

Notes for 30 July 2015 Remarks Specialists Welcome Lunch

- * Welcome and congratulations on your recent entry into the Foreign Service!

- * Today I'm representing not just myself, but also Barbara Stephenson, the President of AFSA, who is away this week. We've both been on the job for a whopping two weeks, so I hope you'll be understanding if I have to punt a few of your more detailed questions to our much more experienced professional staff.

- * As you may already understand, AFSA represents multiple foreign affairs agencies with diplomats overseas, not just the State Department. Each participating agency has its own Vice President who serves as that agency's chief union negotiator on labor-management issues affecting its employees.

- * All 11 State Department representatives on AFSA's new Governing Board, the one which was sworn in two weeks ago, as well as the AFSA-wide officers of President, Secretary, and Treasurer, and myself, the State Department Vice President, were elected on a united slate. We called ourselves Strong Diplomacy – inspired by the President's State of the Union address, in which he said our nation needs precisely that – strong diplomacy. We pledged to be guided in our decision-making by a powerful litmus test: will it make the Foreign Service stronger? We are committed to leaving this great institution, the Foreign Service, a vital pillar of our national security and prosperity, stronger than we found it.

- * When Barbara put together her slate, she made a particular effort to reach out and include specialists. We did not want the fact that she and I were both officers to result in specialist-specific issues inadvertently being overlooked. As a result of her efforts, the new Governing Board includes a Diplomatic Security Special Agent, a Regional Medical Officer Psychiatrist, and an Office Management Specialist. Barbara has been an Ambassador and I have been a DCM, so we've both worked closely with the full range of specialist categories throughout our careers.

- * I personally have been an AFSA member since I joined the Foreign Service over 23 years ago. I had a sister who was active in a machinists union, but I wasn't really active until I began working for the Board of Examiners. If some of you Construction Engineers, IMSes, LNAs, or OMSes have been wondering why I look familiar, perhaps I'm the one who got to give you the good news at the end of the day. I was so impressed by the caliber of the people we were bringing into the Service that I began to feel a sense of personal responsibility to help leave them with the best Foreign Service possible, one that they would be proud to call home not just for the next 5-10 years, but for an entire career full of personally and professionally rewarding experiences.

- * Consequently, when Barbara Stephenson shared her vision of how to use AFSA to strengthen the Foreign Service from within AFSA, inside the Department, on the Hill,

in the media, and in the eyes of the American people, I said yes to her offer to run for office with her...and now here we are, just as eager as all of you are to do a great job.

* As your union, AFSA has a seat at the table with the State Department's senior managers, and works hard to improve your conditions of employment. Some of the issues AFSA has been engaged in recently include linked incentives for priority staffing posts, time-in-class extensions for couriers, improved pay for Foreign Service medical providers, and obtaining more complete data so that we can better advocate for robust career paths for security technical specialists.

* AFSA employees and Governing Board members also serve as an ombudsmen and problem solvers, making sure from the beginning to stay on top of issues such as the recent OPM hack and figuring out in such cases how best to protect our members.

* My final plug today will be about how you, even on your first tour, can get involved in AFSA. We have a post representative program with the goal of at least one active AFSA member serving as post rep at each post, not only keeping the AFSA members at post informed, but also letting us at HQ know what the concerns and opinions are out in the field. If your post doesn't already have an AFSA rep, please consider volunteering to serve as one. One of my goals as State VP is to be in personal contact with each of our post reps, providing them with the material and support they need not only to do a great job in the field, but also to help us do a great job back home.

* As the 20-or-so IMSes in this room probably noticed, the new Governing Board does not have an IMS on it. Consequently, we'd be particularly delighted if one or more of you ended up being post reps and/or otherwise involved in AFSA so that we can make sure to be in touch with issues important to your specialty that we might otherwise not be aware of.

* Regardless of specialty, if your post already has a post rep but you want to be more involved, then please consider running for a position on our Governing Board in the future, responding to surveys we send to our membership, contributing to the Foreign Service Journal and AFSA's online discussion forum, voting in AFSA elections, writing letters to your Congressional representatives and/or senior Department officials when we ask members to do so, letting your post rep know how conditions, policies, and issues affect you...and encouraging your colleagues at post to join AFSA and do all of the above alongside you.

* Barbara and I, along with the rest of the new Governing Board and the entire professional staff of AFSA, want people to be just as proud to be a member of AFSA as they are to be a member of the Foreign Service. To make that dream a reality, we need the enthusiasm and energy and fresh perspective of new entrants as members, so please help us out and sign up not just for membership today, but for active engagement throughout what I hope will be an incredible career for each and every one of you. Thank you.