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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 24, 2010

MSPB RELEASES NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTING FEDERAL WOMEN'S AMBITIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

In a newly released report, "[Women in the Federal Government: Ambitions and Achievements](#)," The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) assesses the treatment and advancement of women in the Federal Government, based on analyses of workforce data and Federal employee perceptions of their experiences and career advancement in the Federal Government.

Much has changed for the better since MSPB's 1992 report, "[A Question of Equity: Women and the Glass Ceiling in the Federal Government](#)." For example, women now hold approximately 30 percent of positions in the Senior Executive Service, a marked improvement from only 11 percent in 1990. Within the Federal Government, differences between women and men in education and experience continue to diminish. Fewer women report that they are subjected to discrimination or stereotypes, reflecting progress toward a workplace in which employees are selected, rewarded, and advanced solely on the basis of their abilities and accomplishments.

Although this progress is commendable, women remain less likely than men to be employed in high-paying occupations and supervisory positions. Continuing occupational differences between women and men may complicate efforts to recruit a diverse workforce and limit women's opportunities for career development and advancement. Discrimination on the basis of sex, although less frequent, has not yet completely disappeared from Federal workplaces.

Therefore, agencies must continue efforts to recruit and advance qualified women, pay close attention to fairness in areas such work assignment and training that can have long-term effects on an employee's performance and promotability, and remain vigilant against prohibited

and individual merit, and must not be influenced by stereotypes, favoritism, or other non-merit factors.

Federal agencies and managers will need to look beyond past strategies to address contemporary concerns and attain and engage a high-performing, knowledge-based Federal workforce. For example, Federal agencies should educate employees on the competencies needed to enter mission-critical occupations and advance to the highest levels, actively support employee work/life balance, and avoid undue inflexibility on matters such as work schedules and geographic mobility. In addition, agencies should understand the potential consequences of continuing occupational differences between women and men. Although women now outnumber men among both college and graduate students, women are still less likely than men to enter some important fields, such as science, engineering, law enforcement, and information technology. As Chairman Grundmann noted, “Occupational differences matter, because they can create ‘glass walls’ in organizations—barriers to lateral movement and career growth for employees outside high-paying or mission-critical fields. Such barriers may require agencies and managers to reexamine their approaches to recruitment, work assignment, or leadership development.”

The MSPB also found that Federal employees have considerable influence over their own careers, beginning with initial decisions about education and occupation. Federal employees who participated in our Career Advancement Survey reported that steps such as seeking a mentor, completing developmental or high-profile assignments, and acquiring new skills contributed greatly to their success. Accordingly, the report includes recommendations for Federal employees who seek advancement within the Federal service.

The [U.S. Merit System Protection Board](#) (MSPB) is an independent, quasi-judicial agency that protects Federal merit systems and the rights of individuals within those systems. The MSPB also conducts studies of the civil service and other merit systems in the Executive Branch. To request a printed copy of OPE reports, email STUDIES@mspb.gov; call (202) 653-6772 ext. 4802; or write to the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, Office of Policy and Evaluation, 1615 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20419.