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**Statement of Doris Hausser,
Panel Member for the Department of Homeland Security
Presidential Transition Study,
National Academy of Public Administration**

On the Presidential Transition

**Before the
Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement of the Federal
Workforce and the District of Columbia,
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,
House of Representatives**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting the National Academy of Public Administration to testify on the best practices for the 2009 Presidential Transition. I served as Panel Member for the Academy's June 2008 report that assessed DHS' executive profile, its transition training, and the department's plans for the 2009 Presidential Transition. Many of the issues and recommendations outlined in that report apply to other departments and agencies, especially those with national or homeland security responsibilities.

The Presidential Transition of 2009 is the first major transition since "9/11." As we point out in our report, recent history demonstrates that political transitions present an opportunity for terrorists to take advantage of real or perceived weaknesses in a nation's ability to detect, deter, prevent or respond to attacks. The final report of the 9/11 Commission raised concerns about the impact of future transitions on the government's ability to deal with terrorism. Owing in part to the delayed resolution of the 2000 election, the incoming Bush administration did not have its deputy Cabinet officials in place until Spring 2001 or its sub-Cabinet officials in place until that summer. Historically, getting the Presidential team in position has been a slow process. The

Commission strongly pushed for changes to the process so that the Nation is not left vulnerable to these types of delays in a post-9/11 world. During the transition, DHS must retain the ability to respond quickly to both man-made and natural disasters.

In light of these issues, Congress and DHS asked the Academy to assess DHS' executive profile, study its transition training, and review its plans for the 2009 Presidential transition. Our June report was the result of the request.

The lessons learned from this work can be applied to other federal departments and agencies. For example, the Academy assessed DHS' allocation of executives between career and political appointees and compared it with other departments. Overall, about 13 percent of DHS' executives are political appointees—about average for all federal departments. The percentage of all executives who are political appointees ranged from 9 percent at the Veterans Administration to 35 percent at the Department of State. But the Academy Panel also noted that 30 or 56 percent of the top 54 executive positions at DHS are filled by political appointees. Large percentages of other departments' top executives are also political—this includes 49 percent at Treasury, 59 percent at Justice and Defense, and 66 percent at the Department of State. At DHS, the Academy Panel recommended that non-career headquarters deputy officials, FEMA regional administrators and other officials be career executives.

Another part of the Academy's DHS study compared DHS' transition training programs with those of similarly structured Cabinet-level agencies. The Academy Panel concluded that DHS' transition training and development efforts are consistent with executive development programs

in most federal agencies and it has a balanced set of transition-specific training programs underway. If implemented, these should help executives prepare to meet their homeland security responsibilities during transition. DHS is well along in its transition training especially given that it is a young agency with a critical national mission and going through its first Presidential transition. The Academy believes other departments could benefit from learning about DHS' transition training.

Finally, the Academy reviewed DHS' transition planning, and the report lays out a series of actions that are tailored to Presidential transition timeframes. Specifically:

- Before the national party conventions. DHS was to have completed, updated and executed its transition plans; identified key operational executive positions; ensured that training and joint exercises had begun; and filled vacant executive positions.
- From the national party conventions to the election. Consistent with the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission and "Sense of the Senate" provisions, DHS should work with Executive Branch agencies and Congress to reach out to the Presidential candidates to identify potential homeland security transition team members and help them obtain security clearances by Election Day.
- From the election to the inauguration. DHS should work with the incoming administration, the Executive Branch and Congress to ensure that the new Secretary of Homeland Security is sworn in on Inauguration Day; that key executives are identified and voted on by the Senate as quickly as possible, recognizing that any day a critical position is vacant is a "gap" in our homeland security coverage; and that transition training and joint exercises are provided to executive appointees and nominees.

- Following Inauguration Day. DHS should continue training of new appointees, nominees and careerists to build trust and operational performance, and reexamine current executive positions and allocations to support administration priorities. Within the first six months of the new administration, DHS should conduct a “capstone” scenario exercise to evaluate the effectiveness of transition planning, training and overall operational readiness.

DHS has begun to address these recommendations. In June it appointed retired Coast Guard Admiral John Acton as a full-time transition director who reports directly to the Deputy Under Secretary for Management. DHS has recently completed a comprehensive plan for all facets of the transition that focuses on several areas:

- Ensuring that management processes are in place and memorialized in policies and procedures;
- Concentrating on knowledge retention for current executives and knowledge transfer to the next administration’s executives;
- Conducting a series of seminars, training, and exercises to make sure current leadership is trained in incident response, as well as positioning the new leaders for these roles; and
- Focusing on the deputy positions in each office and component to make sure they understand transition issues.

In addition, DHS is collaborating with partners such as the Departments of Transportation, Defense, State, and Health and Human Services; State and local governments; and with private industry. Joint training and exercise opportunities are being actively coordinated. Also, the

Academy understands that later this month, OMB is hosting the first Agency Transition Coordination meeting, which will afford an ideal opportunity to enhance collaboration among the federal departments and agencies.

Many of the Academy Panel recommendations for DHS also apply to other federal departments, especially those with national and homeland security responsibilities. For example, the Academy report notes that to the greatest extent possible, incoming DHS leadership—including the Secretary and key staff—must be in place on Inauguration Day or shortly thereafter. Key leadership positions at other federal departments must also be filled quickly. This requires the support and cooperation of federal agencies with background check and clearance responsibilities, as well as the Congress given its confirmation role and responsibilities. The Academy believes that all federal departments and agencies need to begin immediately to address the issues laid out in our DHS report.

Mr. Chairman that concludes my statement. Thank you for inviting the Academy to this Hearing.

I would be happy to respond to any questions.