



# National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives

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Promoting the  
Senior Executive Service  
for Hispanics

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

## DIVERSITY IN THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE, THE POSTAL CAREER EXECUTIVE SERVICE AND IN THE TOP LEVELS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Chairman Davis, Representative Marchant, and Members of the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Gilbert Sandate and I am the Senior Policy Advisor to Jose Osegueda, President and CEO of the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives, or NAHFE. I am also a recently retired member of the career Senior Executive Service and a past President of NAHFE. NAHFE is proud to represent all senior level Hispanics in the federal workforce and to speak on their behalf today at this hearing. As you may be aware, NAHFE's mission is to promote the development and advancement of qualified Hispanics to senior level, policy-making positions in the federal government.

While NAHFE commends this Committee for its noble intention of examining diversity at the senior levels of government, we must ask why this hearing is not more all-encompassing and looking at all levels of diversity in the federal workforce. Perhaps one answer is in the fact that, aside from Hispanics, all other ethnic and gender groups are at or near parity with their numbers in the national civilian labor force. According to OPM's Sixth Annual Report to the President on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government, Hispanics remain the only underrepresented ethnic group in the federal workforce. Thus, some may not view diversity at all levels of government as being problematic, or, if they do, not with the same sense of urgency as Hispanics.

These facts are clear about the state of Hispanics in America and their representation in the federal workforce:

Hispanics are the largest minority group in the country, representing 14.5% of the total population and 13.6% of the national civilian labor force. They are the fastest growing and youngest segments of the U.S. population. Since 2000, Hispanics have accounted for half of all the population growth in the U.S., and nearly 35% of all Hispanics are younger than 18, compared with 25% of the total U.S. population. Hispanic purchasing power, now at 800 billion, will top one trillion by the year 2010.

Yet, despite this robust presence in the fabric of American society, Hispanic representation in the federal workforce was but 7.5% as of June 30, 2006. This means there is an underrepresentation gap of 6.1% for Hispanics in the federal workforce in order to reach parity with their numbers in the national civilian labor force. This underrepresentation gap represents the loss of 120,000 jobs and 5.5 billion in salaries alone to the Hispanic community each year. Moreover, with an average annual hiring rate of 0.13% over the past 40 years, Hispanics will **never** reach parity with their numbers in the national civilian labor force unless dramatic measures are taken to fix the broken federal personnel hiring system.

Predictably, Hispanic representation at the senior levels of government is even more dismal. According to recent OPM reports, Hispanics represented 3.7% of all federal senior pay positions as of June 30, 2006. However, because this occupational category includes political appointees, who are temporary employees, and other non-managerial employees who earn senior pay, a more accurate analysis reveals that Hispanics were represented in **career** SES-level jobs at 2.5% as of June 30, 2006. This is the exact same level of Hispanic representation at the SES-levels as it was in FY 2001, a zero net change over the past five years.

In the key feeder occupational groupings leading to SES positions, OPM reported that Hispanics represented 5.2% of all GS-13 positions, 4.3% of all GS-14, and 3.9% of all GS-15 positions as of June 30, 2006. Here the results are a bit more encouraging because, while not seismic shifts, the numbers represent positive changes when compared with similar data reported three years ago when this Committee last met to discuss this issue. Then, Hispanic representation was reported at 4.5%, 3.8% and 3.3% of all GS-13, GS-14, and GS-15 positions, respectively. The challenge, of course, is to set in place systems or mechanisms to ensure that many of these well-qualified Hispanic candidates are able to matriculate successfully into senior level positions in the near future.

Sadly, it has been our collective experience that many highly qualified Hispanics have found themselves channeled into dead-end, career-ending positions never to be heard from again. Quite candidly, NAHFE believes that many fine Hispanic candidates have been unable to reach the senior level ranks due to favoritism and discrimination by selecting officials. They have been denied career-building training, developmental assignments, coaching and mentoring that would make them more competitive when seeking promotion to SES-level positions.

Having worked my entire 34 year federal career in the civil rights and human resources fields, I can speak with some authority about the barriers and obstacles minorities, but especially Hispanics, face in forging a successful, long-term career and in reaching career goals. I have witnessed first-hand the unfairness, the prejudice and discrimination that is often present in hiring, promotion and advancement decisions in the federal workplace. I have worked for, and with, federal managers who viewed the government's diversity and equal employment opportunity programs as a nuisance, something to be tolerated and marginally complied with, but always relegated to third-tier priority status.

NAHFE believes one answer to successfully diversifying the senior level ranks of government is to set in place and to enforce meaningful systems of accountability, so that managers and supervisors may be held accountable for effectively carrying out their legal mandate to implement and promote equal employment opportunity and diversity programs. In fact, a number of accountability tools are already in place, they just haven't been effectively monitored or enforced. For example, the EEOC has failed to enforce the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures to monitor agency selection practices; OMB and OPM have seemingly rubber-stamped agencies' progress in implementing the diversity component of the President's Management Agenda for the Strategic Management of Human Capital; and OPM has failed to effectively monitor and enforce agencies' implementation of Executive Order 13171, *Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government*. In short, no one agency seems to be minding the store when it comes to enforcing diversity practices in the hiring, development, retention and promotion of Hispanics in the federal workforce.

This culture of non-accountability has resulted in disgraceful levels of Hispanic representation at SES levels in federal agencies that should be leaders in diversity.

For example, the Department of Defense, with nearly one million civilian and 1200 SES-level employees, has but 1.5% Hispanic representation in SES level positions. This is especially shameful when you consider that today, in an ironic deadly twist on successful diversity, over 12% of all casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan are young Hispanic soldiers. We submit to members of this Subcommittee that if we are good enough to die for our country, we ought to be good enough to serve it as government employees at all levels of the federal workforce. Another agency that should be a model for the Hispanic community is the Department of Education. With its mission of ensuring that America's educational system is providing a solid educational foundation for our nation's youth, we would expect that the makeup of its leadership team reflect the diversity of the population it serves. Yet, out of 165 SES positions DOE has a total Hispanic representation of one employee. Other agencies with less than stellar records of senior level diversity for Hispanics include the Department of Commerce, with 1.9%, and the Department of Health and Human Services, with 2.5% Hispanic representation at the SES levels.

Conversely, other departments have been able to shape enviable records of Hispanic inclusion in their workforce. For example, Hispanics at the Department of Homeland Security make up 18.5% of its total workforce, including 5.6% at the SES levels. Similarly, the Social Security Administration can boast of 12.5% Hispanic representation in its total workforce, with 7.9% of its SES positions filled by Hispanics. The key to their diversity success, of course, is directly correlated to the level of support from the highest levels of agency leadership. As quoted recently in Government Executive Magazine, Felicita Sola-Carter, Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources, Social Security Administration, cited as the reason for SSA's diversity success, "It is leadership commitment and a business case hinged on diversity...we set out to represent the Public we serve...that really has been our mantra."

NAHFE also believes that the administration and oversight of government professional career training and leadership development programs must be improved so that any barriers to fair and equal participation by Hispanic and other minority candidates may be eliminated and their inclusion assured. As the gateway to professional career advancement, these developmental opportunities should be available to all in a fair and equitable manner. Yet, because a commitment of resources is involved, too often these decisions are made based on favoritism, prejudice and exclusion. These barriers

are evident just by looking at the number of Hispanics recommended for SES Candidate Development Programs, for participation at OPM's Federal Executive Institute and Management Development Centers, and for participation in interagency and intra-agency Loaned Executive Programs.

In summary NAHFE recommends that organizations advocating excellence in Public Service be given the opportunity to participate in the process of making it better. Non-profit, constituency-based organizations such as NAHFE should have access to small business, education and training funding opportunities to assist federal agencies in the identification, preparation, training and career development programs of employees that will improve diversity in the Federal workforce. In recent years NAHFE has sponsored six SES Summits whereby senior level managers from all agencies have collaborated to focus on ways to increase the representation of Hispanics in SES-level positions. NAHFE welcomes the opportunity to partner with federal agencies to educate and prepare Hispanic candidates through training programs, seminars, mentoring and other tools so that they may be competitive for senior level positions. Working in collaboration with federal agencies NAHFE will continue to inspire a new generation of Hispanics striving to ascend to SES-level positions, and to enrich the pool base of Hispanic candidates for senior level positions.

NAHFE recommends the following solutions for the Subcommittee's consideration:

1. Congress should strengthen existing diversity accountability systems by tying them to the appropriation and budget oversight process. The Congress should hold agencies accountable at appropriation hearings by requiring that they report on their bottom-line diversity accomplishments, especially net increases in Hispanic representation at senior levels. If agencies report no progress in achieving diversity goals, they should be penalized with a lesser appropriation.
2. Congress should require agencies to forcefully implement the accountability systems for which they are responsible. This includes EEOC's responsibility to enforce the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures; OMB and OPM's responsibility to objectively enforce the diversity provisions contained in the Strategic Management of Human Capital as part of the

President's Management Agenda; and OPM's responsibility to hold federal agencies' accountable for effectively implementing Executive Order 13171, *Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government*.

3. Congress should provide a funding source for non-profit, constituency-based organizations such as NAHFE to partner with federal agencies in the outreach and identification of talented Hispanic candidates to prepare them for senior-level positions through education, training and development, mentoring, coaching, and the identification and implementation of inter- and intra-agency developmental assignments.
4. Congress should require that all agencies initiate SES Candidate Development Programs to ensure that qualified GS-14 and GS-15 employees now in the pipeline have every opportunity to get the training they need to qualify for SES vacancies.
5. This Subcommittee can serve as a diversity model by seeking out a cadre of well-qualified Hispanic career civil servants to work with Subcommittee staff on a one-year temporary assignment on issues related to improving Hispanic diversity at the SES-levels of government. Through such an example of diversity leadership, the Subcommittee can serve as a diversity model that other Congressional committees and subcommittees may wish to emulate. NAHFE will gladly provide resumes of qualified candidates for such an assignment.

Chairman Davis, Representative Marchant, and other Members of the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia, we thank you for the opportunity to share our views and ideas for improving diversity at the SES levels of government. We look forward to working with you, with other committees, and with federal agencies to ensure that our federal workforce truly reflects the diversity of America's population at all levels, but especially at the senior ranks.

Thank you.