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Testimony

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**Underrepresentation of Minorities and Women
in the Foreign Service**

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Civil Service
Committee on Post Office and Civil Service
United States House of Representatives



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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are pleased to be here today to discuss our report on the representation of minorities and women in the State Department's Foreign Service.

Our review showed that:

- despite increases in the percentage of minorities employed between 1981 and 1987, minorities and women are still underrepresented in the State Department's Foreign Service work force when matched against comparable civilian labor force representation data developed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC);
- although required by EEOC, State has not adequately reviewed some aspects of its personnel processes for possible artificial barriers to equal opportunity employment and advancement; and
- the EEOC repeatedly pointed out that the State Department has not had an effective affirmative action plan or program for overcoming the underrepresentation in the Foreign Service.

MINORITIES AND WHITE WOMEN ARE UNDERREPRESENTED

The State Department employs (1) about 5,100 Foreign Service officers, who are traditionally considered to be diplomats, and (2) about 4,200 Foreign Service specialists, such as medical doctors, secretaries, and security personnel. According to the Foreign Service Act of 1980, the composition of the Foreign Service should be representative of the American people.

EEOC has developed labor force data for federal agencies to use in analyzing the representation of minorities and women in their work force. According to EEOC guidance, if the percentage of minorities or women in an agency's work force is lower than the percentage available in the civilian labor force with the necessary work skills, that group is considered underrepresented.

Between 1981 and 1987 State increased the representation of minorities from 7 percent to 11 percent. The representation of white women remained essentially unchanged at about 24 percent. In 1987, minorities and women were still significantly underrepresented at the senior levels of the Foreign Service. Minorities represented 4.1 percent of the 703 Senior Foreign Service positions and white women represented 4.4 percent of these positions.

By applying the EEOC criteria, we found that except for Asian-Americans/Pacific Islanders, State has eliminated entry level underrepresentation for Foreign Service officers. However, underrepresentation at the mid- and senior levels of the Foreign Service exists, particularly for white and minority women. For example, 605 of the 655 Senior Foreign Service officers are white men and 31 are white women. With full representation, the Senior Foreign Service would include an additional 55 minorities and 145 white women with corresponding reductions in the white male representation.

Progress in eliminating underrepresentation in the Foreign Service specialist ranks has not been as good as for Foreign Service officers. For example, while State increased representation or eliminated underrepresentation in 75 percent of the grade, race, ethnic origin and gender groupings for Foreign Service officers between 1981 and 1987, only 38 percent of the specialist groupings showed improvement. Women (both minority and white) made little progress in either administrative or technical positions. Black and Hispanic women are underrepresented in Foreign Service clerical positions. For example, out of a total of 1,138 Foreign Service secretaries in 1987, only 56 were black women and 35 were Hispanic women.

Currently, the basis for the EEOC labor force data is the 1980 census. If the increases of minorities and women in comparable

jobs since the 1980 census were considered, the statistics would show an even greater underrepresentation of minorities and women in the Foreign Service. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, blacks, Hispanics, and white women have increased their representation in the civilian labor force in recent years.

CERTAIN PERSONNEL PROCESSES HAVE A DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT

Our review showed that some of State's hiring, promotion, and assignment processes have a disproportionate effect on minorities and women. For example, State's recruiting efforts are not producing the desired results, and the number of minorities who take the Foreign Service examination has been declining. Minorities pass the Foreign Service examination at only one-fourth of the rate of white males. The rate at which black males fail to gain tenure is much greater than the rate for white males. A disproportionate number of minorities and white women are assigned to administrative and consular work rather than political affairs assignments, which are generally considered more prestigious. While promotion rates for minority and white female Foreign Service officers are generally comparable to those of their white male counterparts, rates of promotion for several specialist categories are lower.

The EEOC requires agencies to analyze their personnel practices to identify and eliminate any policies, practices, and procedures that

may be barriers to the employment or advancement of minorities and women. Our review of State Department data on the results of certain personnel procedures and practices indicates there may be barriers that hinder the hiring or advancement of minorities and white women in the Foreign Service. For example:

-- About 20 percent of white applicants passed the written Foreign Service examination, while 5 percent of minorities passed. To compensate for these disparities in the examination pass rates, State instituted a "near-pass" program; as a result 28 percent of all minorities who took the examination in 1987 moved beyond this initial screening step to the oral examination. However, minorities were less successful than whites in the oral examination.

-- A final review panel analyzes the files of candidates who succeed in the written and oral examinations (oral only for specialists). The panel assigns a suitability score to candidates based on the examination scores and a background investigation. We found that in 1987 minority Foreign Service officer candidates were rejected by the final review panel at higher rates than white candidates. Statistics for 1987 showed that minority officer candidates were eliminated at a 17.6 percent rate for males and a 14.8 percent rate for females. These rates are greater than the majority rates of 8.5 and 12.1 percent, respectively.

-- Minorities and white women were disproportionately assigned to administrative and consular work. White males received a greater percentage of political assignments, which are viewed as being more favorable in seeking advancement to Senior Foreign Service positions. These perceptions about advancement, however, are not entirely accurate. Consular officers were promoted at the highest rate at the mid-levels and to the Senior Foreign Service at almost the same rate as political officers. However, political officers were promoted at a higher rate within the Senior Foreign Service.

-- A State Department report on the results of its tenure process for June 1985 through June 1987 showed that (1) white women were selected out of the Foreign Service officer corps at a rate lower than white men and (2) minorities, both men and women, were selected out at much higher rates. For example, about 17 percent of black men (4 of 23) did not receive tenure, while only about 3 percent of white men (7 of 253) were selected out.

Although State's affirmative action plans refer to barrier analyses, the EEOC has criticized them because they do not address the problem of eliminating unnecessary selection barriers. For example, according to State's 1987 affirmative action plan, women and minorities are not as well represented in the political and economic cones as in the other two cones, and the plan identified

that as a barrier. The plan did not address the underlying cause of this problem. The written examination has been a key mechanism in making assignments to cones and may have been an unintended barrier to assigning minorities and women to the economic and political cones.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PLANS DO NOT MEET REQUIREMENTS

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires federal agencies to develop and implement affirmative action programs to eliminate the historic underrepresentation of minorities and women in the work force. Our review showed that for several years, the State Department had not fully complied with federal requirements for affirmative action programs. These requirements were designed to eliminate underrepresentation in the federal work force. EEOC has repeatedly criticized State's affirmative action plans, yet subsequent plans have also been deficient.

Although State had established broad affirmative action goals, it had not, according to EEOC

-- properly analyzed its work force to establish affirmative action hiring goals targeted to specific underrepresented groups,

- established goals or timetables for the internal movement or promotion of personnel to eliminate underrepresentation at mid- and senior levels of the Foreign Service, or
- conducted analyses of possible impediments to equal employment opportunity.

State's affirmative action efforts did not focus on its Foreign Service specialist personnel. However, underrepresentation is significant in several race, ethnic, and gender categories. For example, although black women are about 9.3 percent of the comparable clerical civilian labor force, they represent only 4.9 percent of State's Foreign Service secretaries. In 1987 State hired only one black woman as a Foreign Service secretary while it hired 34 white women. State did not collect or analyze information on applicants for Foreign Service specialist positions to determine whether its hiring processes meet merit requirements established by EEOC.

State's recruiting efforts have not increased the number of minorities taking the Foreign Service examination for officer positions. Between 1985 and 1987, overall registrations for the examination decreased from 26,089 to 22,585 (a decline of 13 percent). The number of minorities who registered for the examination decreased by 25 percent.

One of the key differences in EEOC's current affirmative action guidance (EEO Management Directive 714) from previous EEOC guidance is that agency goals (numerical objectives) are now optional. While establishing numerical goals for the hiring and advancement of minorities and women is now optional, we concluded that it would be helpful for State to have this kind of framework to structure its affirmative action program.

Our report therefore recommended that the Secretary of State establish numerical goals for hiring and advancement by race, ethnic origin, and gender. We also recommended that State

-- compile information needed, such as the race, ethnic origin, and gender of applicants for Foreign Service specialist positions, to monitor the implementation and progress of affirmative action efforts and

-- analyze personnel processes for artificial barriers and eliminate any barriers found. Such analyses should include determinations of

(1) whether the Foreign Service written examination is a valid predictor of success in light of current job requirements;

(2) why minorities and women are eliminated at a higher rate than white men by the final review panel process;

(3) why women and minorities are disparately assigned to certain functional work areas; and

(4) whether artificial barriers are hindering the promotion of minorities and white women in the Foreign Service specialist ranks and the advancement of minorities in the Senior Foreign Service.

In ~~commenting~~ on a draft of our report, the State Department said that it was taking several steps. The Department said it would:

- Alter the 5 year affirmative action plan as needed, including the establishment of specific goals to eliminate underrepresentation.
- Compile more extensive information on the race and gender of applicants for specialist positions to monitor affirmative action progress.
- Undertake a new job analysis that will underpin a redesigned written examination in an attempt to eliminate any disparate impact. State has already taken steps to modify the scoring of the written examination, including the functional field tests, to ensure that these tests will not work against

minorities and women when they are assessed by the final review panel.

More recently the Department has reaffirmed its earlier response by stating that it is committed to setting specific affirmative action goals. The Department has delayed the upcoming Foreign Service examination, allowing time to conduct a job analysis in support of a redesigned examination. Finally, the Department is now compiling specific information on applicants for Foreign Service specialist positions.

This concludes my prepared remarks. I will be happy to respond to any questions.