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Urgent Business for America

National Commission on the Public Service Releases Report; Calls for Sweeping Changes to Revitalize the Federal Government Volcker Report Emphasizes Need for Immediate Action

"Fundamental Change In the Organizational and Personnel Structures of the Federal Government Must Become a High Priority for the President and Congress"

For Immediate Release

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Washington, DC (January 7, 2003) — Concurrent with the convening of the 108th Congress, the National Commission on the Public Service released its report today, urging the President and the new Congress to undertake a sweeping reorganization of the federal government.

The report, titled *Urgent Business for America: Revitalizing the Federal Government for the 21st Century*, declares that "the organization of the federal government and the operation of public programs are not good enough: Not good enough for the American people, not good enough to meet the extraordinary challenges of the century just beginning, and not good enough for the hundreds of thousands of talented federal workers who hate the constraints that keep them from serving their country with the full measure of their talents and energy."

The report calls upon the President and the Congress for immediate action in five areas:

- 1) Debate concerning, and enactment of, broad reorganizational authority,
- 2) Implementation of a proposal to speed and streamline the presidential appointments process,
- 3) Acknowledgement of the growing risk to the judicial system of inadequate salaries of federal judges.
- 4) Review of the salary compression at senior executive levels. Review and elimination of the linkage of executive branch salaries, judicial salaries and those of Congress
- 5) Concerted efforts to recruit and retain employees in the federal government

In releasing the report, Chairman Paul Volcker said: "Now is the time to take advantage of the crisis and opportunity presented by the reality of terrorism, the impending deluge of retirements among senior government employees, and the recognition by policy makers and our fellow Americans that we must and can do better."

The Need

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Urgent Business for America

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The recommendations address key areas of concern, including:

- Citizen disaffection with, and distrust of, government;
- The organizational chaos which defines much of the federal government and the resulting absence of mission clarity;
- The impending wave of retirements coupled with government's inability to attract the skilled talent needed today;
- Personnel systems designed for the workforce of the 1950s;
- Labor management conflict and distrust.

The Recommendations

The Commission report makes fourteen key recommendations for the reform and reorganization of government. The recommendations are both targeted and wide-ranging, and include proposals designed to enhance all aspects of government, including Organization, Leadership and Operational Effectiveness. They call for:

- A fundamental reorganization of the federal government into a limited number of mission-related executive departments containing individual operating agencies with management and personnel systems designed for their needs;
- Realigning House and Senate committee oversight to match this mission-driven reorganization of federal agencies;
- Reform of the presidential appointments process, accompanied by a significant reduction in the number of executive branch political positions;
- A new Executive Management Corps and a Professional and Technical Corps to replace the Senior Executive Service;
- Setting executive, judicial and congressional salaries at levels commensurate with the non-profit sector;
- Salary reform government wide to permit agencies to set compensation related to current market comparisons, with advancement and compensation tied closely to performance;
- Competitive outsourcing practices which advance the public interest and do not undermine core competencies of the government;
- A new commitment and new approaches to enhance labor management relations.

The Commission did not shrink from making recommendations that may be viewed as radical. Commission Chairman Paul Volcker states: "We have grown too accustomed to government reorganization occurring piecemeal. The government of the 21st century demands fast action and implementation, and these recommendations are targeted towards this."

The Volcker Commission stresses: "If we do not make the necessary changes now, when our needs are clear, we will be forced to cope with the consequences later in crisis after crisis."

In its assessment of the need to improve performance as "urgent and compelling," the report recalls the urgent warnings cited by the authors of the Hart Rudman Commission report. The report emphasizes that not only must fundamental change become a high priority for the President and Congress, but that "encouraging and supporting that change must become a high priority for American citizens." The Commission notes: "The national emergency which led to the massive reorganization of the disparate agencies with responsibility for homeland security is a wake-up call to the government wide need for mission focus and managerial

flexibility."

In recognizing the report's recommendations are sweeping in scope, the Commission report states that "the broad reorganization activity in this report will not be the work of months or a single session of Congress, it should be an agenda for years."

A complete copy of the report, and acknowledgement of its contributors, can be obtained at www.brookings.edu/volcker. For additional information or a copy of the report, contact Gina Russo at (202) 797-6405 or grusso@brookings.edu.

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