

**TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM**

**BY
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Good afternoon Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Marchant, and Committee Members. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the topic of "Diversity in the Senior Executive Service and Top Level Executive Positions (GS 14 and 15)" of the Federal government. The full text of my testimony was previously provided to your staff.

Last year, Blacks In Government celebrated 30 years of advocacy on behalf of African Americans employed by federal, state and municipal governments. Our goals and objectives are to promote professionalism among Blacks in government, eliminate practices of racism and discrimination, maintain a mechanism for the gathering and dissemination of pertinent information, and to develop and promote programs that will enhance ethnic pride.

Increasing the percentage of African Americans in the highest level positions is and has always been one of our most difficult and significant challenges -- we have yet to overcome. The number of African Americans in almost every Senior Executive Service (SES) position and job category lags significantly when compared to whites. Today, African Americans comprise roughly 6.6% of SES positions while for whites it is approximately 90%. This low rate of SES appointments for African Americans is unacceptable. Regardless, of whether it is measured against the overall distribution of 20% of African Americans in the federal workforce; or against the 11% employed in the civilian labor force (CLF).

Today, I will highlight four (4) systemic personnel processes that we believe adversely impact the recruitment of African Americans for SES positions. Legislative and/or administrative modifications to these procedures are required in order to achieve true workforce diversity in SES positions. These systemic actions are Expansion of the Relevant Applicant Pool, Development of SES Training and Development Programs, Modification of the SES Selection Process, and creation of a Top Level Accountability, Reporting and Evaluation procedure designed to achieve positive results.

EXPANSION OF THE RELEVANT APPLICANT POOL

The overwhelming majority of SES promotion selections are made from candidates outside the federal government. This is not an accident, but a design by those who conceived the current SES regulation because it was felt, at the time, that there were an insufficient number of "in-house" candidates qualified to meet the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) core competencies. Measures OPM felt were necessary to manage large and complex Federal

organizations. These core competencies called Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) are Leading Change, Leading People, Results Driven, Business Acumen and Building Coalitions/Communications.

The current SES regulation has resulted in an influx of a stream of perhaps qualified applicants, who were and are mostly white males. The reality is that when vacancies do occur recruitment information is essentially disseminated informally by “word of mouth” or via the “good ole boy” networks and passed along to industries, friends, family members, and professional organizations doing business with the government. OPM officially recruits SES and other applicants through its website (www.usajobs.opm.gov) or through its automated bulletin board for SES vacancy announcement system (USAJOBS). Most African Americans outside the federal workforce have no knowledge that these recruitment sources even exist.

The disproportionate use of these informal processes to fill SES vacancies adversely impact the recruitment and selection of African Americans, other minorities and women. Agencies that are serious about making progress in the recruitment and selection of African Americans in SES and GS 14 and 15 positions must expand employment initiatives beyond these traditional methods and include African American advocacy organizations such as Blacks In Government (BIG), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League (NUL), and the African American Federal Executive Association (AAFEA). Further, OPM must advertise these vacancies in afro-centric broadcast media, journals, magazines, and websites. The stream of African American applicants can also be expanded by increasing internal SES recruitment efforts. In most federal agencies and departments, the overall African American demographics are higher than those in external applicant pools. This leads to the next personnel process, training and development programs.

DEVELOPMENT OF SES TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

There are many African Americans in the Federal government who hold advanced degrees and who have many years of specialized experiences. Some may lack the core competencies prescribed by OPM. However, these measures can be acquired by the development of rigorous and targeted training enhancement programs designed to prepare participants for SES consideration. OPM provides support and assistance to agencies in developing such programs. It also grants certification to agencies and departments that formulate and implement training and development courses and initiatives.

A recent initiative is the partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Graduate School, Blacks In Government and the Deloitte Company in the establishment of the Young Leadership Academy Program. The Young Leadership Academy (YLA) began operations in September 2006. USDA in coordination with BIG developed YLA’s curriculum and set the standards for certification at the completion of all criteria. BIG’s members at the various levels of government are provided the opportunity to be trained to be “Leaders for Life”. This in and of itself will increase the number of qualified African Americans’ eligibility at all levels of government including SES positions. Another major event that provides professional development to members is the SES Workshops held at Blacks In Government’s Annual National Training Conference which will be held August 13-17 in Nashville, Tennessee.

In addition to USDA, there are other agencies and departments such as the U.S. Department of State that have made significant progress through increased utilization of training, development and outreach programs designed specifically to increase the number of minorities and women in the area of the Foreign Service Officer Program. In summation, federal agencies and departments must increase internal SES recruitment and seek assistance and support from African American organizations when recruiting externally.

MODIFICATION OF THE SES SELECTION PROCESS

Currently, OPM is the final arbiter for all SES selections. Not only do they control who gets those appointments, but also the number of positions allocated to the various federal agencies and departments. If we are to hold officials in those entities accountable for diversity outcomes, we must give them more authority in the selection process. At present, they utilize Executive Review Boards' (ERBs) procedures to conduct merit staffing for SES appointments. These boards review the executive qualifications of each eligible candidate and make recommendations to the appointing officials concerning the applicant. Once the selection is made by that official the agency and/or department cannot appoint their executive choice until a Qualifications Review Board (QRB) certifies the aspirant's credentials. This appears to be an unnecessary redundancy that can be eliminated by providing officials more control and authority over the final outcomes in the selection process. OPM can execute its oversight responsibilities by simply certifying the qualifications of ERB members. Whether or not it is the QRB or the ERB who makes the final decision on selections, there must be more SES minorities and women involved in the process. OPM and/or agencies and departments can staff these boards with current, former and/or retired SES appointees.

TOP EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY, REPORTING AND EVALUATIONS

All agency and department heads and top level officials must be held personally accountable for efforts made in increasing diversity within their organizations. In the latest EEO Annual Report on the Federal Workforce: Fiscal Year 2005 only 44% of agency heads were even briefed regarding performance with regard to diversity matters. For most of them, their efforts for diversity initiatives are not part of any critical elements in their performance evaluations. Assessments made in this regard need not be based on quantitative outcomes, but on the undertaking of specific qualitative initiatives designed to improve the agency's diversity demographics in both SES and GS 14 and 15 positions.

Chairman Davis, this concludes my formal testimony. Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to articulate our views regarding this very important matter. I'll be glad to answer any questions.