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**ORAL TESTIMONY OF THE
FEDERALLY EMPLOYED WOMEN (FEW)**

**Presented by FEW President
Rhonda Trent**

**HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

HEARING ON “Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act”

April 3, 2008

**Federally Employed Women (FEW)
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FEW is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1968 after Executive Order 11375 – that added sex discrimination to the list of prohibited discrimination in the federal government – was issued. FEW has grown into a proactive organization serving the more than one million federally employed women (both civilian and military). FEW is the only organization dedicated solely to eliminating sex discrimination in the federal workplace, and the only organization that monitors legislation particularly of concern to women employed in the federal government.

INTRODUCTION

Federally Employed Women (FEW) very much appreciates the opportunity to participate in this important hearing on the “Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act.” Passage of these bills in both congressional chambers is a top legislative priority for the more than one million women employed in the federal government and military. We thank Chairmen Danny Davis and Daniel Akaka for their leadership and proactive work towards the fulfillment of a truly diverse Senior Executive Service in the federal workforce.

BACKGROUND

FEW is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1968 after Executive Order 11375 – that added sex discrimination to the other forms of discrimination prohibited in the federal government – was issued. The early organizers of FEW realized that the government could dismantle the Federal Women’s Program (FWP) that was established after E.O. 11375 was issued within most federal agencies and they wanted to ensure that there would always be an organization dedicated to promoting equality for women and addressing concerns of women in the federal workforce.

As a private organization, FEW works as a constructive pressure group to improve the status of women employed by the federal government. This includes contact with Congress to encourage progressive legislation. FEW national officers also meet with agency officials at all levels to demonstrate support of the FWP, encourage officials to support the program and to obtain insight on the effectiveness of the FWP at agency and local levels. FEW has been called on in past years to testify before Congress on sexual discrimination, Senior Executive Service (SES) diversity and sexual harassment cases.

For 40 years, Federally Employed Women has been working to end sexual discrimination and enhance opportunities for the advancement of women in government. Every day, nationwide, FEW members work together to bring about

an awareness of the issues facing women throughout the federal government and achieve positive reforms and equality for women in the federal workplace. In addition, FEW members support all efforts within the government to improve operations and efficiencies in the federal workforce.

FEW'S WORK FOR DIVERSITY

Diversity remains very important for FEW and its members. As an organization, we offer diversity training annually at our national, regional and chapter training programs.

With respect to these two bills, FEW and its members have been extremely active. First, we hand-delivered individualized packets to every House and Senate member that enclosed a fact sheet on these bills. Included was a letter requesting that legislators co-sponsor and support these measures. We also enclosed employment statistics detailing the number of federal employees working in each congressional district and state. Within a couple of days, several staffers contacted FEW's Washington Representative to announce that their bosses were adding their names as co-sponsors.

Our members have also been extremely busy sending letters directly to their legislators urging them to co-sponsor these bills. So far, these letters have successfully resulted in 2 more co-sponsors.

FEW also participated in the press conference organized by Chairmen Davis and Akaka when they introduced their bills. We followed this with a press release of our own, as well as several others since that event that discuss the diversity bills and FEW's commitment to moving them through the legislative process. These releases have resulted in several news articles in publications read by federal workers nationwide.

Finally, on March 10, 2008, FEW sent to 22 federal agencies a survey on the status of women in the government. The survey asked a variety of questions

regarding alternative work schedules, training opportunities, career development programs, upward mobility programs, formal mentoring program, and training dollars targeted towards women. This survey will be used to assess the areas needing support and direction for women to advance in their careers. It will be compiled into a report to be presented to the agencies responding, as well as to Congress. Our goal is to establish a tool to direct focus, identify barriers, and plan for future needs to ensure the federal female workforce is receiving the support and direction it needs to progress.

PROGRESS IN DIVERSITY

The latest employment and demographic statistics available from the Office of Personnel Management are from September 2007. According to these latest totals, women represent 44% of the federal workforce, yet only 29.14% of the Senior Executive Service.¹ The last known statistics of women in grades 13 through 15 was 125,889 in 2006.² Employees from these grades are referred to as “feeder” pools from which SES candidates are sourced.

FEW’S SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In conjunction with the May 2007 Subcommittee hearing, we testified to several suggestions that could improve the ability of women and minorities to move up through the ranks and into the Senior Executive Service. Many of these were included in the SES Diversity bills introduced in each chamber.

In summary, we had suggested that in order to improve the representation of women in management and other senior level positions, we must:

- Ensure that managers and supervisors are held accountable for diversity.

¹ Office of Personnel Management, Federal Human Resources Data, FedScope (<http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/>), September 2007.

² Annual Report to the Congress, Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program, FY 2006, page 5.

- Ensure that women have a meaningful and decisive role on committees, task forces and other decision-making entities.
- Ensure the assignments given to women are not purely task-oriented, but rather include decision-making and strategic thinking roles.
- Conduct focus groups and surveys to identify barriers to women.
- Provide networking training on issues that affect women in the workforce.
- Provide better educational and leadership development opportunities for women at all levels of the federal workforce.
- By far, the lack of training and cross-training has been cited as a major impediment for women moving into the top levels of the federal government.
- There are no formal mentoring programs for women in the federal government. Women need to have leaders to whom they can ask questions, obtain advice about their careers, receive suggestions on career moves, training needs, and special project assignments, and obtain general information about the process of moving up the career ladder.

Again, we very much appreciate the Subcommittee and Chairman's interest in increasing diversity in the Senior Executive Service and all the support you have given federal workers in the past. I, and the FEW members, offer to help in any way to ensure that more women and minorities can aspire and succeed in entering the Senior Executive Service.