

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

Opening Statement of Kiran Ahuja

Nominated to be Director, Office of Personnel Management

Thank you, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and Members of the Committee for welcoming me here today. It is an honor to be considered by this Committee as President Biden's nominee for Director of the Office of Personnel Management.

I want to take a moment to recognize my husband, Javier Guzman, who I am pleased to have here with me today and to whom I owe a deal of gratitude for his ongoing support and encouragement.

Finally, I want to thank the Members of the Committee and their staff for taking the time to meet with me. If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I look forward to continuing our conversations and strengthening the relationship between OPM and this Committee.

It is with a degree of humility that I appear before you today. I am the daughter of Indian immigrants and very much a product of the American dream. My family came to this country in the early 1970's when I was two years old. My father was a trained psychiatrist who accepted an opportunity to serve in rural hospitals across the South at a time when there was great need and demand. My childhood was spent in small towns and cities across Georgia, Louisiana, and Florida where I learned how to build bridges with people from all walks of life. Those formative years were challenging at times, but thankfully, they also taught me adaptability, perseverance, resiliency, and a sense of purpose that has informed and guided me every day since.

After graduating from Spelman College, an historically black college in Atlanta, and the University of Georgia School of Law, I answered an early call to public service beginning my

career as a trial attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice through the Department's Honors Program. I went on to lead mission-oriented organizations of all sizes in the non-profit and public sectors. This included a return to public service, first as the Executive Director of the White House Initiative for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders responsible for increasing access to and participation in federal programs, and later as Chief of Staff at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

During my tenure at OPM, I had the opportunity to witness firsthand the commitment, hard work, and dedication of the OPM staff and the federal workforce. I worked alongside individuals who take very seriously their oath of public office and work every day to successfully fulfill their agency's mission. I believe people are and should be at the center of all policy decisions, and, if I were fortunate enough to be confirmed, I would carry forward this guiding principle while working in service to the American public.

If confirmed, I pledge to protect our merit system principles, a bedrock of our civil service. It would be my mission to serve and support federal employees and to restore, rebuild, and retool the federal workforce. OPM will need to innovate to meet the modern needs of agencies with respect to recruitment, hiring, retention, engagement, and performance management. And, of course, OPM also needs to honor federal retirees by providing them the high-level service they deserve. OPM cannot do this alone, and, if confirmed, I'm committed to working with government partners – including Congress – to ensure OPM has the support and resources necessary to fulfill its mission and that the agency is held accountable to its obligations.

As I reflect upon the examples my parents set, I think of their extraordinary journey, work ethic, and their commitment to underserved communities in Savannah, Georgia. My

parents began their lives as refugees following the Partition of India, and despite all odds, my father obtained his medical degree. My father worked well into his later years, including starting a medical clinic for underserved Georgians in the inner-city of Savannah. My mother also worked at the clinic – though not a doctor, she was the heart and soul of the operation, and fully embraced her role as a servant for public good. They both so embraced the culture and diversity of America, that even during my mother’s retirement, she taught country line dancing at the senior center. My dad and the other husbands sat in chairs along the side of the room, while the women had a blast on the dance floor. I still get text messages from some of her students. And though they have both passed away, I hope their examples live on through my own commitment to public service and community engagement.

If confirmed, it would be an honor and the privilege of my professional career to return once again to public service as OPM’s Director.

I thank the Committee for considering my nomination, and I look forward to working with you all.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you very much.