

2017-2019 AFSA Governing Board Term Report



Members of the 2017-2019 AFSA Governing Board gather for the first board meeting at AFSA headquarters in July 2017. From left: FCS Alternate Rep. Matthew Hilgendorf, Retiree Rep. Amb. (ret.) Al La Porta, BBG Rep. Steven Herman, State Rep. Josh Glazeroff, State Rep. Tricia Wingerter, State Rep. Martin McDowell, President Amb. Barbara Stephenson, Secretary Amb. (ret.) Tom Boyatt, Retiree Rep. Phil Shull, Retiree VP John Naland, Treasurer Amb. (ret.) Tony Wayne, State VP Ken Kero-Mentz and FCS VP Daniel Crocker.

We are pleased to present the board term report for the 2017-2019 AFSA Governing Board.

AFSA has decided to move away from the costly and environmentally wasteful production of a printed annual report mailed to members as a separate publication. Instead, we have moved to a board term report, covering the two years of the most recent board. Going forward, we plan to publish this report every other year in the September issue of *The Foreign Service Journal*.

This report covers the highlights of all departments of the association, providing a window into the work done on behalf of members and the Foreign Service over the term of an elected governing board.

—Ásgeir Sigfússon
Executive Director



Professional Policy Issues

During the 2017-2019 Governing Board term, AFSA strengthened its reputation as a creator of reliable content about the Foreign Service. Starting in 2018, our Professional Policy Issues department created a data library dedicated to the Foreign Service. Since then, AFSA has monitored various trends in Foreign Service life using data—overall numbers on promotion, attrition, the size of the corps and Foreign Service test takers, to name a few. AFSA now receives multiple media requests

every week for information about the Foreign Service as an institution and as a career. Our data is also frequently used by our strategic partners such as the American Academy of Diplomacy and the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition.

AFSA has continued to host structured conversations between the AFSA president, with the appropriate constituency vice president, and groups of members from the various constituencies of each foreign affairs agency to keep up with their top concerns.

For example, in 2018 we heard from our upper mid-level State members about how the loss of State senior leadership deprived them of mentoring, references for bidding, and “top cover” when these members wanted to try new approaches to policy issues. They told us of their experiences bidding when fewer overseas jobs were available, which demonstrated the need to put more positions in the field.

During this board period, AFSA hosted several career development events organized by our Professional Policy Issues department, including a panel for hiring managers on how to choose candidates for jobs, a webinar on family member professional employment and a discussion on different career paths to Foreign Service success.



2019 Youth Awards winners pose with AFSA President Barbara Stephenson (second from left) in June 2019 at a ceremony in the State Department's George C. Marshall Center.

In the summer of 2019, we surveyed our members on their satisfaction with AFSA, and contributed to outreach presentations during Foreign Service Day in 2017 and 2018.

Finance and Administration

The American Foreign Service Association continued to be in excellent financial health as we entered 2019 with a strong reserve. AFSA went through major restructuring in the last three years as we worked rigorously to find efficiencies in operations from 2016 to 2019.

The board has approved a 2020 budget with prudent spending reductions. Recognizing that we will need sufficient resources to meet the challenges facing the Foreign Service, we will continue the effort to create more efficient operations in the years ahead.

With the strong support of our membership, we were able to sustain a professional

staff of 32 and a planned \$5.2 million operating budget for the calendar year 2019. We continue to maintain AFSA assets, the building and equipment with attention to repairs and prompt maintenance.

We ended 2018 with an operating reserve of \$3.1

million, scholarship fund of \$9.7 million, Sinclair Fund of \$477,094 and Fund for American Diplomacy of \$413,964.

Publications / The Foreign Service Journal

The 2017-2019 Governing Board term was a busy time

with an elevated public profile for *The Foreign Service Journal*, which celebrated its centennial year in 2019. To mark the occasion, the publications team created and produced The Foreign Service Journal Centennial Exhibit: Defining Diplomacy for 100 Years.

The 29-panel exhibit of images and excerpts drawn from the archives of the FSJ was on display at the National Museum of American Diplomacy (formerly the U.S. Diplomacy Center) for more than two months, from a launch event in March through the Foreign Affairs Day reception at the site in May.

Beginning in 2017 and completed in time for the launch of the FSJ exhibit, AFSA funded and implemented a major digitization project. The fully search-



Former FSJ editors Steve Honley and Steven Dujack examine a panel of *The Foreign Service Journal's* Centennial Exhibit, "Defining Diplomacy for 100 Years," at the U.S. Diplomacy Center in March 2019.

able FSJ Digital Archive was launched when the FSJ reached the century mark in March, after the work of scanning, tagging and uploading to the AFSA website and then optimizing the entire collection to be searchable and available to the public was completed.

The FSJ Archive is a treasure trove of unique primary source material—namely, the history of the Foreign Service and diplomacy seen through the lens of the practitioners.

The *Journal* began publishing a series of “Diplomacy Works” articles in 2017 to tell FS success stories that can be used to educate Congress and the public. As part of the AFSA Economic Diplomacy Works initiative, we devoted the January-February 2019 edition to that theme, includ-

ing a dozen stories and several analytical pieces on economic diplomacy.

AFSA’s collaboration with the National Museum of American Diplomacy expanded during this governing board’s term. We provided content to better tell the story of the Foreign Service, and we partnered with the museum on several events (including a panel discussion in connection with the July-August 2018 collection of stories from survivors of the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings).

The reach of the FSJ expanded. The *Journal* now appears in Google News searches, and members of Congress regularly contribute Message from the Hill columns speaking to the Foreign Service. The President’s

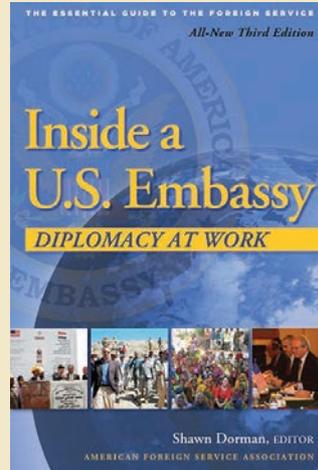
(more than \$500,000 to date) and serving as a top outreach tool for AFSA.

Advocacy

The director of advocacy and the AFSA president collaborate to determine the degree of engagement, the right arguments and timelines for our advocacy efforts on the Hill. At a time when AFSA is at the highest membership level in its history, congressional advocacy has been listed as a top AFSA membership benefit in surveys.

During the 2017-2019 AFSA Governing Board, AFSA emerged as the lead content creator for the U.S. Foreign Service on Capitol Hill. When Congress asked how to counter global power competition, AFSA provided a solution. By demonstrating how the Foreign Service is best suited for the job of promoting U.S. global leadership, AFSA has been able to further build support for the Foreign Service in the halls of Congress.

AFSA pushed for a “field-forward Foreign Service”—for having proper staffing overseas—and supported that push by sharing information about how the Foreign Service keeps American businesses prosperous and Americans safe at home. Focused on the appropriation that funds the cost of moving a Foreign Service member to an overseas post, AFSA helped make a successful argument leading to an increase in “Overseas Programs” funding by \$84 million from Fiscal Year 2018

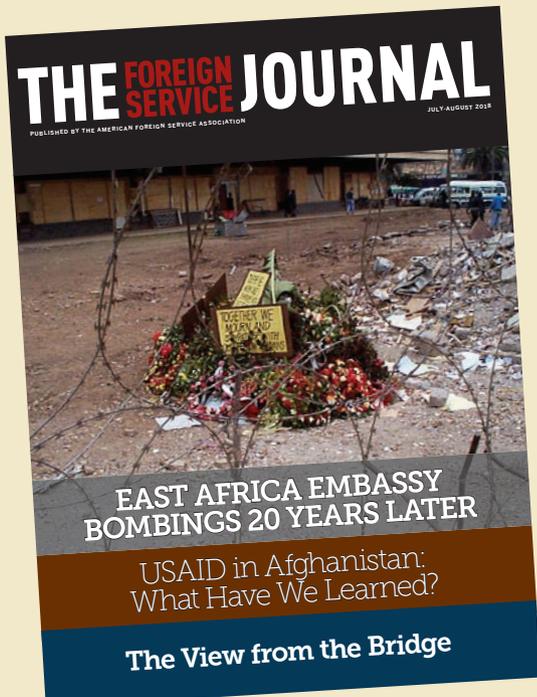


Inside a U.S. Embassy remains a top outreach tool for AFSA.

Views column was used effectively as an AFSA policy document. (The December 2017 column and message, “Time to Ask Why,” was picked up by dozens of media outlets and advanced public awareness of the importance of diplomats and diplomacy.)

The FSJ received several awards, including a 2017 Association Media and Publishing Excel Award for the December 2016 special focus on Russia; a 2019 All Media Contest award from Association TRENDS for the July-August 2018 special focus on the East Africa embassy bombings 20 years later; and a 2019 Association Media and Publishing Excel Award for the April 2018 opinion piece (“Keeping Diplomacy on Track in Troubled Times,” by Ted Osius).

The third edition of *Inside a U.S. Embassy*, published in 2011 and now in its seventh printing, continued to sell well, bringing in revenue



July-August 2018 FSJ.

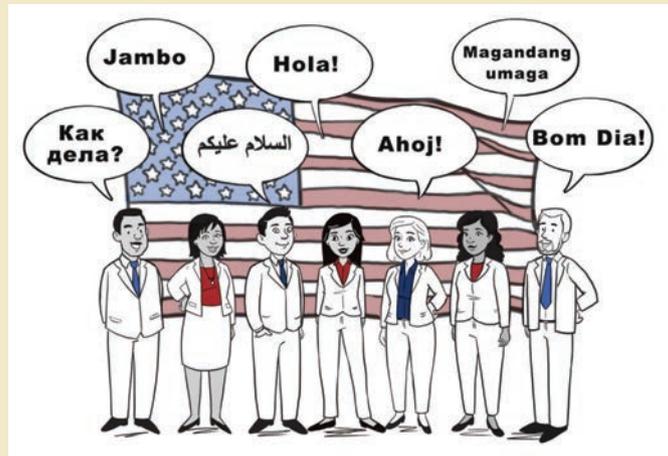
to FY2019 and is poised to increased that funding again by more than \$500 million in a final FY2020 funding bill.

AFSA also convinced Congress to encourage the State Department to establish more FSO positions overseas in the House and Senate FY2020 SFOPS appropriations reports. AFSA received the backing of the business community (96 organizations) in a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo supporting a field-forward Foreign Service.

More broadly, AFSA has helped ward off proposed cuts to the international affairs budget—three years in a row—and many of the critical operational appropriations accounts for Foreign Service agencies have even increased. This included the reversal of the decade-long decline in funding for core diplomatic capability (decreased 2008 to 2018) in FY2019.

AFSA also successfully advocated for Congress to establish a floor for Foreign Service staff levels at State/USAID in the final FY19 appropriations package, a floor that State/USAID are encouraged to hire above.

AFSA's advocacy also focused on shaping the first House State Authorization bill in six years. The Department of State Authorization Act and other pieces of legislation with AFSA input, such as the Championing American Business Through Diplomacy Act, have passed the House, and our efforts continue to focus on the Sen-



A still shot from AFSA's "Economic Diplomacy" video.

ate's passage of these bills with the hope that they will become law someday.

Finally, AFSA worked with Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) to establish the Senate Foreign Service Caucus, which provides a direct channel to communicate with interested Hill staff on issues regarding the Foreign Service.

Media and Communications

AFSA's media posture changed significantly during this period. As official agencies cut back on media interaction, AFSA found itself being increasingly sought out by national media outlets. Media engagements—whether on the record, on background or connecting

Foreign Service experts to journalists—exceeded 250. AFSA's media profile may have reached an all-time high. This higher profile has given the association a great opportunity to get our messaging out to a national audience, beyond the Beltway, and to our own membership.

AFSA's website underwent a revamp in 2019, which resulted in a fresh, clean look and a firewall for certain content. As a result, the website has become a more important benefit of AFSA membership, as most of the association's original content, including guidance and information, is now available only to those who can log in as members.

On social media, we continue to increase our follower numbers and engagements. This rise has been particularly noteworthy on Twitter, where we more than doubled



Speakers at the Athenaeum Hotel in Chautauqua, N.Y., for AFSA's Sept. 30-Oct. 5, 2019, Road Scholar program. From left to right: Ambassador (ret.) Robert Gribbin, Ambassador (ret.) Shari Villarosa, Ambassador (ret.) Deborah Jones, AFSA President Ambassador Barbara Stephenson, Ambassador (ret.) Robin Raphael and Ambassador (ret.) Shaun Donnelly.



AFSA State VP Ken Kero-Mentz addresses the 194th A-100 class in August 2018 at AFSA headquarters.

our followers and are regularly retweeted by notable journalists and individuals in the foreign affairs field.

Thanks to a partnership with the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, AFSA also premiered its first-ever original video. The clip, an “animated explainer” video on economic diplomacy, has already become the most-viewed video on AFSA’s YouTube channel. A new companion video is in the works.

Outreach

During a period of significantly expanded outreach, the AFSA president was invited to grassroots and high-profile events across the country to tell the story of the Foreign Service. These events included the keynote speech for the national Model UN conference in Washington, D.C., FarmFest in Minnesota, the Common-

wealth Club in San Francisco and at the Chautauqua Institution in New York. Other speaking invitations took the AFSA president to Michigan, Florida, Oregon and Texas, in addition to numerous engagements in and around the Washington, D.C., area.

The AFSA Speakers Bureau continues to be a critical element of our outreach efforts. In collaboration with Road Scholars and the Smithsonian Associates, AFSA planned and executed a series of programs throughout the year, reaching more than a thousand participants.

More generally, AFSA fulfilled the steady request for speakers about specific topics or the Foreign Service. To support the many (largely) retired members actively engaged in speaking about the work of the Foreign Service, AFSA updated its resources for speakers,

including talking points and new short explainer videos.

AFSA’s annual national high school essay contest continued to attract hundreds of submissions each year from students across the country, culminating in a visit to D.C. for the winner and their family.

Finally, during these two years we continued to support and honor excellence within the Foreign Service community through the awards program, which moved from June to October in 2018.

Membership

After the hiring freeze was lifted, AFSA was pleased to resume our membership luncheons for incoming classes of A-100 FSOs, specialists, limited non-career appointments, USAID FSOs and Foreign Commercial Service officers. These luncheons are a critical way for new Foreign

Service members to learn about AFSA, and we are proud that, on average, 85 to 90 percent sign up. AFSA membership numbers remained strong during this period and are currently at an all-time high (more than 16,800).

AFSA has successfully increased programming for members, including the launch of the highly popular Next Stage program, offering panels of expert retired Foreign Service colleagues who have embarked on “next stage” careers. To date, Next Stage topics have included how to work in teaching, writing and the private sector and a program focused specifically on post-FS careers for DS agents.

The Federal Benefit series continued with expert presentations on Medicare, Thrift Savings Plan, Long-Term Care insurance, Social Security and Federal Employee Health Benefits. With an eye toward providing access to our many members outside the Beltway, these programs are recorded and offered exclusively to members on our website.

AFSA continues to commemorate Foreign Service Day, the first Friday in May, as a day of honor and remembrance. We remember colleagues who have died in the line of duty with a rolling moment of silence, observed by numerous embassies, during a moving memorial service in the C Street lobby at the State Department.

Each year, members join AFSA’s letter-to-the-

editor campaign aimed at reminding Americans about the important work of U.S. diplomats on behalf of the United States. Year after year, the number of letters has increased, with more than 50 published in local newspapers across the country in May 2019.

During the day preceding Foreign Service Day, AFSA headquarters is open to our members for a full day of programming, including the ever-popular free professional headshots.

The Retirement Services section of the website was updated in March 2019 and continues to serve as perhaps the most complete option for one-stop information on Foreign Service retirement resources.

Finally, the AFSA Scholarship program awarded more than \$500,000 to the children of AFSA members for art and academic merit as well as financial aid scholarships.

Labor Management

Between July 2017 and July 2019, AFSA's Labor Management office opened 803 individual cases and closed 613 cases. Overall, during the two-year period, LM handled approximately 1,304 cases, many of which were opened prior to July 2017.

The office also received 3,389 requests for assistance. Approximately 30 percent of these requests for assistance turn into individual cases.

On the State Department side, AFSA signed a new

framework agreement more than 30 years after the previous one had been signed. In spite of President Trump's executive orders directing agencies to curtail official time and paid office space to Civil Service unions, the new agreement preserves 100 percent official time for the AFSA president and State vice president as well as free office space and use of department telephones and the email system.

While there is still much to be done, we made great progress on Special Needs Education Allowance implementation. Working with HR Deputy Assistant Secretary Steven Walker and the new Office of Medical Services director, Dr. Mark Cohen, LM helped create a new Foreign Affairs Manual provision (in 3 FAM 3280) that offers a supportive regulatory framework for SNEA and protects Foreign Service families against the subjective interpretations previously employed, often to their detriment.

The State Department and AFSA negotiated a three-year Meritorious Service Increase pilot program that is nomination-based, allowing MSIs to be awarded to a greater population of employees, rather than restricting them to only those reviewed for promotions in any given year. The pilot ended in 2019, and the parties are reviewing the results and have begun negotiations on the future of the MSI program.

Thanks to LM's advocacy,

the department incorporated unconscious bias principles—i.e., stripping nominations of gender identifiers—in the 2019 MSI nomination process.

LM also has successfully advocated on behalf of employees adversely affected by incidents in both Cuba and China on several fronts: 1) We gained parity between the two groups, specifically the inclusion of the China group in recurring meetings between the Cuba cohort and MED; 2) We secured administrative leave for the China group following the provision of such leave to the Cuba cohort; and 3) We secured the department's agreement to offer a classified briefing to both groups.

AFSA successfully filed an implementation dispute against the State Department after MED refused to invite AFSA to an official meeting, as it was required to do. As a result, the department agreed to notify those offices involved, three times a year for two years, of their obligation to include AFSA in any formal meetings.

AFSA also successfully filed a cohort grievance on behalf of locally hired Foreign Service employees who attended long-term training of six months or more at FSI but were not assigned to FSI, and thus did not receive locality pay. Relying on a prior AFSA win, AFSA was successful in obtaining back locality pay plus interest for 105 employees. AFSA also secured more than \$50,000

for 49 new DS agents who were promised overtime pay during a two-week period in which they had to bus 90 miles to and from the DS training center in Blackstone, Va., every day.

AFSA filed a series of implementation disputes against the department when it failed to award Meritorious Service Increases to all employees ranked but not reached for promotion (up to a 10-percent cap the parties had agreed to) in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

While we prevailed before the Foreign Service Grievance Board in the 2014 MSI dispute (as we did in an early dispute regarding the 2013 MSIs), the Foreign Service Labor Relations Board unfortunately granted the department's appeal and vacated the FSGB's decision in the 2014 dispute.

The department then argued that this decision bound the FSGB's decision in the 2015 and 2016 MSI disputes. The FSGB reluctantly agreed and dismissed the two remaining cases. AFSA filed an appeal with the FSLRB in late September 2019 and is awaiting a decision from that board.

Finally, AFSA filed a cohort grievance regarding the Secretary's failure to recommend any Presidential Rank Awards between 2014 and 2017. This is an issue that potentially impacts all of the foreign affairs agencies. The department filed a motion to dismiss the grievance, arguing the Secretary had

the sole discretion not to recommend any PRAs to the president. Even if the Grievance Board grants the department's motion, AFSA believes that our advocacy contributed to the department's resumption of the PRA process in 2018.

At USAID, the agency continues to make Foreign Service Limited appointments to Foreign Service positions, including supervisory positions. AFSA previously negotiated a memorandum of understanding with the agency regarding FSL appointments. Despite this agreement, the agency continued its practice of FSL

appointment. As a result of the agency's breach of this negotiated agreement, AFSA filed an implementation dispute.

At the Foreign Commercial Service, we raised concerns about the agency's failure to pay MSIs and its delay in awarding Senior Foreign Service performance pay. We also negotiated changes to the assignments and tour of duty policy.

We continued to actively engage Foreign Agricultural Service management through our collective bargaining agreements. One significant change has been that FAS has started to implement

a low-ranking policy for its selection boards that it has not actively done in the past. We will see how this affects our members.

In 2019, Voice of America and AFSA enjoyed a reopening of constructive dialogue. AFSA brought to the U.S. Agency for Global Media's attention concerns it had with the posting of FS positions on the USA Jobs website and the lack of transparency and consistency in the selection board and promotion process, as well as concerns of individual members.

We engaged with Animal and Plant Health Inspection

Service management and asked that they begin planning for broader negotiations toward a full collective bargaining agreement. In the meantime, however, we remain engaged in discussions over changes to conditions for our members.

In 2019, we filed an information request with management regarding changes to the TIC/TIS policy that affected a number of SFS members hired prior to 2006. APHIS' response provided us with further information, but we continue to look at the issue as it affects our members. ■

2019 AFSA Treasurer's Report

BY VIRGINIA BENNETT, AFSA TREASURER

The American Foreign Service Association is in excellent financial health as of the end of 2019.

AFSA's financial reserves are strong, benefitting significantly from robust market gains during the year. The operating reserve level of \$3.6 million at the end of 2019 represents roughly 65 percent of AFSA's operating budget for 2020. That is an important metric at a time of uncertainty in many quarters and represents meaningful progress toward the association's sustainability.

AFSA's new president and governing board (as of mid-2019) aimed to ensure

the 2020 budget is both prudent and supports the robust implementation of AFSA's strategic priorities: sustaining and building on the best possible service for AFSA's members and effective, agile advocacy for the U.S. Foreign Service.

AFSA is operating at a time of serious challenge to the Foreign Service, its members and its role in promoting U.S. global leadership and prosperity and security at home and abroad.

Your ongoing financial support sustains and drives AFSA's advocacy, outreach and service to members. We

look forward to your continuing commitment to this vital mission in 2020.

Budget Operations

More than 82 percent of AFSA's \$5.3-million planned operating budget for calendar year 2020 comes from membership dues.

AFSA's membership base stood at 16,680 at the end of 2019, representing more than 80 percent of active-duty employees across the foreign affairs agencies, as well as approximately 28 percent of Foreign Service retirees.

Member dues increased by a modest 1.7 percent for

2020, in line with the Consumer Price Index.

In addition to serving members on the traditional range of retirement, labor and other issues, AFSA has greatly strengthened its public advocacy and outreach over the past three years to highlight the contributions the career Foreign Service makes to U.S. national security.

AFSA has worked strategically to leverage our retiree members in this effort, and we thank this cohort for their energetic and effective mobilization.

AFSA and its political action committee also