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June 22, 2020

The Honorable James Lankford
Chairman
Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs
& Federal Management
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kyrsten Sinema
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs
& Federal Management
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Sinema, and Members of the Subcommittee:

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 write to share SEA’s emphatic endorsement of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service’s recommendations and an urgent call to action to Congress to act.

In 2019, SEA and a group of university researchers released a report entitled, [Are Declines in U.S. Federal Workforce Capabilities Putting Our Government at Risk of Failing?](#) The report detailed how long-neglected governing institutions faced with multiple crises could fail the American people when they need it most. The COVID-19 pandemic has proved these fears true. The capacity and capabilities of agencies across the federal government – indeed at all levels of government – are a national security concern. Our nation’s public service infrastructure needs a top to bottom overhaul, and we cannot wait for another pandemic, or even a second wave of this one, to make that any more apparent.

SEA collaborated closely with the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service through its entire process and [wholeheartedly endorses its recommendations](#). We joined other federal managers and good government advocates in an April letter to [Congress and the President](#) to include policies recommended by the National Commission in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) this year. As the Senate brings the NDAA to the floor, SEA reiterates that call to action.

We believe that Congress has all of the evidence it needs about the challenges the public service faces, including the federal workforce. For example, last summer [SEA wrote this committee](#) regarding the need to improve federal hiring and pathways to progress, but none was made. Four years ago, this subcommittee held a [hearing on empowering federal managers](#). The time, and more importantly the need, for more review has long passed. The COVID-19 pandemic has made clear that if we as Americans want our federal government to be responsive to public needs and succeed in the future, Congress must take action now, during the 116th Congress, to lay that foundation for success.

Fortunately, the National Commission’s report and recommendations provide a powerful and integrated set of recommendations to revitalize a spirit and culture of service across the nation. While some recommendations require further inquiry by Congress, there are several that SEA believes can have an immediate impact and represent basic best practices which stakeholders have spent years pressuring Congress to consider. The following recommendations should be prioritized by Congress:

- Expand national service programs targeting diverse populations – Recommendation 17A
- Reduce hardship in provision of wraparound services – Recommendation 17B
- Remote participation in Peace Corps volunteer programs – Recommendation 20A
- Increase the use of term and temporary appointments – Recommendation 21F
- Expand use of direct-hire authority – Recommendation 22C
- Standardize and extend noncompetitive eligibility – Recommendation 23B
- Improve the Pathways Internship and Recent Graduate hiring programs – Recommendation 24A
- Pilot new hiring programs for critical skills – Recommendation 24B
- Implement technical correction for direct-hire authority for students and recent graduates – Recommendation 24D
- Streamline and expand fellowship and scholarship programs – Recommendation 24E
- Streamline federal healthcare professional hiring; credential portability – Recommendation 26

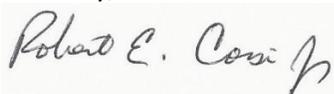
Congress must also take action to spur administrative and agency improvement. Aggressive oversight of agencies will drive continued progress. The National Commission offers many recommendations here, and the following would provide immediate improvements in mission delivery:

- Streamline interagency transfers – Recommendation 21E
- Increase agency use of noncompetitive hiring systems – Recommendation 22A
- Improve communication on use of noncompetitive eligibility (NCE) – Recommendation 22B

Congress this year also received the reports and recommendations from two additional congressionally-chartered Commissions, the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence (NSCAI) and the Cyberspace Solarium Commission (CSC). On May 7, these commissions joined the National Commission in a [joint letter to the Armed Services Committees](#) encouraging the committees to advance each of their respective sets of federal and national security workforce recommendations. Disappointingly, too few did, and SEA encourages Senators on this committee to push for their inclusion in the NDAA or other critical legislation. SEA remains hopeful that [bipartisan support](#) for important related proposals such as the Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act can reach the President’s desk.

Congress consistently delays action on civil service modernization, but as our nation’s recent challenges lament, the American people need a federal government that functions receptively to their needs. Congress must take steps now to improve public service and strengthen the federal workforce. The war for talent grows more competitive every day, and every year Congress fails to take substantial and comprehensive action, the government loses ground. SEA stands ready to assist in this shared effort. Please contact Jason Briefel (Jason.Briefel@seniorexecs.org; 202-971-3300) if the association can provide any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Robert E. Corsi, Jr.
Interim President