



The voice of career federal executives since 1980

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September 1, 2020

William Stepien
Campaign Manager
Donald J. Trump for President
725 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Dear Mr. Stepien,

On behalf of the Senior Executives Association (SEA) – which represents the interests of career federal executives in the Senior Executive Service (SES), those in Senior Level (SL), Scientific and Professional (ST) and equivalent positions and other senior career federal leaders – I would like to introduce our Association and our core suggestions for ensuring the federal government is able to deliver on President Trump’s promises to the American people if re-elected.

For over 40 years, SEA has worked on behalf of leaders in the career federal workforce to ensure our public sector is meeting the needs of the people it serves and, as the largest employer in the country, acts as the model employer for the rest of the nation.

Regardless of debates regarding the size and scope of government, our nation requires an efficient and well-functioning federal workforce in order to deliver basic services to the American people. As a non-profit, non-partisan professional association organization dedicated to good governance, SEA would like to continue working with the Trump Administration in ensuring our Executive Branch agencies are equipped to live up to their important missions.

Unfortunately, in its current state, [research](#) reflects that our federal government lacks the capacity to engage in effective and meaningful reforms and modernization which are necessary to bring public sector employment into the 21st Century.

Outlined below are 5 suggested priorities necessary to improve the federal government’s management quality and deliver sustainable results for taxpayers.

Please have your staff work with SEA Director of Policy and Outreach, Jason Briefel, at Jason.Briefel@seniorexecs.org to discuss how we can partner to ensure our government can deliver on your promises to the American people. I wish you the best on your campaign.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Corsi, Jr.
Interim President
Senior Executives Association



SEA's 5 Core Suggestions for Revitalizing the Federal Government's Capacity

1. End the War on Expertise and Competence in Public Service

Non-competitive appointment of unqualified and unprepared individuals into the Executive Branch as political appointees threatens the effectiveness of federal agency operations, responsible stewardship of taxpayer funds, and ultimately diminishes Presidential control over the Executive Branch.

- **How to get acting jobs filled in 90 days?** Presidential transition law already requires agencies to identify SES ready and capable to fill acting roles. Leverage agency transition councils, those who have had Acting experience previously, to develop a pool of qualified career senior leader talent ready to serve on day 1. Agency transition teams should begin working with agencies to identify this pool prior to the inauguration as many vacancies appear before the end of the calendar year.
- Identify qualified and experienced public servants to consider for PAS and PA positions – potential pools of pre-vetted sources include Presidential Rank Awardees and Service to America finalists and winners.
- Save taxpayers billions by eliminating 1,000 unnecessary political appointments, especially in operational and mission (non-policy) roles.
- Designate senior mission support positions as SES career-reserved, consistent with [Joint Policy Agenda on SES](#) by SEA, Partnership for Public Service, and the Volcker Alliance.
- Require political appointees to have individual performance plans, consistent with requirements in GPRAMA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA).
- Mandate OPM to produce a website that serves as a virtual Plum Book, providing real-time data and visibility into political appointments and vacancies. (PLUM Act)
- Engage a study on the total number, type, cost and benefits of political appointments below the PAS level.
- Work with the Senate to reevaluate the necessity of all PAS positions.

2. Revitalize the Merit System

For 137 years, the policy of the United States government has been to hire career civil servants on the basis of merit. The merit system is in desperate need of attention, with less than 1/3 federal career appointments being made through a competitive hiring process according to a [recent OPM study](#). OPM has no authority nor oversight over the majority of federal personnel systems.

- Restore a quorum to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) – over 3,000 Americans have been deprived of access to justice, some for up to 3 years, and hundreds of thousands of non-unionized federal employees have no forum in which to enforce their rights.
- Strengthen the capacity and independence of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) – appoint a strong, competent, qualified Director. Elevate OPM Director to a Cabinet-level position and have Director serve as the Federal Chief People Officer.
- Strengthen and expand whistleblower protections.
- Study on Inherently Governmental Functions – what roles and decisions must be the responsibility of civil servants versus contractors and consultants.
- [10 Considerations for Civil Service Modernization](#) – eliminate internal bureaucratic red tape that holds dedicated civil servants back and inhibits innovation.

3. Create a National Culture of Service & Expand Service Opportunities

Union-initiated lawsuits annihilated the government’s young talent pipeline when the Federal Career Internship Program was shut down in 2010. The hiring programs that have replaced the viable internship program have largely been failures, and the government workforce under age 30 is now a paltry 6%. The government must repair its talent pipeline.

- Pursue implementation and passage into law of recommendations of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (H.R. 6415, the Inspire to Serve Act).
- SEA identified a subset of these [recommendations for policymakers to prioritize](#).
- Implement the recommendations of the [National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence](#) (NSCAI), the [Cyberspace Solarium Commission](#) (CSC), and the [National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service](#) (NCMNPS) to strengthen the national security and federal workforces, including addressing hiring. ([letter](#))

4. Invest in the Capability of the Federal Workforce

The federal government faces significant [risks of systematic and mission failure](#) due to lack of attention to cultivating its workforce over the past several decades. The [governance of federal human capital management](#) needs a reboot. Reimagined attention to the workforce can drive improvements to [management quality](#).

- Modernization in technology, data, and management practices will not come without sustained investment in the federal workforce. Commit a minimum 2% of agency budgets to protected annual federal employee development accounts.
- Strengthen Career Leadership. The government must cease promoting employees with technical expertise into management and leadership roles and instead pursue a robust assessment program while identifying the skillsets needed to do the work of each position.

- OPM shall develop a registry of candidates who have had their ECQs vetted and approved by the OPM QRB and who are ready for appointment to the SES and furnish the list to agencies.
- Conduct a government-wide talent development study to understand what is working in agencies, what is being spent overall, as well as to identify duplicative programs and those that should be eliminated. [Agency practices vary widely](#).
- Broadening Participation – above GS-13 in the federal government, diversity precipitously drops. This must be addressed to have a career leadership cadre reflective of the American people.
- De-link SES pay from Executive Schedule Level III. Enable agencies to more appropriately compensate executive and other mission-critical talent, remaining under the POTUS cap. The contractor compensation limit is set to \$555,000, which taxpayers pay for, on top of fees for contracted services.

5. Overhaul the Federal Budget

During the modern budget era, Congress has only been able to fully fund the government on-time with the rules it sets for itself 4 times, and has shut down the government 4 times in the past decade. Constant Continuing Resolutions and the inability to address issues by portfolio dramatically limit the effectiveness of taxpayer dollars.

- Use the budget process, not policy, to drive real change.
- Move to biennial budgeting, provide agencies with workforce funding target levels to facilitate planning and investment.
- [Mobilize capital investment](#) to accelerate government modernization.
- Totally rethink budget process and agency/program structure. Does every Department need each of its bureaus to have their own fully staffed HR, IT, Finance, Procurement mission support operations? Consider a FITARA type law for each of the mission support functions.
- Address duplication, fragmentation and overlap in programs and organizational structure.
- Create within OMB a Human Capital cross-cutting RMO that looks at human capital spending and policy across the federal government to ensure alignment and effectiveness across the enterprise and at individual agencies as well as at the traditional civil service oversight agencies.