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ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS IN THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

**Statement of
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before

The Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Organization
The Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives

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Good afternoon, Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of the House Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Organization.

The Asian American Government Executives Network, also known as AAGEN, was founded in 1994. We are a 501(c)3, bi-partisan, non-profit organization of current and former top managers and executives who share the mission to promote, expand, and support Asian Pacific American leadership in the Federal, state, and local governments.

My name is Jasemine Choy Chambers, and I serve as the Chair of AAGEN. I thank you for this opportunity to brief you on the under-representation of Asian Pacific Americans in the Senior Executive Service and to offer our thoughts and ideas to correct this situation and reverse the recent trend.

ASIAN AMERICANS

Available records indicate that Filipino sailors jumped ship from Spanish galleons and established a settlement in the Louisiana bayous in the 1760's. Three Chinese sailors first sailed into Baltimore harbor on board of the merchant ship "Pallas" in 1785. They were among the earliest arrivals of Asians in the United States.

More than two hundred years later, the Census Bureau reported 7.3 million Asian Pacific Americans,¹ or 2.9 percent of the total U.S. population, in the 1990 census. This total increased to 12.8 million, or 4.4 percent of the U.S. population in 2000, making Asian Pacific Americans one of the fastest growing segments in the nation.

The Asian Pacific American population is extremely diverse; they differ in language, culture, and length of residence in the United States. The Pacific Islanders are the indigenous peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, and other Pacific islands; many Chinese and Japanese Americans have been in the U.S. for generations, while Vietnamese, Hmong, and others of Southeast Asian origins are more recent immigrants. This year marks the centennial of the arrival of Koreans in the U.S. There has also been a steady influx of Filipinos and Asian Indians, who are now the second and third most populous Asian groups in the United States.

The diverse backgrounds of the Asian Pacific Americans are united in their contributions and sacrifices to this nation. They fought in the Civil War and built the trans-continental railroad in the 19th century; they risk their lives to carry out space shuttle missions and dedicate their research to develop new medical treatments to AIDS in the 21st century.

¹ This term refers to the combination of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Although OMB revised the race and ethnic definitions to create a separate "Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders" category in 1997, the Office of Personnel Management and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have continued to report combined workforce statistics for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

The Asian Pacific Americans have also served the nation with pride, dedication, and loyalty in public service, including the Federal government. Today, about 87,000 Asian Pacific Americans serve in the Executive Branch,² 56,000 on active duty in the military, 26,000 in military reserve, and 56,000 in the Postal Service.³ These figures do not include those in the Legislative and Judicial Branches and national security agencies. These 200,000+ men and women represent about 4.8 percent of the civilian workforce in the Executive Branch, 3.9 percent of the active duty military, and 3.0 percent of the reserve respectively.

THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

Despite their participation and contributions, Asian Pacific Americans have largely been absent in top Federal leadership and executive positions.

The first Asian Pacific American Congressman was Representative Dalip Singh Saund (D-CA), an immigrant from India who served in the House from 1957 to 1963. Hiram Leong Fong (R-HI), an American of Chinese ancestry, was the first Asian Pacific American elected to the Senate in 1959.

It was not until 2000 when Secretary Norman Y. Mineta became the first Asian Pacific American to hold a post in the presidential cabinet. Secretary Elaine Chao became the first female Asian Pacific American cabinet official in 2001.

With the retirement of General Eric Shinseki as Army Chief of Staff in June 2003, there is only one other Asian Pacific American above the rank of O-7 (the equivalent of Brigadier General) in the entire U.S. military.

Commissioned by the House Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Organization, the two reports⁴ by the General Accounting Office (GAO) provide a grim assessment of the past, present, and future state of Asian Pacific Americans in the Senior Executive Service (SES).

For example, according to the GAO reports,

- In 1990, only 51 Asian Pacific Americans, representing 0.8 percent of the total, were members of the career SES. Among the 24 CFO agencies,⁵ eight had no

² Not including the U.S. Postal Service.

³ This is an estimate; workforce information about the U.S. Postal Service is not publicly available.

⁴ GAO-01-377, *Senior Executive Service: Diversity Increased in the Past Decade*; and GAO-03-34, *Senior Executive Service: Enhanced Agency Efforts Needed to Improve Diversity As the Senior Corps Turns Over*.

⁵ GAO defined CFO departments and agencies to be those covered by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Act. These 24 agencies reportedly covered more than 96 percent of the Federal civilian employees.

Asian Pacific Americans in the career SES, including 5 cabinet-level departments.⁶

- During the period of 1990-1999, there were almost 5,300 career SES vacancies. Asian Pacific Americans filled 89 such positions, a rate of 1.7 percent. During this ten-year period, 7 CFO agencies⁷ had 376 career SES opportunities and did not fill one with Asian Pacific Americans.
- In 1999, the number of Asian Pacific Americans in the career SES reached 100, or about 1.6 percent of the total. Seven⁸ of the 24 CFO agencies had no Asian Pacific Americans in the career SES ranks.
- Based on current separation and hiring trends, GAO projects that the number of Asian Pacific Americans in the career SES will increase modestly to 104 by the year 2007, or 1.7 percent of the total. Compared to the 2000 levels, the slight increase of Asian Pacific American women (from 33 to 39) will be offset by a corresponding decline of Asian Pacific American men (from 70 to 65). According to GAO projections, as many as 9 out of 24 CFO agencies,⁹ - one more than in 1990 - will have no Asian Pacific Americans in the career SES by the year 2007.

GAO anticipates that severe under-representation of Asian Pacific Americans in the career SES will continue in the foreseeable future under the current trends. AAGEN shares this extremely alarming observation, and believes that the actual problems are in fact more severe than reported because:

- Data used by GAO did not cover the national security, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies such as the National Security Agency (NSA), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), as well as the newly created Department of Homeland Security and special pay-band plans, where representation of minorities and women in the upper ranks is well known to be weak.
- The GS-15 level is commonly recognized as the primary pipeline to the career SES; over 80 percent of the promotions to the career SES come from this level. However, more than half of the 2,900 Asian Pacific Americans in the reported GS-15 positions serve as non-supervisory medical personnel under special pay plans in the Department of Veterans Affairs. These positions are not structured

⁶ They include the cabinet-level departments of Agriculture (USDA), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Interior, Labor, and Veterans Affairs (VA) and three other agencies – Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Small Business Administration (SBA), and U.S. Agency for International Development (AID).

⁷ HUD, Labor, State, OPM, AID, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and General Services Administration (GSA).

⁸ HUD, Labor, State, OPM, AID, SBA, and FEMA.

⁹ Education, HUD, Interior, Labor, State, OPM, SBA, AID, and FEMA. AID and FEMA no longer exist due to AID's merger with the Department of State and FEMA's migration to the Department of Homeland Security.

to advance into the career SES. Among the remaining GS-15 employees, many are not in supervisory positions, nor are they in occupational series that would lead them into the senior positions. Therefore, Asian Pacific Americans face a similarly serious under-representation problem (well less than 2.7 percent of the total) in the GS-15 positions.

- As the “Federal Government’s Human Resource Agency,” the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) itself has not had one Asian Pacific American serving in either its career SES or the GS-15 ranks since 1990. It is quite possible that OPM has never had an Asian Pacific American serving in either of these top positions since its establishment.
- To illustrate the pipeline problem, the only Asian Pacific American member of the career SES in the 65,000-employee Social Security Administration is expected to retire soon. There are only 8 Asian Pacific Americans in the GS-15 pipeline to fill this or any other upcoming vacancies, and some of them are eligible for retirement.
- As another example of the pipeline problem, out of a class of 50 candidates, only three minorities (one Asian Pacific American, two Hispanic Americans, and no African American) were recently accepted into a SES Candidate Development Program conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.¹⁰

According to the GAO, representation of Asian Pacific Americans in the career SES ranks was “more than 50 percent below its percentage in five out of six labor forces”¹¹ selected by the GAO – it was the most significant disparity among all of the women and racial and ethnic groups studied by the GAO. The sixth labor category was the Postal Service career executive corps, which demonstrates only that representation of Asian Pacific Americans is similarly poor in the U.S. Postal Service.¹²

AAGEN OBSERVATIONS

The GAO reports show Federal departments and agencies with a paucity of Asian Pacific Americans in the career SES now and into the future. While the Government has an important opportunity to affect SES diversity, “little will change if current appointment trends continue.”¹³ In fact, the percentage of all minorities in the SES

¹⁰ USDA added 33 candidates to the class after protests by multiple groups. The total number of Asian Pacific Americans in the class increased to 2 after the addition.

¹¹ GAO-01-377, page 31, Table 1.

¹² Asian Pacific Americans reportedly made up slightly over 2 percent of the nearly 800-member Postal Career Executive Service.

¹³ GAO-03-34, page 7.

dropped from 14.4 percent in 2000 to 13.7 percent in 2001.¹⁴ There are pipeline and succession issues that are similarly important.

Equal employment opportunity is not only a matter of law; diversity at all grades and ranks is a sound business case.

AAGEN believes that lack of appreciation and understanding of the Asian Pacific American perspective in the Federal government has contributed to the campaign finance controversy and the incarceration of Dr. Wen Ho Lee. Hate crimes led to the death of Vincent Chin in Detroit in 1982. In times of tension or conflict with Asian countries, as in 1942 after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor or in the late 1990s after the allegations of Chinese espionage in the national weapons laboratories, Asian Pacific Americans suffered hostility and profiling because of their race and ancestry. In the aftermath of the September 11 tragedy, there were violence and bigotry against fellow Americans of Sikh and Arab origin.

We believe that the lack of Asian Pacific American perspective in the Federal government nurtures an institutional bias and culture that contributes to the continuing negative image of Asian Pacific Americans as "perpetual foreigners," despite our achievements and dedication to the American society and loyalty to the United States for many generations.

The Committee of 100¹⁵ conducted a national opinion poll¹⁶ about American attitudes toward Chinese Americans and Asian Americans in 2001. It was found that 25 percent of the American public holds a very negative attitude toward Chinese Americans and Asian Americans. That is one out of every four Americans! This can be extremely damaging to our nation if similar views are held or inherent in the making of public policies and decisions. Lack of Asian Pacific American leadership in the intelligence agencies, the law enforcement agencies, and public service in general denies all of us an opportunity to help unite the nation.

It is perhaps most alarming to observe that OPM, which is expected to "provide government-wide leadership and policy direction in the selection, development and management of diverse, highly-qualified Federal executives,"¹⁷ is among the worst performing agencies toward inclusion of Asian Pacific Americans. A lead agency with this kind of performance record for at least 13 years lacks credibility in the Asian Pacific American community.

¹⁴ Latest available statistics from the OPM web site at <http://www.opm.gov/ses/demograph.html>, as of October 4, 2003.

¹⁵ A national non-partisan organization composed of prominent American citizens of Chinese descent. Additional descriptions available at <http://www.committee100.org/>.

¹⁶ American Attitudes Toward Chinese Americans and Asian Americans, A Committee of 100 Survey conducted in collaboration with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and performed by Martilla Communications Group and Yankelovich in February and March 2001.

¹⁷ GAO-01-377, page 103.

While statistical representation is very important, AAGEN firmly believes that members of the career SES must be among the best qualified and the most talented. The few Asian Pacific Americans who are able to join the career SES typically have one or more advanced degrees and extensive experience. They have also demonstrated that they are exceptional leaders and performers among their peers. There are many more Asian Pacific Americans who are qualified, able, and willing to take responsibilities as 21st century Federal senior executives.

AAGEN recognizes that the 21st century Federal senior executives can be quite differently from those of our past and present generations. We fully support changes that will lead to an accountable Government that serves all of its people, values the diversity of its workforce, and produces top performance and results. Some of the changes being proposed to the SES and the Federal workforce are needed and can have profound effects on the future of the Government. There will be discussions and debates of many issues. Asian Pacific Americans have a significant role in this national dialogue; we want to be included and become a constructive and significant part of the 21st century United States Government.

Sound decisions can be made only with good data and good analysis. We commend the Subcommittee and GAO for taking the initiative and producing two insightful reports. However, we also note that there are significant data and information gaps about the Federal workforce.

Military and civilian data are reported separately; the civilian data are scattered and incomplete. The vacancy and hiring data used by the GAO are public information that is not readily available to the public. In addition, applicant flow data are rarely collected. When they are collected, the results are not reported. Consequently, when under-representation problems are identified, as the GAO has, it is not even clear whether they are caused by an agency's failure to conduct outreach or its persistent employment barriers in the application and selection process.

FedScope, an excellent interactive data resource available from the OPM web site, explicitly suppresses the reporting of race and national origin data. As the Government's human resource agency, OPM is expected to monitor the diversity of the Federal workforce, particularly at senior levels. However, OPM's demographic data have become less available to the public. The most recent demographic profile of the Federal workforce on the OPM web site dates back to September 30, 2000.

Timely and reliable information is a form of public accountability. Beginning October 1, 2003, The Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation (No FEAR) Act became effective. It is an extraordinary legislation passed unanimously by the House and by voice vote in the Senate. No FEAR was prompted in part by testimony before Congress of continued, widespread discrimination and retaliation

within the Federal government. The law now requires Federal agencies to disclose publicly their employment complaint statistics on the Internet and make direct payment for complaint settlements and judgments without dipping into the Judgment Fund. AAGEN believes that the same principles underlying the No FEAR Act – public disclosure and accountability – are applicable in workforce diversity issues.

WHAT AAGEN DOES

To accomplish our mission, AAGEN networks with organizations who share our common interests. We are a member of the Coalition of Asian Pacific American Federal Employee Organizations and are active among community, civil rights, and professional organizations. We also interact with sister organizations including the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives, the African American Federal Executives Association, and the Senior Executive Association.

Among other activities, AAGEN

- Sponsors events featuring prominent and influential speakers who share their insights and serve as role models;
- Educates our community by organizing seminars and publishing informative materials about the Government and public service;
- Organizes events to share lessons learned, emerging management concepts, and recent workforce trends and patterns; and
- Offers help to ourselves and others through mentoring, coaching, preparation for career development and enhancement, and information exchange.

In particular, during the creation of the Transportation Security Administration to enhance the nation's homeland security, AAGEN networked with the Asian Pacific American law enforcement organizations and assisted in the efforts to recruit Federal security executives and personnel by exchanging information on available opportunities, use of special Federal hiring authorities, and the required executive core qualifications for the SES under special pay-band plans.

AAGEN is committed to ensure that Asian Pacific Americans will have an opportunity to participate in and contribute to the most senior levels of the Federal, state, and local governments. Its members are dedicated to serve as mentors and lead in other capacities to successfully deliver the AAGEN mission.

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE CONGRESS TO DO

David Montoya, past President of National Image, Inc. and former Director of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, once said,

"Advocates of equal employment opportunity have observed that barriers to career advancement are flexible lids. For the groups who are reserved in their interaction styles, their lack of assertiveness is cited as a barrier. For those who are less advanced in formal education, their relatively low level of educational attainment is a barrier. For those who are vocal, they are considered too loud and therefore a liability to their career. For those who are focused in their professional pursuit, they are deemed to be not managerial material and they are left in their 'technical ghetto.' Some are blocked from advancement because they are too specialized; others are kept from upward mobility because they lack technical expertise."

Many analyses have been performed and reports written about the under-representation of women and minorities in the Federal workforce. Although some improvements have taken place when there was attention and intervention by Congress and the Administration, what has been lacking is the accountability to implement and enforce the recommendations.

The GAO reports confirm that Asian Pacific Americans are severely under-represented at the SES and other senior levels of the Federal government and that there are serious concerns about the lack of inclusion of Asian Pacific Americans at the pipeline levels and in succession planning.

AAGEN urges Congress and the Administration to proceed to the next stage of reaching out to Asian Pacific Americans and removing the employment barriers that prevent Asian Pacific Americans from reaching their full potential, offering true equal opportunities to enter the SES and other senior positions, and be included in the current transformation to a 21st century Government.

In summary, AAGEN concurs with the four GAO recommendations:

1. Recruitments directed at all under-represented groups;
2. Inclusion of diversity in workforce and executive succession planning;
3. Monitoring of existing workforce and selection for hiring and promotions; and
4. Holding executives accountable for diversity.

In addition, AAGEN proposes that

5. These recommendations should be linked to specific agency strategic plans and actions, established performance goals, continuous monitoring of results, and consequences of good or poor performance;
6. Congress continues to exercise oversight by directing GAO to perform annual audits and to hold hearings to address progress or the lack of it;
7. OPM and the U.S. Postal Service should be directed to restore the availability of timely, detail, and accurate demographic workforce data to the public, including both employment and applicant pool information; and
8. The Subcommittee continues to include AAGEN and the Asian Pacific Americans perspectives in the current transformation of the SES.

Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my statement. AAGEN will be glad to respond to your questions and provide additional assistance to your efforts. I thank you most sincerely for the opportunity to share our views.