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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary

Subcommittee On The Constitution

Field Hearing

Statement by Harold K. Brown, Associate Dean
College of Business Administration
San Diego State University

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Thank you for holding a hearing in San Diego and providing me with the opportunity to share my feelings on the topic of Affirmation Action.

There are two groups that disturb me regarding this issue of Affirmative Action, (1) the group that wants to retain all Affirmative Action programs and refuses to recognize the need for review and possible modifications, and (2) the group that uses Affirmative Action to scare and mislead the public to benefit their personal interests.

I am a supporter and advocate for Affirmative Action programs that address the problems created by our country over a period of a couple of centuries. America chose to develop its society by incorporating into it a system of slavery and post slavery discrimination. The choice of this economic and social system that denied the privileges of citizenship to its citizens of African descent, resulted in conditions and behavior that still lock out African Americans, other people of color and women from entering the mainstream of America. This was America's choice. It seems to me that America should not retreat from its responsibility to correct those wrongs that we all know took place and for which none of us are proud.

To eliminate the Affirmative Action Program to satisfy the short term interests of those who are seeking political power for themselves or for their political party, represents the poorest example of being an American, and defrauds the American people. Those who are calling for the elimination of the Affirmative Action Program are not basing their decision on fact, but rather on myths and misrepresentations. They claim that the conditions affecting African Americans and other groups have been removed from our society, that the uneven field of the past is now level. The people who make this claim

are intelligent, sophisticated people. So, I know they know better. The Whites making this claim would be horrified at the prospect of living the rest of their lives as an African American and giving up all privileges as a White American. Black Americans who support that claim do so for a host of reasons that could be enumerated and explained but would require time that is not available here. Suffice it to say that they also know better.

The myths go on:

A. White males are being discriminated against because of Affirmative Action.

My reply to that claim is that when Black Americans made the charge, with much evidence to support it, they were being discriminated against, it has taken centuries for Congress, governors, mayors, legislators and the public to speak out against discrimination. Now, that some White males feel they are being treated unjustly, there is a call from some of our leaders to immediately dismantle all Affirmative Action programs - which violates a very fundamental practice of effective management.

B. Affirmative Action creates preferences for ethnic groups and women.

Affirmative Action programs have been like a walking cane. A cane will help you walk a little better, but your leg is still broken. Until the break is corrected you will not be able to walk or run normally and compete with those who do not have broken legs. America has not corrected the "broken legs" it created. A review of the numbers will clearly show that minorities and women continue to lag far behind White males in economic progress.

C. Affirmative Action hurts people of color.

Affirmative Action only hurts people of color when the program is not sincerely implemented. Affirmative Action programs have opened for us the economic doors that have been closed for so long. Even with Affirmative Action, the struggle for equal economic opportunities for people of color and women persists.

I don't believe however, that the real issue regarding Affirmative Action is one of myths and the offering of evidence to dispel those myths. The real issue is whether the American people will permit themselves to be used by politicians and others who would

sacrifice the interests of our nation for their own personal benefit. The real issue is whether the people of this country will permit themselves to be fooled into thinking that the elimination of Affirmative Action programs will somehow make their lives better. The real question in America is not how many jobs White males have lost due to Affirmative Action, but how many jobs White males have lost due to America's loss of jobs by shifting jobs to other countries, or by our country's loss of manufacturing and the jobs that it provided, or how many jobs have been lost to technology, or lost to the inefficiency of the management of our nation's corporations, or lost through our administrations' lack of ability to compete in a globally competitive economy.

So please, don't put the blame on Affirmative Action. Don't blame us, the victims of a horrible system of discrimination. My plea is to the people of America. Don't allow those self interested few divide us against each other. There are much more serious and fundamental problems we as a nation must solve. And we can solve them if we ask the right questions and not let ourselves be manipulated to elect a person or party into power. Let's elect a person or a party on the basis of how they propose to address the really serious and fundamental issues facing our nation - crime, the loss of middle class income, drugs, the economy, creating jobs, protecting against terrorists - both inside and outside U.S. borders, and a deteriorated education system. Is Affirmative Action blamed for these also?

Today our nation finds itself struggling to retain the economic competitive edge that we enjoyed since World War II. Our nation is struggling to find jobs to replace the hundreds of thousands of jobs that were lost over the last couple of decades. We struggle to find a way to make our citizens again feel safe to walk the streets of their neighborhoods and cities. This is not the time to accuse each other and call each other names. This is what those who want to divide us, want us to do. They want us to concentrate on this thing called Affirmative Action and go to the polls and vote for them based on Affirmative Action. Well, I believe the American people are a lot smarter than they give us credit for. If there are some improvements needed to make Affirmative Action work better for this nation, then make those improvements.

To eliminate the Affirmative Action program, and to leave the problems it is addressing unaddressed, sends a terrible message to the millions of people it was designed to help. It seems to me to be foolish to unnecessarily alienate friends who have been loyal and supportive to America's cause. To snatch the cane from us at this point is both unwise and immoral. America has a moral obligation to redress the problems it created for millions of people. We call upon your leadership to lead this nation in a spirit of cooperation and working together. We call upon your leadership to speak out against

those who fan the flames of fear and distrust. We call upon you to provide the intelligent leadership of objective analysis and evaluation of the Affirmative Action Program, and after review, apply fairness to whatever corrective measures that are needed.

Election campaigns that are run by playing on the fears caused by a system that we all deplore and wish to forget, reflect the lowest form of leadership. As the guardians of our country you are burdened with the responsibility of bringing out the best in this nation. We pray for your strength and courage in carrying out that responsibility. Thank you for this time.