



Press Release

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6 Months and Counting: SEA Calls Upon Administration to Announce Plans for Alternate Recognition in Place of Suspended Presidential Rank Awards

Washington, D.C. – On June 11 *The Wall Street Journal* reported that an official from the Obama Administration confirmed that Presidential Rank Awards would not be awarded in FY 2013. At that time the unnamed official said the White House is “focused on finding means to acknowledge excellence in non-monetary ways.” To date, however, no alternate means have been announced by the Administration although the end of the fiscal year - the time when the President would normally approve Rank Awards – has long passed. The Senior Executives Association (SEA) understands that departments and agencies, in response to a May Office of Personnel Management (OPM) call, submitted Presidential Rank Award nominations.

Although SEA does not agree with the cancellation of the Presidential Rank Awards, the Association does believe that recognition, aside from the award itself, can and should still be given. In an October 30 letter to the President, SEA recommended appropriate means for the Administration to meet its commitment to acknowledge excellence in the career executive service and to do so in a meaningful way. These recommendations, along with SEA’s offer to cooperate with the Administration in recognizing the winners, were reiterated in a December 12 letter to OPM Director Katherine Archuleta.

SEA President Carol Bonosaro said, “To date, it is deeply disappointing that no response has been forthcoming from the Administration and, further, that no call for nominations for 2013 has been issued. The Presidential Rank Awards have been given annually to Senior Executives (and, more recently, to Senior Professionals), since the inception of the Senior Executive Service in 1979; they recognize extraordinary achievement and substantial savings, estimated at \$95 billion for the 2012 awardees alone. The Administration is missing a superb opportunity to let the American public know the good government - and career civil servants - have accomplished. This strategic omission is especially unfortunate given the criticism the Executive Branch generally and federal employees in particular take regularly in the Congress and the media.”

In its release and letter, SEA called upon the Administration to:

- Host a meeting with the President for the awardees at all levels, including a photo opportunity
- Provide all Rank awardees with a certificate or letter signed by the President
- Permit OPM to publicize the names of the award winners and allow agencies to publicly recognize awardees and hold appropriate internal ceremonies
- Confirm that the traditional Presidential Rank Awards program will be resumed upon the end of sequestration and assure that receipt of this year’s non-monetary awards will not preclude recipients from consideration for a monetary Presidential Rank Award upon resumption of that program

If these steps are taken, the letter promised that the SEA Professional Development League will host a banquet for the awardees at the Department of State Diplomatic Reception Rooms (as it has done each year since 1986 for Presidential Distinguished Rank Award winners) and will be pleased to welcome the President at this event where he can recognize them in lieu of the separate meeting recommended above. Implementing the Association’s recommendations would make clear

that the President understands the importance of the career executive service to meeting the Administration's program and policy agenda and values the corps' significant contributions to effectively managing the Executive Branch.

The Senior Executives Association believes that the awards are required by statute. Although the Association said at the time of the Administration's announcement in June that SEA recognizes the concern for both budget and optics during the sequester, SEA also pointed out that it seemed rather short sighted to sacrifice a program designed to encourage and reward excellence in government, especially one which is completely justified given both the significant accomplishments of the awardees and the huge savings they secure for government and taxpayers. At such a challenging time, we need the kind of executives exemplified by the Presidential Rank Awards.

Given the 3 year federal pay freeze, the Administration's reduction in funding for SES performance awards (an integral part of Senior Executives' compensation), the congressional attacks on SES performance awards and employment security, the continued decline in Presidential Rank Awards even prior to their recent suspension (124 federal executives were honored for their service in 2012 -- down from 344 award winners in 2009), and the managerial challenges presented by sequestration, it is not surprising that more and more Senior Executives and Professionals are choosing to retire and that more and more talented, able potential candidates have lost interest in SES positions as the attractors for service in the executive corps have steadily eroded.

The Senior Executives Association (SEA) is a professional association representing Senior Executive Service members and other career federal executives. Founded in 1980, SEA's goals are: to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of the federal government; to advance the professionalism and advocate the interests of career federal executives; and to enhance public recognition of their contributions. The SEA Professional Development League (PDL) is a nonprofit educational organization committed to advancing the professionalism of career federal executives through the sponsorship of training, recognition, and research activities.