

**SPECIAL ELECTION EDITION  
AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION • APRIL-MAY 2025**

The Committee on Elections is conducting the AFSA Governing Board election.  
This packet contains the candidate list and candidates' statements.

**AFSA Governing Board Election for the 2025 to 2027 Term  
Governing Board Candidates**

<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Position</b>
John Dinkelman ^	President	DeMark Schulze ^	State Representative
Tom Yazdgerdi +	President	Stephanie Straface +	State Representative
Sue Saarnio	Secretary	Austan Mogharabi ^	USAID Representative
John Naland	Treasurer	Joshua Burke +	FCS Alternate Representative
Peter Burba	State Department VP	Joseph Ragole	APHIS Representative
Rohit Nepal +	State Department VP	Gunter Schwabe +	USAGM Representative
Mary Brett Rogers-Springs	State Department VP	Jennifer Bonner	Retiree Representative
C. Logan Wheeler ^	State Department VP	Donald A. Camp ^	Retiree Representative
Randy Chester	USAID VP	Yolonda Kerney ^	Retiree Representative
Kevin Sampson	USAID VP	Michael D. Kirby +	Retiree Representative
Jay Carreiro +	FCS VP	Julie Nutter +	Retiree Representative
Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley ^	Retiree VP	Tedde Thompson	Retiree Representative
John O'Keefe +	Retiree VP		
Sandra (Castillo) Abrahamsen ^	Full-Time State Representative		
hannah draper ^	State Representative		
Donald Emerick ^	State Representative		
Connor Ferry-Smith ^	State Representative		
Christina Higgins	State Representative		

+ Denotes a member of the "Diplomacy Matters" slate.  
^ Denotes a member of the "Support and Defend" slate.

## 2025-2027 AFSA Governing Board Election Candidates' Statements

The order in which statements appear was determined by a random drawing of lots during an informational meeting with the candidates on March 3, 2025.

### Jay Carreiro, FCS Vice President +

Dear Colleagues,

First, thank you for being an AFSA member. Your support has allowed AFSA to stand up to the unprecedented challenges facing the Foreign Service today.

As we've demonstrated time and again, the Foreign Commercial Service is essential to advancing U.S. interests worldwide. As Commercial Officers, you work tirelessly to ensure American companies compete on a level playing field and that our economic interests are protected. AFSA, in turn, must do what it can to ensure that you have the resources, tools, and institutional support necessary to succeed. This means strong advocacy and constructive engagement with Commerce leadership to strengthen our mission. I therefore ask for your vote as FCS Vice President to continue that commitment.

Beyond internal advocacy, I will engage with allies in Congress and leverage relationships in the business community to raise the profile of the Foreign Commercial Service. It is essential that policymakers and stakeholders understand the value we bring to America's economic and national security.

I am also grateful to be part of the Diplomacy Matters slate. This is a very experienced group that is dedicated to representing the entire Foreign Service and will work tirelessly for all AFSA members. Much of my focus will remain on increasing transparency within Commerce, particularly in budget and workforce planning. I will continue to engage in current discussions on trade promotion and commercial diplomacy, challenge assumptions when necessary, and advocate for reasonable, effective policies. Above all, I will rely on your feedback to ensure AFSA represents you fully and forcefully.

I also want to recognize the outstanding AFSA staff, particularly our Office of General Counsel led by Sharon Papp, a great friend and advocate for FCS. I've worked with her and her team on many issues, chaired the Legal Defense Fund Committee, and I will continue to remain deeply committed to protecting your rights. We may not win every battle, but we will continue to use all the tools at our disposal and provide top-tier legal support to our members.

Finally, being a Commercial Officer is both rewarding and challenging. Serving overseas requires resilience and personal sacrifice, and our families often endure a lot. So, if you ever feel unsupported and out in the cold, I want to hear from you. AFSA is a member-driven organization, and I am committed to ensuring your voice is heard and your concerns addressed. My door will always be open.

So again, I ask for your vote for FCS Vice President, to represent you, to work hard for you and your family, and to enthusiastically advocate for our collective interest.

### C. Logan Wheeler, State Department Vice President ^

My name is C. Logan Wheeler, and I seek your vote for AFSA State VP as a member of the Support and Defend slate. I currently serve AFSA as a State Representative, and I am convinced of the importance of this role at this critical moment.

Our service is under threat. My heart hurts for our USAID colleagues who are enduring unimaginable hardship as a seeming punishment for their devotion to service. While I would never wish this on anyone, we should prepare ourselves for the possibility that the same lies ahead for more of our Foreign Service community.

What will this struggle look like? What ability does AFSA have to respond? In recent months, AFSA has played an admirable role in supporting and defending the Foreign Service. From filing lawsuits and growing the legal defense fund to leading seminars on retirement options and virtual go bags, AFSA has been a rare source of good news at a time when we could use so much more.

And we must do more. Broader legal battles will come, and we will fight them. As the Hill continues to churn through rapid change, we will find new and broader engagement. As decision-making in the Department migrates into non-traditional offices and ranks, we will knock on every door to find a seat at the table.

We cannot be afraid to get our hands dirty. The routine work of AFSA is often quiet and subtle, but the work ahead

is anything but. On the current board, I have often been frustrated with internal, administrative minutiae that pull the board's focus away from key issues. Those key issues vary across ranks—RIFs look very different for SFS, mid-level, and entry-level. And AFSA must do a better job of seeking out more voices. We all know the Foreign Service is full of broken procedures—bidding, promotion, feedback, and more—but we are now seized with existential considerations that demand our full attention before we can turn to the needed work on ideals.

With 17 years as a Foreign Service Officer, I am ready for this challenge. I have served in three regional bureaus, on the 7th floor, and now as Deputy Director at the Board of Examiners. At BEX, my focus for three years has been the future of the Foreign Service. As State VP, I expect this same focus to remain. Like many political officers, I have convinced myself of my facilities as a speaker and drafter, but my best quality is my ability to care for people. I am at my best when I am pushing for a cause I believe in. And I believe in AFSA—its mission, its staff, and its membership.

### **Tom Yazdgerdi, President +**

First, thank you for being an AFSA member. Without your support, AFSA would not be able to confront the existential threats to you and the Foreign Service that we are now experiencing. I will never forget that AFSA is a member-driven organization.

As of this writing in early March, we have witnessed the wholesale dismantling of USAID, our second largest member agency. Members' lives and livelihoods have been uprooted through no fault of their own. Life-saving programs have been abandoned. U.S. influence has waned, ceding the field to our rivals. We may see largescale RIFs and other ill-thought-out disruptions at the State Department and other member agencies. For that reason, AFSA has filed a lawsuit and is preparing further class-action challenges.

I am running for re-election as president because I care deeply about our members and will continue to do everything in my power to defend our beloved Foreign Service from these threats. Even in this tough environment, I also run on a record of achievement (please see <https://afsa.org/year-end-advocacy-update-fy25-state-department-authorization-act-wins>).

I am fortunate to be joined by a slate of talented, dedicated and experienced candidates who share my desire to fight for you. We call ourselves "Diplomacy Matters" because without

our non-partisan, professional diplomats engaging with our friends and confronting our adversaries throughout the world, the threat of conflict will increase. The threat of losing political and economic influence and American "soft power" will increase. Our candidates have decades of Foreign Service experience among them, and some have served on the previous AFSA Governing Board or are FS retirees who have worked for AFSA. They are tried and true. I am proud to have them on our team.

Under my leadership, and with the aid of our indefatigable AFSA legal staff, we have fought the dismantling of USAID in the courts and are preparing to fight the looming challenges on the horizon. We may not win every battle, but we will continue to file lawsuits, lodge grievances, and provide our members with the best legal advice possible. The bottom line is that this and any administration must be held to account.

I have directed our communications team, with input from our policy issues, advocacy, and membership directors, to keep all of our members informed on a near-daily basis of what to expect and how to prepare for this unprecedented upheaval in their lives.

USAID Vice President Randy Chester and I have engaged with major media, including CNN, BBC, 60 Minutes, NPR, the New York Times, Politico and others, to relate not only the terrible impact on our members and their families but the very real danger to sick and starving people throughout the world who may no longer receive U.S. assistance. We have also told the story of the Foreign Service, and why what we do matters. With our help, I am proud that our retirees have also answered this call in their hometowns across the country.

As a first-generation Iranian American and second-generation Czech American, I firmly believe the United States remains the greatest country in the world. I have seen firsthand how my immigrant forebears prospered in America. We diplomats represent the face of our great country to the world, as we see the Foreign Service in a fight for its survival. I feel a deep obligation to do something about that.

If re-elected, this will be my last assignment in my nearly 34-year career. It was one of the proudest moments in my life to join the Foreign Service and I am determined to make perhaps the greatest impact of my career with the time that remains.

I ask for your vote in this make-or-break time to use my drive and the power of AFSA to engage with the leadership at our member agencies, on Capitol Hill and in the media to fight for the Foreign Service, our great 100-year-old union, and above all, our members. Thank you.

**Gunter Schwabe, USAGM Representative +**

I am honored to run for the position of USAGM AFSA Representative, bringing nearly two decades of experience in the Foreign Service and a strong commitment to advocating for employees' rights and workplace fairness.

As a former AFGE and AFSA Union Steward, I have first-hand experience representing employees in the workplace, negotiating fair policies, and advocating for staff concerns to be effectively addressed. Throughout my career, I have worked extensively in overseas operations, station management, and interagency coordination, giving me a deep understanding of our challenges—whether related to career advancement, working conditions, or agency policies that impact our daily lives.

Federal employees are navigating increasingly difficult times. Budget constraints, hiring freezes, and shifting agency priorities have created uncertainty about our careers and future opportunities. Now more than ever, we need strong representation to ensure that our rights, job security, and workplace conditions are not overlooked.

As your AFSA representative, I will be committed to:

- Advocacy—Ensuring that USAGM employees' voices are heard and that concerns are addressed at the highest levels.
- Transparency—Promoting clear communication on policies, rights, and changes that affect our careers.
- Support—Providing guidance and representation in matters related to assignments, and workplace concerns.

My experience as a Foreign Service Officer, station manager, and union steward has reinforced my belief that strong representation matters. I will work to strengthen AFSA's role.

**Michael D. Kirby, Retiree Representative +**

I've been an AFSA member since joining A-100 number one on election day 1980. Ronald Reagan promised a government-wide hiring freeze should he become President. He implemented one, but his personnel policies were tame compared to what we retirees and our active-duty colleagues face today. Reagan's administration changed our retirement system. This administration will look to cut the retirement benefits we have. Expect health benefits to be on the table. We need a strong AFSA with experienced board members to temper management and block changes harmful to current retirees.

In my second and fifth tours, I was post's AFSA rep where I assisted colleagues facing issues such as serious, pervasive sexual harassment by an American supervisor on his LES staff, an unjust separation from service six months before pension eligibility, and allegations of criminal voucher fraud.

Those cases were important to the individuals, but they are nothing compared to the existential threat the Foreign Service faces today. I have the experience as a former AFSA rep, two-time ambassador, and PDAS to help the AFSA board protect retiree benefits and the Foreign Service. I've joined the Diplomacy Matters slate because I believe together we bring extensive AFSA and other experience which will help everyone in our Foreign Service family in these tumultuous times.

**Mary Brett Rogers-Springs, State Department Vice President**

Vote for me if you want an effective State Vice President. I joined AFSA at the start of my career as a single woman and have benefitted from the organization pushing for better pay, workplace flexibilities, and fairness in our performance and promotion practices. Now I'm ready to pay AFSA back and to fight as we face existential challenges and unprecedented reductions in force (RIFs) that will hurt FSOs and their families. AFSA's role is to support and advocate for the Foreign Service and I've witnessed its impressive commitment to press the Department and Congress for continuous improvements to conditions for its constituents in terms of safety, security, and benefits, not the least of which are overseas comparability pay and parental leave, to maintain a strong and diverse diplomatic corps and support EFMs—all issues I would defend and seek to expand. I will bring my broad FS and labor and employment legal experience to turbocharge efforts on all fronts to fight for everything we've been promised and expect our organization to deliver on.

Before the Foreign Service, I was a management-side labor and employment attorney with a background in civil rights and employee and immigrant advocacy. I understand collective bargaining and was a litigator for several years. I believe strongly in the institution of the Foreign Service and have contributed to its development and improvement by regularly serving on promotion boards, ad hoc committees to improve the FS, and performance and awards panels, as well as judging AFSA scholarships. I bring a wealth of relevant experience combined with true passion for fairness and would partner with AFSA's Office of the General Counsel to explore every available option to address the threats of restructuring and RIFs, including looking to maximize voluntary early retirement authorities (VERAs) so that anyone who is forced to leave, even those who aren't FS-01 or 50 years of age, get reasonably compensated for their service.

During my entire career, I've supported and advocated for members of the many teams I've built and strengthened by actively listening and finding creative solutions.

I've maximized available tools available to promote, reward, and improve the work performances of the newest members of the FS to the most experienced.

We need to protect and strengthen the institution of the Foreign Service through accountability, professionalism, and advocacy, plus strong defensive legal action and well-crafted legislation. If elected, my priorities will include holding Department leadership accountable to all FS employees; maintaining appropriate workplace flexibilities to retain and reward valuable human talent; and reforming assignments and performance evaluations. If you support me, I promise to listen and advocate for what is important to you and your family to the best of my ability.

### **Randy Chester, USAID Vice President**

My name is Randy Chester, and I am seeking your support for my re-election as the USAID AFSA Vice President. It is important that USAID has a strong active voice, a passionate promoter of workers' rights, and an enthusiastic advocate for the entire USAID Foreign Service. I believe that I bring the needed skills and passion to defend the Foreign Service and champion our cause to a better outcome.

There is no hiding or talking around what is happening to us now. This is not the job I wanted two years ago when you first elected me, but at this moment in time, it is the job I want and will continue to do till they shut me off.

I don't want to waste any time or energy here rehashing all the negative garbage or mischaracterizations of our work. We know the truth and no unelected, soulless, cowardly official can take away our accomplishments or define us. Now and if re-elected I will continue fighting for our rights as guaranteed in the FS Act of 1980, outlined in the FAM and the ADS, and other legislation protecting worker and union rights.

Since this crisis began, I have been asked by many: Do you still want to do this work? My response is always emphatic: Absolutely! I believe in AFSA, USAID, the work we do, and the importance of our mission. USAID makes America safe and protects Americans. This sentiment has been echoed by many of you in your communications to me and AFSA. This is the power of your and my commitment. At USAID we believe in America and as your VP, I believe in you!

I have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from all over the world for the work we do at USAID. This provides some solace.

Know that AFSA professional staff and the current Board of Directors are doing everything it can to fight for you, working

non-stop to resolve the crisis. If re-elected I will not leave you. I will be here, pushing headlong into the wind to support all of you and to safeguard your rights.

I know how important your work is, how great your sacrifices have been, and I will continue to tell everyone about my heroes, every one of you. I remain in awe of the work we have done and your continued efforts in the face of this storm.

Thank you for your support and regardless of what happens with this election, I will always be your friend and supporter.

### **Joshua Burke, FCS Alternate Representative +**

As our Service is facing novel and complex challenges, continuity in leadership ensures that our members can serve with dignity and loyalty to our nation. After my two-year service as your Vice President, I am running as the part-time Representative for FCS. I am committed to advocating for the rights and well-being of our members. In this role I will partner with the VP to serve as a bridge between the workforce and leadership, ensuring that every worker's voice is heard and that their concerns are addressed with fairness and urgency.

In the part time role, I will continue to bring an effective approach to fighting for the rights of our members. I am not running to fight against management or the Administration. I will be fighting to ensure that our members and our Service overall can effectively serve our leadership without fear of retaliation or prosecution. Our officers spend only 60% of their valuable time on commercial activities, with the rest on needless administrative and operational tasks.

I am committed to fostering a culture of transparency, collaboration, and advocacy that protects our members while positioning our Service for long-term success. Whether it's negotiating for the removal of wasteful processes, addressing workplace challenges, or pushing for policy improvements, I stand firm in my dedication to fight for each of you and for all of us.

### **Julie Nutter, Retiree Representative +**

Diplomacy Matters is not just a slogan. Diplomacy gave us decades of relative stability and peace, built on the strongest ally network in history. The Foreign Service will not let that network die. That is why I'm running for the AFSA Board.

AFSA members matter. In my eight years as AFSA policy director, you challenged us to be better and you modeled for us the resourcefulness and decency of the Foreign Service community.

Retirees matter. During this difficult period, you stepped up and engaged media markets across the country to tell the story of the Foreign Service. You offered to host fundraisers and to help with our litigation. Thank you.

Experienced advocacy matters. The current chaos has sharpened our focus down to the survival of the Foreign Service—and since January, we have had to push ahead under siege. I will use my AFSA and Foreign Service experience to fight for you with that singular focus.

Your service matters. We want lower state taxes on your pensions. We will challenge federal threats to pensions and healthcare due to budget cuts. I will fight anything that disregards your service to America.

AFSA matters. Keeping AFSA strong and capable is an honor and is job one. I hope I can continue to serve AFSA as a Board member.

Thank you.

### **Sandra (Castillo) Abrahamsen, Full-Time State Representative ^**

My name is Sandra (Castillo) Abrahamsen and I would like to be your next Full Time State Representative. I joined the Foreign Service and AFSA in July 2005. I vividly remember finishing Orientation with the takeaway unspoken message that I was “just” a specialist. This idea colored my view of both my job and career trajectory for years afterwards. Having transitioned from an OMS to a GSO Specialist, I have experienced the disparities in rules and procedures between our Foreign Service cohorts. In almost 20 years working in overseas and domestic assignments I have developed a deep understanding of the issues and problems that we face as we do our jobs from both the consumer and provider points of view. In my current assignment in the FSI Orientation Division, I have worked to create a more relevant all-encompassing experience for Specialists. I believe every employee in the Foreign Service is a diplomat who carries out important-but-varied work. As your Full Time State Representative, I will advocate for parity in policies, assignments, and procedures for all Foreign Service employees. As we move into a new future for the Department, my experience places me as the ideal candidate to advocate for all service members. Though the mandate of the Full Time State Representative position is to focus on specialist issues, I pledge to advocate for all employees regardless of hiring mechanism. The Foreign Service is a community, and I firmly believe in the importance of supporting and caring for one another.

### **John O’Keefe, Retiree Vice President +**

Having served as Treasurer of AFSA the past four years, I bring that knowledge to address what will be the greatest challenges the Foreign Service has experienced in many years. The latest House Budget Resolution envisions increasing our contributions to our health plans and pushing us to a voucher system, potentially affecting active duty and retirees. The threat of RIF’s, and the assault on USAID are only the beginning.

The AFSA staff has been highly effective in countering these actions through legal challenges, keeping our members informed and working the legislative side. I will support these efforts with heart and soul. Moving our resources quickly to ensure we respond to the latest salvo is a skill I can employ. My ten years heading a legislative branch agency brings an ability to help our staff on legislative initiatives.

It is a time of high risk for our profession. We are all in this together. I hope to lend a steady hand to our collective effort.

### **John Naland, Treasurer**

Having served on the AFSA Governing Board for 14 of the last 26 years in the positions of President, State VP, and Retiree VP, I had planned to step off the board this summer. However, given the current unprecedented threats to our Foreign Service and its union AFSA, I believe that my knowledge and experience could benefit the next Governing Board. Therefore, I ask for your vote for me to serve as AFSA Treasurer.

The position of Treasurer will likely be very important over the next two years if AFSA experiences a decline in revenue due to Foreign Service reductions in force and/or faces the need to increase expenditures to defend the Foreign Service. Fortunately, Governing Boards over the past several decades have built up a sizeable operating reserve. AFSA will now likely need to draw down those reserves to fund core programs but should do so prudently given that the current “black swan” event will likely last at least four years.

If you give me your vote, I will continue to work hard contributing to AFSA’s vital mission. If you decide not to vote for me, please let me know what I could do better in the future. You can reach me at nalandfamily@yahoo.com. Thank you.

### **Donald Emerick, State Department Representative ^**

In Bob Dylan’s words, “We Gotta Serve Somebody.” I’ve dedicated my 15-year career to serving officers and families in our foreign affairs community. As a GSO, service is genuinely my middle name!

As INR Watch Deputy Director, I supported the evacuations of Embassies Khartoum and Port-au-Prince. In EUR-IO/EX, I helped Mission Ukraine during its shelter in Poland and implemented support and allowance to re-open Embassy Kyiv. After my family's evacuation from Managua, I intimately understand the strains of separation on our third-culture children and the sacrifices we make in service to our country.

My experience includes GSO instruction at FSI, management tours in Hermosillo and Buenos Aires, and consular service in Krakow. The professional gifts I gained in these multicultural communities inform my belief that diverse voices strengthen our foreign service.

If elected, I'll advocate for family resources and tell our story to citizens and officials using real-world examples. My D.C. experience taught me the importance of asking Congress for post needs—a message diluted by beltway bureaucracy. I'll bring field perspective to policy discussions and amplify your voices over administrative abstractions.

I live in Vienna, VA, with my wife Heather and three daughters. We live next to Wolf Trap and catch as much live music as possible. I am grateful to be an FSO and for this opportunity to serve you.

### **hannah draper, State Department Representative ^**

As a member of the 9/11 and Iraq war generation of high school students, I learned Arabic in college so I could serve my country where I might be most useful. As a first-generation college graduate and the granddaughter of union members, I sought a federal job with the benefits that could provide me and my family financial security and stability in a complex world. As a 17-year Foreign Service officer, I have served in danger and hardship posts, with and without my family, as well as several tours in D.C. so my kids have their roots in America. As a manager for ten years, I have worked with my teams to develop their professional goals and careers, and I have defended them and our institution against bullies in the workplace, unequal policies affecting our staff, and the difficulty of balancing a personal life with a career like ours. I hope to bring these experiences—my dedication, service, gratitude, and appreciation for the full diversity of our experiences as a profession and as colleagues—to the AFSA board as a State representative. We work hard, often in dangerous situations, to represent the best of America, and we deserve to be treated fairly and in dignity for our work. I will bring this zeal to AFSA to support and defend our people.

### **Christina Higgins, State Department Representative**

Federal workers are patriots. Diplomacy is national security. I want to thank each and every one of you for showing up to work every day, giving the Department, your colleagues and the American people your best. I want to thank you for living in war zones, enduring terrorist threats. Thank you for taking painful shots against typhoid, and meningitis, taking malaria pills, living in pollution. Thank you for supporting your loved ones with the many changes in jobs, homes and schools, in countries where they don't speak the language, and don't always understand the rules. To all retirees, thank you for your outstanding service. THANK YOU.

I am proud to have been your colleague for 25 years as an FSO. I am asking for your vote so that I can advocate on your behalf with all my energy. I will put my extensive HR experience at your service. I have served on several non-profit boards. Our shared experiences will inform my advocacy: I have been single in the Foreign Service, divorced, married, a parent, a subordinate, a supervisor, a DCM. I know what it's like to be an entry-level employee with two weeks annual leave at a hardship post and to need the education allowance for speech therapy for my child. Plain speak: I want to be there for you and your family.

### **Sue Saarnio, Secretary**

I am seeking election as AFSA board secretary after previously serving on the AFSA board for three terms at different points in my career. I retired in 2021 after 36 years of service as an economic officer in WHA, NEA, and EB, including my last post as Consul General in Tijuana. I have strongly supported AFSA's efforts because I believe our country needs a committed corps of officers dedicated to and prepared to represent our country abroad. I am proud of AFSA's consistent support for the important role of constructive dissent—even in years when administrations have not welcomed differing views.

I am also proud that the AFSA staff and board were prepared this year to stand up in support of our USAID colleagues with a legal challenge. AFSA needs to continue to raise funds to support our Legal Defense Fund and operating expenses to ensure that we can protect the legal rights of our members into the future. AFSA retirees came forward to volunteer their time to support our fundraising efforts. Retirees also supported AFSA's communications team to make sure the story of USAID's successes was heard beyond the beltway. Our team of retiree volunteers gained media coverage beyond

the beltway for retired ambassadors speaking out in favor of USAID. In recent months, the AFSA staff has worked hard to keep members informed through regular messages to the field. It has been rewarding to see our membership ranks grow and donations flow in recognition of those efforts.

In Mexico I saw the deep pool of talent among our Limited Non-Career Appointees (LNAs) and the important role they play in providing consular services abroad. I felt strongly that the State Department could take steps to make it easier to retain their talent and for them to be able to extend their service. AFSA has worked with Consular Affairs to persuade Global Talent Management to offer more flexibility for LNAs seeking to convert to generalist status.

We have a tough road ahead. Active duty and retired officers will need more support than ever to protect their rights and benefits. When I served on the AFSA board as an FS-2 in the 1990s, I worked alongside a corps of retired officers who devoted many hours of their time to support FSOs in the field and in Washington. If elected, I plan to do the same as retiree who believes strongly in the special role the Foreign Service plays in a democracy.

### **Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, Retiree Vice President ^**

I'm running for AFSA Vice President for Retirees and intend to have transparency, intentionality and accountability guide me as an AFSA board member. I've been a proud active AFSA member my entire professional life. I've had the privilege to serve for over 40 years as a foreign affairs officer—first in USIA, and then as a State FSO. During my two stints in retirement, I continued to mentor and coach our next generation of diplomats from State, AID, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Commerce

It's this commitment to our people that makes me thrilled to step up to serve in this new way. So, why me and why now?

As a former Chief of Mission and Assistant Secretary equivalent, I focused on changes that helped support every employee reach their full potential. I led a team focused on the Department's efforts to increase transparency in assignments. Working with HR, we pushed bureaus to publicize specifically what skills successful candidates needed and began the push to have managers and employees more accountable for supporting each other.

We all know the extraordinary treatment our colleagues in active service now face. These pressures are unprecedented. Throughout my 40 years of service, I have advocated, publicly

and privately, for EVERY member to get the resources and support necessary to do their best work. Since retirement, I have continued to use my voice in U. S. and international media to flag the invaluable contributions the Foreign Service makes to America's national security. I know there is great strength in unity and as a board officer, I believe I can be a strong and effective part of AFSA's team that supports and defends our members, expands our membership and expands our champions both in Congress and around the country.

Now we have to prepare for those same pressures to come to bear on retirees. Whether it's our benefits that we worked so hard for, our ability to continue service as retired annuitants, or some other aspect that ill-informed cost cutters latch on to, AFSA will have to redouble its efforts and energies to protect ALL of its members. We need strong, experienced and engaged voices to tell our story and why we must be supported. I am proud to stand on my record of successful advocacy for all of my colleagues and am proud to ask for your vote for AFSA Vice President for retirees.

Thank you.

### **Tedde Thompson, Retiree Representative**

America and the Foreign Service are at a critical crossroads. There's great uncertainty at home and abroad about who America is, what we stand for, and how we will interact with people and governments abroad. Right now, if we don't tell our story, someone else will—and not necessarily the way we want it told.

Overseas, we tell America's story to promote American interests and values. In America, we need to tell our story to Americans who often do not know who we are, what we do, or why we do it.

Retirees are well versed in that story after years of service overseas and in Washington, D.C. We have the knowledge, experience, and doggedness to make a difference within AFSA and our local communities. We contribute expertise, institutional memory and, most importantly, perspective at a time when these strengths are being questioned but should be valued.

I joined the Foreign Service in my 50s after successful careers in journalism and public relations. As a public diplomacy officer, I served in India, Turkey, Mauritius and Seychelles and taught PD tradecraft at FSI. Now retired, I still want to serve my country, my colleagues, and continue to make a difference. I ask for your vote to help lead, effect change, and protect our rights, benefits, and voice as one of AFSA's two Retiree Representatives.



### **Peter Burba, State Department Vice President**

My name is Peter Burba, I joined the Foreign Service in 2009 and have been an AFSA rep in Bucharest, Moscow, Berlin and Abuja. I come from a union family and have experience dealing with labor disputes. I want AFSA's top priority to be protecting the employment of its current members and to help people better understand and navigate our system.

I thank the current AFSA leadership for their hard work and service. However, the way forward is uncertain, and we need new ideas and not "more of the same" in a slightly different manner. AFSA has a better database of personal emails than ever; I would survey members (potentially anonymously) to get the heartbeat of the membership on issues and priorities.

The Foreign Service personnel system is unique, members need to know where OPM guidance on RIFs differs, for example do we have "bump and retreat rights?" If necessary, we should engage legal experts to clarify members' rights and protections during uncertain times.

If RIFs occur, AFSA must advocate for reinstatement policies that give current members the best possible chance to return to the Foreign Service. AFSA should not be pushing for hiring commitments for non-members from fellowship programs while we face potential job loss. AFSA must direct its efforts toward supporting the people serving and ensuring that their careers are protected.

Beyond job security, AFSA must work to improve the promotion and bidding systems to ensure transparency. The 2019 *Figueroa v. Pompeo* court ruling revealed flaws in the Department's ability to explain its own promotion system. When judges describe the process as "vague" and rule against the Department because of its lack of accountability, reform is needed. Members should understand what is expected of them and how decisions about their careers are made. For example, friends who've served on past panels told me that EERs indicated we had successfully "turned the corner" on democracy, women's rights and economic development in Afghanistan and Iraq — contrary to the reality. We can ask ourselves, are all EERs 100% true? If not, are we really comfortable continuing this way? Furthermore, other panelists have said it was not possible to even review all the EERs in their limited time. To those reading this, you are doing great work, don't agonize and define your self-worth over the vicissitudes of a panel of people you've never met.

The bidding system must also be improved. There are no easy answers, but I would survey members on creating a

more centralized system run by GTM, outside of the control of regional bureaus. A system with a greater focus on career development, fairness and predictability would be a step forward.

Thank you, more to come.

### **Rohit Nepal, State Department Vice President +**

We are in unprecedented times. USAID is being dismantled at astonishing speed, many of our colleagues put on administrative leave and others separated from service, with potential RIFs looming for the rest of us. Worse yet, our service and loyalty are being unfairly called into question. AFSA has been at the forefront of defending against these attacks and, as part of the Diplomacy Matters slate, I would be honored to have your vote to be the next State Department Vice President. I am ready to bring my almost 23 years of experience in the Foreign Service, along with the skills I learned as a litigator in New York and civil rights lawyer in Alabama, to defend our people and our service.

If you feel threatened and demoralized these days, I hear you. I feel the same way, and I'm ready apply all my experience and energy in representing you. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, I was an attorney working on behalf of victims of civil rights violations. I've helped shape class action lawsuits and know that litigation can be a powerful tool to force government agencies to live up to their legal responsibilities. But I also know that court cases move slowly, and litigation must be part of a broader strategy. We need to rally all those who know the extraordinary work you do for our country every day—other agencies, Congress, think tanks, and the private sector, to name just a few.

My parents, immigrants to the United States, instilled in me the importance of public service and giving back to the country that has given so much opportunity to us. Throughout my career in the Foreign Service, I've always been humbled by the extraordinary talent and sacrifice you demonstrate every day around the world in service of the American people. Most recently, as DCM and Chargé d'Affaires, I've experienced firsthand the impact of the recent actions affecting our workforce. As I walk the halls and talk with our teams these days, I feel the fear and uncertainty gripping our entire embassy community. I've made taking care of people my highest priority, starting with giving every employee— regardless of rank, agency, or role—the chance to be heard and the respect they deserve. I've also taken every opportunity to advocate for my team, whether through front channel messages, emails, phone calls,

or briefings—especially on behalf of our extraordinary USAID colleagues, who are a vital part of the fabric of our embassy's community. If elected, I promise I will take the same people-centered approach to representing your interests as we navigate these difficult times together.

### **Austan Mogharabi, USAID Representative** ^

I am proud to be running as part of the Support and Defend slate, which is filled with dedicated candidates who want to stand up and defend the Foreign Service during this challenging time.

USAID and our Foreign Service are facing unprecedented pressures and cuts—threats that demand action. I know AFSA is working hard to support us even as there is little information. I am running for this role because I want to make sure we are fighting with every tool available to defend our people. I will take on this role without fear, advocating fiercely within AFSA and with the agency—when possible—for our collective interests.

I know this fight is bigger than one person. I know many of you are already working and organizing on ways to push back and build support. I want to make sure to amplify those efforts and help communicate them with AFSA leadership so they can be amplified. We are strongest when we act together, and I will do everything I can to turn ideas into action. I will need your help to do this.

Finally, I know how confusing, frustrating, and hard this moment is. I am committed to transparency—keeping everyone informed, cutting through uncertainty by sharing news as we receive it, and ensuring that you know what's happening and why.

### **John Dinkelman, President** ^

Over my 37 years in the Foreign Service, I believe I have always left a lasting positive impact wherever I've worked. At times, that has meant working to protect the Department from being undermined by adversaries. I understand that at this moment, it is important that AFSA does just that: protect our members and institutions from being irreparably harmed. By serving as AFSA president, I will advance the cause of AFSA, its members, and their loved ones wherever possible.

As Orientation Coordinator from 2002 to 2007, I was instrumental in changing the tenor and quality of the introduction of thousands of generalists and specialists into our ranks. As both Regional Executive Director and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Logistics Management, I championed various improvements to the quality of life for Foreign Service employees and

their families. Now, I intend to devote my efforts to advocating for and preserving the Foreign Service in this turbulent time. My platform is simple with three main goals:

1. **Protect and Rebuild.** By the time the new AFSA administration takes office in July, the bulk of the damage will already be done. That damage inflicted to the Foreign Service in the first six months of 2025 will not be repaired easily or quickly. Should Reductions-in-Force continue into the next AFSA administration, I promise that AFSA will do everything to:

- Ensure members are treated with dignity under established and codified procedures.

- Cut vacant positions first, not people.

- Argue that cuts are fairly distributed across all grades of the Foreign Service. AFSA will argue against RIFs focused on new untenured FS employees and push the Department to keep its promises to all Pickering, Rangel, Clarke, and FAIT Fellows ready to enter the Service.

- Continue our efforts to secure Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) for employees approaching retirement eligibility to maximize members' access to retirement options.

- Ease the transition for those eligible for retirement who selflessly volunteer to take Reductions in Force.

2. **Greater Transparency.** Too much already happens in Washington behind closed doors. As our profession faces unprecedented challenges, I commit to full transparency on all matters. I commit to candor and forthrightness. I commit to telling you well in advance about important issues that may affect you. Incidents like the recent delay in broadly sharing the expiration of overseas comparability pay will NOT happen under my watch.

3. **Stronger Advocacy.** We have no natural "constituency" and need to create one. The existential threat facing the Foreign Service is compounded by Congress' and the American public's lack of understanding of who we are and what we do.

As a "Collective Bargaining Unit," AFSA has primarily focused its efforts on managerial elements of the agencies/departments where we work. While there has been some success in our advocacy on the Hill and with the general public, these have not been widely publicized and have not received corresponding resources from the AFSA Governing Board. AFSA must strengthen its self-promotion efforts to Congress and the American people. If given the opportunity, I would double AFSA's Congressional outreach department and create a new department solely focused on public advocacy.

As a "Professional Association," AFSA needs to stop letting others craft our story of the Foreign Service. We must reach Americans who don't grasp how we benefit them directly or

our country as a whole. I will ensure AFSA crafts the narrative that gets in front of these challenges and makes known our hard work and value to America and to Congress.

Support and Defend! I encourage you to favorably consider the candidacy of all members of the “Support and Defend” slate of candidates. I have found each of them to be an honest, hardworking, reasonable person worthy of your vote. I am confident that, together, we will serve you well in these unprecedented challenging times.

### **Kevin Sampson, USAID Vice President**

I am running for AFSA USAID VP. I have served for 16 years as a contracting officer. Rather than provide a 5-point plan or a white paper I thought I would use this space to introduce myself.

Prior to joining the Agency I had a private sector career in telecommunication, consumer products, and real estate. I did not serve in the Peace Corps while teaching English. To be honest I joined the Agency like many others during the great economic downturn of 2008 to hide out for a couple years while the economy recovered. Along the way I was bitten by the development bug.

While supporting the old EGAT (Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade) Bureau I was fascinated by a range of exciting and new topics. I met some exciting people that were truly passionate about their work. As part of my portfolio my team had to procure worldwide IDIQs on a range of areas which included clean energy, basic education, and infrastructure. Through developing statements of work, I had to work closely with the technical teams. Given the 9 months it takes to develop and award a new procurement I had numerous meetings. Every technical expert would have an open door to educate me about their program. The passion for work was something I had not experienced before in corporate America.

I eventually converted to FS and forgot about corporate America. Once I joined the Foreign Service, I dove right in. While serving overseas I truly enjoyed working and socializing with the broader embassy community. I was a judge on a national science competition, I served as the English Club rep for the American center, and 3 of my recommendations were selected for IVLP. I also served as the ICASS chair at a SIP. At the same time, I also experienced the challenges of living overseas. I became all too familiar with The EVT section with ailing parents and being Medevaced myself during Covid.

In summary although I am the “accidental development professional.” I hope you see I have a breadth of experience in

corporate, Washington and the field; firsthand experience of the challenges of living overseas, and a deep passion for collaborating across all agencies. I think USAID is at a pivotal point in not only development but world history. As VP I commit to listen to your concerns, advocate tirelessly, and leverage the resources of AFSA to the maximum extent possible to carve a new path for development in the future.

### **Yolonda Kerney, Retiree Representative ^**

I joined the Foreign Service in 2004 as a member of the Incomparable 120th A-100. After tours in WHA, AF, GTM, and on the 7th floor, I'm now a Gen X'er preparing for my Retirement Tour. The profile of the “typical” FS retiree continues to evolve - some retirees parent minor children and/or manage eldercare issues, some intend to continue full time employment after FS retirement.

While the priorities of FS retirees may change, what remains evergreen is the value of FS retirees' experiences, collective wisdom, and devotion to the diplomatic corps. I ask for your vote and the opportunity to represent you as a Retiree Representative and member of the Support and Defend slate. I will ensure retiree perspectives help shape the policies that impact the Foreign Service we faithfully served, and the retirement benefits we earned.

### **Donald A. Camp, Retiree Representative ^**

I've been a member of AFSA since I joined the Foreign Service. Never in that time has the Foreign Service been under such threat. We retirees owe it to ourselves, our successors and to the future to do what we can to protect the institution and protect our country.

AFSA is known and respected on Capitol Hill and must be an important tool to strengthen the forces of sanity. We need to increase our membership, increase our visibility, and increase our clout.

We need in the months and years ahead to fight to rebuild USAID and all that it does. We need to protect the Foreign Service, especially new and untenured employees who will be the pillars of the institution in the future. We need to protect our own futures—the health and life insurance and pensions on which we depend. There will be threats ahead that we can't plan for now. AFSA needs to be strengthened to confront whatever comes our way. That is why I am running and that is why I ask for your vote for myself and for the “Support and Defend” slate.

I am committed to the Foreign Service. I offer determination, communication skills, and a willingness to lead.

### **DeMark Schulze, State Department Representative ^**

With 66 of my 225 allotted words, I recall our common oath, which we all should have readily on our tongues should we be pressed to wrongfully ally or commit ourselves: "I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

I have been fortunate to work in four geographic and two functional bureaus in my FS career and have spent the last two years working on the Hill with both sides of the aisle. I have mentored many aspiring FSOs and FAST officers from many backgrounds. I believe my experiences and contact-base are wide, but my focus is narrow: crafting and honing an effective, non-partisan, brave, and proud Foreign Service that is honest with its political leadership about challenges and opportunities in foreign affairs.

It has often been said that FSOs forego better paying opportunities in order to serve. I disagree. There is no greater compensation than the opportunity to serve. I hope you agree and will cast your vote for me and the 'Support and Defend' slate.

### **Joe Ragole, APHIS Representative**

APHIS-IS is a unique corner of the Foreign Service with its own challenges and opportunities. While much remains to be done, we have made some progress toward making IS a more effective defender of American agriculture and, more importantly, a better place to work. In addition to your vote, I'm asking for your support over the next two years as we work together to improve our organization. As your AFSA representative, I will continue to advocate for our mission and our people.

### **Connor Ferry-Smith, State Department Representative ^**

Believe it or not, one thing that excited me about joining the Foreign Service was joining a union. It was not an option in my private-sector career, so I am grateful for the opportunity to help shape the future of AFSA as part of the "Support and Defend" slate.

As a specialist finishing my first tour, I will bring a fresh perspective to AFSA's governing board. I'll especially focus on the needs and concerns of our most junior and overlooked stakeholders: FAST generalists/specialists, specialists, and Consular Fellows.

As a current FAST professional, I'm uniquely positioned to listen to the voices of newer officers who are still adjusting to State's culture. Due to hiring surges in recent years, roughly a quarter of the Foreign Service joined since COVID. As a specialist, I will also make sure that AFSA is addressing the needs of all 5,000 specialists across 19 skill codes.

As your representative, my priority will be ensuring AFSA serves its members first and foremost. This means prioritizing collective bargaining and members' needs, even if that makes management uncomfortable. I also will not tolerate any delay in sharing bad news, such as expiring OCP.

It is time for a new generation of leaders to serve. If elected, I promise to rebuild trust between leadership and members, making AFSA a union that works for you.

### **Stephanie Straface, State Department Representative +**

As a dedicated member of the U.S. Foreign Service for 12 years, I am honored to submit my candidacy as a State Department Representative on the AFSA Board. With my experience and commitment to the values that underpin the integrity and professionalism of our workforce, I am eager to serve as an advocate for our community.

My goal is to inform, protect, and represent the interests of our colleagues, ensuring that every Foreign Service employee is treated with respect, fairness, and dignity. I aim to amplify the voices of those who may feel marginalized or unheard, fostering an environment where concerns are addressed promptly and effectively. In particular, I will focus on issues related to workplace fairness, career development, and the well-being of our workforce, always with an eye toward preventing any undue treatment or actions that may undermine the trust and morale of our community.

The challenges we face as diplomats are unique, and the need for a supportive, transparent, and accountable structure is critical. As your representative, I will work tirelessly to safeguard our collective rights and uphold the values that make the State Department and AFSA strong. I am committed to a future where every Foreign Service employee feels empowered, supported, and valued.

Thank you for your consideration. ■



AFSA works because of you.  
Please vote in the AFSA election.