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*Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the
Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia
Chairman Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI)*

Hearing on:
Domestic Crisis with Global Implications:
Reviewing the Human Capital Crisis at the State Department
July 16, 2008

Mr. Chairman, Senator Voinovich, and distinguished subcommittee members, the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) welcomes this opportunity to speak before this subcommittee on the subject of the Department of State's human capital crisis. AFSA is the professional association and labor union representing our nation's career diplomats. We are grateful to you for convening this hearing on this vital issue. I will make an opening statement and then look forward to answering any questions.

The title that you selected for today's hearing could not be more accurate. As America prepares to hand over unprecedented foreign challenges to a new President, our nation's lead foreign affairs agency is hobbled by a human capital crisis. Here are some key facts as best as AFSA can determine them:

- Due to the mismatch between resources and requirements, hundreds of Foreign Service positions worldwide are now vacant. As a result, the State Department is reportedly moving to "freeze" (leave unfilled) about 20 percent of the Foreign Service jobs (overseas and domestic) due for reassignment in summer 2009 (excluding fully-staffed Iraq and Afghanistan). That is on top of other positions left unfilled in the 2008 assignment cycle. All together, 12 percent of overseas Foreign Service positions are now vacant.
- Many Foreign Service positions are held by under-qualified personnel. Some 19 percent of positions worldwide are held by employees "stretched" into a job designated for a more experienced person. Many positions are held by people who lack necessary training. For example, a 2006 GAO report found that 29 percent of diplomats in language-designated positions did not meet the job's language proficiency requirements.
- Foreign Service members continue to be shortchanged when it comes to training, especially long-term professional training. As a result, today's Foreign Service does not have to a sufficient degree the knowledge, skills, abilities, and outlooks needed for 21st

century diplomacy. For example, while Army officers are sent to six-to-nine month-long professional education courses three times during their careers, Foreign Service members are rarely offered even one such opportunity. Elsewhere, AFSA estimates that less than 20 percent of Foreign Service Officers have had training in negotiating (imagine if only 20 percent of Army officers had been trained to fire a weapon).

- Because our nation has under-funded diplomatic engagement while building up military muscle, the U.S. military has increasingly taken on tasks once assigned to diplomats and development professionals. For example, over 20 percent of U.S. bilateral official development assistance is currently administered by the Department of Defense. If left unchecked, this growing militarization of diplomacy and foreign assistance will reduce America's options when responding to foreign challenges. As the saying goes, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail."
- The work of diplomacy has become increasingly dangerous. The deterioration can be seen in the number of posts that are too dangerous to permit employees to bring their families along. Since 2001, the number of unaccompanied and limited-accompanied Foreign Service positions has quadrupled to over 900 positions at two dozen posts. That is a dramatic change for an institution that had just 50 such slots to fill when I joined. Last week's deadly attack on the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, underscores the dangers that our diplomats face overseas.
- The Foreign Service has faced an unprecedented high operational tempo in recent years. Well over half of the Foreign Service has served at a hardship post within the past five years. Over 30 percent of the Foreign Service has served in an unaccompanied position within the past five years. Over 20 percent of the Foreign Service has served in war zone Iraq or Afghanistan. With two-thirds of the Foreign Service forward deployed overseas -- and two-thirds of them serving at hardship posts -- there is no remaining "bench strength" with which to staff future new contingencies.
- Foreign Service morale has been seriously damaged in recent years. Inadequate staffing, insufficient budgets, and poor management have left the Foreign Service a career out of balance. Many employees have concluded that their loyalty has been a one-way street as their employer has not reciprocated with needed resources and benefits. Employees' top disappointment is the exclusion of overseas Foreign Service members from receiving the "locality pay" salary adjustment given to other federal employees.

These harmful trends have been accumulating for a number of years. Unfortunately, little has been done to ameliorate them:

- The Bush Administration dramatically increased Foreign Service staffing demands without taking decisive action to increase personnel. Unfunded mandates include 325 positions in Iraq, 150 in Afghanistan, 40 in the office to coordinate reconstruction efforts, 100+ training positions to increase the number of Arabic speakers, and 280 new positions in areas of emerging importance such as China and India. While AFSA strongly endorses the Administration's FY09 budget request for over 1,000 additional employees, we regret

that the Administration waited until its final budget request to seek these long-needed staffing resources (Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's largest previous budget request asked for less than one quarter of the additional positions that are being sought in FY09).

- Congress, which has the constitutional duty to appropriate monies to advance national goals, did not insist on closing the Foreign Service staffing gaps. Congress did not even fund the Administration's inadequate FY05 to FY08 position requests which sought to add a total of 760 additional State positions (excluding positions Congress earmarked for consular and security). AFSA certainly lauds Congress for including some funding for new Foreign Service positions in the FY08 Iraq Supplemental, but much more is needed.
- Congress has yet to pass a correction to the now 14-year old unintended inequity in the worldwide Foreign Service pay schedule. Today, junior and mid-level diplomats take a 20.89-percent cut in base pay when transferring abroad. Thus, they take a pay cut to serve at all 20-percent and below hardship differential posts -- 183 of 268 overseas posts (68 percent). At this rate, within three years, another 42 posts -- those at the 25-percent hardship level -- will fall into that category, unless the overseas pay disparity is corrected.
- Secretary Rice's signature "Transformational Diplomacy initiative proved to be more of a slogan than a program. Its centerpiece was a Global Repositioning Program that moved 280 positions from one place to another. Unfortunately, as the September 2007 State Department Inspector General report documents, the transferred positions often did not come with adequate support resources to enable the employees to execute programs, travel around their host countries, and undertake other "transformational diplomacy" tasks.
- For the past year, senior State Department management officials have focused almost exclusively on the short-term need to staff Iraq and other unaccompanied posts. By treating human resource management as a sprint rather than a marathon, the State Department has altered assignment and promotion policies in ways that may mortgage long-term needs in order to achieve short-term results.
- Senior officers at the State Department have failed to protect the Foreign Service. For example, even as staffing fell behind mission requirements, key officials failed to insist -- if necessary at the point of resignation -- that more resources be requested from Congress. Key officials undermined public confidence in the Foreign Service in fall 2007 by noisily threatening to order personnel to Iraq despite the fact that the Foreign Service has stepped up year after year to volunteer to fill the ever-increasing number of positions in Iraq.

As a result of these factors, the next Secretary of State will inherit a human capital management system that is in crisis and a Foreign Service that is at a tipping point. This will saddle the next Administration with serious logistical constraints to implementing their foreign policy initiatives.

Thus, now is the time to address these urgent human capital needs. The next President, whoever he is, will want a strong diplomatic corps to work hand-in-hand with our strong military. Delaying sending in diplomatic reinforcements would reduce the new President's

flexibility in crafting foreign policy and would continue to place undue burdens on the military to carry out tasks for which it is ill-suited. Therefore, while I commend Congress for providing some additional staffing funding in the FY08 Iraq supplemental, I continue to urge timely passage of the full pending FY09 request for the State Department and USAID.

Longer-term, the forthcoming Function 150 budget study by the American Academy of Diplomacy is expected to provide a multi-year blueprint for fully repairing the urgent human capital needs of diplomacy and development assistance. Once that study is published, I urge Congress and the next President to act urgently on its recommendations.

For my own part, as the President of the American Foreign Service Association, I underscore the need to reverse years of under-investment in Foreign Service staffing and training. The world is changing rapidly, and I fear that today's Foreign Service does not have to a sufficient degree the knowledge, skills, abilities, and outlooks that -- taken together as a package -- should make career diplomats uniquely able to conduct 21st century diplomacy. Those skills include: foreign language fluency, area knowledge, leadership and management ability, negotiating skills, public diplomacy know-how, and job-specific functional expertise.

I am confident that my colleagues would welcome a "grand bargain" that coupled a significant expansion of Foreign Service staffing with a strengthening of their professional development system. My colleagues are dedicated to being effective agents of foreign policy development and implementation. They are eager to take back from the overburdened U.S. military those tasks that should properly be assigned to career diplomats and development professionals. Therefore, they are willing to undergo the career-long training that will provide the abilities they need. To do so, the Foreign Service needs a 15 percent training complement (above the staffing required to fill operational positions) like that afforded to the uniformed military. Once that training complement is in place, the establishment of benchmarks for required training and developmental details would insure that all Foreign Service members received the training they need to advance our nation's vital interests overseas.

Finally, I wish to mention two related issues:

- This subcommittee is commended for its interest in the optimal utilization of Civil Service employees at the State Department. Having spent most of my career in overseas Foreign Service jobs, I am not an expert on the Civil Service. However, I know that a program already exists to send Civil Service personnel on overseas excursion tours when there are no Foreign Service volunteers. There is also a program allowing Civil Service personnel to convert permanently to the Foreign Service. However, I urge caution when considering possible new programs that might allow unseasoned Civil Service personnel to take key Foreign Service positions such as section chief or Deputy Chief of Mission. Such a program could harm mission accomplishment by putting inexperienced personnel in key jobs which require years of overseas seasoning. Secondly, putting Civil Service personnel in high-profile Foreign Service jobs would inevitably deny those jobs to Foreign Service members who have "paid their dues" in multiple overseas hardship tours and who need those jobs to prepare themselves for senior responsibilities in the Foreign Service.

- The upcoming presidential election is drawing renewed attention to the long-standing problem of unqualified non-career ambassadors appointed solely for their political loyalty. A column last week (July 10) by syndicated columnist Robert Novak cited unnamed "big-money" political donors who openly lamented that they would not be in line for a U.S. ambassadorship because the candidate to whom they donated is not getting the party nomination. This view that ambassadorships are literally for sale must end. AFSA joins the American Academy of Diplomacy in calling on Congress to lower the non-career portion of ambassadors from the informal historical average of 30 percent to a statutory maximum of 10 percent. That would allow a select number of distinguished citizens to go out as envoys, while reforming the unchecked spoils system under which many scores of political activists are tapped for critical national security positions for which they are unqualified. Absent reform, I fear that some U.S. embassy may someday be lead by a FEMA Michael D. Brown-like figure who, in the face of evidence of a looming terrorist attack, may ignore expert advice and make the wrong decision, with catastrophic results.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this very timely hearing. I would be happy to answer any questions that you and your colleagues may have.