

Remarks at the 183rd A-100 Class Welcome Lunch, July 15 2015

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

* I've 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 have been wondering why I look familiar, perhaps I'm the one who interviewed you, or, better yet, 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 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. For example, some of the key issues we're in discussions on right now include the status of benefits for same sex domestic partners, danger pay, and the use of cell phones in unclassified work spaces.

* 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. As you've already heard, today is my first day on the job, so I can't claim credit for any of this personally, but some of the issues AFSA has been engaged in recently include the new performance management system, linked incentives for priority staffing posts, a new Foreign Affairs Manual chapter governing employees' private capacity outreach, including social media, and obtaining a seat on the Department's Work Life Wellness Leadership Council.

* 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 as first-tour officers, 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. 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, 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.