

Statement by

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Before the

House Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce,
Postal Service and the District of Columbia

and

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the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

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Thank you, Chairmen Akaka and Davis, Ranking Members Voinovich and Marchant and Members of the Subcommittees. It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss diversity issues within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), especially regarding our career Senior Executive Service (SES) cadre.

Secretary Chertoff, Acting Deputy Secretary Paul Schneider and Deputy Under Secretary for Management Elaine Duke are committed to increasing diversity within the Department, particularly within the Department's career Senior Executive Service. For example, under Secretary Chertoff's leadership, the number of career Senior Executives who are persons with disabilities has increased dramatically.

It is my privilege to serve as the Department's Acting Chief Human Capital Officer, a position to which I was appointed just last month, and also as its Director of Workforce Relations and Performance Culture, a position that I have held since joining the Department in May 2007. My service to the Department has furthered my understanding of the importance and benefits of maintaining a qualified and diverse workforce.

The Department has continued its efforts to develop such a workforce, particularly with regard to its corps of career Senior Executives. To date, that effort has enjoyed achievements that DHS will continue to build upon. DHS will continue to address challenges that remain.

Indeed, we are making an effort to develop a qualified and diverse pool of applicants for SES positions by preparing current GS-14 and GS-15 employees through new programs, such as:

- Mentoring and coaching programs,
- Rotational assignments,
- The DHS Fellows Program, and
- The SES Candidate Development Program – of the 23 DHS employees just selected for the next SES Candidate Development Program, 22% are African American, 13% are Hispanic, and 30% are women.

We believe it is imperative to explore a variety of means to ensure more diverse applicant pools for all our jobs, for the present and for years to come.

Starting with recruitment efforts, we have implemented Department and component recruitment strategies designed to improve the diversity of the DHS talent pool, including:

- Creating an SES-level Director of Recruiting and Diversity within our Chief Human Capital Office, who is responsible for implementing strategic programs to recruit a larger diversity talent pool for all jobs within DHS, including the SES;
- Establishing a formal partnership with the Urban League's Black Executive Program (BEEP) whereby 150 DHS employees have volunteered, with managerial endorsement, to serve as presenters and speakers at BEEP events at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs);
- Pursuing similar partnerships with the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE) and the African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEEA); and

- Exploring the assistance of an executive search firm with a proven record in enhancing diversity.

In my previous role as Director of Workforce Relations and Performance Culture, I initiated plans to create Labor Management Councils at DHS. As Acting Chief Human Capital Officer, I will ensure that diversity is a focus of these Councils.

In order to demonstrate the Department-wide commitment to diversity, DHS has designated our Management Council as the DHS Diversity Council. This Council is composed of top-level officials from every component and chaired by the Deputy Under Secretary for Management. Among the Council's most pressing actions will be to issue a DHS Corporate Diversity Strategy and to implement a Diversity Action Plan (DAP) for the remainder of FY 2008 through FY 2010.

In the coming year, DHS will pursue a number of other avenues aimed at increasing diversity. As a first step, we have begun to identify requirements for a consultant to conduct a cultural audit of the Department.

We are reviewing our SES hiring procedures to identify potential practices and procedures that would integrate attention to diversity in our processes.

Other plans include:

- Establishing an external Diversity Outreach Advisory Forum of interested stakeholders to assist in DHS' diversity outreach plans and efforts;
- Ensuring the accuracy of the current racial and gender information in the personnel database;
- Prototyping diversity management training for managers and executives; and

- Issuing specific guidance to hold executives accountable for the “Diversity Advocate” competency in their performance plans.

These efforts are critical given that 26% of our career executives are eligible to retire in 2008, 34% in 2009, and 41% will be eligible for retirement in 2010.

The Department of Homeland Security is only five years old. When the President and Congress called for the integration of 22 disparate agencies, we answered the call and stood up an agency that today is nearly 210,000 employees strong.

I have had the opportunity to meet with and observe the hard work and dedication of employees from across the Department. I have also observed that our ability to deliver on our critical mission depends upon the hard work, knowledge, diligence and insights of these employees.

By reflecting America’s diversity, our employee workforce will provide the widest range of ideas and solutions to protect America. We are committed to achieving a diverse DHS workforce, including our executive cadre.

We are pleased with your interest and support in ensuring that DHS continues to increase the diversity of its workforce and we look forward to working further with you to ensure continued success.