

Partner Cheri Cannon discusses demoralization of federal workers as well as neglect with Chicago Daily Herald.

Report: Federal workforce demoralized, neglected

WASHINGTON -- A new report on the state of the federal workforce can cause angst even in the sanguine.

The title, "Embracing Change," does not begin to convey the severity of the change that federal chief human capital officers (CHCOs) said is needed in a series of interviews with the Partnership for Public Service, a good-government group that focuses on federal workplace issues, and the Grant Thornton consulting firm.

Those interviews, with 62 CHCOs and other personnel leaders at 43 agencies, present a picture of a government that risks malfunction if serious repairs are not made soon. The report will be released at a forum Wednesday.

Consider these findings:

- "(I)f government policies and policymakers continue to undermine the federal workforce, the weakening of that workforce could overwhelm government's capacity to carry out its responsibilities."
- Federal leaders "need to help undo the deep institutional neglect within major segments of the federal workforce."
- Tight budgets and growing workloads "have damaged the federal workforce's ability to meet demands effectively and efficiently."
- "Significant challenges must be overcome to rebuild a federal workforce that has been battered on a number of fronts over the past few years."

In response, Frank Benenati, an Office of Management and Budget spokesman, said the administration is committed to "fostering a culture of excellence among those who serve ... the Administration will continue to work aggressively to ensure the Federal workforce is engaged, well-prepared, and well-trained with the right set of skills to accomplish agency missions and serve the American people."

The report is one of five issued since 2007, based on interviews with top federal human resource managers. This one draws on November-to-February discussions that followed a particularly bleak period for feds, including a three-year freeze on basic pay rates, pay cuts for some through furloughs, and a 16-day partial government shutdown.

Those things contributed to sinking employee engagement and left many feds "feeling

demoralized and undervalued," according to the report. What's more, lower-level managers are not always committed to improving morale, according to the HR leaders.

Continued difficulties with the federal hiring process also got a lot of ink in the report.