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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 "The Lack of Diversity in the
Top Levels of Federal Government"**

May 10, 2007

**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 Lack of Diversity in the Top Levels of the Federal Government.” On behalf of the 1.2 million women employed in the federal government and military, we thank Chairman Danny Davis and the other legislators serving on this Subcommittee for inviting us to testify.

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 39 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 has instituted a diversity program with the aim of developing strategies to identify and eliminate barriers within the federal government. We also offer diversity training annually at our national, regional and chapter training programs.

PROGRESS IN DIVERSITY

We were happy to see that between 1992 and 2003, women made progress in moving into the SES, moving from 12.3% to 26.2% of total SES employees. Further the representation of women at the higher General Schedule (GS) grades and at senior pay levels increased in 2006. According to the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the number of women in grades 13 through 15 rose to 125,889 in 2006 from 124,827 in 2005.¹ Employees from these grades are referred to as “feeder” pools from which SES candidates are sourced.

However, we would suggest that these numbers should move higher to better reflect the percentage of women employed in the federal government overall. As of December 2005, women represented 47.1% of the federal workforce,² and men 52.9%. Yet according to December 2006 statistics obtained from the OPM website,³ women only make up 28.7% of the career of the SES and 34.8% of all employees in grade 13 through 15. Increasing the ranks of women in the SES by 2% over four years is simply not good enough.

FEW’S SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

We have queried the FEW leaders and members and offer the following suggestions that could help improve the ability of women and minorities to move up through the ranks and into the Senior Executive Service.

¹ Annual Report to the Congress, Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program, FY 2006, page 5.

² Congressional Budget Office Report, “Characteristics and Pay of Federal Civilian Employees,” March 2007, page 12.

³ Office of Personnel Management, Federal Human Resources Data, FedScope (<http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/>), December 2006.

Training:

By far, FEW members cited the lack of training and cross-training as a major impediment to women moving into the top levels of the federal government. There are several areas in which training can be improved for women aspiring to move into the SES. First and foremost, training dollars have shrunk to truly unbelievably low levels over the last couple of years. When funding is tight, training is one of the first things cut, and yet it critically impacts the quality of our federal workforce.

Second, women tend to be employed at the lower ranks in the federal government at much greater numbers than men. This does not mean that they do not aspire to be in leadership or management positions. Yet, they are not permitted to obtain upper grade training because they are not in upper management jobs. We argue that to help women move into these higher level jobs, they need the training first and therefore should be permitted to take manager and upper level training.

FEW believes so strongly in this approach that during the National Training Programs held over the years, any attendee – whatever their GS level or job description – can take any training workshop that they want – including those geared towards management and leadership. Further, by attending our National Training Program, attendees are exposed to high ranking officers and government employees in both educational and social settings. This allows attendees to receive mentoring tips and suggestions that would not be afforded on the job.

Mentoring:

Having a mentor is an extremely important aspect to any federal worker's progression into the Senior Executive Service. However, 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.

Obviously because there are far fewer female SES and high ranking employees in the federal government, our mentor pool is much smaller than that of men. With the male mentor pool being so large, it is often easier for men to become schooled and guided into the ranks of the upper career set. Thus men are often referred or recommended for higher positions while women are not - simply because they do not have the luxury of getting under the wing of a female mentor as readily as men.

FEW has tried to fill the void by offering exposure and time with its organization leaders who are often sought out as mentors and role models. However, more needs to be done.

FEW suggests that perhaps incentives should be made available to senior managers to establish, endorse, and participate in a mentoring program. Further, the establishment and participation in a mentoring program should be part of the manager/supervisor and the employee's performance requirements.

OPM's Federal Candidate Development Program:

As we remarked during our 2003 testimony before this subcommittee, the creation of the Federal Candidate Development was an important and critical first step in increasing diversity in the Senior Executive Service and developing a more diverse pool of candidates for positions in the SES. However, there are many ways the program should be improved.

First, only an extremely low number of applicants are actually admitted into the program. For instance, in 2004, 4,704 applications were received, while only

about 50 were accepted. (NOTE: We tried to get totals for 2005 and 2006, but OPM could not provide these to us.) Considering the vast numbers of retirements expected in the next couple of years – especially from top levels the government – many more potential SES candidates must be trained to fill these slots.

Second, not all agencies are participating. According to OPM, twenty-one agencies currently have a program in place. It should be mandatory that each agency create and institute a Federal Candidate Development Program.

Of more critical importance is the lack of outreach to potential candidates about the program. An overwhelming majority of our members have never heard of the program – many of whom would have qualified and could have been accepted. Of the members that did, most heard through FEW events, the National Training Program and publications – and not from their respective agency managers. We are concerned that managers and agency heads are not adequately informing their employees about the existence and benefits of this program.

Federal Women's Program:

In 1967, Executive Order 11375 added sex to the other forms of discrimination prohibited within the federal government. Also the Order created the Federal Women's Program (FWP) which was to provide ongoing training, career counseling, leadership training, and ensure women were provided guidance and information to further their careers in the federal workforce. These programs also helped provide training for women to help them excel and improve their job skills.

However, FWP has become another victim of vastly decreased funding in each federal agency. Over the years, staff assigned to run these programs have been cut drastically to a point now where the responsibilities are given to a federal worker on top of his/her other full-time job tasks. The obvious end result has been the virtual disappearance of an effective women's program in the federal government.

As FEW President, I travel around the country conducting Agency visits at government offices to spread the word about FEW and to ask for support. As part of these meetings, I always ask about their internal FWP. It has been disappointing to me to find that there are very few active and operating programs in the field now. This is simply not right as the Federal Women's Program was established to benefit women and to help steer their careers.

FEW had partnered with FWP to ensure that women were given the opportunities and guidance to advance in their professional careers. Without an active FWP, FEW is operating in a vacuum and it is difficult to gain attention, support and funds for women to receive the guidance and support they need to advance.

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 other 1.2 million federally employed women, am proud of the work we do for the federal government, and offer to help in any way to ensure that more women and minorities can aspire and succeed in entering the Senior Executive Service.