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SES diversity predicted to fall short in 2030 and beyond

By Emily Long elong@govexec.com September 22, 2011

The Senior Executive Service will continue to lag in employment of women and minorities over the next two decades and beyond, according to a progressive advocacy group.

A new [report](#), released on Thursday by the Center for American Progress, found that diversity in the SES will not reflect the makeup of the American workforce as a whole in 2030. In the group's projections, whites, who made up 82.7 percent of the SES in 2010, will remain overrepresented at 71 percent in 2030 -- compared to 57 percent of the overall labor force -- while Hispanics will continue to fall below the national average.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that Latinos will make up 23 percent of civilian workers nationally in 2030, but CAP projections put them at just 6.8 percent of the government's senior executives. The gap is expected to extend through 2050, when 30 percent of the workforce will be Hispanic compared to 12.5 percent or less of the SES. Women will hold 41 percent of federal executive posts in 2030 compared to 47 percent of the overall labor force, the report found.

CAP reached its conclusions by looking at the age, gender and race of the current SES as well as what the group calls "feeders" -- employees in the upper levels of the General Schedule -- and built a predictive model using that data. The study excludes political appointees.

Carol A. Bonosaro, president of the Senior Executives Association, said it would be more accurate to compare diversity in the SES to that of the college educated workforce. Part of the difference could be attributed to the different rate of earning college degrees, as well as age, she noted.

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Asian-American and African-American members of the SES are likely to represent their share of the total workforce, according to CAP. Pacific Islanders and Native Americans are likely to hold less than half of comparable positions, however.

President Obama in August [issued an executive order](#) directing agencies to develop strategic plans to boost diversity. Administration officials later this fall will release a framework with roadmaps for hiring, training and promoting more minorities, women, and disabled employees in an effort to diversify the federal government, particularly at the senior levels. Agencies then will have 120 days to develop their own plans.

The governmentwide plan should specifically address ethnic, racial and gender diversity of the SES, according to CAP. The group recommended that the administration set an objective to close the diversity gap by 2030 with milestones every four years; create a database to recruit talented Hispanics into government; establish a diversity subcommittee within the President's Management Council; and study the causes of the diversity gap. Agencies should focus on identifying and attracting talent both outside government and within GS-13 through GS-15 levels and pilot a centralized SES recruitment system, the report said.

Fixing the pipeline for preparing candidates for SES careers is an important step, especially because there's a ready and willing minority population aiming for executive jobs, according to Bonosaro.

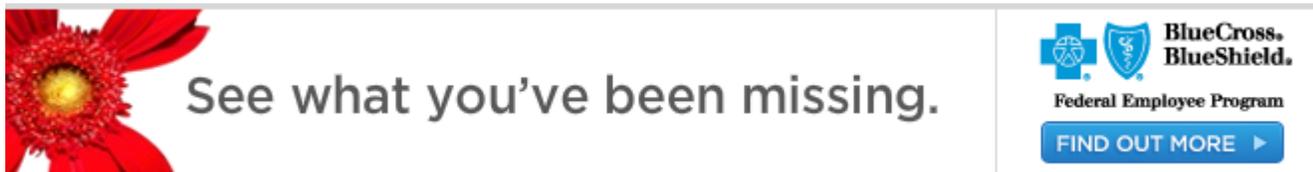
"We need to see where along the climb up the ladder that the fall off is occurring in terms of minority representation," she said. "It's equally important to figure out why. Only when we do that are we going to be able to really solve this problem. It's not enough just to say let's look solely at the selection process for the SES and what's happening there."

The report also cautioned against hiring solely based on diversity.

"When hiring into the Senior Executive Service, [the federal government] should always look for the best people it can find regardless of ethnicity, race or gender," CAP wrote. "Not only would this lead to a poorer quality government but it would also undermine the confidence of all applicants, not just minority groups and women."

According to Jorge Ponce, co-president of the Council of Federal EEO and Civil Rights Executives, increasing the percentage of Hispanics in the SES does not mean lowering hiring standards. Building diversity in the government's top positions "is not just a moral necessity," he said. "It's an economic necessity to survive in a global marketplace. Until the diversity of the SES ranks in the federal government reflects the tapestry of its population, it will waste the homegrown talent that can offer solutions to its greatest challenges."

Janet Kopenhagen, Washington representative for Federally Employed Women, said the report's results are disappointing, but she expressed hope that the recent executive order will alter the predictions. The percentage of women in the SES should be equal to that in the overall federal workforce, she added.



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