreign languages.

The initiative was an attempt to mold a comprehensive national plan to expand the education of Americans to include the learning of critical foreign languages. Since the change in Administration, NSLI has renewed formal collaboration among NSLI members and formed a NSLI Working Group to coordinate interagency efforts. However, the Obama Administration has yet to officially endorse the Initiative.

*2. Key Legislation*

Following World War II, Congress enacted the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1946 (P.L. 79-724), which originally funded a teacher exchange program with teachers from other countries. Further, through the United States Cultural Exchange Act of 1948 (P.L. 80-402), the framework for cultural and educational exchange programs was established in order to provide American students the ability to learn foreign cultures. Several years later, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (P.L. 85-864), which provided federal funding to educational institutions to support international education and research.

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (P.L. 107-110). While the Act recognized foreign languages as a core subject, neither teaching nor testing foreign languages are requirements. Two years later, Congress passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-458), which called on the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to develop and maintain their own language programs, and on the State Department to increase the number of Foreign Service Officers proficient in languages spoken in Muslim countries.

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, *Enhancing Foreign Language Proficiency in the United States: Preliminary Results of the National Security Language Initiative*, Washington, D.C., 2008.

### 3. *President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies*<sup>14</sup>

The President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies released a report in 1979 that explored America's foreign language competencies and provided recommendations on how to strengthen them. Importantly, the Commission emphasized the importance of incorporating foreign languages into the U.S. education system as early as kindergarten in order to increase the likelihood of more advanced language study. The Commission identified a need for the federal government to place a higher priority on learning foreign languages and cultures and for a monitoring body to encourage necessary national action.

#### *Current Legislation: S. 1010, National Foreign Language Coordination Act*

Senators Akaka, Cochran, Dodd, and Durbin introduced the National Foreign Language Coordination Act (S.1010) on May 7, 2009; Senator Feingold since has joined as a cosponsor. The bill would create a National Language Advisor and a National Foreign Language Coordination Council, to develop and oversee implementation of a national foreign language strategy. Senator Akaka and other Members originally introduced legislation to address the shortfall of foreign language skills in the U.S. in 2005.

The bill is based on recommendations from a white paper entitled, "A Call to Action for Foreign Language Capabilities." The white paper was a result of the National Language Conference hosted by DoD and the University of Maryland in June 2004, which brought leaders from government, industry, academia, and language associations to discuss how to increase proficiency in foreign languages and understanding of and respect for different cultures. The white paper acknowledged that increasing our Nation's foreign language skills and cultural understanding would need to take place at the state and local level, but concluded that guidance and incentives at the federal level were also necessary. As a result, it called for a National Language Authority, appointed by the President, to serve as a principal advisor and coordinator in the federal government, and to coordinate with state and local governments, academia, and the private sector. Another recommendation was to create a National Foreign Language Coordination Council, chaired by the National Language Authority, to identify priorities, increase awareness of the need for foreign language skills, make recommendations, and coordinate efforts.<sup>15</sup> S. 1010 would implement these recommendations.

#### **Relevant Legislation in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress**

H.R. 2410, Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011

H.R. 3359, US and the World Education Act

H.R. 4065, Foreign Language Education Partnership Program Act

<sup>14</sup> President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, *President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies: Background Papers and Studies*, Washington, D.C., November 1979.

<sup>15</sup> The National Language Conference, *A Call to Action For Foreign Language Capabilities*, February 1, 2005, <[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/1b/b7/f3.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/b7/f3.pdf)>.

H.R. 4832, One America Many Voices Act

S. 473, Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2009

S. 1010, National Foreign Language Coordination Act of 2009

S. 1387, Intelligence Critical Language Training Improvement Act

S. 1524, Foreign Assistance Revitalization and Accountability Act of 2009

S. 2971, Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011

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U.S. Department of Defense, *Defense Language Transformation Roadmap*, January 2005, <[http://www.uscg.mil/hr/cgi/downloads/DOD\\_roadmap.pdf](http://www.uscg.mil/hr/cgi/downloads/DOD_roadmap.pdf)>.

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U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Department of Homeland Security: DHS Needs to Comprehensively Assess its Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities and Identify Shortfalls*, GAO-10-714, June 2010.

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U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls*, GAO-02-375, January 2002, <<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02375.pdf>>.

U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance: Overarching Guidance Is Needed to Advance Information Sharing*, Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Air and Land Forces and Seapower and Expeditionary Forces, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, GAO-10-500T, March 17, 2010, <<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10500t.pdf>>.

U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Language Access: Selected Agencies Can Improve Services to Limited English Proficient Persons*, GAO-10-91, April 26, 2010, <<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1091.pdf>>.

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**STATEMENT OF  
COLLEEN M. KELLEY  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT  
NATIONAL TREASURY EMPLOYEES UNION**

**ON**

**FEDERAL GOVERNMENT  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES**

**BEFORE THE**

**SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF  
GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL  
WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**July 29, 2010**

Chairman Akaka, ranking member Voinovich, and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide this statement on the important issue of foreign language incentive programs in the federal government. As president of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), representing more than 150,000 federal employees in over 31 different agencies and departments throughout the government, I am pleased to add NTEU's perspective to this important subject.

NTEU strongly supports providing monetary incentives to address shortfalls in foreign language capabilities throughout the federal government workforce. Witnesses at this hearing will outline government-wide and department-wide foreign language capabilities, foreign language needs and foreign language shortfalls. In this testimony, I will outline the foreign language award program that NTEU has pioneered at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and is attempting to replicate at other federal agencies to address these needs and shortfalls.

#### **FOREIGN LANGUAGE AWARDS PROGRAM**

The Foreign Language Award Program (FLAP), established by the 1993 Customs Officer Pay Reform Act (COPRA), allows employees who speak and use foreign language skills on the job to receive a cash award if they use the language for at least 10 percent of their duties and have passed the competence test.

Congress understood that these law enforcement officers stationed at the 327 air, sea and land ports of entry were in daily direct contact with international travelers. Facilitation of trade and travel along with port security is a dual mission of these employees. Not only do language barriers delay processing of trade and travel at the ports, for these law enforcement officers, communication breakdowns can be dangerous. Confusion arises when a non-English speaking person does not understand the commands of a law enforcement officer. These situations can escalate quite rapidly if that person keeps moving forward or does not take their hands out of their pockets when requested.

NTEU and the former U.S. Customs Service negotiated the first congressionally-authorized Foreign Language Awards Program (FLAP) in 1997 and FLAP continued for former Customs Officers that became Customs and Border Protection Officers after the creation of U.S. Customs and Border Protection at DHS in March 2003. In 2007, FLAP became available to all CBP Officers and CBP Agriculture Specialists covered by COPRA. Under the negotiated agreement, in order for employees to receive an award, they had to show proficiency in a foreign language via a test, and use the foreign language during at least 10 percent of their normal work schedule. CBP pays for an officer's exam to test foreign language skills once per year -- and for two additional exams per year for languages of special interest.

Since its implementation in 1997, this incentive program, incorporating more than two dozen languages, has been instrumental in identifying and utilizing Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employees who are proficient in a foreign language. At CBP, this program has been an unqualified success, and not just for employees, but for the travelers who are aided by having someone at a port of entry who speaks their language, for the smooth functioning of the

agency's security mission. Under COPRA, CBP Officers who use their foreign language skills on the job have the opportunity to earn monetary awards equaling up to five percent of their base pay.

Even though the majority of those who receive a FLAP award do so on the basis of their proficiency in Spanish, other languages that CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialist are called upon to use include French, Creole, Chinese, and Vietnamese among other foreign languages. Qualified employees are also eligible for awards for use of the following languages of special interest that have been identified as critical foreign languages in support of CBP's anti-terrorism mission:

- Arabic
- South Asian – Urdu (UAE, Oman), Farsi (Iran, Bahrain), Punjabi (Pakistan), Dari-Pushtu (Afghanistan), Turkish (Turkey, Cyprus)
- Eurasian – Uzbek, Tajik, Turkoman, Uighur
- African Horn – Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya
- Bahasa (Indonesia), Tagalog (Philippines)
- Kurdish (Karmanji)
- Russian
- Chechen

FLAP has been an unqualified success in recognizing and encouraging foreign language capability at CBP. According to CBP's available data, since FY 1998 the number of FLAP awards for the then-eligible 7699 CBP Officers (legacy Customs inspectors) grew from 1260 to 2173 in FY 2007, nearly doubling CBP's foreign language capability. This data does not include those CBP Officers (legacy INS and post-2003 CBP Officer hires) and Agriculture Specialists that became eligible for FLAP in 2007.

This increased capacity at CBP compares favorably to DHS's existing foreign language award program. According to the GAO report entitled DHS's Actions to Recruit and Retain Staff and Comply with the Vacancies Reform Act, GAO-07-758, page 22, DHS has a separate "monetary award paid as a recruitment and retention incentive for law enforcement agents with foreign language skills." In FY 2006, only two DHS component agencies participated in the DHS foreign language award program, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with 580 awards and the U.S. Secret Service with 68 awards (see GAO-07-758, page 51). Both ICE and the Secret Service Human Resource managers rated the foreign language award a "very effective" tool for recruiting and retaining staff (GAO-07-758, page 57-58).

NTEU's negotiated FLAP program was not included for evaluation in this GAO report. According to GAO, CBP--a component DHS agency--did not utilize the department-wide foreign language award program. But for NTEU's negotiated FLAP, thousands of CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialists at the ports of entry would have had no incentive to use existing and acquire new foreign language capability.

A key to the success of the CBP FLAP is that Congress specified a dedicated funding source to pay for these awards -- customs user fees pursuant to Title 19, section 58c (f) of the

U.S. Code, rather than appropriated funding. Congress authorized user fees for certain customs services in the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. The Act stipulates the disposition of these user fees for the payment of overtime, premium pay, agency contributions to the Civil Service Retirement and Disability Fund, preclearance services and FLAP (see 19 U.S.C., section 58c (f)(3) (A)(i)). The statute states “to the extent funds remain available after making [these] reimbursements”, then salaries for full and part time inspectional personnel, called “enhanced positions” by CBP, and equipment may be paid for by the fee collected (see 19 U.S.C., section 58c(f)(3)(A)(ii)).

Despite this statutory language, on February 4, 2010, CBP proposed the immediate suspension of its FLAP for CBP Officers and CBP Agriculture Specialists in order to divert user fees to fund “enhanced positions”, even though the statute specifically states that these user fees can be used for “enhanced positions”, only to the extent that fee funds are available after paying other specified costs, including FLAP awards.

On April 30, 2010, NTEU was informed that CBP is reinstating the CBP Officer Foreign Language Award Program without limitation and employees will be paid FLAP awards in accordance with the current procedures set up in the program.

In its’ FY 2011 budget request, however, the Administration proposed to eliminate FLAP stating “FLAP benefits are funded from the collection of COBRA fees. Funding freed up from the elimination of FLAP will be used to fund salary cost, decreasing the appropriated funding.” (CBP Congressional Justification, S&E-88.)

It is unclear what the reinstatement means with respect to the FY 2011 FLAP budget reduction request. By having this hearing, this Committee has demonstrated its commitment to addressing the federal government’s current foreign language capabilities and needs. It would be useful for this Committee to express to DHS the importance of FLAP, CBP’s language incentive program, in helping CBP achieve its trade and travel enforcement and facilitation mission by encouraging employees to use and strengthen their foreign language skills.

NTEU continues to support H.R. 4832, a bill that amends Title 5 to provide that premium pay be paid to federal employees whose official duties require the use of languages other than English at work.

Rewarding CBP employees for using their language skills to protect our country, facilitate the lawful movement of people and cargo across our borders, and collect revenue that our government needs makes sense. Congress agreed that employees should be encouraged to develop their language skills by authorizing FLAP. Not only does it improve efficiency of operations and make the U.S. a more welcoming place when foreign travelers find CBP Officers can communicate in their language. It is also an important tool in the critical border security mission.

Thank you for holding this important hearing and allowing NTEU to provide this statement.

STATEMENT OF

DR. PHIL MCKNIGHT  
CHAIR  
SCHOOL OF MODERN LANGUAGES  
GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,  
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
UNITED STATES SENATE

ON

CLOSING THE LANGUAGE GAP: IMPROVING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES

JUNE 17, 2010

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

**Improving Foreign Language Capabilities of the Federal Government**

During the past eight years enrollments in foreign languages at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) have increased over 125% (vs. 13% nationally)—from about 2,000 students per year to over 5,000; and currently over 21% of undergraduates are enrolled in foreign languages (vs. 8.6% nationally), even though Georgia Tech has no formal foreign language requirement. Our program focuses on “applied languages and intercultural studies” and delivers foreign language study in the many contexts in which other languages are spoken, including social and technical communication, cultures, industry, technology, arts, media and science.

Some 25 undergraduate majors at Georgia Tech, including most of the engineering majors, participate in the International Plan, which requires students to spend two terms abroad and pass a test in foreign language proficiency administered by the ACTFL-approved Language Testing Institute.

These programs work well because so many students have realized that a) they will very likely spend some time in their career working in a foreign country; b) they want to be competitive in the job market when they graduate; and c) the internet and global affairs has brought this generation into contact with the rest of the world and their interest in communicating with their peers around the world is at an all-time high.

According to Dr. G. P. “Bud” Peterson, the President of Georgia Tech, “the study of languages is an important factor for helping to create global citizens.” The added intercultural and humanistic skill set is equally important as a contributing factor to solving the global technological, political, social and environmental problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For this reason it makes sense for students to combine their chosen field of study with advanced proficiency in a foreign language.

Georgia Tech is the recipient of several Department of Education Foreign Language and Area Studies awards, and has received major funding from the Department of Defense-Sponsored ROTC Project Go program, which is designed to develop advanced language skills in “critical” languages for future commissioned officers, with special emphasis on STEM majors.

I am writing to support all efforts to meet the foreign language needs of the federal government. In the past number of years numerous well-researched studies have demonstrated that the United States needs foreign language skills in order to be globally competitive and to support national security. These studies include “Global Competence and National Needs,” by the Abraham Lincoln Commission Report (2006), “Education for Global Leadership” by the Committee for Economic Development (2006), “International Education and Foreign Languages: Keys to Securing America's Future” by the Center for Education (2007); “Meeting America’s Global

Education Challenge” an IIE Study Abroad White Paper Series (2007), the “MLA Report on Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” (2008), the “Comprehensive Plan Needed to Address Persistent Foreign Language Shortfalls” by the US Government Accountability Office (2009) and “The Value of International Education to U.S. Business and Industry Leaders: Key Findings from a Survey of CEOs,” Institute of International Education Briefing Paper (2009).

The study, *Education for Global Leadership*, by the Committee on Economic Development concluded that U.S. employees are seriously lacking in knowledge about “international issues that affect their present and their future; too few Americans are proficient in other languages, especially those critical languages that are vital to our security; the lack of international skills and knowledge threatens America’s economic competitiveness and national security; and our inattention to other languages and cultures undermines our ability to be good citizens, both in our own country and in an increasingly interdependent world.”

Each of these reports demonstrates specifically that the U.S. Government—and U.S. business, is woefully short of well trained individuals skilled in foreign languages. Georgia Tech emphasizes the training of engineers, scientists, international affairs, management and other disciplines in foreign language skills and experience abroad. A 2004 report by the National Security Education Program identified (based on 21 responding Federal organizations) urgent needs in 42 languages combined with basically all disciplines taught at US universities. These needs have not been addressed.

In my opinion, we have produced enough excellent studies by a broad variety of highly qualified task forces created by the government to do so. It is now time to take the action recommended by these studies.

The ROTC Project Go program is a good start, and it provides substantial scholarship support for cadets and midshipmen to study abroad for a longer period of time. The best course of action now would be to fulfill the recommendation by the Lincoln Commission report to send one million U.S. students abroad every year. With competitive grants of \$5,000 per undergraduate student, this would amount to an allocation of \$5 billion per year, or if spaced out over five-year increments, it would be \$1 billion per year. This would be a highly effective way to recruit students into meaningful foreign language study, and would be an excellent follow-through for planned allocations to U.S. secondary schools to support their foreign language programs. S. 473, the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2009, sets the country on this path and I commend Senators Akaka and Voinovich for being original cosponsors of this important legislation.

In my opinion, we should not limit our support to only the “critical” languages.

Educational needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflect the challenges and opportunities of globalization and technological developments in international trade, computing, media and information exchange, and international relations that impact virtually every aspect of our lives. Faced with much stiffer worldwide competition, businesses and organizations throughout the U.S. and specifically in Georgia, to use my own State as an example—where over 1,600 foreign-owned companies

operate—must search for profitable opportunities that often include collaborations with international entities that may be better facilitated with graduates prepared to act as *intercultural mediators*. Education must prepare students with the necessary language, cultural awareness, foreign experience and economic and technological skills to effectively and productively compete in Georgia, the U.S., and the world.

The state of Georgia and the entire Southeast region of the United States, like all regions of the United States, has become part of a global, interdependent and multicultural community. Georgia's ports and the Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson Airport are hubs of international trade entering and exiting the U.S., and the economic impact of foreign trade on the Georgia economy is tremendous. Data from the Georgia Department of Economic Development portray a dynamic and expanding international marketplace with trade flow with China, for example, at over \$12 billion, Japan at \$8 billion, Germany at \$6.3 billion, and South Korea at \$4 billion. Fifty-seven percent of imports to Georgia come from Asia, 21% from Europe and 8% from the Americas, while 24% of exports go to Europe, 28% to Asia and 40% to the Americas. In Georgia there are 346 German-owned companies (and 102 Swiss and 19 Austrian companies for a total of 467 companies with potential German language needs), 338 Japanese companies, 191 French, 64 Italian, 21 South Korean, already 14 Chinese, and 20+ Latin American companies contributing to the economy. Georgia has developed numerous trade missions around the globe as well to promote and further trade with Georgia that relies on skills in international collaboration.

The need for French and German in this context is as equally obvious as that for Chinese and Japanese. Arabic, Korean, Russian, Farsi and Hindi are equally important, both for national security and economic development.

I urge you to provide support for the development of foreign language study, especially for the enhancement of study abroad opportunities in all parts of the world for U.S. students from all disciplines. Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can assist you in your efforts.

Respectfully,

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**Post-Hearing Questions for the Record  
Submitted to Mr. David Maurer  
From Senator Jon Tester**

**“Closing the Language Gap: Improving the Federal Government’s Foreign  
Language Capabilities”  
July 29, 2010**

1. There is clearly significant amount of anecdotal information that supports the language and culture training you are providing to deploying U.S. combatants.
  - a. What theater-based empirical data do you have that demonstrates training effectiveness based on combat experience?

GAO has previously reported that DOD lacks a comprehensive strategic plan to guide its efforts to transform language and regional proficiency capabilities with measures to assess the effectiveness of its transformation efforts.<sup>1</sup> Currently, GAO is reviewing Army and Marine Corps’ language, cultural awareness, and regional expertise training plans for general purpose forces in response to a mandate included in the committee report accompanying the House version of the Fiscal Year 2011 National Defense Authorization Act.<sup>2</sup> In general, we are examining the progress of the Army and Marine Corps in implementing training programs in support of their goal to develop forces that are more language capable and have a better understanding of the cultures and regions around the world. As part of this work, we will be examining whether DOD has established metrics to assess the impact of its training programs. Our specific preliminary objectives in conducting this review are to determine (1) how the Army and Marine Corps define training requirements for language proficiency, regional expertise, and cultural awareness; (2) the extent to which training requirements in these areas have been integrated into pre-deployment training and other joint exercises, and the metrics, if any, that have been developed to evaluate the impact of this training; (3) the challenges, if any, that the services face in implementing training requirements for language proficiency, regional expertise, and cultural awareness; and (4) the extent to which the services have incorporated lessons learned from ongoing operations regarding language proficiency, regional expertise, and cultural awareness into training programs.

<sup>1</sup> See GAO, *Military Training: DOD Needs a Strategic Plan and Better Inventory and Requirements Data to Guide Development of Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-09-568 (Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2009) and *Military Training: Continued Actions Needed to Guide DOD’s Efforts to Improve Language Skills and Regional Proficiency*, GAO-10-879T (Washington, D.C.: June 29, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> H.R. Rep. No. 111-491 at 259 (2010), which accompanied H.R. 5136.

Our prior work and the work of others has shown that for a strategic plan to be helpful, it should contain certain key elements, such as measurable performance goals and objectives and funding priorities that are linked to goals. In the absence of a comprehensive strategic plan that includes measurable performance goals and objectives, funding priorities linked to goals, and accountability for achieving results, we concluded that it would be difficult for DOD to guide the military services as they develop and implement strategies and supporting programs and activities—including pre-deployment training plans—and also to ensure these efforts are synchronized and consistent with departmentwide goals.

- b. What empirical data exists to show improvement over time based on the increased emphasis DOD has given to this type of deployment preparation?

See above.

2. What training gaps or deficiencies in pre-deployment language training for U.S. combatants have you identified? How would you recommend addressing these deficiencies?

GAO has previously reported that DOD lacks the information it needs to identify gaps in language and regional proficiency and to assess related risks.<sup>3</sup> DOD has information on the inventory of language capabilities for its military and civilian personnel, but the department does not yet have data on regional proficiency capabilities because DOD lacks an agreed-upon way to assess and validate these skills. DOD also lacks a standardized methodology to aid its components in identifying language and regional proficiency requirements, which has resulted in estimates of requirements that vary widely. Without complete inventory and requirements information, GAO has concluded that DOD cannot determine capability gaps, assess risk effectively, and inform its strategic planning for language and regional proficiency transformation, which also limits its ability to make informed, data-driven decisions about investments in language and regional proficiency capabilities to meet current and future military operations. GAO has recommended that DOD establish a mechanism to assess and validate regional proficiency capabilities and develop a validated methodology for identifying language and regional proficiency requirements for all communities and all proficiency levels. As of June 2010, DOD had taken steps to address these recommendations, but these actions were incomplete.

3. In Afghanistan, there has been an increase use of U.S. women soldiers in the role of relationship-building with the women of individual Afghan villages.

<sup>3</sup> See GAO-09-568 and GAO-10-879T.

- a. Do these women soldiers receive any special training or preparation to assist them in fulfilling this important role? If so, where is this training provided and by whom?

We are aware that, as of April 2010, DOD is emphasizing the need for increased training and use of Female Engagement Teams to interact with Afghan women. Our ongoing review of Army and Marine Corps' language, cultural awareness, and regional expertise training plans will examine the language training provided to general purpose forces that are deploying to Afghanistan.

- b. Does their training include indigenous tribal language from a woman's perspective?

See above.

4. What steps is the Defense Department taking to provide language and culture training designed to address likely community health needs as well as other subjects culturally consistent with the needs of women within the particular region/province/tribe? If this kind of training is not currently provided, what is your view on the value and efficacy of providing this training?

GAO is currently examining the progress of the Army and Marine Corps in implementing training programs in support of their goal to develop forces that are more language capable and have a better understanding of the cultures and regions around the world. As part of this work, we will identify the content of training programs. Our specific preliminary objectives in conducting this review are to determine (1) how the Army and Marine Corps define training requirements for language proficiency, regional expertise, and cultural awareness; (2) the extent to which training requirements in these areas have been integrated into pre-deployment training and other joint exercises, and the metrics, if any, that have been developed to evaluate the impact of this training; (3) the challenges, if any, that the services face in implementing training requirements for language proficiency, regional expertise, and cultural awareness; and (4) the extent to which the services have incorporated lessons learned from ongoing operations regarding language proficiency, regional expertise, and cultural awareness into training programs.

**Post-Hearing Questions for the Record  
Submitted to Ms. Nancy Weaver  
From Senator Jon Tester**

**“Closing the Language Gap: Improving the Federal Government’s Foreign  
Language Capabilities”  
July 29, 2010**

1. There is clearly significant amount of anecdotal information that supports the language and culture training you are providing to deploying U.S. combatants.
  - a. What theater-based empirical data do you have that demonstrates training effectiveness based on combat experience?
  - b. What empirical data exists to show improvement over time based on the increased emphasis DOD has given to this type of deployment preparation?

Answer: The Department does not currently consolidate theater-based empirical data that demonstrates the effectiveness of language and cultural pre-deployment training. However, the Services do review their training programs and adjust scope and content to ensure the right skills and information is provided.

For example, the USMC has initiated steps to review and assess the impact of language and cultural training. They recently conducted a survey which targeted a select percentage of Marines across all ranks to quantify perceptions of the effectiveness of language and cultural training and the importance of this type of training to their overall operational mission effectiveness. Although premature to provide definitive statistics, the initial findings have been promising. Using over 2,500 valid surveys, USMC analysts are confirming, with statistically relevant data, the effectiveness of the language and cultural program and establishing a clear link between language and cultural training on operational effectiveness in culturally complex environments. The survey results will be released in the next several months.

Furthermore, the Department is currently conducting two reviews on the effectiveness of the language and cultural pre-deployment training as well as in the accession and Professional Military Education (PME) programs.

- The first is a baseline study evaluating Service language and cultural pre-deployment training and how it prepares individuals for operations in theater. This study is scheduled to be completed in early 2011 and should inform the training development process.
- The second review will evaluate the programs of instruction in DoD’s accession programs (ROTC, Service Academies, etc.) and the Services’ Professional

Military Education programs in preparing Service members to meet mission requirements. Results of the review should also be complete in early 2011.

2. What training gaps or deficiencies in pre-deployment language training for U.S. combatants have you identified? How would you recommend addressing these deficiencies?

Answer: Specific training gaps/deficiencies in pre-deployment language training for U.S. combatants were first identified in the Commander, International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF) and U.S. Forces –Afghanistan memorandum dated November 10, 2009. This memorandum emphasizes the need for Service members to have command of basic language skills to best accomplish the mission and highlighted that language skills are as important as other basic combat skills.\* In order to address these training gaps and deficiencies the DoD has:

- (1) assessed the effectiveness of pre-deployment language and cultural training based on the results of theater and Service level review of lessons learned
- (2) established and published standardized pre-deployment training standards for counterinsurgency (COIN)
- (3) provided greater access to language training through technology and Language Training Detachments
- (4) provided tests designed to better measure language proficiency levels at the survival and elementary level
- (5) continued to emphasize language training prior to accession to provide foundational skills upon which to build during pre-deployment training.

These required actions are being included in a policy memorandum from the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to establish COIN Training Guidance.

While this policy memorandum is being staffed, the Department has taken action to help close language and cultural training gaps and deficiencies identified by COMISAF and U.S. Forces - Afghanistan by implementing the Afghanistan/Pakistan Hands program. This program is designed to create greater continuity, focus and persistent engagement. Members are training in the local languages, becoming culturally attuned and focusing on regional issues for extended periods of time.

DoD is utilizing technology to provide accessible pre-deployment language and culture training for individuals deploying to Afghanistan. Using computer-based training technologies and web-based courseware, information resources and collaboration tools, foundational skills and knowledge are provided as either standalone training or as a valuable complement to traditional pre-deployment training programs.

The Department also increased funding for General Purpose Force (GPF) culturally-based foreign language training in response to the same gaps and deficiencies identified by COMISAF. The increased funding provides for Afghanistan/Pakistan GPF Language Training Detachments (LTD) for the four Military Services.

The Army addressed potential training gaps in a July 23, 2010, Pre-Deployment Training Standards Execution Order (EXORD). It includes a new program developed by the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) that will require every soldier to complete four to six hours of language training and cultural orientation prior to deployment.

\*Note: Please see provided SECDEF COIN memo for informational review.

3. In Afghanistan, there has been an increase use of U.S. women soldiers in the role of relationship-building with the women of individual Afghan villages.
  - a. Do these women soldiers receive any special training or preparation to assist them in fulfilling this important role? If so, where is this training provided and by whom?
  - b. Does their training include indigenous tribal language from a woman's perspective?

Answer: Male and female personnel receive the same pre-deployment training. Language and cultural training offered during pre-deployment includes and addresses the differences in gender roles, duties, and societal implications. Services provide the training for their respective deploying units at their pre-deployment location.

However, there is some special training offered to women that addresses their role in relationship-building. For example, in 2009, the Marine Corps began training volunteers for Female Engagement Teams. Graduates are now in-theater in Afghanistan and are attached to units that conduct patrols or operations in their area of responsibility.

Additionally, Service members in the Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands program receive 16 weeks of language, regional, and cultural training followed by pre-deployment training. After arrival in theater, they attend the Counterinsurgency Academy and receive about three weeks of language immersion training. Training for female AFPAK Hand personnel is not solely focused on female-to-female or female-to-male communications, but the training provided enables them to readily engage in either situation when the opportunity presents itself.

Further, US Army Special Operations Command is currently in the process of developing Cultural Support Teams (CST). Each team will have two female Soldiers and one female linguist/interpreter. Female volunteers for this program must undergo an assessment and selection process that provides testing on: physical fitness, medical readiness, and psychological screening. Female Soldiers selected for this program will undergo training at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. Training will consist of basic introduction to language and culture, followed by classes on Personal Interactions with the Local Populace, Public Affairs/Media Engagement, Information Operations, and Reporting Civil Information. The first CST training course will begin on November 1, 2010.

4. What steps is the Defense Department taking to provide language and culture training designed to address likely community health needs as well as other subjects culturally consistent with the needs of women within the particular region/province/tribe? If this kind of training is not currently provided, what is your view on the value and efficacy of providing this training?

Answer: The Department has taken steps to provide language and cultural training designed to address the issues the deployed Service member will encounter. Service members receive general, low-proficiency-level language training. However, health care providers require specialized vocabulary and a deep cultural understanding. In order to prepare health care providers, Medical Language Survival Kits have been developed that include vocabulary, key phrases, and phonetic pronunciation guides. These enable basic communication that can lead to proper treatment for individuals.

Language enabled Service members facilitate delivery of health services. Regional experts, like the AfPak Hands\* and members of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, can have major roles in this regard, especially in facilitating community-wide efforts.

\*Note: AfPak Hands is a new, "all-in" language and cultural immersion initiative developed last summer and stood up in the fall by Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The program is a new way to build trust with the military and local populations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

United States Government Accountability Office

**GAO**

Report to the Subcommittee on Oversight  
of Government Management, the Federal  
Workforce, and the District of Columbia,  
Committee on Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

June 2010

**DEPARTMENT OF  
HOMELAND  
SECURITY**

**DHS Needs to  
Comprehensively  
Assess Its Foreign  
Language Needs and  
Capabilities and  
Identify Shortfalls**



GAO-10-714

June 2010

## DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

**DHS Needs to Comprehensively Assess Its Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities and Identify Shortfalls**

Highlights of GAO-10-714, a report to the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

**Why GAO Did This Study**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a variety of responsibilities that utilize foreign language capabilities, including investigating transnational criminal activity and staffing ports of entry into the United States. GAO was asked to study foreign language capabilities at DHS. GAO's analysis focused on actions taken by DHS in three of its largest components—the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Specifically, this report addresses the extent to which DHS has (1) assessed its foreign language needs and existing capabilities and identified any potential shortfalls and (2) developed foreign language programs and activities to address potential foreign language shortfalls. GAO analyzed DHS documentation on foreign language capabilities, interviewed DHS officials, and assessed workforce planning in three components that were selected to ensure broad representation of law enforcement and intelligence operations. While the results are not projectable, they provide valuable insights.

**What GAO Recommends**

GAO recommends that DHS comprehensively assess its foreign language needs and capabilities and identify potential shortfalls, assess the extent to which existing foreign language programs are addressing foreign language shortfalls, and ensure that these assessments are incorporated into future strategic planning. DHS generally concurs with the recommendations.

View GAO-10-714 or key components. For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurer@gao.gov.

**What GAO Found**

DHS has taken limited actions to assess its foreign language needs and existing capabilities and to identify potential shortfalls. GAO and the Office of Personnel Management have developed strategic workforce guidance that recommends, among other things, that agencies (1) assess workforce needs, such as foreign language needs; (2) assess current competency skills; and (3) compare workforce needs against available skills. However, DHS has done little at the department level, and individual components' approaches to addressing foreign language needs and capabilities and assessing potential shortfalls have not been comprehensive. Specifically:

- DHS has no systematic method for assessing its foreign language needs and does not address foreign language needs in its Human Capital Strategic Plan. DHS components' efforts to assess foreign language needs vary. For example, the Coast Guard has conducted multiple assessments, CBP's assessments have primarily focused on Spanish language needs, and ICE has not conducted any assessments. By conducting a comprehensive assessment, DHS would be better positioned to capture information on all of its needs and could use this information to inform future strategic planning.
- DHS has no systematic method for assessing its existing foreign language capabilities and has not conducted a comprehensive capabilities assessment. DHS components have developed various lists of foreign language capable staff that are available in some offices, primarily those that include a foreign language award program for qualified employees. Conducting an assessment of all of its capabilities would better position DHS to manage its resources.
- DHS and its components have not taken actions to identify potential foreign language shortfalls. DHS officials stated that shortfalls can affect mission goals and officer safety. By using the results of needs and capabilities assessments to identify foreign language shortfalls, DHS would be better positioned to develop actions to mitigate shortfalls, execute its various missions that involve foreign language speakers, and enhance the safety of its officers and agents.

DHS and its components have established a variety of foreign language programs and activities but have not assessed the extent to which they address potential shortfalls. Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE have established foreign language programs and activities, which include foreign language training and award payments. These programs and activities vary, as does DHS's ability to use them to address shortfalls. For example, foreign language training programs generally do not include languages other than Spanish, and DHS officials were generally unaware of the foreign language programs in DHS's components. Given this variation and decentralization, conducting a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which its programs and activities address shortfalls could strengthen DHS's ability to manage its foreign language programs and activities and to adjust them, if necessary.

United States Government Accountability Office

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**Abbreviations**

|         |                                            |
|---------|--------------------------------------------|
| CBP     | U.S. Customs and Border Protection         |
| CSRS    | Civil Service Retirement System            |
| CTR     | Counter-Terrorist Response                 |
| DHS     | Department of Homeland Security            |
| DLPT    | Defense Language Proficiency Test          |
| DRO     | Office of Detention and Removal Operations |
| FBI     | Federal Bureau of Investigation            |
| FERS    | Federal Employees' Retirement System       |
| FLETC   | Federal Law Enforcement Training Center    |
| ICE     | U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement   |
| ILR     | Interagency Language Roundtable            |
| OCHCO   | Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer  |
| OPM     | Office of Personnel Management             |
| PAU/TAG | passenger analysis unit and tactical group |

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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

June 22, 2010

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka  
Chairman  
The Honorable George V. Voinovich  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,  
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia,  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

In the wake of a changing security environment, federal agencies' needs for personnel with foreign language proficiencies have grown significantly. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the United States established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which has a variety of missions, including protecting against terrorism, securing and managing the nation's borders, and enforcing immigration and custom laws, among others. DHS's components are located on our coastlines and land borders and throughout the country and abroad. In carrying out their daily responsibilities, many of the men and women at DHS frequently interact with individuals who do not speak English, or rely on information that needs to be translated from another language to English. DHS staff encounter a wide array of languages and dialects, under sometimes difficult and unpredictable circumstances, including arrests, surveillance, and interviewing individuals. Foreign language skills are vital for DHS personnel to effectively communicate and overcome language barriers encountered during critical operations, and are a key element to the success of the department's homeland security responsibilities.

Since 2002, we have issued a series of reports<sup>1</sup> on two key aspects of foreign language capabilities across the federal government.<sup>2</sup> Our work has examined (1) the use of foreign language skills as well as (2) the nature and impact of foreign language shortages at federal agencies,

<sup>1</sup>See Related GAO Products at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup>In this report, we refer to foreign language capabilities as the capabilities that include a range of language skills, proficiencies, and resources to conduct operations related to homeland security involving foreign language (e.g., language-proficient staff, language services obtained through contracts, and inter- and intra-agreements between DHS and other federal agencies).

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particularly those that play a central role in national security. We have reported that lack of foreign language capability at some agencies, including the Departments of Defense and State as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), have resulted in backlogs in translation of intelligence documents and other information, adversely affected agency operations, and hindered U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence, counterterrorism, and diplomatic efforts. We and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) have developed strategic workforce planning guidance that has formed the basis for our prior reviews on foreign language capabilities at other departments. We recommended that these agencies adopt a strategic, results-oriented approach to manage foreign language capabilities, including setting a strategic direction, assessing agency gaps in foreign language skills, and taking actions to help ensure that foreign language capabilities are available when needed, among other things.<sup>3</sup> Most recently, in September 2009, we reported that Department of State documents did not contain measurable goals, objectives, resource requirements, and milestones for reducing its foreign language gaps, and recommended that a more comprehensive strategic approach be established to more effectively guide and assess progress in meeting foreign language requirements.<sup>4</sup>

In response to your request, this report discusses foreign language capabilities at DHS. For this review, our analysis focused on actions taken by DHS to assess its foreign language capabilities and address shortfalls in three of its largest components—the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). We also focused on some offices in those components that use foreign language capabilities to carry out law enforcement and intelligence activities. Specifically, this report addresses the extent to which DHS has (1) assessed its foreign language needs and existing capabilities and identified any potential shortfalls and (2) developed foreign language programs and activities to address any foreign language shortfalls.

For this work, we obtained all available foreign language-related assessments conducted by three DHS components and seven offices

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<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls*, GAO-02-375 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2002).

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *Department of State: Comprehensive Plan Needed to Address Persistent Foreign Language Shortfalls*, GAO-09-055 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 17, 2009).

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within those components.<sup>5</sup> The earliest assessment was conducted in 1999, and the most recent assessment was conducted in 2009. We selected the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE to review because they comprise a broad representation of program areas whose missions include law enforcement and intelligence responsibilities. We then selected locations based on geographic regions, border locations, and language use. The locations we visited were San Antonio and Laredo, Texas; Artesia, New Mexico; New York City and Buffalo, New York; Miami, Florida; and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Although the results are not projectable, they provided us with valuable insights about the exposure to and use of foreign languages across DHS, primarily Spanish. We examined documentation on foreign language needs and capabilities, including DHS's strategic plans for fiscal years 2004 through 2008 and 2008 through 2013, human capital plans for fiscal years 2004 through 2008 and 2009 through 2013, and DHS's *Work Force Planning Guide* and *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report*.<sup>6</sup> Further, we interviewed knowledgeable DHS officials in DHS's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) and conducted over 430 interviews with component officials for all the locations we visited to obtain information on existing capabilities and potential foreign language capability shortfalls.<sup>7</sup> We compared DHS activities to criteria in our and OPM's strategic workforce planning guidance.<sup>8</sup> We also visited CBP's Border Patrol Academy at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center to observe the Spanish Language Program, interviewed officers in training and program officials about their training program, and examined documentation on foreign language training development for all existing programs at select component offices. Appendix I contains additional details on our scope and methodology.

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<sup>5</sup>In this report, we refer to select component offices as the Coast Guard's Foreign Language Program Office; CBP's Office of U.S. Border Patrol, Office of Air and Marine, and Office of Field Operations; and ICE's Office of Detention and Removal Operations, Office of Investigations, and Office of Intelligence.

<sup>6</sup>Department of Homeland Security, *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report: A Strategic Framework for a Secure Homeland* (Washington, D.C., February 2010).

<sup>7</sup>We interviewed the following component officials: Coast Guard personnel; Border Patrol agents; Air and Marine officers; CBP officers and agriculture specialists; and ICE officers, special agents, and intelligence research specialists.

<sup>8</sup>GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, GAO-04-39 (Washington, D.C., Dec. 11, 2003), and Office of Personnel Management, *Migration Planning Guidance Documents: Workforce Planning Best Practices* (Washington, D.C., May 2008).

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We conducted this performance audit from December 2008 through June 2010 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

### DHS Use of Foreign Language Capabilities

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 created DHS and brought together the workforces of 22 distinct agencies governed by multiple legacy rules, regulations, and laws for hundreds of occupations.<sup>9</sup> The department's 216,000 employees include a mix of civilian and military personnel in fields ranging from law enforcement, science, professional, technology, administration, clerical professions, trades, and crafts.

DHS has a vital role in preventing terrorist attacks, reducing our vulnerability to terrorism, and minimizing the damage and facilitating the recovery from attacks that do occur. The *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* calls on all government agencies to review their foreign language programs. Further, the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* articulates activities to enhance government capabilities, including prioritizing the recruitment and retention of those having relevant language skills at all levels of government.<sup>10</sup> The 9/11 Commission, a statutory bipartisan commission created in 2002, concluded in 2004 that significant changes were needed in the organization of government, to include acquiring personnel with language skills and developing a stronger language program.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Homeland Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135 (2002).

<sup>10</sup>*National Strategy for Combating Terrorism Report* (Washington, D.C., February 2003), and *National Strategy for Homeland Security* (Washington, D.C., October 2007).

<sup>11</sup>The 9/11 Commission was established in the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, Pub. L. No. 107-306, 116 Stat. 2353 (2002). The commission was mandated to provide recommendations for corrective measures that can be taken to prevent acts of terrorism, among other things. On July 22, 2004, the commission released its public report.

DHS has a variety of law enforcement and intelligence responsibilities that utilize foreign language capabilities. For example, DHS undertakes immigration enforcement actions involving thousands of non-English-speaking foreign nationals and conducts criminal investigations that cross national borders, among other things. Conducting investigations and dismantling criminal organizations that transport persons and goods across the borders illegally are operations where foreign language capabilities help DHS to identify and effectively analyze terrorist intent. DHS also reports that foreign language capabilities enhance its ability to more effectively communicate with persons who do not speak English to collect and translate intelligence information related to suspected illegal activity.

At the component level, Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE are among DHS's largest components with law enforcement and intelligence responsibilities that have a potential use of foreign language capabilities. Table 1 briefly describes the law enforcement and intelligence roles and responsibilities of these components.

**Table 1: DHS Select Component Responsibilities for Which There Is Potential for Use of Foreign Language Capabilities**

| DHS components                            | Law enforcement and intelligence roles and responsibilities where there is potential for foreign language use                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| U.S. Coast Guard                          | Enforces immigration laws at sea by interdicting, communicating with, and boarding vessels to intercept undocumented persons; denying these persons illegal entry to the United States via maritime routes; and disrupting and deterring illegal activity while encountering persons of various nationalities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>U.S. Customs and Border Protection</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| U.S. Border Patrol                        | Conducts operations to prevent terrorists, terrorist weapons, inadmissible aliens, smugglers, and narcotics and other contraband from entering the United States between ports of entry while approaching individuals and groups to interview, gathering information, and examining documents and records of individuals with varying backgrounds.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Office of Air and Marine                  | Operates air and marine forces to detect and interdict drugs and weapons, and prevents acts of terrorism and the unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs, and other contraband along or across the borders and within the United States, Canada, the Bahamas, Mexico, and the Caribbean while encountering a variety of foreign languages in use in the operating area.                                                                                                                                                        |
| Office of Field Operations                | Conducts operations to prevent terrorists, terrorist weapons, inadmissible aliens, smugglers, and narcotics and other contraband from entering the United States. Conducts operations to facilitate legitimate trade and travel at the nation's air, land, and sea ports of entry while using judgment and applying behavioral and cultural analysis, questioning individuals, and examining documents. Encounters and overcomes language and cultural obstacles to make determinations and to further compliance with U.S. laws. |

| Law enforcement and intelligence roles and responsibilities where there is potential for foreign language use |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DHS components                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Immigration and Customs Enforcement                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Office of Detention and Removal Operations                                                                    | Performs enforcement functions for individuals who are subject to removal or criminal proceedings by reviewing documentation and interviewing persons at various stages of deportation, encountering a variety of foreign languages. Also analyzes records and develops and uses informants to develop leads on where individuals of varying backgrounds may be found to obtain and execute warrants of arrest. |
| Office of Investigations                                                                                      | Identifies and recruits sources of information to develop investigations, conduct interviews, and communicate with criminal targets in proactive investigations that may involve persons who speak foreign languages.                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Office of Intelligence                                                                                        | Collects intelligence information through various sources, which may require foreign language capabilities, and conducts interviews of persons of interest and develops reports on intelligence information to support homeland security activities.                                                                                                                                                            |

Source: GAO analysis of DHS documentation.

OCHCO is responsible for departmentwide human capital policy and development, planning, and implementation. In this role, OCHCO works with the components to ensure the best approach for the department's human capital initiatives. Specifically, OCHCO establishes DHS-wide policies and processes and works with components to ensure that the policies and processes are followed to ensure mission success. Additionally, OCHCO provides strategic human capital direction to and certification of departmental programs and initiatives, such as DHS's foreign language capabilities.

**DHS Components Have a Variety of Missions**

The Coast Guard is a multi-mission agency, the only military agency within DHS, and serves as the lead agency for maritime homeland security, enforcing immigration laws at sea. In support of DHS's mission to control U.S. borders, the Coast Guard's Ports, Waterways, and Coastal Security mission goal is to manage terror-related risk in the maritime domain. Additionally, its responsibilities include (1) interdicting undocumented persons attempting to illegally enter the United States via the maritime sector and (2) boarding vessels to conduct inspections and screenings of crew and passengers in its attempt to reduce the number of illegal passenger vessels entering the United States, among other things. For example, Coast Guard Maritime Safety and Security Teams conduct patrols and monitor migration flow from countries neighboring the Caribbean Basin, including Colombia, Venezuela, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. In fiscal year 2009, the Coast Guard increased its presence in the vicinity of Haiti to deter mass migration and interdicted nearly 3,700 undocumented persons attempting to illegally enter the United States. Additionally, during fiscal year 2009, the Coast Guard reported screening over 248,000 commercial vessels and 62 million crew and passengers for

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terrorist and criminal associations prior to arrival in U.S. ports, identifying 400 individuals with terrorism associations. The Coast Guard conducts approximately 10,000 law enforcement boardings while interdicting drugs each year in the southern Caribbean, which is where the Coast Guard is likely to encounter non-English speakers.

CBP is the federal agency in charge of securing U.S. borders and three of its offices—the Offices of U.S. Border Patrol, Air and Marine, and Field Operations—share a mission of keeping terrorists and their weapons from entering the United States while carrying out its other responsibilities, including interdicting illegal contraband and persons seeking to enter at and between U.S. ports of entry while facilitating the movement of legitimate travelers and trade.<sup>12</sup> CBP regularly engages with foreign nationals in carrying out its missions and is DHS's only component authorized to make final admissibility determinations regarding arrivals of cargo and passengers. Annually, CBP reports that it has direct contact with approximately 1 million people crossing borders through ports of entry each day. It is through these contacts that CBP has a potential likelihood of encountering non-English speakers. As a result, foreign language skills are needed to assist CBP federal law enforcement officers in enforcing a wide range of U.S. laws. In 2009, CBP encountered over 224,000 undocumented immigrants and persons not admissible at the ports of entry. CBP employs over 45,000 employees, including border patrol agents stationed at 142 stations with 35 permanent checkpoints, Air and Marine agents and officers, and CBP officers and agriculture specialists stationed at over 326 ports of entry located at airports, seaports, and land borders along more than 5,000 miles of land border with Canada, 1,900 miles of border with Mexico, and 95,000 miles of U.S. coastline. Border patrol agents work between the ports of entry to interdict people and contraband illegally entering the United States. CBP's Office of Air and Marine manages boats and aircraft to support all operations to interdict drugs and terrorists before they enter the United States. CBP officers work at foreign and domestic ports of entry to prevent cross-border smuggling of contraband, such as controlled substances, weapons of mass destruction, and illegal goods.

ICE is the largest investigative arm of DHS, with more than 20,000 employees worldwide. ICE has immigration and custom authorities to

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<sup>12</sup>U.S. ports of entry include land border crossings along the Canadian and Mexican borders, seaports, and U.S. airports for international flight arrivals.

prevent terrorism and criminal activity by targeting people, money, and materials that support terrorist and criminal organizations. ICE and three of its offices—the Offices of Detention and Removal Operations, Investigations, and Intelligence—identifying, apprehending, and investigating threats arising from the movement of people and goods into and out of the United States. In fiscal year 2009, the Office of Detention and Removal Operations completed 387,790 removals, 18,569 more than in fiscal year 2008. ICE's Office of Investigations investigates a broad range of domestic and international activities arising from illicit movement of people that violates immigration laws and threatens national security. For example, investigations where there is a potential use of foreign language capabilities include those for human trafficking and drug smuggling, illegal arms trafficking, and financial crimes. In 2009, ICE initiated 6,444 investigations along U.S. borders. ICE's Office of Intelligence is responsible for collecting operational and tactical intelligence that directly supports law enforcement and homeland security missions.

#### Guidance on Strategic Workforce Planning

Strategic workforce planning helps ensure that an organization has the staff with the necessary skills and competencies to accomplish strategic goals. We and OPM have developed guidance for managing human capital and developing strategic workforce planning strategies.<sup>13</sup> Since 2001, we have reported strategic human capital management as an area with a high risk of vulnerability to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. In January 2009, we reported that while progress has been made in the last few years to address human capital challenges, ample opportunities exist for agencies to improve in several areas.<sup>14</sup> For example, we reported that making sure that strategic human capital planning is integrated with broader organizational strategic planning is critical to ensuring that agencies have the talent and skill mix they need to address their current and emerging human capital challenges.<sup>15</sup>

Our and OPM's workforce planning guidance recommends, among other things, that agencies (1) assess their workforce needs, such as their foreign language needs; (2) assess current competency skills, such as

<sup>13</sup>For a more complete discussion of human capital management and workforce planning guidance, see app. II.

<sup>14</sup>GAO, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-09-271 (Washington, D.C.: January 2009).

<sup>15</sup>GAO-04-39.

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foreign language capabilities; and (3) compare workforce needs against available skills to identify any shortfalls, such as those related to foreign language capabilities.

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**DHS Has Taken Limited Actions to Assess Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities and Identify Potential Shortfalls**

DHS has taken limited actions to assess its foreign language needs and capabilities and to identify potential shortfalls. DHS efforts could be strengthened if it conducts a comprehensive assessment of its foreign language needs and capabilities and uses the results of this assessment to identify any potential shortfalls. By doing so, DHS could better position itself to manage its foreign language workforce needs to help fulfill its organizational missions.

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**DHS Has Taken Limited Actions to Assess Its Foreign Language Needs**

DHS has not comprehensively assessed its foreign language needs because, according to DHS senior officials, there is no legislative directive for the department to assess its needs for foreign languages. As a result, DHS lacks a complete understanding of the extent of its foreign language needs. According to DHS officials, the department relies on the individual components to address their foreign language needs. However, while some DHS components have conducted various foreign language assessments, these assessments are not comprehensive and do not fully address DHS's foreign language needs for select offices or programs consistent with strategic workforce planning. Specifically, the components' foreign language assessments assess primarily Spanish language needs rather than comprehensively addressing other potential foreign language needs their workforces are most likely to encounter in fulfilling their missions.

While DHS's *Human Capital Strategic Plan* discusses efforts to better position the department to have the right people in the right jobs at the right time, DHS has not linked these efforts to addressing its workforce's foreign language needs. DHS's strategic plan acknowledges the department's multifaceted workforce and the complexity of DHS operations, and envisions "a department-wide approach that enables its workforce to achieve its mission," but it does not discuss how its planned efforts will help ensure that the workforce's foreign language needs are

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met.<sup>16</sup> Further, the DHS *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review*, which was completed in February 2010, does not address foreign language capabilities and needs.<sup>17</sup> The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 called for each quadrennial review to be a comprehensive examination of the homeland security strategy of the nation, including recommendations regarding the long-term strategy and priorities of the assets, capabilities, budget, policies, and authorities of the department.<sup>18</sup> As we previously reported, strategic human capital planning that is integrated with broader organizational strategic planning is critical to ensuring that agencies have the talent and skill mix they need to address their human capital challenges.<sup>19</sup> While the department states that there is no legislative directive for it to assess its foreign language capabilities and relies on the individual components, considering foreign language capabilities when setting its strategic future direction would help DHS to more effectively guide its efforts and those of its components in determining the foreign language needs necessary to achieve mission goals and address its needs and any potential shortfalls.

The extent to which components have conducted language assessments of their foreign language needs varies. These assessments were limited primarily to Spanish as well as the needs of the workforce in certain offices, locations, and positions rather than comprehensive assessments addressing multiple languages and needs of the workforce as a whole. Table 2 shows the various assessments that were conducted at the component level and in certain offices.

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<sup>16</sup>Department of Homeland Security, *Human Capital Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2009-2013* (Washington, D.C., October 2008).

<sup>17</sup>Department of Homeland Security, *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report*.

<sup>18</sup>Pub. L. No. 110-53, 121 Stat. 266, 544 (2007).

<sup>19</sup>GAO-04-39.

Table 2: DHS Components' and Offices' Foreign Language Assessments and Needs

| DHS component                       | Office                                     | Language assessments                                                                                                                                                                                        | Foreign language needs                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| U.S. Coast Guard                    | Foreign Language Program Office            | 1999 <i>Foreign Language Needs Assessment</i><br>2008 <i>Foreign Language Speakers Needs Assessment</i><br>2009 <i>Foreign Language Speakers Interpreter and Linguist Performance Analysis</i> <sup>5</sup> | Spanish, Haitian-Creole, Russian, Vietnamese, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, French, Indonesian, Portuguese, and Tagalog |
| U.S. Customs and Border Protection  | U.S. Border Patrol                         | None                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Spanish <sup>6</sup>                                                                                                                  |
|                                     | Office of Air and Marine                   | 2009 <i>Marine Interdiction Agent (MIA) Critical Analysis to Support Spanish Language Need</i> <sup>7</sup>                                                                                                 | Spanish                                                                                                                               |
|                                     | Office of Field Operations                 | 2004 <i>Spanish Language Proficiency Determination for Customs and Border Protection Officer</i> <sup>8</sup>                                                                                               | Spanish                                                                                                                               |
| Immigration and Customs Enforcement | Office of Detention and Removal Operations | None                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Spanish <sup>9</sup>                                                                                                                  |
|                                     | Office of Investigations                   | None                                                                                                                                                                                                        | None specified                                                                                                                        |
|                                     | Office of Intelligence                     | None                                                                                                                                                                                                        | None specified                                                                                                                        |

Source: GAO analysis of DHS components' documentation.

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Coast Guard, Office of Law Enforcement, *Foreign Language Needs Assessment, Final Report* (Washington, D.C., 1999); *Foreign Language Speakers, Needs Assessment* (Petaluma, Calif., 2008); and *Foreign Language Speakers Interpreter and Linguists, New Performance and Planning Front End Analysis* (Petaluma, Calif., 2008).

<sup>6</sup>The agency administrative provision governing the requirements and procedures that are applicable to the training, evaluation, and examination of border patrol agent trainees, including their Spanish language skills, is Section 2301.02 of the *Administrative Manual* and went into effect on May 20, 1983.

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Marine Interdiction Agent (MIA) Critical Task Analysis to Support Spanish Task-Based Language Training, Final High Level Recommendations Report* (Alexandria, Va., 2009).

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Spanish Language Proficiency Determination for Customs and Border Protection Officer, Report and Recommendations* (Washington, D.C., 2004).

<sup>9</sup>The Office of Detention and Removal Operations prior to its transfer to DHS had identified and established Spanish foreign language requirements, but after the transfer in March 2003 those requirements were rescinded and then reinstated in 2007.

**Coast Guard.** Since 1999, the Coast Guard has conducted three assessments that identified the need for certain foreign language capabilities, which have resulted in the Coast Guard establishing requirements for certain foreign languages skills related to 12 mission-critical languages and foreign language positions for the foreign language

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award program. Additionally, according to the Coast Guard's Foreign Language Program Manager, by obtaining information from Coast Guard leadership and operational units, the Coast Guard determines what languages are encountered most in the field. Additionally, the official stated that annual reviews are conducted to determine how best to allocate the Coast Guard's foreign language linguist and interpreter positions. A "linguist" is expected to use his or her foreign language skills on an almost daily basis in support of a specific function within his or her unit, while interpreting is a collateral duty that can be filled by any qualified personnel. According to Coast Guard officials, they face difficulty in meeting their foreign language needs because of the difficulties experienced by personnel in obtaining qualifying proficiency scores on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT).<sup>20</sup> To meet foreign language program requirements, DLPT testing results are used to make allocation decisions for foreign language speakers. For example, according to the Foreign Language Program Manager, at one of its offices near Brownsville, Texas, the Coast Guard has native Spanish-speaking personnel who successfully use Spanish during operations but are not testing high enough on the DLPT and thus are not considered during allocation decisions for foreign language needs.

**CBP.** CBP has conducted two assessments since 2004 that have primarily focused on Spanish language needs. CBP's needs assessments are based on a task-based analysis. For example, CBP assessed critical tasks necessary to carry out certain operations, such as its officers requesting and analyzing biographical information from persons entering the United States and addressing suspects attempting to smuggle people, weapons, drugs, or other contraband across borders. These encounters may require foreign language skills, primarily Spanish for offices such as the U.S. Border Patrol, the Office of Air and Marine, and the Office of Field Operations. However, CBP's foreign language assessment for its Office of Field Operations included only those CBP officers located along the southwest border, in Miami, and in Puerto Rico, and this assessment did not include its foreign language needs in other field offices around the country. CBP's U.S. Border Patrol conducted similar assessments, which focused on assessing its foreign language training program, while the Office of Air and Marine's foreign language assessment determined the

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<sup>20</sup>The DLPT is a battery of foreign language tests produced by the Defense Language Institute to assess language proficiency in a specific foreign language in the skills of reading and listening, and also includes an interview to determine oral proficiency.

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extent of its Spanish language needs and, as a result, established its Spanish language training program.

**ICE.** According to ICE officials, rather than conducting foreign language needs assessments, ICE primarily identifies its needs based on daily activities. That is, ICE relies on its agents' knowledge of foreign languages they have encountered most frequently during their daily law enforcement and intelligence operations. However, ICE has not collected data on what those daily needs are. Without such data, ICE is not in a position to comprehensively assess its language needs. According to ICE officials, in 2007, ICE reinstated the Spanish language requirements that were in place prior to the formation of DHS for its Office of Detention and Removal Operations. Further, for its Offices of Investigations and Intelligence, it utilizes foreign language interpreter services by contract for foreign languages necessary, including Spanish.<sup>21</sup>

The components' efforts to assess their foreign language needs are varied and not comprehensive. Specifically, the assessments have been limited to certain languages, locations, programs, and offices. As a result, component officials we spoke with identified foreign language needs that are not captured in these assessments, such as the following:

- In the five CBP and ICE offices we visited near the Mexican border, we were told that they have encountered foreign language needs for variations of Spanish language skills, such as Castilian, border, and slang Spanish (that is, Spanish dialects in certain geographic regions that use words and phrases that are not part of the official language). According to ICE officials, in 2009, its Office of Detention and Removal Operations experienced a need for Mandarin Chinese language skills because of an influx of encounters with Chinese speakers near the Mexican border. However, CBP and ICE have not assessed their needs for Chinese speakers.
- In the three CBP and ICE offices we visited near the Canadian border, we were told that their encounters primarily involve Spanish, Arabic,

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<sup>21</sup>Services obtained by contract include interpretation, translation, and transcription. For example, ICE's Office of Investigations conducts wiretapping (intercepting of communications content) under Title III that may include conversations in a foreign language that can be interpreted or translated through contract services to support criminal investigations. ICE Title III investigations include the investigation of possible crimes related to narcotics, human trafficking and smuggling, technology transfer, financial investigations, and gangs.

and Quebecois French speakers. However, CBP and ICE have not assessed their needs for Arabic and Quebecois French speakers.

- In the seven Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE offices we visited in the Caribbean region, we were told that they primarily encounter Puerto Rican and slang Spanish, Haitian-Creole, and Patois. Although the Coast Guard has assessed its need for some of these languages, CBP and ICE have not assessed their needs in these languages.
- Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE offices in New York report that their primary language needs include Colombian Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Urdu, and Fulani. Although the Coast Guard has assessed its need for these languages, CBP and ICE have not assessed their needs for Arabic, Chinese, Urdu, and Fulani.

According to DHS officials, foreign language skills are an integral part of the department's operations. Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE officials in the seven components generally agreed that a comprehensive approach to conducting a foreign language needs assessment would be beneficial. By conducting a comprehensive assessment, DHS would be in a better position to address its foreign language needs. In addition, this assessment would enable the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE to comprehensively assess their component-level foreign language needs.

#### DHS Has Taken Limited Actions to Assess Foreign Language Capabilities

DHS, including the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE, has not comprehensively assessed its existing foreign language capabilities. However, components have various lists of staff with foreign language capabilities, as shown in table 3.

**Table 3: DHS Components' and Offices' Knowledge of Foreign Language Capabilities**

| DHS component                       | Office                                     | Existing knowledge of foreign language capabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| U.S. Coast Guard                    | Foreign Language Program Office            | Personnel voluntarily identified as foreign language speakers, in certain languages and proficiency levels, and meet foreign language award program requirements.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| U.S. Customs and Border Protection  | U.S. Border Patrol                         | All officers and agents that demonstrated a certain level of Spanish language skills through the Border Patrol Academy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                     | Office of Air and Marine                   | Officers and agents that demonstrated a certain level of Spanish language skills through the Border Patrol Academy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                                     | Office of Field Operations                 | Officers and agriculture specialists that demonstrated a certain level of Spanish language skills through the Office of Field Operation's academy.<br>Officers and agriculture specialists voluntarily identified as foreign language speakers, in certain languages and proficiency levels, and meet foreign language award program requirements. <sup>a</sup> |
| Immigration and Customs Enforcement | Office of Detention and Removal Operations | Some officers and agents that demonstrated a certain level of Spanish language skills through ICE's academy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                     | Office of Investigations                   | Agents voluntarily identified as foreign language speakers, in certain languages and proficiency levels, and meet foreign language award program requirements.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                     | Office of Intelligence                     | None documented.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

Source: GAO analysis of DHS components' documentation.

<sup>a</sup>In general, under 19 U.S.C. 267a, cash awards for foreign language proficiency may, under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury, be paid to customs officers (as referred to in section 267 (e)(1) of this title) to the same extent and in the manner as would be allowable under subchapter III of chapter 45 of title 5 with respect to law enforcement officers (as defined by section 4521 of such title).

Although DHS and its components maintain these lists that identify some of their staff with foreign language capabilities, these lists generally capture capabilities for personnel in certain components or offices, primarily those that include a foreign language award program for qualified employees. These include the Coast Guard, CBP's Office of Field Operations, and ICE's Office of Investigations.

**Coast Guard.** The Coast Guard, through its foreign language award program for foreign language skills, has developed a list that identifies personnel with certain proficiencies in one or more authorized foreign languages and meets program requirements. For example, the list identifies a Coast Guard member with a certain proficiency level in Spanish at the Miami Sector office. However, these lists contain the personnel voluntarily identified as speaking an authorized foreign language and have successfully met the program's requirements and receiving award payments. While this list identifies some personnel who speak at least one of the 12 authorized languages, it does not account for personnel who successfully carry out an operation utilizing their foreign language skills but are unable to meet the proficiency requirements per the

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**DLPT.** According to the Foreign Language Program Manager, a challenge exists in assigning foreign language speakers while aligning their foreign language proficiencies per the DLPT to the operational needs in the field. As a result, personnel who speak a foreign language are being utilized but are not considered part of Coast Guard's foreign language capabilities and are unable to receive foreign language award payments. In May 2010, the Coast Guard made some changes to its foreign language program and expanded compensation requirements to include other proficiency levels and award payments, which could improve its ability to identify foreign language resources that were unaccounted for prior to this change to meet its foreign language needs.<sup>22</sup>

**CBP.** CBP, through its foreign language award program in its Office of Field Operations, has developed a list that identifies CBP officers and agriculture specialists with a certain proficiency level in a foreign language. Additionally, it identifies those officers and agriculture specialists who (1) have received Spanish instruction through its academy, and (2) speak Spanish in certain field office locations.

**ICE.** ICE, through its foreign language award program in its Office of Investigations, has developed a list that identifies certain agents with a certain proficiency level in a foreign language. For example, the list includes an agent with a certain proficiency level in Jamaican Patois at the New York field office. Further, although its Offices of Detention and Removal Operations and Intelligence do not have foreign language award programs, they have developed lists in their individual offices of employees with foreign language capabilities. For example, one list identifies an intelligence research specialist at the Office of Intelligence in Miami who speaks Haitian-Creole, but does not include his proficiency level.

Across all three components, while certain offices have developed lists of staff with foreign language capabilities, component officials told us that their knowledge of foreign language capabilities is generally obtained in an ad hoc manner. For example, at each of the seven locations we visited, Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE officials told us that they generally do not use the lists described above to obtain knowledge of their colleagues' foreign

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<sup>22</sup>A foreign language award program incentivizes some employees by providing a discretionary monetary award that is in addition to basic pay based on the use of certain foreign language skills and proficiencies.

language capabilities, but rather have knowledge of their colleagues' foreign language capabilities through their current or past interactions. For example, according to ICE intelligence analysts, existing foreign language capabilities in ICE's Office of Intelligence are not systematically identified in the lists, but the specialists are aware of colleagues who have proficiencies in Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Haitian-Creole. Component officials stated that the inability to identify all existing capabilities may result in intelligence information potentially not being collected, properly translated, or analyzed in its proper context for additional foreign languages and thus affect the timeliness and accuracy of information. Moreover, they said that this information may be vital in tactical and operational intelligence to direct law enforcement operations and develop investigative leads.

Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE staff at each of the seven locations we visited generally agreed that more detailed information on existing capabilities could help them to better manage their resources. These officials told us that while Spanish language proficiency may be identified as an existing capability, it may not always be available and generally the levels of proficiencies vary. For example, according to one ICE immigration enforcement agent in the Office of Detention and Removal Operation's fugitive operation program, he speaks Spanish but is not proficient. He told us that there have been cases in which he needed assistance from an agent who was proficient in Spanish to converse with Spanish speakers. As the agent was not proficient in Spanish, he said he did not apprehend certain individuals because he was unable to verify their immigration status because he could not communicate with them.

Although DHS has some knowledge of its existing capabilities in certain components and offices, conducting an assessment of foreign language capabilities consistent with strategic workforce planning—that is, collecting data in a systematic manner that includes all of DHS's existing foreign language capabilities—would better position DHS to manage its resources.

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**DHS Has Not Taken  
Actions to Identify Foreign  
Language Shortfalls**

DHS, including the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE, has not taken actions to identify potential foreign language shortfalls. Moreover, DHS's *Human Capital Strategic Plan* does not include details on assessing potential shortfalls, as called for by best strategic workforce planning practices. DHS officials in OCHCO told us that in response to our review, they had canvassed the components to assess DHS's foreign language shortfalls and that the components' response was that they address shortfalls through

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contracts with foreign language interpreter and translation services. This canvassing was not based on a comprehensive assessment of needs and capabilities, which calls into question the extent to which it could comprehensively identify shortfalls. According to OCHCO officials, OCHCO plans to conduct a review and realignment of the DHS *Human Capital Strategic Plan*, and officials said that the plan will include more specific direction to the components on workforce planning guidance.

We also found that the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE have not taken actions to identify foreign language shortfalls. According to component officials, they face foreign language capability shortfalls that affect their ability to meet their missions. At the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE locations we visited, 238 of over 430 staff we interviewed identified ways that foreign language shortfalls can increase the potential for miscommunication, affect the ability to develop criminal cases and support criminal charges, increase the risk of loss or delay of intelligence, and can have a negative impact on officer safety. For example, according to the Border Patrol Academy's Spanish Language Program officials, as part of the Spanish language training, a video is shown of an actual incident in which a Texas law enforcement officer begins interviewing four Spanish-speaking individuals during a routine traffic stop. The video was recorded by the law enforcement officer's dashboard video camera. In the video, the four suspects exit the car and begin conversing in Spanish among each other while the officer appears to have difficulty understanding what the individuals are saying. Seconds later, the four individuals attacked the officer, took his gun, and shot the officer to death.

As another example, an ICE special agent told us that in the course of conducting a drug bust in 1991, he had been accidentally shot by a fellow agent because of, among other things, foreign language miscommunications. According to the agent and other sources familiar with the incident, he was working as the principal undercover agent in a drug sting operation in Newark, New Jersey. At the time of the incident, prior to the formation of DHS, he was working as a U.S. Customs Service agent. The undercover operation involved meeting and communicating in Spanish with two Colombian drug dealers as part of a cocaine bust. According to the agent, there were up to 18 other federal agents involved in the operation, at least two of whom were fluent in Spanish. Further, agents were videotaping and monitoring the conversation between the federal agent and the drug dealers from a nearby command post. However, the agent told us that none of the law enforcement officers in the command post who were covertly monitoring his dialogue with the drug dealers spoke or understood Spanish. The agent stated that as a result, law

enforcement officers were signaled to rush in prematurely to make the arrests. In the chaos that ensued, the agent was accidentally shot by a fellow agent and paralyzed from the chest down. According to the agent, as well as other agents familiar with the incident, had there been Spanish-speaking officers in the command post to interpret the audio transmissions from the agent, the accidental shooting may have been avoided. By conducting an assessment of needs and capabilities, and using the results of these assessments to identify shortfalls, DHS can be better positioned to take action to mitigate these shortfalls, which will help to ensure the safety of its officers and agents as they fulfill the department's mission.

**DHS Has Developed a Variety of Foreign Language Programs, but the Extent to Which They Address Foreign Language Shortfalls Is Not Known**

DHS has established a variety of foreign language programs; however, officials stated that they have not addressed the extent to which these programs address existing shortfalls. According to DHS officials in OCHCO, DHS's foreign language programs are managed at the component level and are based on component operational capabilities and mission requirements. The components have established programs and activities, which consist of foreign language training, proficiency testing, foreign language award programs, contract services, and interagency agreements.<sup>23</sup> Table 4 summarizes the extent to which foreign language programs and activities have been established in Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE select offices.

<sup>23</sup>Services obtained by contract include face-to-face and over-the-phone interpretation, document translation, and video/audio media transcribing and translating. Select components' language services requests include immigration cases involving deportation, employment authorizations, investigation, and processing deferred inspections and complicated bank transactions involving foreign countries and represented by specific banking or financial terminology native to a country.

**Table 4: Components' and Offices' Foreign Language Programs and Activities**

| Programs and activities                         | Description                                                                                                  | U.S. Coast Guard | U.S. Customs and Border Protection |         |     | Immigration and Customs Enforcement |     |     |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------|-----|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|
|                                                 |                                                                                                              |                  | OBP                                | OAM     | OFO | DRO                                 | OI  | FIG |
| 1. Language training <sup>a</sup>               | Foreign language training (other than Spanish)                                                               | Partial          | Partial                            | No      | No  | No                                  | No  | No  |
|                                                 | Academy Spanish language training                                                                            | No               | Yes                                | Yes     | Yes | Yes                                 | No  | No  |
|                                                 | Post-academy self-guided, Web-based software                                                                 | No               | No                                 | Partial | No  | Yes                                 | Yes | Yes |
| 2. Proficiency testing <sup>b</sup>             | Oral proficiency interview                                                                                   | Yes              | No                                 | No      | Yes | Yes                                 | Yes | No  |
|                                                 | Automated over the phone                                                                                     | No               | Yes                                | Yes     | Yes | No                                  | No  | No  |
|                                                 | Defense Language Proficiency Test 5 <sup>c</sup>                                                             | Yes              | No                                 | No      | No  | No                                  | No  | No  |
| 3. Contract services                            | Language services by contract                                                                                | Yes              | Yes                                | Yes     | Yes | Yes                                 | Yes | Yes |
| 4. Interagency agreements                       | Memorandums of understanding and other similar agreements between components and other agencies              | No               | No                                 | No      | No  | Yes                                 | Yes | Yes |
|                                                 | Agreements between components and other agencies to leverage language resources as needed                    | Yes              | Yes                                | Yes     | Yes | Yes                                 | Yes | Yes |
| 5. Foreign language award programs <sup>d</sup> | A monetary award paid as an incentive for law enforcement officers with foreign language skills <sup>e</sup> | Yes              | No                                 | No      | Yes | No                                  | Yes | No  |

Source: GAO analysis of DHS and component documentation.

Legend: OBP = Office of Border Protection; OFO = Office of Field Operations; DRO = Office of Detention and Removal Operations; OI = Office of Investigations; FIG = Office of Intelligence; Yes = office manages the specified foreign language program or activity; No = office does not manage the specified foreign language program or activity; Partial = foreign language program or activity is temporarily managed, but not permanently established.

<sup>a</sup>Spanish training program proficiency is based on an evaluation on the ability to carry out certain tasks in Spanish and a passing score of 56 out of 80.

<sup>b</sup>Select components use different versions of a six-level scale to describe proficiency in language, also known as the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale. The scale starts at zero—no knowledge of the given language—and goes up to five—proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker of the language. App. III contains additional details on the ILR Scale.

<sup>c</sup>The Defense Language Institute produced this test, which is used to assess the general language proficiency of native English speakers in a specific foreign language, in the skills of reading and listening, and includes an oral proficiency interview.

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<sup>23</sup>The foreign language award program provides, in general, a discretionary monetary award for the use of foreign language skills that is in addition to basic pay and does not increase an employee's base salary. Payment of the award is subject to the availability of funds.

<sup>24</sup>In general, under the foreign language award program provisions for law enforcement officers, the term "law enforcement officer" includes those personnel whose duties have been determined to be primarily the "investigation, apprehension, and detention of individuals suspected or convicted of offenses against the criminal laws of the U.S."

According to DHS officials in OCHCO, decisions on whether to establish programs and activities to develop foreign language capabilities are left to the discretion of individual components and are based on component operational capabilities and mission requirements. As shown in table 4, foreign language programs and activities varied across DHS and within select DHS components. For example, four of the seven component offices we reviewed maintain Spanish language training programs, and some of these offices require that officers complete Spanish language training before they are assigned to their duty stations. The five types of foreign language programs and activities used within and among the components are language training, proficiency testing, foreign language award programs, contract services, and interagency agreements.

- **Spanish language training.** Before officers can be assigned to their duty stations, some components require that they complete a Spanish language training program. Specifically, U.S. Border Patrol requires the completion of an 8-week task-based Spanish language training program. The Office of Field Operations has a 6-week basic Spanish training program requirement, and the Office of Air and Marine requires 6 weeks of task-based Spanish language training. The Office of Detention and Removal Operations has a requirement for a 6-week basic Spanish training program. These programs are designed to provide officers with a basic Spanish language competency. U.S. Border Patrol and Office of Air and Marine agents and officers are required to attend Spanish language training only if they do not pass a Spanish language proficiency exam.<sup>24</sup>
- **Foreign language proficiency tests.** Several proficiency tests are used by different components, and the type of test that is used depends

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<sup>24</sup>U.S. Border Patrol and Office of Air and Marine agents and officers are administered a telephonic recognition Spanish proficiency test that is delivered over the telephone by a computerized testing system.

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on the foreign language for which proficiency is being assessed.<sup>26</sup> The Coast Guard's proficiency test is produced by the Defense Language Institute and consists of a set of tests that include an oral interview to assess language proficiency in the skills of reading and listening. ICE's proficiency test consists of an oral interview for all foreign languages assessed, while CBP uses a combination of both oral and automated telephone tests for assessing proficiency in similar foreign languages, such as the Spanish language.

- **Contract services.** Contract services consist of contracts held by individual components and offices for interpreter and translation services. The use of language contract services depends on the unique requirements of the operation in individual offices. For example, the U.S. Border Patrol provides funding for translation services and the Coast Guard contracts annually for Haitian-Creole interpreter services. Select components utilize over-the-phone language contract services, while other components also utilize in-person translation and transcription contract services. Additionally, DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services operates and manages the Language Services Section, comprising both intermittent and full-time language specialists who may provide assistance to some offices in CBP and ICE in certain cases.
- **Interagency agreements.** Interagency agreements consist of individual component offices establishing professional relationships with other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies as a result of carrying out joint operations. Additionally, these agreements vary by component, office, and location, and may often depend on the extent to which other agencies in those areas work closely with DHS. The interagency cooperation we observed during our site visits largely occurs on an ad hoc basis. For example, component officials in Miami told us that local, state, and federal government officials provide translation assistance as needed without any written agreement between agencies.
- **Foreign language award programs.** The foreign language award program consists of certain DHS personnel voluntarily identified as being proficient in an authorized foreign language and meeting program requirements, including certain proficiency levels and

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<sup>26</sup>The proficiency tests used by select components include (1) the DLPT 5, administered by the Defense Language Institute's Foreign Language Center for foreign language proficiency pay certification; (2) the Language Testing International test; (3) the FBI's test; (4) the Foreign Language Institute's test, which are used to conduct oral proficiency interviews; and (5) ordinate versant, which is an automated telephonic language proficiency test that measures broad-based language proficiency.

minimum usage requirements. As shown in table 5, the usage requirement and award payment vary by component. Specifically, the Coast Guard does not have a usage requirement, while CBP and ICE offices require that certain DHS staff use the language 10 percent of the time, or 208 hours each year. The usage requirement for special interest languages is only twice per 6-month increment. Further, Coast Guard interpreters receive up to \$200 each month and linguists receive up to \$300 each month, while CBP and ICE employees can receive up to 5 percent of basic pay as an award payment.

**Table 5: DHS Components' and Offices' with Foreign Language Award Programs**

| Component and office                                            | Staff eligible to receive award payments for foreign language skills | Usage requirement to receive award payments | Authorized foreign languages                                                                                                                                  | Award                                                                        | Total expenditures for FY 2009 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| U.S. Coast Guard                                                | Coast Guard personnel                                                | Not applicable                              | Spanish, Haitian-Creole, Russian, Vietnamese, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, French, Indonesian, Portuguese, and Tagalog <sup>a</sup>            | Up to \$200 a month for an interpreter<br>Up to \$300 a month for a linguist | \$600,000 <sup>b</sup>         |
| U.S. Customs and Border Protection - Office of Field Operations | Only CBP officers and agriculture specialists <sup>c</sup>           | Two uses biannually                         | Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, Punjabi, Turkish, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkoman, Ulghur, Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya, Bahasa, Tagalog, Kurdish, Russian, and Chechen <sup>d</sup> | Up to 5 percent of basic pay                                                 | \$15,262,833                   |
|                                                                 |                                                                      | 10 percent = 208 hours annually             | All foreign languages                                                                                                                                         |                                                                              |                                |
| Immigration and Customs Enforcement - Office of Investigations  | All law enforcement officers                                         | 10 percent = 208 hours annually             | All foreign languages                                                                                                                                         | Up to 5 percent of basic pay                                                 | \$1,834,316                    |

Source: GAO analysis of DHS and component documentation.

<sup>a</sup>The Coast Guard annually determines what languages are encountered most in the field by obtaining information from Coast Guard leadership and operational units.

<sup>b</sup>The Coast Guard's active duty pay account is funded for foreign language proficiency pay as a yearly recurring rate for this amount.

<sup>c</sup>In general, under 19 U.S.C. § 287a, cash awards for foreign language proficiency may be paid to certain specified customs officers to the same extent and in the same manner as are allowable with respect to law enforcement officers under 5 U.S.C. 4521 et seq. In addition, according to CBP, the current state of its foreign language award program is a result of a negotiated agreement between CBP and the National Treasury Employee's Union.

<sup>d</sup>The Office of Field Operation's languages of special interest are not part of its 2004 assessment but were identified as part of the antiterrorism mission.

Components have established some language award programs as an incentive for certain DHS employees to develop foreign language

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capabilities to address components' language needs. According to ICE officials, statutory language providing authorization for their foreign language award program is limited to those employees who meet a statutory definition of the term law enforcement officer.<sup>30</sup> For example, with respect to the law enforcement officer definition, intelligence research specialists in ICE have not been determined to meet such definition and be eligible to receive award payments for their use of foreign language skills. In addition, component requirements may also affect eligibility for foreign language awards. For example, according to CBP, although U.S. Border Patrol agents are law enforcement officers, Spanish language skills are a requirement for employment of that position, therefore agents do not receive award payments for their use of Spanish or other foreign language skills. Additionally, CBP told us that it is not opposed to assessing its options regarding foreign language needs.

While DHS components have a variety of foreign language programs and activities, DHS has not assessed the extent to which these programs and activities address potential shortfalls at the department or component levels. OPM's strategic workforce planning guidance recommends that agencies assess potential shortfalls in human capital resources, such as foreign language capability, by comparing needs against available skills. OCHO officials told us that DHS has not performed a department-level assessment of the extent to which the programs address potential shortfalls because DHS has delegated responsibility for foreign language programs to the components. However, we found that the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE also have not assessed the extent to which their programs address potential shortfalls.

Although foreign language programs and activities at select components contribute to the development of DHS's foreign language capabilities, DHS's ability to use them to address potential foreign language shortfalls

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<sup>30</sup>Statutory language (5 U.S.C. § 4521 et seq.) authorizing agencies to pay an incentive award to law enforcement officers who possess and make substantial use of one or more foreign languages in the performance of official duties define "law enforcement officer" to mean, in general, (1) those qualifying as law enforcement officers under Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) or Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS) laws and regulations and (2) members of certain other specified groups, such as a member of the United States Secret Service Uniformed Division, a member of the United States Park Police, and a special agent in the Diplomatic Security Service. In general, CSRS and FERS law enforcement officer definitional criteria include those personnel whose duties have been determined to be primarily the investigation, apprehension, or detention of individuals suspected or convicted of offenses against the criminal laws of the United States.

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varies. For example, the foreign language training programs generally do not include languages other than Spanish, nor do they include various Spanish dialects.<sup>27</sup> According to several Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE officials we spoke with, their foreign language programs and activities were established to develop specific foreign language capabilities, primarily in Spanish. Officers we interviewed noted that these programs and activities generally do not account for variations of the Spanish language spoken in certain regions of the country, which can potentially have fatal consequences, particularly during undercover operations. Further, according to agents we interviewed in Puerto Rico, both the agents and criminals understand that the Spanish phrase "tumbarlo"<sup>28</sup> in the Caribbean region means "kill him," while agents from the southern border understand this phrase to mean "arrest him." As another example of the vital role of foreign language proficiency in certain operations, we were told that foreign language capabilities in one operation enabled an agent to infiltrate a prolific drug trafficking organization. While working in a long-term drug smuggling investigation, the agent came under suspicion by members of the trafficking organization. However, the agent was able to utilize Spanish language skills and dialect to avoid being discovered as a U.S. federal agent and escape execution by his captors.

Further, in certain cases, according to component officials, the programs and activities are not well suited for some operational needs. CBP and ICE officials noted that although their foreign language training programs and activities are used for the Spanish language, they maintain a language service contract for an over-the-phone, 24-hour translation service in over 150 languages. However, according to component officials we spoke with in the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE, this resource is limited depending on the unique requirements of operations within and among components. Specifically, the component officials said that this resource is limited because of (1) the time it can take to obtain an interpreter over the phone, (2) difficulty in relying on over-the-phone interpretation while conducting operations at sea, and (3) the inability to use an interpreter who is over the phone for an on-the-spot discussion and resolution of an issue or problem encountered in the field. For example, officials stated that during an

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<sup>27</sup>U.S. Border Patrol's Spanish Training Program includes specific scenario activities (ranging from 10 to 50 minutes long) on how other cultures differ from the Mexican culture, including words and phrases not part of the formal Spanish language.

<sup>28</sup>The English translation for "tumbarlo" is "overthrow the . . . ."

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operation in which they entered a house suspected of harboring individuals trafficked into the United States, an officer intercepted a phone call from one of the individuals who was involved in this illegal activity who spoke Russian. In other operations, according to intelligence analysts we spoke with, it is difficult or impossible to develop detainees' trust during phone interviews to obtain intelligence.<sup>29</sup> For example, according to all of the agents we interviewed, potential informants are difficult or impossible to recruit when the discussion is occurring through a third-party interpreter on the phone. Because the components have not assessed the programs and activities, they have not addressed this limitation.

Furthermore, these programs and activities are managed by individual components or offices within components. According to several Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE officials, they manage their foreign language programs and activities as they did prior to the formation of DHS. At the department level and within the components, many of the officials we spoke with were generally unaware of the foreign language programs or activities maintained by other DHS components. In addition, many of the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE officials at all seven locations we visited stated that they relied on colleagues from current or past interactions to interpret or identify other foreign language resources. Given this decentralization, conducting an assessment of the extent to which its program and activities address shortfalls could strengthen DHS's ability to manage its foreign language programs and activities and to adjust them, if necessary, to address shortfalls.

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## Conclusions

Since its formation in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, DHS and three of its largest components—the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE—have performed vital roles in carrying out a range of law enforcement and intelligence activities to help protect the United States against potential terrorist actions and other threats. To achieve its mission, it is important that DHS and its components manage their human capital resources in a way that ensures that fundamental capabilities, such as foreign language capabilities, are available when needed. Foreign language capabilities are especially important for DHS, as its employees frequently

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<sup>29</sup>Intelligence research specialists report that as part of "operation last call," they often conduct or participate in interviews designed to obtain intelligence information or investigative leads, primarily with respect to individuals of interest who are in ICE custody.

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encounter foreign languages while carrying out their daily responsibilities. While DHS has taken limited actions to assess its foreign language needs and capabilities, it has not conducted a comprehensive assessment of the department's and its components' foreign language needs and capabilities nor has it fully identified potential shortfalls. Further, although the Coast Guard, CBP, and ICE have a variety of foreign language programs and activities in place, they have not assessed the extent to which the programs and activities they have established address foreign language shortfalls. As a result, DHS lacks reasonable assurance that its varied and decentralized foreign language programs and activities are meeting its needs.

We have recommended that other federal agencies, including the Departments of Defense and State and the FBI, take actions to help ensure that their foreign language capabilities are available when needed. Similar opportunities exist for DHS to help ensure that foreign language capabilities are available to effectively communicate and overcome language barriers encountered during critical operations, such as interdicting the transport of contraband and other illegal activities. Comprehensively assessing its foreign language needs and capabilities and identifying any potential shortfalls and the extent to which its programs and activities are addressing these shortfalls would better position DHS to ensure that foreign language capabilities are available when needed. Further, considering the important role foreign language plays in DHS's missions, incorporating the results of foreign language assessments into the department's future strategic and workforce planning documents would help DHS ensure that it addresses its current and future foreign language needs.

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### Recommendations for Executive Action

To help ensure that DHS can identify its foreign language capabilities needed and pursue strategies that will help its workforce effectively communicate to achieve agency goals, we recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security (1) comprehensively assess DHS's foreign language needs and capabilities and identify potential shortfalls, (2) assess the extent to which existing foreign language programs and activities address foreign language shortfalls, and (3) ensure that the results of these foreign language assessments are incorporated into the department's future strategic and workforce planning documents.

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**Agency Comments  
and Our Evaluation**

We provided a draft of our report to the Secretary of Homeland Security for review and comment on June 9, 2010. On June 14, 2010, DHS provided written comments, which are reprinted in appendix IV. In commenting on our report, DHS stated that it concurred with our recommendations and identified actions planned or under way to implement them.

Regarding our first recommendation that DHS comprehensively assess its foreign language needs and capabilities and identify potential shortfalls, DHS concurred and stated that OCHCO will work with the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties to establish the DHS Joint Task Force consisting of those components and offices that have language needs in order to identify requirements and assess the necessary skills.

DHS also concurred with our second recommendation to assess the extent to which existing foreign language programs and activities address foreign language shortfalls, and stated that the DHS Joint Task Force will work to recommend a system for the department to track, monitor, record, and report language capabilities. DHS also stated that with respect to the foreign language skills required by DHS personnel stationed abroad, this task force will include the Office of International Affairs.

DHS also agreed with our third recommendation to ensure that the results of these foreign language assessments are incorporated into the department's future strategic and workforce planning documents and stated that OCHCO will ensure that DHS-wide language policies and processes are incorporated into the DHS *Human Capital Strategic Plan*.

DHS also provided written technical comments, which we considered and incorporated as appropriate.

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As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of Homeland Security and interested congressional committees. The report also will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

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If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9627 or at [maurerd@gao.gov](mailto:maurerd@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix V.



David C. Maurer  
Director, Homeland Security and Justice Issues

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## Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

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To address our first and second objectives, we reviewed operations in three Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components and seven offices. We selected the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) because they constitute a broad representation of program areas whose missions include law enforcement and intelligence responsibilities. We selected the Coast Guard's Foreign Language Program Office; CBP's Office of U.S. Border Patrol, Office of Air and Marine, and Office of Field Operations; and ICE's Office of Detention and Removal Operations, Office of Investigations, and Office of Intelligence to ensure that we had a mix of different program sizes and a broad representation of program areas whose missions include law enforcement and intelligence responsibilities and are most likely to involve foreign nationals, foreign language documents, or both. We then selected a nonprobability sample of seven site visit locations—San Antonio and Laredo, Texas; Artesia, New Mexico; New York and Buffalo, New York; Miami, Florida; and San Juan, Puerto Rico—to identify and observe foreign language use at select DHS components. We selected these locations based on geographic regions, border locations, and language use. Although the results are not projectable, they provided us with valuable insights. During our site visits, we spoke to over 430 DHS staff in law enforcement and intelligence units, and observed the use of foreign language skills where foreign language capabilities are deemed vital to meeting mission requirements, including the following:

- We interviewed Coast Guard officials at the Command, Sector, District, and Stations and Intelligence and Enforcement representatives of the Coast Guard in New York, Miami, and San Juan. During an operational boat ride tour at Station Miami Beach, we observed an encounter involving Spanish-speaking individuals.
- We spoke with officials in ICE's Detention, Fugitive, Intelligence and Criminal Alien Operations units. We also observed interviewing and processing at five detention facilities and processing centers.
- We interviewed ICE intelligence research specialists who were sent to the southern border and Mexico City in support of operations, including Armas Cruzadas,<sup>1</sup> in 2009, and obtained information on arrests, seizures, and significant events. We also interviewed an intelligence research specialists who provided foreign language support in Spanish for ICE's 2009 gang surge operation and an analyst

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<sup>1</sup>Armas Cruzadas is a DHS operation intended to identify, disrupt, and dismantle trans-border weapons smuggling networks.

who was sent to Haiti to conduct law enforcement training in the Haitian-Creole language, and obtained copies of reports needing translations.

- We spoke with ICE officials in the Drug Smuggling, Human Trafficking and Smuggling,<sup>2</sup> Worksite Enforcement, and Immigration and Customs Fraud units. We interviewed four Title III wiretap transcription monitor linguists in San Antonio and observed a targeted area of responsibility for surveillance composed of Spanish-speaking populations that select DHS components encounter while carrying out operations in New York City.
- We observed "Operation-Cooperation" at the Lincoln Juarez Bridge Number 2 at the Service Port of Entry in Laredo. The operation consisted of CBP border patrol agents and customs officers conducting outbound vehicle inspections to confiscate illegal weapons and cash. We also observed interviews and inspections, fingerprinting, and the permit/visa issuance process.
- We observed passenger processing<sup>3</sup> and interviews conducted by a passenger analysis unit and tactical group (PAU/TAG)<sup>4</sup> and passenger Enforcement Roving and Counter-Terrorist Response (CTR) teams<sup>5</sup> at the Miami and San Juan international airports.
- We observed the Border Patrol Laredo Sector's initial processing of illegal immigrants at the Laredo North Station by 14 Border Patrol interns (refereed to as interns by the U.S. Border Patrol while receiving post-academy training in the field).
- In addition, we interviewed members of the Border Patrol's International Liaison Unit, Border Intelligence Center, and Joint Terrorism Task Force in Laredo, Buffalo, Miami, and San Juan.

<sup>2</sup>ICE defines human trafficking (exploitation-based) as the recruitment, harboring, and transportation of a person through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, among other things. ICE defines human smuggling (transportation-based) as the importation of people into the United States involving deliberate evasion of immigration laws, including transporting and harboring illegal persons.

<sup>3</sup>Passenger processing is the core process that includes all aspects of the processing of inbound and outbound air, sea, and land passengers; this process includes, but is not limited to, the initial processing and any secondary inspections.

<sup>4</sup>PAU/TAGs are units charged with using automated systems to target high-risk passengers, conducting threat analysis, or utilizing after-action reports to identify threats.

<sup>5</sup>A CTR team is made up of CBP officers assigned to special teams, drawing from personnel with prior counterterrorism, antiterrorism, or intelligence-related training or experience. Such a unit is charged with the interdiction of high-risk passengers attempting to facilitate entry of contraband or who are associated with terrorist activities.

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- We also interviewed officials in the Swanton Sector located on the northern border and reviewed documents on its Québécois French training initiatives.

During our site visit to Artesia, New Mexico we observed the Spanish Language Program at U.S. Border Patrol's Law Enforcement Academy at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. While conducting this site visit, we interviewed officers in training and program officials and examined documentation, such as training manuals, lessons, and videos on foreign language training development.

We also examined documentation on foreign language needs and capabilities, including DHS's strategic plans for fiscal years 2004 through 2008 and 2008 through 2013, human capital plans for fiscal years 2004 through 2008 and 2009 through 2013, and *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report* and *Work Force Planning Guidance* to determine whether DHS's plans provide details on how to address actual workforce needs, such as foreign language capabilities. Further, we interviewed knowledgeable officials in DHS's Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer and conducted over 430 interviews with component officials (component officials consist of Coast Guard members; Border Patrol agents; Air and Marine agents and officers; CBP officers and agriculture specialists; and ICE officers, special agents, and intelligence research specialists) for all the locations we visited to determine the extent to which they have assessed their foreign language needs and existing capabilities and identified any potential shortfalls. We also interviewed these component officials and other DHS staff to determine the extent to which they have foreign language programs in place to develop operational foreign language capabilities. We compared DHS activities to our and the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) workforce planning criteria. We also examined and analyzed relevant studies and observed the use of foreign language proficiencies in a number of law enforcement operations. Finally, we considered our prior work on human capital strategic workforce planning related to foreign language needs and capabilities for the Departments of Defense and State and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2008 through June 2010 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Appendix II: Human Capital Management and Workforce Planning Guidance

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We and OPM have developed guidance for managing human capital and developing workforce planning strategies.

Strategic workforce planning helps ensure that an organization has staff with the necessary skills and competencies to accomplish its strategic goals. Since 2001, we have reported strategic human capital management as an area with a high risk of vulnerability to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. In January 2009, we reported that while progress has been made in the last few years to address human capital challenges, ample opportunities exist for agencies to improve in several areas.<sup>1</sup> For example, we reported that making sure that strategic human capital planning is integrated with broader organizational strategic planning is critical to ensuring that agencies have the talent and skill mix they need to address their current and emerging human capital challenges.<sup>2</sup>

We have also issued various policy statements and guidance reinforcing the importance of sound human capital management and workforce planning. Our 2004 human capital guidance states that the success of the workforce planning process that an agency uses can be judged by its results—how well it helps the agency attain its mission and strategic goals—not by the type of process used.<sup>3</sup> Our 2002 strategic human capital guidance also highlights eight critical success factors in strategic human capital management, including making data-driven human capital decisions and targeted investments in people.<sup>4</sup> To make data-driven human capital decisions, the guidance states that staffing decisions, including needs assessments and deployment decisions, should be based on valid and reliable data. Furthermore, the guidance states that to make targeted investments in people, organizations should clearly document the methodology underlying their human capital approaches. We have identified these factors, among others, as critical to managing human capital approaches that facilitate sustained workforce contributions.

Our 2004 guidance on strategic workforce planning outlines key principles for effective workforce planning. These principles include (1) involving

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<sup>1</sup>GAO, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-09-271 (Washington, D.C.: January 2009).

<sup>2</sup>See GAO-04-39.

<sup>3</sup>See GAO-04-39.

<sup>4</sup>See GAO, *A Model of Strategic Human Capital Management*, GAO-02-373SP (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2002).

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management, employees, and other stakeholders in the workforce planning process; (2) determining critical skills and competencies needed to achieve results; (3) developing workforce strategies to address shortfalls and the deployment of staff; (4) building the capabilities needed to address administrative and other requirements important in supporting workforce strategies; and (5) evaluating and monitoring human capital goals.<sup>5</sup>

OPM has also issued strategic workforce planning guidance to help agencies manage their human capital resources more strategically.<sup>6</sup> The guidance recommends that agencies

- analyze their workforce needs,
- conduct competency assessments and analysis, and
- compare workforce needs against available skills.

Along with OPM, we have encouraged agencies to consider all available flexibilities under current authorities in pursuing solutions to long-standing human capital problems. In addition, our guidance outlines strategies for deploying staff in the face of finite resources.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>See GAO-04-39.

<sup>6</sup>Office of Personnel Management, *Key Components of a Strategic Human Capital Plan* (Washington, D.C., September 2005), and *Migration Planning Guidance Documents: Workforce Planning Best Practices* (Washington, D.C., May 2008).

<sup>7</sup>GAO, *Human Capital: A Self-Assessment Checklist for Agency Leaders*, GAO/OCG-00-14G, Version 1 (Washington, D.C.: September 2000).

## Appendix III: Federal Interagency Language Roundtable Proficiency Scale

Federal agencies use the foreign language proficiency scale established by the federal Interagency Language Roundtable to rank an individual's language skills. The scale has six levels from 0 to 5—with 5 being the most proficient—for assessing an individual's ability to speak, read, listen, and write in another language. Proficiency requirements vary by agency and position but tend to congregate at the second and third levels of the scale. (See table 6.)

**Table 6: Federal Foreign Language Proficiency Levels**

| Proficiency level         | Language capability requirements                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0 - None                  | No practical capability in the language.                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1 - Elementary            | Sufficient capability to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy and travel requirements.                                                                                          |
| 2 - Limited working       | Sufficient capability to meet routine social demands and limited job requirements. Can deal with concrete topics in past, present, and future tense.                                         |
| 3 - General professional  | Able to use the language with sufficient ability to participate in most discussions on practical, social, and professional topics. Can conceptualize and hypothesize.                        |
| 4 - Advanced professional | Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Has range of language skills necessary for persuasion, negotiation, and counseling. |
| 5 - Functionally native   | Able to use the language at a functional level equivalent to a highly articulate, well-educated native speaker.                                                                              |

Source: Interagency Language Roundtable documents.

Note: When proficiency substantially exceeds one base skill level yet does not fully meet the criteria for the next base level, a plus sign (+) designation may be added.

GAO-10-714 Foreign Language Capabilities

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## Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

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June 14, 2010

David C. Maurer  
Director, Homeland Security and Justice  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Maurer:

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, GAO-10-714, "*DHS Needs to Comprehensively Assess Its Foreign Language Needs and Capabilities and Address Shortfalls*". DHS generally concurs with the report's recommendations.

As GAO notes, Department components have been responsible for determining their foreign language requirements and for identifying and implementing methods for satisfying them. The Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) coordinates the Department's efforts in the area of Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Given the importance of language skills to the accomplishment of the agency's mission, the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) has considered GAO's recommendations and will take the following actions in the immediate future:

- OCHCO will ensure that DHS-wide language policies and processes are incorporated into our Human Capital Strategic Plan;
- OCHCO will work with CRCL to establish a DHS Joint Language Task Force consisting of those components and offices which have language needs in order to identify requirements and assess the necessary skills; recommend a system so that the Department can track, monitor, record, and report language capabilities; and identify the functional office responsible for managing DHS-wide language capabilities. This work will include the Office of International Affairs with respect to the foreign language skills required by DHS personnel stationed abroad.

GAO-10-714 Foreign Language Capabilities

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Appendix IV: Comments from the Department  
of Homeland Security

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Again, we appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report and we look forward to working with you on future homeland security issues.

Sincerely,

  
Jerald E. Levine  
Director  
Departmental GAO/OIG Liaison Office

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## Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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### GAO Contact

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### Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, William W. Crocker III, Assistant Director; Yvette Gutierrez-Thomas, Analyst-In-Charge; Stephen L. Caldwell; Wendy Dye; Rachel Beers; Virginia Chanley; Geoffrey R. Hamilton; Lara Kaskie; Adam Vogt; Robert Lowthian; Candice Wright; Mona Nichols Blake; and Minty Abraham made key contributions to this report.

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