



the voice of career federal executives since 1980

820 First Street N.E., Suite 700 • Washington, D.C. 20002 • (202) 927-7000 • Fax (202) 927-5192 • www.seniorexecs.org

TESTIMONY

of

WILLIAM L. BRANSFORD

General Counsel

SENIOR EXECUTIVES ASSOCIATION

Before the

FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OVERSIGHT & GOVERNMENT REFORM
COMMITTEE

November 13, 2007

Chairman Davis and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

The Senior Executives Association (SEA), the professional association representing the interests of members of the career Senior Executive Service and those holding equivalent positions, appreciates the Subcommittee's focus on the important topic of how to promote diversity in the senior ranks of government. I have been happy to work with committee staff and other interests in an effort to strive to achieve greater diversity in the senior ranks of government in a practical way which respects merit system principals, and am pleased to continue our discussion on this issue here today concerning Legislative Branch agencies.

As SEA stated at the May 05, 2007 hearing on SES diversity in the Executive Branch before this Subcommittee, we believe the SES of the future must fully represent the diversity of America. It is not only the right thing to do, but achieving diversity will pay dividends by producing a government led by executives who are even better able to respond to and provide services to all Americans. SEA believes this is achievable only through proper data, a strong pipeline, and—most of all—strong, central leadership on the issue

Legislative Branch agencies tend to follow the same guidelines as those in the Executive Branch when it comes to career executive personnel. We understand that the systems vary in different agencies, but merit selection plans apply, and general principles of requiring executive leadership qualifications are applicable. Executive and Legislative Branch agencies also share similar problems when it comes to their SES corps. Both have concerns about diversity and developing the pipeline of candidates being trained and recruited to become part of the SES corps.

SEA has stated its support in the past for greater collection of data on the SES. We would like to see OPM be a greater guide for the SES by collecting greater data, consolidating policy and programs into one office, and acting as a clearinghouse for agencies in need of guidance, the central office will be invaluable in guiding the SES to greater diversity. A central OPM SES Resource office can provide best practices for both Executive and Legislative Branch agencies. SEA believes that legislative branch agencies could be required to meet periodically with a central SES resource office at the Office of Personnel Management. Without such an office, there will continue to be no central voice of leadership on SES matters and many agencies will continue to implement SES policy differently on issues ranging from diversity to pay and performance issues.

SEA would also suggest legislative branch agencies consider a council which provides coordination for sharing best practices on diversity and addressing pipeline issues. This would contribute to ensuring best practices when it comes to hiring a diverse workforce, not to mention the cohesiveness of the SES corps and general workforce best practices as a whole.

When approaching the challenges of diversity in Executive agencies, some have

suggested a proactive approach in managing for diversity through structural changes to their Executive Resources Boards or to the selection process. These committees might have a different name in a Legislative Branch agency, depending on how the agency manages its executive corps, but the concept is the same. SEA believes that structural changes can help and should focus on both the selection process and pipeline development. SEA supports a proven model to allow for what we have termed Executive Resources Board Diversity Subcommittees. It is modeled after a process developed by former Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson. The Subcommittee would have oversight responsibility, including authority to review selections made by the Executive Resources Board and to reverse any selection that it deemed did not provide significant outreach to or consideration of minority and women candidates. Further, this subcommittee would be responsible for ensuring a diverse pipeline through guiding minority outreach and leadership development for SES recruitment. We believe that Executive Resources Board Diversity Subcommittees consisting of agency career Senior Executives, a majority of whom must be either minority or female, would be an effective way for legislative branch agencies to assure a diverse Senior Executive Service. Such a strong leadership group would provide pro-active monitoring and managing of diversity.

SEA applauds Chairman Davis for taking the first steps to addressing issues concerning diversity, proper oversight and providing much needed data on the SES corps. SEA believes it is necessary to begin improving the candidate pipeline, addressing pay concerns, and—most of all—have greater leadership, if we are going to achieve diversity in the SES.