

Testimony of
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Before the House Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal
Service, and the District of Columbia, and the Senate
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the
Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, April 3, 2008.

Good afternoon, my name is William A. Brown SR. I am a retired federal senior service executive, and President of the African American Federal Executive Association Incorporated. AAFEA was founded in 2002 by four African American members of the Senior Executive Service. Our purpose is the professional development and advancement of African Americans into the senior levels of Government.

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Representative Danny Davis and Senator Akaka, their committees and staff for introducing the Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act. This landmark legislation will go a long way in correcting the underrepresentation of minorities and women in the Senior Executive Service. This underrepresentation was validated by the Government Accountability Offices' testimony before this Subcommittee on May 10, 2007. With regards to African Americans, GAO testified that only 8.6 percent of the approximately 6300 career members of the senior executive service were African Americans. Between October of 2000 and October of 2006 the percentage of African American men in the SES dropped from 5.5 percent to 5.1 percent. During the same period, the percent of African American women in the SES increased from 2.9 to 3.5 percent. Looking at the total percentages in October 2000, African Americans represented 8.4 percent of the SES and six years later they represented 8.6 percent an increase of two tenths of a percent in six years. Approximately 90 percent of the entire cadre of career Senior Executives are expected to retire in the next ten years. If current trends are allowed to continue in ten years when we would have replaced these executives, African

American may represent 8.9 percent or an overall increase of .3 of a percent. Another way of saying this is 91.1 percent of these vacancies at the current trend will not be filled with highly qualified African Americans.

The SES Diversity Assurance Act will correct this situation by ensuring that as agencies go about the business of filling SES vacancies the selection process will be fair, consistent among federal agencies and that minorities and women are considered and evaluated against the same objective criteria as others.

Today marks my third visit to the hill to testify on diversity in the SES and ways to improve it. I testified on October 15, 2003 and May 10, 2007 and as I do so today I am confident that this legislation is the roadmap our nation needs to make the highest levels of government representative of the mosaic of America.

Our organizations 225 African American senior leaders have written to their members of congress urging passage of this legislation in its present form. The responses we have received overwhelming support this Act. Yet despite the underrepresentation of minorities in the SES some organizations are calling for voluntary implementation of the Act's requirement that diverse selection panels be used to recommend candidates for selection to the SES. AAFEA does not support such viewpoints. Federal agencies have had years to voluntarily diversify and failed to do so as the governments own statistics point out. We see voluntary implementation as an effort to slow roll the diversity mandate, deprive our nation of the talent it desperately needs to maintain its' position of leadership in the world, and deprive our nation of the opportunity to avert an approaching workforce crises.

Since 2003 our organization has conducted three national training workshops where we trained over 450 senior level African Americans in core subjects critical for any member of the SES. Many of these courses were taught by retired senior executives and have produced for our nation a cadre of what I refer to as "Leadership Ready Candidates for Senior Executive Service"

positions. Despite this training by experts, African Americans continue to be passed over disproportionately for SES positions. This reaffirms our organizations' position that the reason our federal workforce is not adequately diversified is not because of a lack of training but due to flaws in the selection process. The SES Diversity Assurance Act, as written, will correct this situation by requiring the use of a selection panel consisting of three individuals, of which one person must be a female and one must be a minority.

Some are also suggesting that we return to practices used in yesteryear. We looked at past agency programs to see if they were applicable to the present crises and found none. As an example, under former Secretary Richardson, the Department of Energy was successful in increasing the number of minorities in the SES. Secretary Richardson took a personal interest in the mandate and actively participated. The drawback to his approach was that it worked as long as he was Secretary, it was implemented in one agency, DOE, and it was personally and not process driven. We salute DOE for their initiatives however; this was the exception not the rule. The majority of federal agencies continue to do business as usual meaning interviewing but not selecting qualified minorities for senior positions. The SES Diversity Assurance Act will weed out bias against minorities. It establishes a process where the selection of senior executives will be consistent, institutionalized across the entire federal government and driven from both the bottom and the top beginning with the three person diverse selection board and commencing with validation of the candidate by the Head of the Agency.

The process mandated in the SES Diversity Assurance Act will cause selecting officials to take selection and diversity seriously and it will hold selecting officials and agency heads accountable for their actions/decisions.

Mr. Chairman, we are a nation at war. Our men and women, white, brown, black, short, tall are being called to fight and if necessary die defending our nations' interest around the world. We are also at war at home with bigotry and indifference to minorities, with access to senior executive positions being denied everyday to people of color. Our military is not just looking for one

completion of people to serve so why should our senior executive service be any different.

AAFEA says full speed ahead with this ACT. It is a step in the right direction, it levels the playing field and it draws upon the full resources of our nation to solve the impending workforce crises.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee. The African American Federal Executive Association Incorporated stands ready to assist any federal agency in achieving diversity in the senior executive service ranks within our limited resources. Together we can provide our nation with the leadership and talent necessary to tackle the challenges a diverse world poses now and will pose in the foreseeable future.

Thank you!