

# AFSA NEWS

American Foreign Service Association • February 2009

MEMBERS WANT CONCERNS ADDRESSED BY NEW ADMINISTRATION

## Annual Opinion Poll Yields Record Number of Responses

BY STEVE KASHKETT, STATE VICE PRESIDENT

AFSA's annual opinion poll of our State active-duty membership worldwide took on special importance this year because of the U.S. presidential election and the prospect of sweeping changes in the leadership and management of the Department of State. The people of the Foreign Service clearly saw the survey as an opportunity to send a strong message to the new administration about the priorities and initiatives that are important to our profession. The knowledge that AFSA would be meeting with the transition team during the same timeframe prompted a rush to provide feedback.

As a result, this electronic poll got a remarkable, enthusiastic response that leaped above the numbers we witnessed in previous years. More than 5,500 Foreign Service employees at State — nearly half of the entire active-duty ranks — completed the survey. This included thousands of entry-level members, comparable numbers of mid-level personnel and more than 500 Senior Foreign Service officers.

As in past years, the respondents were divided among generalists and specialists, and those serving overseas and domestically, in proportions that statistically match those of the entire State Department Foreign Service contingent. Responses came from every overseas post and every domestic bureau.

Scanning the numerical results of yes/no and multiple-choice questions (reflected in the charts accompanying this article), as well as the thousands of



Many of the top issues relate to managing a career increasingly dominated by hardship and unaccompanied postings. Of high-ranking importance is the desire for fairness and equity in assignments.

free-form comments that people entered, one gets an unambiguous sense of the foremost concerns on the minds of U.S. diplomats.

Many of the top issues relate to managing a career increasingly dominated by hardship and unaccompanied postings. Of high-ranking importance is the desire for fairness and equity in assignments, as well as apprehensions about guiding our families through the challenges of today's Foreign Service life. Only a small minority of respondents (15 percent) think the department is doing enough to

help separated families. Some 71 percent believe that people should be allowed to extend in an overseas or domestic assignment to enable a son or daughter to finish the senior year of high school. And a strong majority (63 percent) want AFSA to advocate for official recognition and benefits for same-sex partners of our members.

The people of the Foreign Service remain frustrated over the worsening overseas pay disparity and the outgoing administration's neglect of the staffing and resource needs of our embassies and consulates all over the world. A large majority of respondents attach "high importance" to AFSA's efforts to address these two problems. Significant majorities affirm that inadequate funding and staffing have made it more difficult for

Continued on page 41

### Renovation Update

In mid-December, AFSA staff moved out of temporary quarters at 1800 N. Kent St. in Rosslyn and were awaiting final checks on the renovated headquarters building at 2101 E St. NW before moving in.

Despite a few of the glitches that seem to be part of every renovation project, we hope to be settling into our renovated offices this month.

We'll keep you posted!

them to do their jobs efficiently and effectively. Overwhelming numbers of responses to these questions leave no doubt that most consider it a fundamental part of the Secretary's job to fight for resources for American diplomacy.

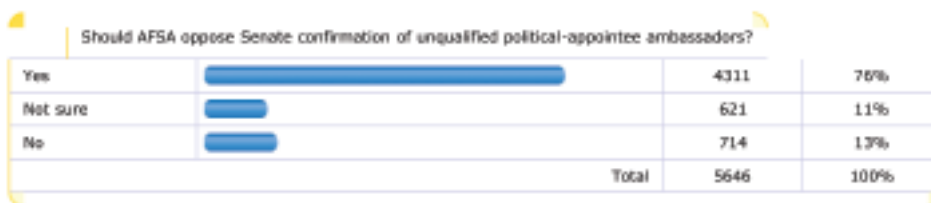
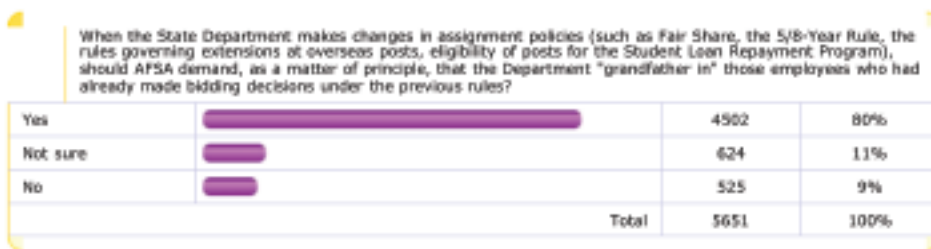
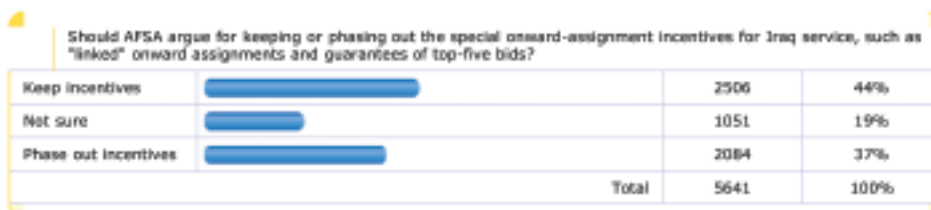
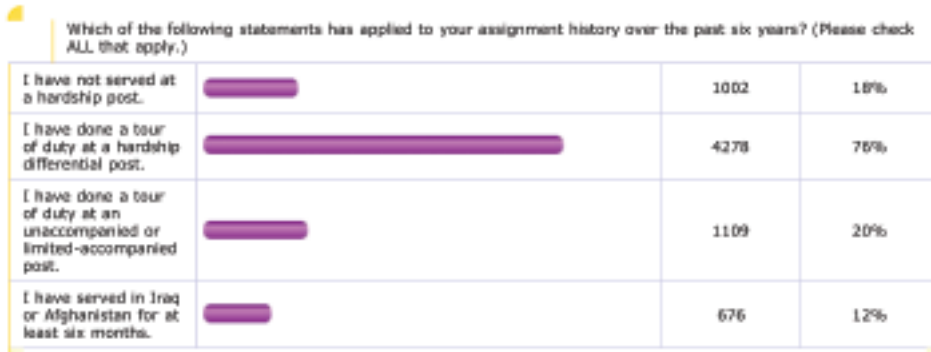
Our opinion poll revealed strong sentiment over professional issues. A whopping 98 percent of respondents agreed that "Foreign Service members, especially senior officers, have a duty to provide frank, constructive advice to the political leadership behind closed doors on foreign policy issues and on management issues impacting the Foreign Service — even if that

Some 71 percent believe that people should be allowed to extend in an overseas or domestic assignment to enable a son or daughter to finish the senior year of high school.

advice is not welcomed by the superior." Hundreds of comments indicated that people do not believe this has been the case in recent years and are concerned over the lack of open discussion of policy issues. Finally, a very strong majority (76 percent) believe AFSA should oppose unqualified political-appointee ambassadors.

On a positive note, there appears to be a reversal in our members' thinking about their long-term prospects in the Foreign Service. While last year's poll indicated

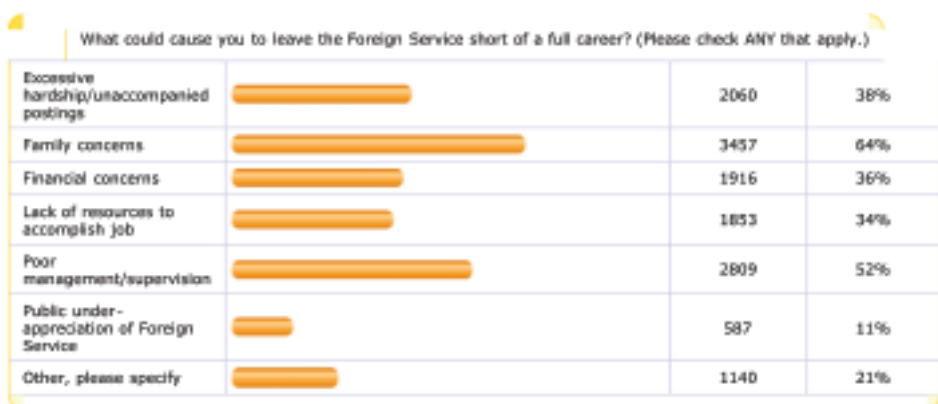
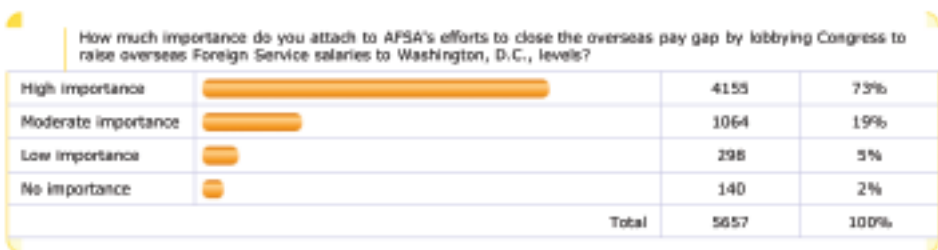
Article and charts continue on page 42



A whopping 98 percent of respondents believe that "Foreign Service members, especially senior officers, have a duty to provide frank, constructive advice to the political leadership ... even if that advice is not welcomed by the superior."

that 41 percent did not expect to remain in the Service for a full career, that number dropped to 21 percent this year (although there was a marked rise in the number of those who responded "not sure"). Again, hundreds of comments suggested that the main reasons for this turnaround were relief at the department's less heavy-handed approach to war-zone assignments this year and anticipation of progressive change with the arrival of a new administration.

The unmistakable impression that emerges from a careful reading of member comments in this poll is of a proud, dutiful Foreign Service accustomed to the increasingly difficult challenges we face overseas and ready for the uphill task of restoring American diplomacy and leadership abroad — but at the same time keenly aware of the need for improvement in the way our leaders treat the diplomatic profession and the men and women who devote their lives to it. □



To see the report in full,  
visit the AFSA Web site at  
[www.afsa.org](http://www.afsa.org).