



Asian American Government Executives Network

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MANAGING DIVERSITY OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP IN THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND POSTAL SERVICE

Statement of
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Before

The United States Senate Committee on
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,
Subcommittee of Government
Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia

And

The United States House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce,
Postal Service and the District of Columbia

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Washington, D.C.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka, Chairman Davis and Distinguished Members of the House and Senate.

My name is Carson Eoyang and I serve as the Executive Director of the Asian American Government Executive Network (AAGEN) which was founded in 1994 as a non-profit, non-partisan organization of current and former senior government officials. Our mission is to promote, expand and support Asian Pacific American leadership in the Federal, state and local governments.

On behalf of AAGEN, we are very appreciative of this opportunity to speak in favor of the Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Bill. We applaud your proactive leadership in addressing this critical but neglected challenge confronting our federal civil service. We proudly join our fellow federal executive associations to support this landmark legislation. Our arguments are simple.

1. Asian Pacific Americans are significantly under represented in the SES.
2. Progress in SES diversity has been slow, uneven and inconsistent.
3. The SES Diversity Assurance Act is long overdue.

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS IN THE SES

When AAGEN previously testified on this subject before the House Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Reform, on October 15, 2003, we made the following observations.

> In 1999, the number of Asian Pacific Americans (APA) in the career SES reached 100, or about 1.6 percent of the total. Seven¹ of the 24 Chief Financial Officer (CFO) agencies had no APA's in the career SES ranks.

>Based on current separation and hiring trends, GAO projected that the number of APA's in the career SES should have increased modestly to 104 by 2007. According to those projections, APAs would make up 1.7 percent of the total SES workforce, which is lower than their representation in the federal workforce, and in the population at large. Compared to the 2000 levels, the slight increase of APA women (from 33 to 39) will be offset by a corresponding decline of APA men (from 70 to 65). According to GAO projections, as many as 9 out of 24 CFO agencies,² - one more than in 1990 - will have no APA's in the career SES by the year 2007

¹ HUD, Labor, State, OPM, AID, SBA, and FEMA.

² Education, HUD, Interior, Labor, State, OPM, SBA, AID, and FEMA. AID and FEMA no longer exist due to AID's merger with the Department of State and FEMA's migration to the Department of Homeland Security.

> According to the GAO, representation of APA's in the career SES ranks was "more than 50 percent below its percentage in five out of six labor forces"³ selected by the GAO – it was the most significant disparity among all of the women and racial and ethnic groups studied by the GAO.

> The GAO reports confirm that APA's are severely under-represented at the SES and other senior levels of the Federal government and that there are serious concerns about the lack of inclusion of APA's at the pipeline levels and in succession planning.

BETTER PROGRESS IN SES DIVERSITY IS NEEDED

Regrettably four and a half years later, inclusion of APA's in the SES has not significantly improved. While the GAO projections may not have been perfect in every agency, to our knowledge there is no agency whose SES ranks matches or exceeds the APA ratio of 5.89% of the entire Federal Executive Branch in FY 2006. The number of Asian Pacific Americans in all upper grades from GS13 through SES in the entire Federal government only totaled 3.72% in FY2006.

With the potential retirement of many if not most of the career SES over the next five years, ensuring diversity in our senior ranks is even more important as we grow the next generation of senior executives. While Administration officials continue to urge progress in making the federal civil service and its top leadership look like America, this progress has been slow, uneven and inconsistent. In dynamic, complex, and sometimes turbulent global markets, diversity in the executive ranks of Corporate America is an imperative for economic and financial success. This imperative is even more critical for our government if we are to serve effectively our increasingly pluralistic society as well as to compete and collaborate in multiple international environments

There is a wide disparity in the degree of workforce diversity across the federal government with little concrete evidence on why some agencies have consistently been unrepresentative of the nation as a whole, while others have made measured if only partial progress during the same time frame. Unfortunately there has been too little study of recent executive branch diversity efforts. While it is easy to measure the changes in demographics, it is more difficult to understand the causes. It is important that the Executive Branch and the Congress address the various factors that promote and inhibit federal workforce diversity such as minority recruitment, building talent pipelines, succession planning, management development and most importantly sustained commitment of agency senior leaders to diversity.

The federal government should have a diverse workforce not only to demonstrate that it represents the American population, but also because

³ GAO-01-377, page 31, Table 1.

diversity enhances the effectiveness of government. For example, our various law enforcement agencies at all levels and across the country must begin to mirror our nation's diversity if they are to maintain domestic peace and equitably enforce our laws within and across our social strata. Failure to have diversity in the law enforcement may lead to misunderstanding and assumptions of prejudice by communities that are not represented. However the Department of Justice reported that only 2.9% of its workforce in FY2007 was APA, with the likelihood of an even lower percentage for their SES.

NEED FOR SES DIVERSITY ASSURANCE ACT

The SES Diversity Assurance Act is a long overdue and welcome correction to past policies and practices that have not been adequate to expand executive diversity across our government. Without this legislation it is unlikely that the SES will adapt quickly enough to meet the enormous global and domestic challenges of the 21st century.

Moreover the lack of SES diversity will be compounded throughout the entire federal workforce, as future generations of potential leaders and executives will be discouraged from pursuing careers in organizations that are visibly characterized as non-inclusive at their most senior levels. If the civil service is to attract and retain the best and brightest from all sectors of America, then there must be sufficient numbers of diverse SES role models at all federal agencies. Otherwise our talented young professionals will migrate to those organizations that place no such artificial ceilings on their career advancement.

Agencies must include diversity as a strategic goal of their agencies' Human Capital Planning and goal accomplishment must be measured just as other high priority mission performance measures. Ultimately, unless substantive initiatives are taken to attract and retain a diverse workforce—starting from building a diverse pipeline, to planning for succession which includes diversity as a key element, and selecting senior leaders with diversity as one of the key goals, then the status quo will continue.

Establishing a single office to ensure that the SES is reflective of national diversity is a critical element to effective and responsible oversight of the entire federal SES. The Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act will bring much needed visibility and accountability in advancing and measuring the degree of progress in increasing the number of women and minorities in the SES. This legislation will require the Federal government to institute policies, practices and reporting processes that will clearly advance our common goals of equal opportunity and diversity.

The oversight to be exercised by the Senior Executive Services Resource Office will raise the visibility of executive diversity across all agencies by

collecting and publishing SES demographic statistics, thereby increasing the accountability of agency leaders for their rates of progress or lack thereof. By requiring public access to these statistics, this legislation will remedy a long standing frustration over the unavailability of accurate, complete and timely SES diversity data by agency.

In addition, this legislation requires that agencies establish SES evaluation panels with explicit membership by women and minorities to review executive qualifications for each SES candidate and to certify those best qualified for each executive vacancy. Ensuring diverse perspectives in the SES selection process is an important step towards achieving more diverse executive appointments.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we encourage both Committees to continue to exercise vigorous oversight over the evolution of the Senior Executive Service. We recommend that regular studies by the General Accountability Office be conducted to assess the degrees and rates of progress in executive diversity across all federal agencies. Where particular challenges and obstacles for specific minorities such as Asian Pacific Americans are identified, the Executive Branch in collaboration with the Congress should formulate and implement appropriate remedies and solutions to ensure that our Senior Executive Service is truly reflective of all parts of American society.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to share our views.