THE GOVERNMENT CONTRACTOR®

Information and Analysis on Legal Aspects of Procurement

JULY 30, 2025 | VOLUME 67 | ISSUE 28

¶ 182 FEATURE COMMENT: Institutional Amnesia And The Neglect Of The Federal Acquisition Workforce

As the federal acquisition community focuses on the hasty rewrite and reorganization of the Federal Acquisition Regulation, far less attention has been given to the workforce responsible for implementing these changes. This reflects a longstanding pattern in U.S. federal procurement reform: prioritizing procedural change over investment in workforce capacity. Although a serious, sustained, and strategic effort to recruit and develop acquisition talent would likely yield the greatest improvements in procurement outcomes, no such initiative appears forthcoming.

Turbulent Times for Civil Servants—Few current and former federal employees will fondly look back on 2025, a uniquely turbulent period in the evolution of federal service. For example, according to media reports, in the spring of 2025, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration terminated nearly 50 employees from its Office of Regulatory Policy under the Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) Governmentwide federal layoff initiative, only to order them back to the office with just 24 hours' notice. Elsewhere, after firing thousands of probationary employees for purported "performance" issues, the Internal Revenue Service recalled them so hastily that many did not even have a desk or laptop upon their return. See generally, Hannah Natanson, et al., Trump Administration Races to Fix a Big Mistake: DOGE Fired Too Many People, Wash. Post (June 6, 2025), *https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/06/06/doge-staff-cuts-rehiring-federal-workers/*.

Nor are these chaotic reversals isolated incidents. They are part of a Governmentwide pattern of rash, politically driven layoffs carried out under the guise of "efficiency," with little regard for agency mission, operational continuity, or the dignity of the public servants whose lives have been upended in the process. Although numerous civil servants have retired or restarted careers elsewhere, some agencies are now scrambling to rehire many of the same federal workers, as the short-term optics of austerity have jeopardized essential public services. Id.

None of this was accidental or unintentional. As Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought, previously voiced: "We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected … When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work, because they are increasingly viewed as the villains. We want their funding to be shut down …. We want to put them in trauma." Stephen Engelberg, The October Story That Outlined Exactly What the Trump Administration Would Do to the Federal Bureau-

cracy, ProPublica (March 20, 2025), *https://www.propublica.org/article/propublica-russell-vought-prophetic-trump-second-term*.

Vought's aspiration appears to have become reality, as nearly 90 percent of federal employees who responded to a recent survey said "mental health challenges have affected their personal health and wellness," while 95 percent said "they have experienced increased stress, anxiety and depression as a federal employee since Jan. 20." Anastasia Obis, 'A never-ending nightmare': Federal Workers Detail Mental Health Toll of Government Downsizing, Federal News Network (July 28, 2025), *https://federalnewsnetwork.com/federal-report/2025/07/a-never-ending-nightmare-federal-workers-detail-mental-health-toll-of-government-downsizing/*.

Whiplash for the Acquisition Workforce: A Self-Inflicted Capacity Crisis—The federal acquisition workforce has not been spared from these Governmentwide efficiency initiatives, which have left some agencies so drained that they can no longer perform basic procurement functions. See, e.g., Eric Katz, Ross Wilkers & David DiMolfetta, OPM Procurement Processing Fully Halted Following Agency Layoffs, Internal Email Says, Wash. Tech. (Feb. 25, 2025), *https://www.washingtontechnology.com/contracts/2025/02/opm-procurement-processing-fully-halted-following-agency-layoffs-internal-email-says/403272/* (reporting that entire procurement functions have ceased following a "complete reduction in force" within the Office of Personnel Management's Office of Procurement Operations). Against that backdrop, it's disorienting to hear Larry Allen, associate administrator of the General Services Administration's Office of Governmentwide Policy, state: "One goal is for acquisition teams to feel empowered—and have confidence that their leadership will support smart risk taking and not punish imperfect outcomes." Nick Wakeman, FAR Overhaul Targets Risk-Averse Acquisition Culture, NextGov/FCW (July 9, 2025) *https://www.nextgov.com/acquisition/2025/07/far-overhaul-targets-risk-averse-acquisition-culture/406624/*.

The U.S. Federal Government spent approximately $755 billion on contract awards in fiscal year 2024. Yet, the acquisition workforce is smaller, more junior, and, in many respects, less experienced than a generation ago. See Mona Sehgal, A Snapshot of Governmentwide Contracting for FY 2024, U.S. Gov't Accountability Off.: WatchBlog (June 24, 2025), *https://www.gao.gov/blog/snapshot-government-wide-contracting-fy-2024-interactive-dashboard*. This imbalance didn't happen overnight. Beginning in 1989, Congress mandated several reductions in the acquisition workforce, ultimately shrinking the defense acquisition workforce by approximately 50 percent. See Strom Thurmond National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1999, P.L. 105-261; National Defense Authorization Act for 2000, P.L. 106–65, Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DOD Acquisition Workforce Reduction Trends and Impacts, Report D-2000-088 (Feb. 29, 2000), *https://media.defense.gov/2000/Feb/29/2001713980/-1/-1/1/00-088.pdf*. See also *Defense Workforce: Opportunities for More Effective Management and Efficiencies* (GAO-23-106966), available at *https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106966.pdf*.

These reductions, undertaken without a "clear strategy for avoiding the adverse effects of downsizing," were criticized by the Government Accountability Office for producing "serious imbalances" in skills and experience, leaving DOD "on the verge of a retirement-driven talent drain." *Defense Workforce: Opportunities for More Effective Management and Efficiencies* (GAO-23-106966), available at *https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-106966.pdf*. See also Peter Levine, Defense Management Reform: How to Make the Pentagon Work Better and Cost Less, 91–92, 141 (Stanford University Press, 2020) (Even after the Packard Commission exposed the "undertrained, underpaid, and inexperienced" acquisition workforce, DOD experienced "a damaging loss of capability in [the same] acquisition workforce" during the acquisition reform era).

Less than a decade later, independent reviews documented what many acquisition shops were already experiencing: an acute shortage of mid–career procurement professionals, stagnant or declining workforce numbers despite increasing workloads, and widening gaps in the skills necessary to manage complex programs. In 2007, the Acquisition Advisory Panel reported that, despite

recent hiring efforts, a severe shortage of procurement professionals with 5 to 15 years of experience remained—a situation expected to worsen as nearly half the workforce became eligible for retirement within four years. See Acquisition Advisory Panel, Report of the Acquisition Advisory Panel to the Off. of Fed. Procurement Pol'y and the U.S Cong. (Jan. 2007). Later that same year, the "Gansler Report" concluded that, despite a dramatic increase in contracting workload, the Army's acquisition workforce remained stagnant or shrinking, and that the number and expertise of military contracting professionals would need to be significantly increased to fill the void. Report of the Commission on Army Acquisition and Program Management in Expeditionary Operations (2007), *https://ogc.altess.army.mil/Documentation/EandF/Guidance/ Gansler%20Commission%20Report _ Final%20Report _ 10-31-07.pdf*.

The impact of these drastic cuts unfolded over the following decades, culminating in a series of high-profile scandals and failures in performance, oversight, integrity, and management that continue to this day. For example, in the mid-2000s, the limited oversight of detention facility contractors at Abu Ghraib, attributed to an understaffed and overtaxed acquisition workforce, was widely viewed as a contributing factor to the human rights abuses that occurred at the facility. See generally, Steven L. Schooner, Contractor Atrocities at Abu Ghraib: Compromised Accountability in a Streamlined, Outsourced Government, 16 Stanford Law & Policy Review 549 (2005), available at *http://ssrn.com/abstract=605367*. During the same period, the Coast Guard's Integrated Deepwater System experienced multibillion-dollar cost overruns and significant design flaws, attributed to deficient program management and a shortage of in-house acquisition expertise. *Coast Guard: Challenges Affecting Deployment and Management and Efforts to Address Them* (GAO-07-874), available at *https://www.gao.gov/assets/a262312.html*.

This pattern continued during the 2008 financial crisis, where, during the implementation of the Troubled Asset Relief Program, the U.S. Department of Treasury made significant cuts to its contract management staff, leaving insufficient personnel to administer over $400 billion in obligations and manage a complex network of contractors. Cong. Oversight Panel, *October Oversight Report: Examining Treasury's Use of Financial Crisis Contracting Authority*, 111th Cong. (2010), *https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-111JPRT61540/html/CPRT-111JPRT61540.htm*. Over the next two decades, GAO repeatedly cited workforce and infrastructure limitations as key contributors to cost overruns, delivery delays, and reduced capabilities in Navy shipbuilding efforts. *Navy Shipbuilding: A Generational Imperative for Systemic Change* (GAO-25-108136), available at *https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-108136*.

Notably, despite decades of warnings, these same challenges continue today, particularly in acquisitions involving emerging technologies. A 2024 GAO audit found that contractors lead most software programs at DOD, highlighting DOD's persistent failure to develop and retain the in-house expertise needed for effective oversight. *Weapon Systems Annual Assessment: DOD Is Not Yet Well Positioned to Execute Its Most Critical Programs* (GAO-24-106831), available at *https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106831.pdf*. The report concluded that "DOD programs have struggled to hire and retain a workforce with sufficient software expertise." Similarly, a 2025 GAO assessment highlighted that for decades, "GAO has identified mission-critical gaps in federal workforce skills and expertise in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. More specifically, there is a severe shortage of federal staff with AI expertise." *Fraud and Improper Payments* (GAO-25-108412), available at *https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-108412.pdf*. See also Artificial Intelligence: Generative AI Use and Management at Federal Agencies (GAO-25-107653), available at *https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-107653.pdf* (describing agency challenges in attracting and developing individuals with expertise in generative AI).

As these examples illustrate, when agencies lack the professional capacity to manage what they purchase, the risks to public services, national security, technological superiority, and critical infrastructure are exacerbated.

Failure to Invest, Predictable Consequences—The longstanding failure to effectively

recruit, develop, and retain the workforce responsible for managing billions of dollars in annual public expenditures has led to serious consequences: inefficient use of public funds, increased risks of procurement and integrity failures, and a continued erosion of public trust in Government. "Procurement is one of those things that few notice until it goes wrong." M. McKee, England's PPE Procurement Failures Must Never Happen Again, BMJ, [British Medical Journal], 370, m2858 (2020). *https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m2858*.

Decades of failing to invest in and prioritize the acquisition workforce have often hindered the Government's ability to provide basic services to the public. Unsurprisingly, an under-resourced acquisition workforce cannot effectively plan, negotiate, or manage contracts, particularly as the volume and complexity of federal procurements continue to grow. This imbalance has led to recurring procurement failures, including inertia, vague or poorly defined requirements, overpayments, delays, and insufficient oversight. The weakening of internal capacity has forced agencies to become excessively reliant on contractors, ultimately weakening Government oversight and undermining accountability. Steven L. Schooner & Daniel S. Greenspahn, Too Dependent on Contractors? Minimum Standards for Responsible Governance, 6 Journal of Contract Management 9 (Summer 2008), available at: *http://ssrn.com/abstract=1263358*; see also Paul C. Light, The Government Industrial Complex: The True Size of the Federal Government 1984–2018, xii, 57–61 (Oxford University Press 2019) (discussing, among other things, the first Trump Administration's plan to deconstruct the administrative state and explaining how this becomes an "outsourcing" approach leading to an increased reliance on contractor and grantee personnel); Steven L. Schooner, "The Well-Reasoned Case for Reversing the Outsourcing Trend: A Review Essay of Jon Michaels' *Constitutional Coup: Privatization's Threat to the American Republic*," 59 GC ¶ 319 (2017).

Despite widespread acknowledgment that the acquisition workforce has never fully recovered from the significant staffing cuts of the 1990s, reform efforts remain largely episodic and symbolic, often failing to address the root causes of this crisis. One notable example was the Office of Federal Procurement Policy's (OFPP) 2005 workforce management initiative, which reclassified lawyers and finance employees as "acquisition personnel," effectively masking shortages within the acquisition workforce. See, e.g., Steven L. Schooner, "Empty Promise for the Acquisition Workforce," 47 GC ¶ 203 & Christopher R. Yukins, "A Pedagogical Perspective On Training The Acquisition Workforce," 47 GC ¶ 204 (2005).

Inadequate recruitment and retention strategies have further hindered agencies from developing a workforce capable of awarding and managing increasingly complex procurements. 47 GC ¶ 203; *Acquisition Workforce: Federal Agencies Obtain Training Requirements but Have Limited Insight into Costs and Benefits* (GAO-13-231), available at *https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-13-231*. As a result, federal acquisition offices face growing performance risks and the perpetuation of a "check-the-box" culture, where procedural compliance is prioritized over sound business judgment and critical thinking. Left unaddressed, these trends stifle innovation and undermine the U.S. Government's ability to achieve best value outcomes for taxpayers.

Rules Over People: Formalism at the Expense of Workforce Development—In the wake of Executive Order 14210 ("Implementing the President's 'Department of Government Efficiency' Workforce Optimization Initiative"), which authorized voluntary early retirements and reductions in force, the current administration has announced a multitude of procurement policy changes that have a shrinking acquisition workforce struggling to perform their jobs. See EO 14210, "Implementing the President's 'Department of Government Efficiency' Workforce Optimization Initiative," 90 Fed. Reg. 12035 (Feb. 14, 2025); EO 14275, "Restoring Common Sense to Federal Procurement," 90 Fed. Reg. 16,447 (Apr. 18, 2025), *https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/18/2025-06839/restoring-common-sense-to-federal-procurement*; EO 14271, "Ensuring Commercial, Cost-Effective Solutions in Federal Contracts," 90 Fed. Reg. 16,433 (Apr. 18, 2025), *https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/18/2025-06835/ensuring-commercial-cost-effective-solutions-in-federal-contracts*.

Despite decades of warnings of the negative consequences that stem from an overtaxed acquisition workforce, the Trump Administration is now asking more of the acquisition workforce than ever before, demanding greater innovation and more strategic thinking under increasingly complex conditions, without the training, resources, or institutional support required for success. Nowhere is this contradiction more visible than in the context of the "Revolutionary FAR Overhaul." *Revolutionary FAR Overhaul*, Acquisition.gov, *https://www.acquisition.gov/far-overhaul*. Although the FAR can hardly be described as concise, the "Revolutionary FAR Overhaul" now requires acquisition professionals to contend with a growing number of additional, disaggregated rules and guides during the acquisition process, including FAR deviations, "Practitioner Albums," and a forthcoming series of "Buying Guides."

The growing complexity of the acquisition policies and guidance only exacerbates the longstanding capacity challenges, as no matter how well written "FAR 2.0" may be, "[e]very passage in the FAR, regardless of whether it is long or short, complex or simple, statutory or not, requires members of the acquisition workforce to read, analyze, interpret, and apply those words." Matthew J. Fleharty, "The Futility of FAR Reform: It's About People, Not Rules," 39 N&CR ¶ 31 (June 2025). The same offices that just lost half their staff must now comply with dramatic changes to the acquisition rulebook and new procedural requirements that will, at least in the near term, reduce efficiency and create new challenges for the workforce.

Recent regulatory initiatives reflect a familiar pattern in U.S. procurement reform: an emphasis on overhauling procedural rules, while neglecting the workforce responsible for implementing them. This moment is déjà vu for "scholars" of the U.S. procurement system who have spent decades warning that the core problem in federal acquisition is not poorly designed regulations, but the chronic underinvestment in the people tasked with implementing them. "[W]e have never thought that the rules are the principal source of the problems in the acquisition business.... [Rather,] the Government/industry acquisition workforce is the heart of acquisition, and that it needs treatment. Sound rules reform is good, but it is not enough. We also know that the problem of providing effective education and training is extremely difficult to solve." Vernon J. Edwards, "Out of the Whirlwind: What Is Going To Happen To Acquisition And The Acquisition Workforce?," 39 N&CR ¶ 22 (April 2025).

Despite this longstanding recognition, reform efforts continue to focus on procedural changes, introducing new compliance requirements and procurement techniques, while overlooking the fundamental issue of workforce capacity. Experience shows that periods of regulatory churn and streamlining place a premium on fundamentals, especially the kind of experience and business judgment that an overhaul of the rules cannot capture. The most capable acquisition professionals exercise discretion and work *within* the rules to deliver innovative and value-driven outcomes. By contrast, the least experienced tend to merely *follow* the rules, often defaulting to rigid compliance at the expense of critical thinking and mission effectiveness. The consequence is a widening gap between lofty policymaking goals and the day-to-day reality of federal acquisition, resulting in a system with increasingly complex rules yet lacking the personnel and expertise necessary to implement them. As Steven Kelman noted decades ago, it would "certainly not hurt ... to accompany the grant of increased discretion with efforts to raise the quality of the federal workforce." Steven Kelman, Procurement and Public Management: The Fear of Discretion and the Quality of Government Performance (The AEI Press 1990) (discussing primarily information technology procurement).

Vern Edwards has eloquently and persuasively made this point and pounded this drum *ad nauseum*. "Regulations do not design, create, and execute processes and make contracts. People do. The real fix to today's messy processes and unsatisfactory outcomes is to educate and train the workforce, which cannot be done in 180 days." Vernon J. Edwards, "The FAR Reform Project: Will Past Be Prologue?," 39 N&CR ¶ 26 (May 2025). Nor is Vern alone in concluding that:

> [A] "Revolutionary FAR Overhaul" alone cannot fix our federal acquisition system. Regardless of what is

> or is not written in the FAR, those words will require people to read them, analyze them, interpret them, and apply them. How well people do those things is what ultimately determines acquisition outcomes. So, unless we make substantial changes and investments in the education and development of our people, the contracting workforce, the FAR overhaul will merely be another acquisition reform effort in a long line of Sisyphean "successes."…
>
> For far too long, we have failed to properly invest in educating our contracting workforce. Few members receive a quality professional education about contracting concepts, principles, rules, processes, procedures, methods, and techniques….
>
> We would be wise to remember [that …] people, not policy, produce revolutions, and … much of what plagues our acquisition system is not due to the FAR, but to a failure of competency that we cannot correct by merely rewriting the rulebook.

Matthew J. Fleharty, "The Futility of FAR Reform: It's About People, Not Rules," 39 N&CR ¶ 31 (June 2025). Exactly.

Most importantly, no matter how 'revolutionary' the latest rules overhaul may appear, its credibility is undermined when launched by an administration that publicly celebrates mass workforce reductions. It is challenging to promote public service and mentorship to top candidates when Government leaders are simultaneously advocating for the elimination of hundreds of thousands of federal positions. Nandita Bose, White House Reviews Mass Federal Layoff Plans, Reuters (July 11, 2025).

If we expect the acquisition workforce to do more (better and faster), we must invest in them. Reforms that emphasize rules without strengthening the capacity of the individuals tasked with implementation fail not due to design flaws, but because of persistent neglect of the workforce. Yet leadership continues to undermine their ability to meet these expectations by failing to invest in the tools that support professional development. For example, funding for participation in industry educational conferences is now routinely denied, and opportunities for advanced training have become increasingly scarce. See generally, Helene Cooper, Pentagon Suspends Its Participation in Think Tank Forums, N. Y. Times (July 24, 2025), *https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/24/us/politics/pentagon-ban-think-tank-events.html*; Thomas Novelly, Trump's Orders Curbing Government Spending Dwindle Attendance at Air Force Conference (March 5, 2025) Military.com, *https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/03/05/trumps-orders-curbing-government-spending-dwindle-attendance-air-force-conference.html*; Dave Lutz, How Is DOGE Impacting the Meetings Industry?, Convene (March 14, 2025), *https://www.pcma.org/doge-impact-meetings-industry/*. The challenges stemming from this disinvestment are compounded by Governmentwide downsizing, declining morale, and corrosive public statements that portray civil servants as expendable and unworthy of their paychecks. James Bickerton, Marjorie Taylor Greene Says Federal Jobs Are 'Not Real Jobs', Newsweek (Feb. 27, 2025), *https://www.newsweek.com/marjorie-taylor-greene-federal-jobs-not-real-2037223*.

Even as understaffed offices grapple with significant policy changes, political appointees are now creating new procedural bottlenecks in agency acquisition processes. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's June 2025 memorandum now requires either secretariat-level approval or a DOGE review for every IT or professional services award over $10 million, as well as for any advisory and assistance contract exceeding $1 million. This new policy has added thousands of reviews to a workforce already operating in a state of crisis. Stan Soloway, SecDef's Recipe for Procurement: A Dash of DOGE with a Pinch of Obama, NextGov (June 9, 2025), *https://www.nextgov.com/ideas/2025/06/secdefs-recipe-procurement-dash-doge-pinch-obama/405903/*. Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem recently mandated that all contracts and grants exceeding $100,000 receive her approval. Gabe Cohen, Noem Demands More Control over FEMA and Homeland Security Funding, Which Could Slow Disaster Response, CNN (June 18, 2025), *https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/18/politics/kristi-noem-fema-dhs-funding*.

Meanwhile, the Government purchase-card program, which, before February 2025, efficiently handled tens of billions in low-dollar purchases, remains frozen across multiple agencies due to unsubstantiated claims of widespread fraud. *Government Purchase Cards: Little Evidence of Potential Fraud Found in Small Purchases, but Docu-*

mentation Issues Exist (GAO-17-276), available at *https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-276*. As a result, offices are now forced to process micro-purchases through slow and cumbersome procurement methods. Anastasia Obis, Purchase Card Freeze Paralyzes Small Business, Leaves Agencies Scrambling, Fed. News Network (Mar. 28, 2025), *https://federalnewsnetwork.com/contracting/2025/03/purchase-card-freeze-paralyzes-small-business-leaves-agencies-scrambling/*.

Instead of restoring capacity and treating the acquisition workforce as the "national strategic asset" that this administration claims it to be, [Modernizing Defense Acquisitions and Spurring Innovation in the Defense Industrial Base, 90 Fed. Reg. 15,621 (Apr. 15, 2025) ("the defense acquisition workforce is a national strategic asset")], the administration has added new layers of red tape, exacerbating delays, increasing transaction costs, further demoralizing an already struggling workforce, and hastening the departure of critically needed acquisition professionals.

The result is a cycle of overload and neglect. New mandates continue to pile onto a depleted workforce with no proportional investment in capacity. As Prof. Sanchez-Graells and Nathan Davies have observed, expecting the procurement corps to absorb ever-growing responsibilities without corresponding resources is like forcing a pedestrian bridge to carry freight. Eventually, it buckles under the weight. Nathan Davies & Albert Sanchez-Graells, Procurement as Infrastructure (June 16, 2025), available at *https://ssrn.com/abstract=5297077*.

Conclusion: Invest in People—There is now a broad consensus in both scholarship and practice that professionalizing the acquisition workforce is essential to effective governance. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes, in *Professionalising the Public Procurement Workforce*, "the capacity of the public procurement workforce is a crucial element of a sound procurement system that delivers efficiency and value for money in the use of public funds." *Professionalizing the Public Procurement Workforce: A Review of Current Initiatives and Challenges*, OECD Public Governance Policy Papers No. 26 (2023), *https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/01/professionalising-the-public-procurement-workforce_aea552cb/e2eda150-en.pdf*. This workforce must be treated not as minions sustaining a back-office function, but as critical infrastructure: essential to public governance, trust, and operational success. To achieve better procurement outcomes, governments must stop treating workforce recruitment, retention, and development expenditures as waste and begin recognizing workforce capacity as an area that demands sustained investment and continual improvement. What is needed now is not an avalanche of procedural revisions, but a framework that treats procurement capacity as that "national strategic asset" worthy of statutory protection, executive support, and insulation from politically expedient cuts.

Indeed, as recently as October 2024, the OFPP was prioritizing recruiting (and retaining) acquisition talent, recognizing that the Federal Government's:

> contracts [are] awarded by tens of thousands of acquisition professionals whose business acumen, analytic and research skills, and judgment are critical to the success of agency missions.... [T]he Federal Government relies heavily on this workforce – the most important element of our successful federal acquisition system - to deliver best value solutions and ensure that the acquisition system is working for all Americans

OFPP Memo, *Building our Best: Recruitment and Retention of the Contracting Workforce* (October 2024), archived at *https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Building-our-Best-Recruitment-and-Retention-of-the-Contracting-Workforce-Final.pdf*; see also, "OFPP Plans To Hire, Train Next Generation Of Acquisition Personnel," 66 GC ¶ 309. The October 2024 OFPP memo reflects what career policymakers have consistently argued: procurement succeeds only when the Federal Government invests in the recruitment and development of its workforce. However, like many prior initiatives, this effort has likely been abandoned under the current administration.

More recently, we were pleased to see a recent

OMB recommendation to Congress that would increase the Acquisition Workforce Training Fund credit from 5 percent to 7.5 percent—a boost that could enable the Federal Acquisition Institute and the Defense Acquisition University to meet new statutory training mandates and close emerging technical knowledge gaps. *Legislative Proposals*, U.S. Gen. Serv. Admin., Acquisition Policy, *https://www.gsa.gov/policy-regulations/policy/acquisition-policy/legislative-proposals* (updated July 16, visited July 17, 2025); Off. of Mgmt. & Budget, 119th Cong., Legislation Proposals: Acquisition Proposals (2025). DOD has also announced plans to "reform, right–size, and train the acquisition workforce." "President Directs DOD to Overhaul Defense Acquisitions," 67 GC ¶ 95(e), citing EO 14265, "Modernizing Defense Acquisitions and Spurring Innovation in the Defense Industrial Base," 90 Fed. Reg. 15621 (Apr. 15, 2025). But this feels like trying to upgrade the paint on a burning barn.

Without a long-term strategy, even a modest funding boost or promise of training will fall short in addressing the crises stemming from decades of neglect. To truly rebuild capacity, increased funding must be accompanied by a comprehensive, long-term and strategic approach that addresses all aspects of this workforce crisis, including, but not limited to, advanced training initiatives, expanded scholarship-for-service programs modeled on the Defense Civilian Training Corps, Dept. of Defense, Defense Civilian Training Corps, *https://dctc.mil/*, and the re-launch of targeted OFPP initiatives aimed at improving recruitment and retention across the contracting workforce.

Of course, no workforce initiative will succeed unless Congress and the Administration make this a priority through consistent, sustained leadership and support. Career staff cannot solve a politically driven capacity problem alone. History demonstrates that well-intentioned, potentially effective efforts are often reversed or left to languish by the following administration, unless enshrined in statute and championed by policymakers committed to the long-term development of acquisition workforce capacity. Achieving this requires more than modest funding increases or hollow rhetoric about acquisition team empowerment. Long-term investment in the acquisition workforce should be treated as a foundational pillar of the federal procurement system. Without sustained commitment, these reforms will eventually wither and be forgotten until the next crisis forces this issue back into the spotlight.

♦

This Feature Comment was written for THE GOVERNMENT CONTRACTOR by* Jessica Tillipman, *Associate Dean for Government Procurement Law Studies and the Government Contracts Advisory Council Distinguished Professorial Lecturer in Government Contracts Law, Practice & Policy, and* Steven L. Schooner, *the Nash & Cibinic Professor of Government Procurement Law, both at the George Washington University Law School. Before joining GW Law, Dean Tillipman served as a law clerk to the Honorable Lawrence S. Margolis of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims and was an associate at Jenner & Block. In addition to private law practice, Professor Schooner previously served in the Army, the Department of Justice, and the Office of Federal Procurement Policy. He is a Fellow of the National Contract Management Association, a Certified Professional Contracts Manager (CPCM), a director of the Procurement Round Table, and a member of the GC Board of Advisors. ***The authors thank Spencer Baker (JD'27) for his diligent research assistance.***

