

**Testimony of
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President, African American Federal Executive Association Inc.
Before the House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the
District of Columbia, May 10, 2007**

Good afternoon, my name is William A. Brown SR. I am President of the African American Federal Executive Association Incorporated. I am a retired federal senior service executive, SES level 5. The African American Federal Executive Association Incorporated was founded in 2002 by me and three other members of the Senior Executive Service. AAFEA has one purpose, the professional development and advancement of African Americans into the senior levels of Government. While our membership is open to any federal employee in grades GS-13 thru SES, the overwhelming majority of our members are African Americans in grades GS-14, 15 and SES. We have held three national conferences and training workshops attended by over 550 federal employees. At these training events African American senior executives conducted workshops and counseled and mentored other African Americans seeking SES positions. We also used these conferences to obtain further insight into many of the challenges facing African Americans as they strive to compete for SES positions. I would also like to mention that everyone in our organization is a volunteer, we have no paid positions in our organization. With that as a backdrop I would like to comment on SES diversity in the federal government.

Currently there are 6100 SES positions in the federal government. Only 200 or 3.2 percent of these positions are occupied by African Americans. This appalling statistic has remained constant for the last seven or eight years despite increased emphases on training,

temporary assignments and other initiatives. These statistics clearly support the position our organization articulated in 2003 during a congressional hearing 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. Many of our members have accepted temporary assignments, moved their families across country and in some case outside of the country, obtained advanced degrees at their own expense while others had their education supported by their agency and gone the extra mile in hopes of advancing to the next level of federal service only to be denied that opportunity by selecting officials. What is ironic is that by denying African Americans advancement into the senior ranks of government selecting officials are denying American the talent it needs to keep our nation strong.

Over the next ten years approximately 89 percent of the senior federal workforce is expected to retire. AAFEA recommends that the following steps be taken so that the resulting replacement workforce will represent the mosaic of America.

1. We recommend that this sub-committee champion legislation mandating that federal agencies use the following process for selecting individuals for positions in grades GS 14, 15 and SES. All federal agencies would be required to use panels comprised of three people to screen and select all individuals for positions at grade GS-14 through SES. At least one member of each panel would be required to be a minority and the panel would be required to provide written justification for their selection and their non-selection. This written justification would have to be approved by the Agency Head before the position could be offered to the selected individual. Mr. Chairman we believe this process will cause selecting officials to take selection and diversity seriously and it will hold selecting officials and agency heads accountable for their actions/decisions. We have heard many

stories of individuals being selected for promotion by their immediate supervisor with no other input from any other supervisor and no other person being seriously considered for the vacancy. This selection of individuals who look, feel and talk like current selecting officials is counter to achieving diversity in the work place and has no place in our federal workforce. Diversity will never occur if we allow this selection process to continue.

2. We recommend that this subcommittee task the General Accountability Office with conducting a detailed study on diversity in federal agencies, by grade, ethnicity and age. Current OPM reports group all minorities in grades GS 14, 15 and SES together. This presents a distorted view of diversity with respect to the SES since SES are not broken out as a separate reporting group. It also is impossible to determine makeup or progress by any ethnic group because of the lumping together of all figures. We need an accurate baseline to measure progress or the lack thereof. Information on age has been included because we have noticed that a large percentage of the few African Americans who reach the SES level are doing so much later in life than their majority counterparts. This shortens the period that African Americans will be able to impact agency policy and in many cases rules them ineffective.
3. We recommend that you pass legislation requiring all temporary assignments or details exceeding 120 days be filled in the same manner as permanent positions. Too often we hear of individuals being pre-positioned for a promotion by being temporarily detailed to a vacancy gaining competitive advantage over other possible candidates.

4. We recommend that OPM's Candidate Development Program be expanded and fully funded to accommodate 200 positions. We applaud OPM for launching this program however, over 5000 applicants applied for the twenty plus slots making chances of being selected difficult. This huge response indicates interest, bench strength and readiness for senior executive positions. What is lacking is opportunity. An expansion of this program would be a powerful tool in the diversity toolbox.

5. Our final recommendation is about reward and recognition. We recommend establishment of an "Annual Federal SES Diversity Award". This award would be presented to the federal agency that achieved the most diverse SES workforce over the past year. This would encourage and promote diversity and reward and recognize agencies that take steps to increase diversity in their senior ranks.

Mr. Chairman, 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 will pose now and in the foreseeable future.