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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### H.R. 3774, the "SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE DIVERSITY ASSURANCE ACT"

#### EXTENSION OF REMARKS

Thursday, October 9, 2007

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that Senator Daniel Akaka will be joining me today in introducing the "Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act". The Act addresses the extremely important issue of diversity in the Senior Executive Service (SES). Sen. Akaka and I plan to continue our collaboration in the future, introducing additional legislation that will make a difference in the lives of federal employees.

Our introduction of the Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act would not have been possible without the hard work of the African American Federal Executives Association, the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives, the Asian American Government Executives Network, Federally Employed Women, Blacks in Government, and the Senior Executive Association. I applaud them for not only raising the lack of diversity in the SES as an issue but for devoting their time and energy to work with our Subcommittees to rectify it.

The lack of diversity in the SES has been a longstanding concern of mine. As a first step toward doing something about it, I asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate the situation. GAO subsequently issued two reports - in 2001 and 2003. Both reports documented a poorly diversified SES. The 2003 report was entitled "Senior Executive Service: Enhanced Agency Efforts Needed to Improve Diversity as the Senior Corps Turns Over" (GAO-03-34). As the title suggests, this report revealed that while there will be a large amount of turnover in the SES in the years ahead due to retirements and attrition, it **will not result in greater racial diversity**. While there are numerous minorities in the pipeline ready to be promoted, to few are being given the opportunity to advance. Well, you might ask, why not, and what can be done about it?

In 2003, I joined then Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director, Kay Cole James, in announcing the creation of OPM's SES Candidate Development Program. This program was created to address the lack of minority representation in the SES. Yet last July,

when I attended the program's first graduation ceremony and saw few minority graduates, I realized that much more had to be done to effectively change the racial and the gender make up of the SES.

Diversity is valuable because it can bring a wider variety of perspectives and approaches to policy development and implementation. Minorities and women need to be at the table contributing when strategic planning, problem solving and decision making is taking place. Our ideas and talents can help strengthen an organization and lead to the achievement of results. That is not really happening today. What I see as I visit federal agencies is a senior level workforce that is not reflective of the diverse people we serve.

As Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, I held a hearing in May of this year on diversity in the SES. It was after that hearing that I began to meet with the federal minority groups represented here to effect change that would help diversify the SES. The Subcommittee met extensively with these groups and what we heard was that it was not a lack of training, experience, or minorities in the feeder pool that caused the lack of diversity in the SES. What we heard was that there are flaws in the selection process, and that there is a lack of oversight and accountability when it comes to promoting and hiring minorities in the SES. The Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act aims to fix all of that.

The Act establishes SES evaluation panels that are charged with reviewing the qualifications of all candidates for career reserve vacancies. The evaluation panels must be a diverse group consisting of three members. One must be a member of a racial or ethnic group and one member must be a woman. The panel will forward the names of the most qualified candidates to the Executive Resource Board.

In addition, the Act establishes the Senior Executive Service Resources Office (SESRO) within OPM. The purpose of the SESRO is to ensure that the Senior Executive Service is reflective of nation's diversity and to establish and maintain records, to the extent possible, on the race, ethnicity, gender and disabilities of employees in the SES. This bill aims to create an environment where diversity will flourish. And where it does not, Congress will have the tools and information to hold agencies accountable.

Diversity of gender, ethnicity, age and disability, as well as diversity of education, thinking, and experience are crucial if the federal workforce is to mirror the communities we live in and serve. To stay competitive in an increasingly global economy and recruit the best and brightest workforce, diversity is an issue that we must pay close attention to. All Americans want to work for organizations where they have the opportunity to use their knowledge and skills, develop their careers and be promoted to the highest levels. The Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act is going to give ethnic minorities and women that opportunity; an opportunity that does not broadly exist today.

Thank you.