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**TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA M. WOLFE, PRESIDENT
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**HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CIVIL SERVICE AND AGENCY REORGANIZATION**

**HEARING ON
“Diversity in the Senior Executive Service”**

October 15, 2003

**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 an international organization serving the over 850,000 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

FEW very much appreciates the opportunity to testify at this subcommittee hearing on diversity in the Senior Executive Service (SES). On behalf of the over 850,000 women employed in the federal government and military, we thank Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Member Davis and the other Representatives serving on this Subcommittee for conducting this important hearing.

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. 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 and sexual harassment cases.

For 35 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 to provide women with the opportunities to enhance their skills so that they will be ready to take advantage of opportunities for advancement.

In addition, FEW supports efforts within the government to improve operations and efficiencies in the federal workforce, but asks Congress and federal agencies to obtain input and include federal workers as part of the process.

OUR ORGANIZATION

FEW, as an organization, is quite diverse. Although we have no specific figures on actual membership demographics, our estimates show that about one-third of our membership is comprised of minorities at this time. Further, more than 50% of our organization's leadership is comprised of minorities. I am very proud of this ethnically diverse group of leaders in Federally Employed Women.

FEW also 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.

Our members and leaders firmly believe that diversity should be a mandatory goal in the senior levels of our government. Our organization has listed the following reasons why diversity is so important:

1. Diversity prevents negative assumptions about racial and ethnic community groups.
2. It prevents gender stereotypes.
3. It promotes intercultural understanding.
4. It eliminates communication barriers.
5. Diversity articulates the similarities and differences among cultures.
6. It eliminates organizational norms which legitimize negative assumptions about people.
7. It increases organizational effectiveness.
8. It promotes employee harmony.
9. It values individuality.

THE GAO STUDY

In January of this year, the General Accounting Office (GAO) published the results of a study on “The Senior Executive Service: Enhanced Agency Efforts Needed to Improve Diversity as the Senior Corps Turns Over.” As the members of this subcommittee are aware, according to this report more than half of the 6,100 career SES members employed on October 1, 2000 will have left service by October 1, 2007. According to that same study, by 2007 there will be approximately 23.1% white females in the SES, up from 19.1% in 2000. (In 2002, women occupied 25.06% of SES positions; and only 4.6% of these were minorities) Only 14.6% of minorities are expected to be serving in the SES in 2007, up from 13.8% in 2000.

While FEW acknowledges that this is an improvement for women as a gender group over the last several years, these levels still do not represent actual employment levels of women and minorities currently serving in the federal workforce. According to the 2000 OPM Personnel Data files, women comprised about 45% of non-military government employees. Minorities comprised about 30.2%.

In order to better reflect the demographics of the entire federal workforce, the SES composition should be somewhat comparable to employment levels of both women and minorities.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

OPM has provided some recommendations on how agencies and federal departments can enhance diversity in their SES workforces. These include:

- Including recruitment efforts specifically targeted at underrepresented groups
- Inclusion of diversity goals in workforce planning processes

- Monitoring the numbers of women and minorities in the existing workforce to ensure that the composition of senior management truly reflects the composition of the workforce in general
- Holding executives accountable for diversity in the workforces they manage

I also want to applaud OPM's initiative in creating the SES Candidate Development Program. This program, which includes rotational assignments, formal training, mentoring and performance assessments, is geared to helping women, minorities and disabled federal workers move into the executive ranks of the government. This type of program should be a model for all federal agencies in creating a high-quality SES that reflects the diversity of the workforce, and the US as a whole. We are looking forward to its full implementation this year.

Another agency - the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission - warns in their comments to the GAO report that "In the years ahead, agencies will need to continue their vigilance in ensuring a level playing field for all federal workers." The Commission suggests that agencies pursue proactive strategies to accomplish this, including:

- Succession planning aimed at increased diversity
- SES development strategies to help achieve this diversity
- Mentoring programs for mid-level employees, with an emphasis on women and minorities

FEW supports each of these recommendations. However, we also have some additional measures that we ask be considered:

- Include more women and minorities at top-level personnel and human resources meetings as representatives of these demographic groups to provide insight, and to represent the views and concerns of these groups.
- Put more of an emphasis on providing opportunities for career ladder positions for women and minorities. Too often, women and minorities are

- stuck in positions that offer them no continuous upward mobility through a grade level of 14 – a necessity for entering the SES.
- Provide more cross training for women and minorities in order to encourage a natural progression to SES positions.
 - Finally, agencies should provide guidance to management officials outlining specific guidelines on how to enhance diversity in their SES workforces. Managers need to fully support these efforts if they are to succeed.

Finally, FEW joined as a member organization of the No Fear Coalition, and was very happy to see the No Fear Act signed into law two years ago. Federal agencies should be held accountable and responsible for discrimination and whistleblower retaliation against federal workers. We will gladly work with this Subcommittee and Congress on any similar bills that will help ensure that our workplace is free from bias and injustice.

Again, we very much appreciate the Subcommittee's interest in this issue and all the support you all have given federal workers in the past. I, and the thousands of other FEW members, am proud of the work we do for the federal government, and simply want to ensure that all workers are given the same opportunity to enter the ranks of the Senior Executive Service and that the SES truly represents the federal workforce.

We believe that a proactive approach to diversity will achieve much in our federal workforce. If we are all committed and work together, cultural biases can be overcome. Diversity then becomes a strength as we pursue the common goals of opportunity and equality for women and minorities in government.

Diversity is about everybody. Thank you, and I will be happy to answer any of your questions.