

**TESTIMONY OF
WILLIAM A. BROWN SR, P.E, HAIA,
PRESIDENT, THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FEDERAL
EXECUTIVE ASSOCIATION BEFORE THE COMMITTEE
ON GOVERNMENT REFORM, Subcommittee on Civil
Service and Agency Organization, OCTOBER 15, 2003**

Good morning, my name is William A. Brown Sr. I am President of the African American Federal Executive Association. In January of this year I retired from federal service as the Deputy Director of Military Programs for the US Army Corps of Engineers after a 38-½ year career. I was very fortunate to achieve the rank of Senior Executive, level five, but I assure you it was no easy feat.

I encountered many obstacles in reaching the SES ranks despite my qualifications. I was a licensed professional engineer. At age 32, I became one of the youngest persons to be inducted into the College Of Fellows of The Society of American Military Engineers. In 1986, the American Institute of Architects conferred honorary membership upon me, which is the highest honor they give an allied professional. I had held a variety of responsible GS-15 positions including, Chief Engineer, Chief Architect and Chief of Program Management for the US Air Force Civil Engineers office.

In January 1995 after applying for 23 SES vacancies and making the short list and being interviewed 15 times, I became the first African American career civil servant sworn into the Senior Executive Service in the field of engineering in the Department of Defense. Additionally, I was the only African American promoted to SES in the entire Army that year. That was just eight and one half years ago! Can you imagine the large number of qualified minorities who preceded me and who had been denied the

opportunity to serve our nation at the highest levels? Just think of where our nation might be now if selecting officials had taken advantage of the skills and experience of the hundreds of highly qualified African Americans who were willing to stand up for America and put duty, honor and country before all else.

In February of 2002 several African Americans including myself came together and vowed that if our government was to reflex the mosaic of America and not just the face and ideas of the majority we would have to become proactive. We formed the African American Federal Executive Association. Our goal is very simple. We promote the professional development and advancement of minority groups, with particular emphases on African Americans, into and within the senior levels of the Federal government. With that as a backdrop I would like to comment on SES diversity in the federal government.

Most federal agencies are not serious about diversity! The good ole boy network continues to flourish, agencies continue to change the rules of engagement just as more minorities become qualified, and minority groups are pitted against one another for the few vacancies that becomes publicly available each year. This year the General Accounting Office issued report 03-34, on SES diversity. This report indicates that with current trends, the number of white SES females will increase by 4 percent by year 2007 while the number of minority males and females will only increase by .7 percent.

Our nation can ill afford to wait at this snails pace for the complexion of our government leaders to change. The latest census results indicate that our nation is more diverse then ever. How long must the citizenry wait before the leadership reflects the ethnicity of our population? Are we not striving for ethnic equality in Iraq and Afghanistan? Why then are we not striving for the

same in America? I would offer that we have not yet developed the resolve to do what is right for America and it will be up to this Subcommittee to put America on the right track. To help you achieve this goal I offer several recommendations.

Recommendation number one: We recommend endorsement and support for the new SES Candidate Development Program that the Office of Personnel Management has initiated. AAFEA provided comments during the development of this program and while not all of our comments were incorporated, those dealing with direction, vision, intent and implementation were. Like most things in life, the devil is in the details and it is at that level that we are continuing to work with the OPM staff. The Honorable Kay Cole James, Director of the Office of Personnel Management and Ron Sanders, Associate Director are commended for their leadership and willingness to consider alternates to business as usual.

Much more needs to be done however if diversity is to be achieved in the SES corps in the near term. **Our second recommendation** is that you consider withdrawing all authority from an agency to hire senior service executives until the agency achieves diversity in the SES ranks equal to ethnic representation in the US as a whole. In the interim OPM or a congressionally appointed board should be given authority to fill all career SES vacancies in that agency until ethnic SES parity is achieved.

Our third recommendation is that you pass legislation prohibiting federal agencies from changing the rules of engagement within one year of filling a vacancy. I have observed first hand the selection of individuals with out a college degree into the SES corp., none were minorities. I have also observed discussions on the academic qualifications of candidates when an African American is one of the top candidates. Invariably the discussion always centers on the African American not having

enough degrees or the right degree. This changing of the rules of engagement when a minority is being considered must be eliminated. If a degree is required it must be required of all candidates and if it is not required it must not be required of any candidate.

I recently met with African Americans from a very visible agency where an African American has not been promoted beyond the GS 14 level in the last twenty years. I discovered that in this agency one SES screens all candidates for senior positions and makes the vacancy selection. No other person is involved in the senior promotion process. The process being used by this agency is ensuring that no African American ever gets in the pipeline to compete for an SES position. Does anyone wonder why African Americans are being frustrated in their efforts to serve our nation? Why is this kind of process being allowed to exist in our government? Madame Chairman **our fourth recommendation** is that your Subcommittee put an end to this kind of practice by enacting legislation requiring all agencies to use a panel of no less than three individuals to screen applicants for all GS 14 and above vacancies. Furthermore, we recommend that the legislation include a provision that when a minority is among the top three candidates the agency be required to justify in writing to the agency head why the minority was not selected. We also recommend that the selection/recommendation panel be required to include a voting minority at or above the level at which the position will be filled. To offset, the argument that qualified minorities cannot be found to serve on the panels we recommend that your legislation include a provision for the agency to hire and reimburse retired minority federal employees to sit on the selection panels.

Finally Madame Chairman we are finding that complaints against an agency are not being adjudicated in a timely manner. I am sure that when agencies realize that under the No Fear Act they will be

required to pay from their budget settlement fees that they will be quick to resolve complaints as well as take steps to insure issues do not reoccur. For these reasons, AAFEA supports the No Fear Act.

Madame Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts with you. I have always believed that pride in public service occurs when you treat people with dignity and respect and you allow them to be all they can be. There have been times when this belief has been tested. In the final analysis I was one of the lucky ones, I got to serve on diplomatic missions, travel all over the world and stand tall for America. But remember, I said I was lucky, what about those who were not so lucky, what about those who could have made America even stronger, what about your children, my children, the future generations to come? People are Americas greatest asset. You have the opportunity to make America an inclusive rather than exclusive society by implementing the recommendations that I have outlined for you. Thank You! I will be happy to respond to any questions that you might have.