

THE FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL

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WORKPLACE WELL-BEING

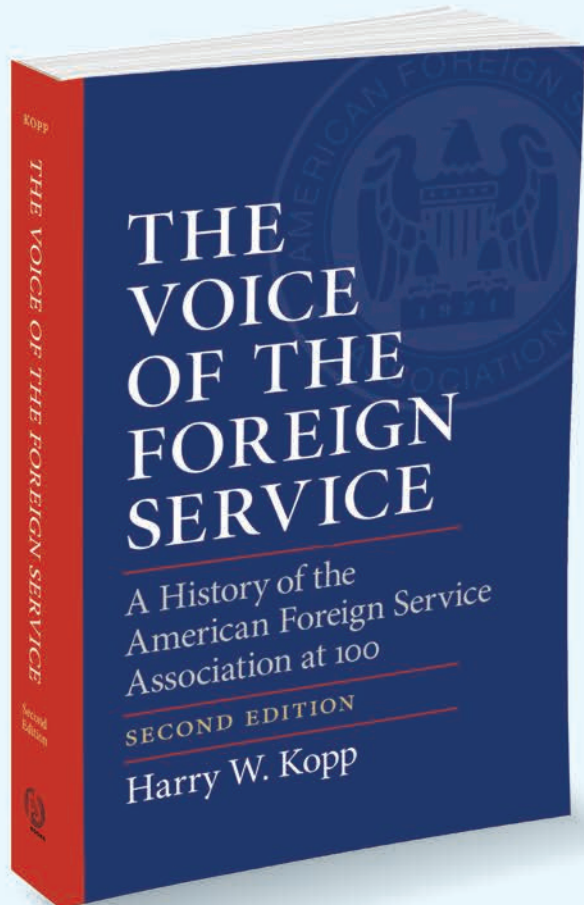
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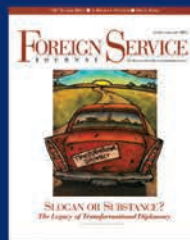
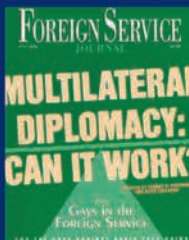
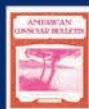
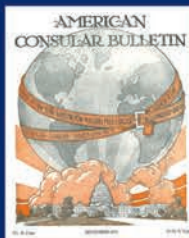
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On the Cover—Illustration by Mark Smith.

Hope for Resolving Workplace Conflict

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

I was serving as AFSA State VP when I wrote the November 2020 *FSJ* article, “Time for an Office of Conflict Resolution.” It was about the need for such an office because of the corrosive effect of bullying bosses on morale and the State Department’s work culture.

I noted that this phenomenon, not the formal complaints that led to grievances or EEOC filings, accounted for the most messages we received from our members about workplace conflict. (Please also see FSO Zia Ahmed’s eloquent January-February *FSJ* Speaking Out on why bullying has never truly been addressed and why we are all to blame.)

I am happy to report that the Workplace Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (wCPRc) is about to be resourced and staffed up, hopefully as soon as this month or next, as the article from the Ombuds Office in this edition details.

Full disclosure: AFSA had hoped a new anti-bullying office would be established within the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM), as outlined in the original plan, with a dedicated investigatory arm and the ability to compel both sides in a workplace conflict to come to the table and abide by center decisions.

The original plan could not go forward, stymied by some congressional opposition. So we do appreciate the department’s willingness to think creatively, leverage existing authorities, and establish it

under the Ombuds Office (S/O), which is part of the Secretary’s office and led by the very able ombuds herself.

We all want the wCPRc to have a real effect in stamping out the scourge of bullying in all its forms. Having a dedicated point of contact within the department for reporting these abuses is an important first step.

Previously, you could go to the ombuds if you were getting bullied, but that office did not have a mandate, the resources, or staff to triage at the case level. We hope they will now.

There are those who remain skeptical about what this new center can achieve, which is completely understandable. The Ombuds Office describes itself as confidential, informal, impartial, and independent. It does not formally investigate allegations of bullying or serve as an advocate for one side or the other in a workplace conflict. Nor does it issue binding decisions.

We ask that you engage with and provide feedback to the center if you use its services—and even if you don’t. The S/O can conduct consultations, coaching sessions, and climate surveys for individual offices or entire missions, as needed. The wCPRc will complement those functions by serving as a point of contact to review, triage, and refer individual cases to bureau executive offices, S/OCR, and other units as appropriate.

Please get involved, ask questions, and provide your thoughts. Once the center is up and running, please let AFSA know what you think of its operations and impact.

The wCPRc is meant to play a part in the oft-stated department effort to hold people accountable for their actions. That is something that AFSA strongly supports and deeply hopes will amount to more than just words. We know that many of our members believe the more senior the official, the less accountable for their own actions. We also know from the State Department’s Stay Survey and exit surveys of those resigning or retiring from the Foreign Service that this remains a big problem.

AFSA also hopes the department will give no quarter to the argument that the bully produces excellent analysis for Washington or that exigent circumstances “forced” the bully to act the way they did. When an office or post faces challenging circumstances, that is precisely when behaving appropriately and treating people with dignity are most important.

We hope that the ombuds will make the principle of accountability—regardless of who is involved or what the circumstances are—the overarching vision for wCPRc.

AFSA will do its part by engaging with the center to help ensure its activities and operations are as effective and transparent as possible. This is an initiative that must succeed.

If successful, the center can be an example for the other foreign affairs agencies, which no doubt suffer from the same affliction of workplace conflict. Please let us know what you think by writing me at yazdgerdi@afsa.org. ■



Tom Yazdgerdi is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.

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From Bullying to Happiness

BY SHAWN DORMAN

Almost everyone in the Foreign Service has a story about bullying or uncivil behavior on the job. This is likely true in any profession, but there are peculiarities in the FS context that make the problem difficult to address.

The “wait it out” culture of a career in which people change jobs and countries every few years; the fear of retribution or career-damaging evaluations (the bullying boss is your rater or reviewer); and doubt that anything positive would come out of reporting it—these are just a few of the reasons many remain silent in the face of bullying.

Addressing bullying behavior in the workplace is also tricky because, unlike “harassment” and “discrimination,” it hasn’t clearly fallen under any office’s authority to act.

State Department leadership has acknowledged the problem. AFSA has long been advocating for an anti-bullying office, as Tom Yazdgerdi notes in his President’s Views column, “Hope for Resolving Workplace Conflict.”

In December 2022, State management announced plans to create such an office, and in a Feb. 1 message to State employees, Under Secretary for Management John Bass announced establishment of a home office to address the problem—the Workplace Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center in the Office of the Ombuds.



Shawn Dorman is the editor of *The Foreign Service Journal*.

In this month’s Straight from the Source, “Office of the Ombuds Takes on Bullying at State,” Brianna Bailey-Gevlin explains how it’s going to work. Like other SFTS articles, this one lays out the aims of a new policy, and we look to our readers in the FS community to respond with feedback on how it goes, what’s working and what’s not.

(For example, see “A Look at the New Learning Policy” in the March *FSJ* and, in this edition, responses to that SFTS piece from Alexis Ludwig, Ambassador James Jeffrey, and Don Jacobson.)

The lively discussion of issues of concern to the Foreign Service in these pages can, every so often, make a difference, so please help keep the foreign affairs agencies accountable by keeping us posted.

Ambassador Ana Escrogima offers practical advice on how to shrink the space for bullying in “Setting the Table for Inclusion: Five Things Leaders Can Do to Interrupt Toxic Behaviors.”

On the flip side of a toxic office culture is a healthy workplace, made possible by ... happy leaders. Meet public diplomacy FSO Johanna Villalobos in the Speaking Out, “The Surprising Secret to Powerful Leadership.” She has spent the past year on a Cox fellowship studying the relationship between leadership and happiness, and she’s on to something.

What she’s finding in the growing (and trending) field of happiness studies, and how it can be applied in the Foreign Service context, is inspiring. It warrants consideration.

Which brings us to another factor in workplace well-being and productivity—diversity. Executive Order 14035: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workplace (2021) states that more representative and inclusive workplaces yield higher-performing organizations.

And so we turn to FSO Scott Winton’s Feature, “First-Generation Professionals: Another Dimension of Diversity,” for a look at the challenges faced by first-generation college students, graduates, and professionals, as well as their great potential for broadening the department’s representation of the United States.

In the Retirement Supplement, we hear from FS retirees Ladd Connell, Patricia Haslach, and John Rendeiro, about the paths they chose in “Life After the Foreign Service.”

In FS Heritage, “The Department of State’s Reception Centers: Back to the Future,” FSO Matthew Asada tells the story of this little-known but possibly instructive early example of city and state diplomacy.

In the Reflection, “Get That Man a Chair,” former FSO Michael Varga tells his story of living with HIV. And in the Local Lens, FSO Andrea Nagy offers a bird’s-eye view of Kathmandu.

Look for the special centennial edition of the *FSJ* next month, including more than 50 mini-stories from practitioners for “FS Proud: 100 Words for 100 Years” and the first-place winning essay from the *FSJ* Centennial Writing Competition.

Meanwhile, keep in touch. Write to us at journal@afsa.org. ■

A New Idea to Speed Ambassadorial Confirmations

As of mid-March, more than three years into the Biden administration and at a time when international challenges are especially daunting, more than 20 American ambassadorships and nearly a dozen ambassadorial-level positions at multilateral organizations remain vacant. The Senate and White House share responsibility for this problem, but one idea would speed part of the process.

The failure to confirm American ambassadors is the diplomatic equivalent of the U.S. military operating without its top generals, compromising strategic leadership, coordination, and the ability to respond to international crises effectively. Moreover, in a world that operates on optics, having vacant ambassadorial posts signals vulnerability and diminishes our standing on the global stage.

Though some of these positions still have a previously confirmed incumbent in place or a capable Foreign Service officer serving as acting, those interim officials lack the standing of a Senate-confirmed ambassador when it comes to interacting with host country officials and harmonizing the sometimes-divergent agendas of the multiple federal agencies represented at the embassy.

The slow ambassadorial confirmation process is a long-standing problem, which some view as intractable. But one new idea has the potential to speed it up.

In 2011 the Senate overwhelmingly approved a change to confirmation procedures in a bipartisan 89-8 vote. That change designated 272 presidentially appointed positions as no longer requiring committee action unless a senator requests it.

Eliminating the requirement to hold a committee hearing and vote moves those nominations directly to final Senate action. No ambassadorial positions were included in the 2011 reform.

Our proposal would expand on that reform to remove the requirement for a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing for ambassadorial nominees to the 100 or so smaller, but still important, embassies as determined by the Department of State in its Overseas Staffing Model. The model ranks embassies from 1 to 5+, with higher numbers assigned to larger embassies.

Currently, 103 of the 175 U.S. embassies are in the lower categories 1, 2, or 3.

Typically, ambassadorial nominees to smaller embassies are confirmed by unanimous consent after a committee hearing attended by only a few senators. Allowing those nominees to be cleared for final Senate action without a hearing would make the confirmation process far more efficient and effective.

It would reduce the time nominees wait for Senate action, reduce the time those embassies are without a confirmed ambassador, and, importantly, increase the Senate's ability to focus on vetting nominees to lead the larger embassies.

As in the 2011 reform, any senator could still request a committee hearing and vote on any nominee to a smaller embassy.

We understand that reforms to Senate procedures demand thoughtful consideration and should never be entered into lightly. However, the persistent vacancies in American ambassadorships

represent a critical lapse in America's ability to lead and influence on the global stage.

This commonsense reform of *internal* procedures is the Senate's prerogative to adopt without obtaining agreement from the House of Representatives or the president. We urge the Senate to do so.

Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann,

President, American Academy of Diplomacy

Ambassador Eric S. Rubin, Chair,

Foreign Affairs Council

Tom Yazdgerdi, AFSA President

A Superb Edition

I just read the January-February 2024 *Foreign Service Journal* and congratulate you on a superb edition.

I was delighted to see that my high

school, Arroyo High in San Lorenzo, California, was featured in "The High School Foreign Service Association: Engaging Aspiring Diplomats" by Ivan Pankov. In 1958 I was in the first graduating class from that high school. Thanks to this article, I am now in contact with Arroyo's HSFSA group and was invited to speak

with the students.

I was also most pleased to read Harry Kopp's excellent article, "AFSA's First Hundred Years." Harry and I, along with an amazing group of junior FSOs, served together in the early 1970s at our embassy in Warsaw. It is good to see that Harry has lost none of his super writing skills.

Well done, *FSJ!*

Charles Richard Bowers

Ambassador, retired

Nashville, Tennessee



A Capital Offense?

I was enjoying reading Harry Kopp's article, "AFSA's First Hundred Years," in the January-February edition of *The Foreign Service Journal* until I reached the section on austerity and diversity.

Shortly after the author quotes the section of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 that mandates "equal opportunity and fair and equitable treatment" without regard to "political affiliation, race, color, religion" (emphasis added), he refers to "white males" and "Black officers."

The reasons for capitalizing "Black" are understandable, and I am not writing to argue against that practice. The problem is not capitalizing "white."

The fact that uppercasing "Black" and lowercasing "white" is now the practice in many publications doesn't change the fact that it is blatantly racist, offensive, and infuriating. It is discrimination based on skin color.

The AP style guide [used by this magazine] contains several reasons for the practice, all of which, in my opinion, are flawed. For example, "White people generally do not share the same history and culture, or the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color."

Is their history and culture, in mainly Europe and North America, a historical and cultural void? Why should a period of discrimination be a prerequisite for capitalizing this word?

AP further states that "capitalizing the term 'white,' as is done by white supremacists, risks subtly conveying legitimacy to such beliefs." What about the majority of us who are just as committed to racial equality as the authors of the style guide?

Is insulating the AP and its imitators from the possibility of this linkage so important that they think it acceptable



The advertisement features a top image of a person using a calculator and a laptop. The AFSPA logo is in the top right. The main title is "AFSPA'S Financial Services". A QR code with the AFSPA logo is on the left, with the URL "afspa.org/aip" and a "Learn More" button below it. On the right, a "Enroll Now!" button is above the text: "AFSPA has partnerships with financial experts such as Prudential and GEBA to offer members Financial Wellness, and Wealth Management. Contact us now to start planning your financial future, today."



The advertisement has a large blue "MOVING?" on the left. On the right is a globe with an orange airplane. Below the globe is the text: "TAKE AFSA — AND THE FSJ — WITH YOU!". At the bottom, it says "Send your address updates to member@afsa.org".

to lump the majority together with the few? The antidiscrimination principles that would cause a person to object to lowercasing “white” are the same principles that underlie most people’s opposition to racism in the larger context. It makes no sense to alienate people who are wholly supportive of the basic effort to fight racism.

Why do the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, the Columbia School of Journalism, and other mainstays of the press bother exerting so much effort to justify lowercasing “white”? The cynical explanation is that it is a political stance by the radical so-called woke left. This should cause the *FSJ* to run in the opposite direction.

The Foreign Service consists of officers who spend their professional lives upholding the principles of the American republic, including racial equality and nondiscrimination. In 20 years on active duty, I never met a single officer who even remotely caused me to suspect they had any type of racial supremacy beliefs. AFSA publishes the *FSJ* for those officers, of all colors.

This is simply an issue of equality. The *FSJ* is free to set its own style standards. Is capitalizing all colors too much to ask of a publication that, rightfully so, vigorously supports DEI in every issue?

Bob Boynton
FSO, retired
Carmel, Indiana

What “Two-State Solution”?

As an Israeli-born American, I find the letter in the January-February 2024 *FSJ* proposing a “two-state solution” for the chronic Arab-Israeli conflict (“A Two-State Solution” by George Lambakis) a bit unnerving given the history and reality of the region.

Furthermore, idealistic opinions and advice by foreigners are easy to dispense when you don’t have to live with 75 years of wars, terrorism, and the most recent pogrom.

Key points for Westerners to note: An Arab Palestinian state was rejected by the Arab League in 1947; and, other than Anwar Sadat, no Arab leader has ever accepted publicly the legitimacy of the Jewish state.

The “present extremist Israeli government” (as described by the letter writer) was democratically elected by Israeli citizens—can you say that about any Palestinian or any other Arab leadership in the region?

Who would, therefore, serve as a representative negotiating partner with Israel? Do you really think Palestinians prefer to live under the PLO, Hamas, Hezbollah, or Islamic jihad rule?

The Middle East continues to be a mess, and I attribute it to a lack of socioeconomic development and failed leadership by Arabs, in spite of extensive aid packages.

Compare this stunted growth with the resurgence of other countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Germany that were destroyed by wars.

Peace will come to the region when Palestinians (and others) accept Israel’s right to exist from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, and focus on building their own society and nation, not exterminating the Jews.

Joseph Harari, DVM
FSJ reader
Spokane, Washington



Clarifying the Numbers

I found the December 2023 issue of the *FSJ* on “Constructive Dissent Today” informative and insightful, especially the section on the history and impact of the Dissent Channel, including the suggestions on “Doing Dissent” and “Dissenting Well.”

One clarification is needed regarding the paragraph on Archer Blood and the Blood Telegram on page 23. It states Blood authorized use of the consulate’s telegraph facilities for “seven staff” to send our dissent message to the department.

Actually, when I prepared the April 6, 1971, cable on behalf of a number of similarly concerned officers at Consulate General Dacca (now Dhaka), the draft ended up being signed by a total of 20 officers from the three major elements of the mission—State, USAID, and USIS.

Additionally, after our message reached the department, several “South Asia hands” sent a memo to Secretary William P. Rogers associating themselves with its substance—one of those signing the memo being the late Howard B. Schaffer, subsequently U.S. ambassador to Bangladesh.

W. Scott Butcher
Senior FSO, retired
Potomac, Maryland ■



**Share your thoughts
about this month’s issue.**

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RESPONSE TO MARCH 2024 STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE—
 “A LOOK AT THE NEW LEARNING POLICY” BY SARAH WARDWELL

A Step in the Right Direction

BY ALEXIS LUDWIG

One obstacle facing the implementation of the new Learning Policy, which aims to provide a more systematic approach to professional education and training for the Foreign Service, has been the embarrassment of riches these professionals bring upon entering. Most Foreign Service generalists and specialists are highly educated.

Notwithstanding the absence of formal academic requirements for anything beyond a high school diploma in the case of generalists, many enter with advanced degrees. Moreover, the average age of FS entrants hovers around 33, so most bring significant professional experience to the table.

The assumption is that, after they pass the rigorous Foreign Service exams and interview process, incoming officers and specialists are already “prepared” for the work they will do. Unlike, say, military officers, who enter as young adults on the organization’s bottom rungs (sometimes beginning their careers in one or another military academy), FS professionals traditionally aren’t viewed as needing further training or education to develop the knowledge and skills they need to do the job. If one is seeking an explanation for the historical absence of mandatory skills training at State, one would have to begin there.

Beyond the (possibly) flawed assumption that doing diplomacy depends on

an easily transferable skill set, the central challenge becomes one of “level-setting.” The backgrounds of incoming Foreign Service professionals are stupefyingly multiple and varied—from the newly minted college graduate to the retired Air Force colonel adding a coda to their decades-long military career. So it is practically impossible to know who knows what (or how much), and who has which skills at what degree of development, irrespective of rank or grade.

To make this work, managers and supervisors at all levels will need to carve out time for professional development for their teams.

The deeper question becomes: Do all FS professionals have the knowledge and skills they need to do the work they are asked to do at each successive stage of their career? Judging by repeated needs assessments, reports of supervisors, and complaints from employees themselves, the answer to this question is a resounding “no, they do not.”

Enter State’s new Learning Policy. The intentions of this policy, whose elements are identified in the March Straight from the Source article, must be applauded. It focuses first on the core challenges facing diplomats today: accelerating technology leaps, advancing climate change, and the emergence of the People’s Republic of



China as a peer competitor of the United States, among others.

It also homes in on the core knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the practice of diplomacy requires. Boiled down to basics, these are: thinking critically and strategically; communicating effectively; and adapting quickly to different cultural, organizational, and

situational environments. A tall, almost all-encompassing order indeed.

However praiseworthy its intentions, this policy appears easier to roll out as an idea than to implement in practice. Its practical success will depend on fully harnessing the political will of the current administration to marshal the resources needed to get it done, probably on a scale similar to what the late Secretary of State Colin Powell did in establishing mandatory leadership and management training a generation ago.

Absent the political mandate to implement *mandatory* training, the new learning policy will depend on notoriously overworked and resource-

strapped supervisors with veto power over merely *recommended* training.

And absent the investment of real resources—that is, resources equal to the scope of the policy’s ambition that help to establish and sustain the bureaucratic and other structures required—the new policy’s fate will be subject to (and probably the victim of) inevitable shifts in the political winds.

Such gaps between lofty ideas and rubber-meets-road reality make skeptics

predictably wary. Many have seen this roadshow before. Still, while fully supporting the idea and hopeful that things will be different this time, most FS observers are looking for concrete signs of *how* and *why* this new policy will be different—different for being serious, structural, and sustainable over the long term, with ends and means in dynamic balance.

While all would welcome the telltale signs foreshadowing success, many fear that in their absence the new learning

policy might well collapse and revert to the old learning policy in short order.

Alexis Ludwig is a retired Senior Foreign Service officer. He joined the Foreign Service in 1994 and spent most of his career in overseas missions in the Western Hemisphere and East Asia. He served on the FSJ Editorial Board from 2018 to 2024 and helped launch the pilot version of the new Core Skills for Mid-Career Professionals course, which anchors the core curriculum.

Prioritizing Learning

BY DON JACOBSON

I was delighted to see the September 2023 announcement of the new Learning Policy and Sarah Wardwell’s excellent article about it in the March 2024 issue of *The Foreign Service Journal*. The policy reflects a potentially transformative commitment to professional development by State Department leadership; achieving its goals will require commitment from all of us.

Providing top cover and giving their teams space to invest in professional development is one of the greatest contributions senior leaders can make to advancing the Learning Policy.

Senior leaders generally have short time horizons for accomplishing our mission-related goals, so it’s tempting to keep our teams going at full sprint all the time. However, investing in well-thought-out approaches to professional development will help our team members be more effective and motivated, thereby increasing their capacity to accomplish the mission.

To make this work, managers and supervisors at all levels will need to carve out time for professional development

We must become students of our craft.

for their teams and think strategically about how to use the practices inherent in their role as supervisors (i.e., assigning work and giving feedback) to develop their people.

For example, assigning projects that make employees stretch while providing them feedback and support is a great way to help employees grow in the process of doing the job. The Learning Policy also encourages the use of individual development plans (IDPs), and we should embrace that as a mechanism for ensuring our investment in professional development aligns the needs of our employees with the needs of the mission.

Of course, we also need to find ways to free up our people to attend training and go on detail assignments or temporary duty tours.

Finally, we need to remember that every single one of us, as employees of the State Department, needs to take ownership of our own professional

development. We are not empty vessels who just go to the Foreign Service Institute to get filled with leadership, language skills, or regional expertise.

We must become students of our craft and put in the continuous effort required to learn and grow, whether we are in training or on the job. That also includes taking the initiative to volunteer for projects, identify new learning resources, and adopt a disciplined practice of professional reading.

It’s up to each of us to make carving out time for professional development a priority; this is simply one of the many balancing acts we must do as leaders. It’s not a question of getting the work done or developing our people. We must do *both*.

Don Jacobson joined the Foreign Service in 1992 and has led some of the State Department’s largest consular operations. He currently serves as acting deputy assistant secretary for passport services.

Deeply Disillusioning

BY JAMES JEFFREY

The March *FSJ* piece on State education and training is deeply disillusioning. That starts with the policy's 16 Core Curriculum courses. With minor tweaks these could be the common curriculum for the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

With the exception of "International Negotiation Arts and Skills," nothing in the curriculum seems to speak to what an outsider would correctly think is the central mission of the Department of State, foreign policy. It apparently can't be found in the "Succeeding at State: Core Skills" course, described as teaching "strategic empathy" and "understanding the pressures your colleagues ... experience."

The article cites as inspiration for the new policy the Belfer Center's "A U.S. Diplomatic Service for the 21st Century." Yet that report's first recommendation was to restore State's centrality in "executing the nation's foreign policy," and to that end urges education "on mastery of substantive foreign policy issues, diplomatic expertise, and leadership."

So wouldn't our core curriculum benefit from, say, a course in "Principles of Foreign Policy" or "Case Studies in Country Team Policy Planning"? If anything like that is in the new approach, why wasn't it mentioned anywhere in the five-page article?

Learning policy work does involve much on-the-job training, but there is a place for formal training, and not just for

political officers, because everyone supports diplomacy in some way.

The military gets this. It trains communications and logistics professionals along with infantry officers in not just war fighting, the core competency, but in foreign policy, in multiple yearlong programs augmented by university training.

I've heard much griping at State about the Department of Defense encroaching on our authorities and activities. Perhaps it's because the military takes training seriously, not only in their tradecraft, but in ours.

James F. Jeffrey of Alexandria, Virginia, is a Career Ambassador who served as U.S. ambassador to Albania, Turkey, and Iraq.

RESPONSE TO DECEMBER 2023 COVER STORY, "THE STATE DEPARTMENT DISSENT CHANNEL: HISTORY AND IMPACT"

Constructive Dissent Today

BY DESAIX MYERS

Many thanks for your December *FSJ* celebrating the importance of constructive dissent. The article by Sara Berndt and Holly Holzer, "The State Department Dissent Channel: History and Impact," and Holzer's sidebar "Doing Dissent at State" illustrated the importance of dissent to good decision-making and appropriate ways to dissent and encourage debate.

It could hardly have been more timely. It appeared just as increasing numbers

of students, citizen groups, and public servants were raising questions about the administration's policy in the Middle East.

My copy of the *Journal* arrived just before a Jan. 12 *Al-Monitor* article reported U.S. government workers were planning to stay home to protest the U.S. policy in Gaza. A spokesperson for a group calling itself "Feds United for Peace" claimed employees from 22 agencies had committed to join the action.

It's unclear whether the plan was real. The spokesperson was unnamed,

the employees anonymous. Jan. 16, the day of the proposed walkout, turned out to be the day of Washington's first snow in two years. The government shut



itself down and told everyone to stay home, making it hard to know whether the group's claims were aspirational, actual, or merely a trolling exercise to provoke right-wing anger at government workers.

If the latter, it was certainly successful. The *National Review* promptly said the walkout would be “a felony,” and House Speaker Mike Johnson tweeted: “They deserve to be fired. Oversight Chairman Comer and I will be working together to ensure that each federal agency initiates appropriate disciplinary proceedings against any person who walks out on their job.”

Word of a walkout stirred fresh debate over many of the issues raised in the December *FSJ*. I awoke to a long chain of emails from former FS colleagues debating the proposed walkout's merits. Some argued against, noting other paths—internal dissent, resignation, private opposition. Others saw it as the protest of a different generation, one that viewed jobs as gigs rather than careers, while still others simply appreciated the youth and the passion.

What they shared was a common concern about a backlash against government workers to come from calls like Speaker Johnson's for retribution and Donald Trump's campaign promises to reinstitute “Schedule F” (the executive order stripping protections from—and making it easier to fire—career civil servants).

The online discussion sent me scurrying to the basement to retrieve a button buried among souvenirs from the 1960s. It was a thrill to find it, with its blue dove flying against a background of red and white stars and stripes, above the words “Federal Employees for Peace.” We, too, were once young and impassioned.

Having a bureaucracy able to accept dissent, protest, internal opposition, even the occasional leak, is healthy and realistic.

In 1969 I came to Washington as an international development intern. The war in Vietnam was raging. Opposition was growing. Monthly demonstrations brought tens of thousands to Washington, D.C., to march in protest.

Within the State Department building a scattering of employees formed a group, Foreign Service Officers Against the War. We wore our buttons, some more discreetly than others.

We were unconcerned about the impact protest could have on our careers. We probably could have used the injunction in Holzer's article about the “fine line between acting out of personal integrity and being self-righteous and self-absorbed.” We only wanted to be heard—and seen. We marched around the outside of the State Department building long enough to be noticed.

At our next meeting at a table in the cafeteria, Princeton Lyman—then chief of USAID's Office for Political Participation in Development, later ambassador to South Africa during its transition from apartheid to democracy and an assistant secretary of State—sat down and counseled us gently: Our message had been delivered. So was his.

It would be nice to think that our protest contributed to the creation in 1971 of the State Department's Dissent Channel. Certainly, at my first post, East Pakistan, during the Pakistan army crackdown and Bangladesh's Liberation War, we in Dacca (now Dhaka) were grateful the channel existed.

Distraught at the U.S. government's silence over Pakistan's killing of Bengalis and its continued supply of arms to Islamabad, we signed the first dissent cable, the “Blood Telegram” (named after then Consul General Archer Blood), calling for a change in direction.

The protest didn't bring change (Bangladesh fighters backed by the Indian army did that), but it contributed to the recognition of dissent's importance in democratic policymaking.

Speaker Johnson's threat to fire protestors is wrong. Trump's call to remove protections for government officials echoes the worst of McCarthyism. Having a bureaucracy able to accept dissent, protest, internal opposition, even the occasional leak, is healthy and realistic.

As Ray Sontag, a beloved and esteemed professor of diplomatic history, told us at Berkeley more than a half century ago, wars are most often fought not over a question of right and wrong but over deeply felt rights. Today's conflict in the Middle East is no exception.

We should brace ourselves for the debate and hope for the creative ideas that emerge from dissent. And we should fight against efforts to cut it short. ■

Following 33 years in USAID—Kenya, East Pakistan (Bangladesh), Indonesia, Senegal, India, Russia, Burma, and Washington, D.C.—FSO Desaix “Terry” Myers taught at the National Defense University until he retired in 2016. He is the author of several books.

Deal to Swap Navalny, Two Americans

On Feb. 26, the Associated Press and others reported that at the time of Alexei Navalny's death in a Russian prison on Feb. 16, talks were underway with Germany to exchange Navalny and two unidentified American prisoners for a Russian imprisoned in Germany. On March 18, Russian President Vladimir Putin confirmed the news.

It is unclear which Americans would have been included in the deal. Several are currently being held in Russia, including *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan, and Marc Fogel, who, until his arrest in 2021, was a teacher at the Anglo-American School of Moscow.

State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller declined to comment on the story.

Another American Arrested in Russia

Ksenia Karelina, a 33-year-old dual national who lives in Los Angeles, was arrested after she traveled to Russia in January to visit family members. She was charged with treason for, according to Russia's Federal Security Service, "providing financial assistance to a foreign state in activities directed against the security of our country."

Karelina had allegedly donated just over \$50 to a U.S.-based charity, Razom for Ukraine. Razom released a statement



Karelina reportedly sent Razom for Ukraine \$51.80 in the months before she was arrested.

noting its activities are "focused on humanitarian aid, disaster relief, education, and advocacy." Among the tens of thousands of people who have donated to Razom are many from the U.S. foreign affairs community.

U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby told reporters that it is dangerous for U.S. citizens or dual citizens to be in Russia, calling on Americans to "depart immediately."

Afghanistan Update: SIGAR

On Jan. 30, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) released its 62nd Quarterly Report to Congress.

For the first time, this quarterly report examines the "critical question of whether, two and a half years after the U.S. withdrawal, things are getting better or worse for the Afghan people," and it finds that except for some improvement in a couple of areas, such as counter-narcotics, "most social, economic, and humanitarian indicators are clearly worsening."

Acute food insecurity was predicted to affect 15.8 million people by March 2024. Polio eradication efforts are at risk. Rates of child and forced marriage are increasing. Girls' education past sixth grade continues to be banned, and in January the Taliban began detaining women and girls for violating the dress code mandating full covering.

The humanitarian crisis intensified in October, the report states, when

Pakistan's government announced it would deport all undocumented Afghan migrants, estimated to be up to 1.3 million. By January 2024, some 493,000 Afghans, many with no place to go or means of sustaining themselves, had returned.

Despite the fact that it does not recognize the Taliban government, the U.S. remains the largest donor to the Afghan people, having appropriated \$11.21 billion in assistance since its withdrawal in August 2021. And the U.S. continues to respond to humanitarian crises there as they evolve.

The report documents the status of U.S. funding and activities in Afghanistan, including a detailed review of State Department and USAID programs to support refugees, remove unexploded ordnance, reform the criminal justice system, and limit drug trafficking, as well as the condition of the Afghan Fund.

In December 2023, SIGAR reports, the State Department released "an updated integrated country strategy for Afghanistan," the first since the Taliban seized power. Aimed at ensuring the country is never again used for attacks against the U.S. and its allies and at reducing Afghanistan's dependence on U.S. assistance, the strategy acknowledges the need to "build functional relationships" with the Taliban to succeed.

Significantly, SIGAR is working on a lessons-learned report on how to better understand and mitigate interference and diversion of humanitarian assistance in countries where the government isn't recognized.

Read the full report at <https://bit.ly/SIGAR-Report-Jan2024>.





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Mr. Nice Guy?

Politico’s senior foreign affairs correspondent, Nahal Toosi, asked the question in a February column: Is Antony Blinken too nice to be Secretary of State?

“He doesn’t yell or scream,” writes Toosi. But his voice becomes “intense,” and he may tap a nearby table for emphasis when he gets angry.

Toosi suggests Blinken should show the public the “quiet fury” he sometimes exhibits behind closed doors.

When asked about the article, the Secretary responded: “I’ll let others speak to my character, and all I can say is that most people who assume the position that I have the great privilege of assuming now don’t get there by being nice all the time.”

U.S., European Officials Sign Dissent Letter

More than 800 officials in the United States, the U.K., and the European Union (E.U.) signed and publicly released a letter of dissent against their governments’ support of Israel’s actions in Gaza, *The New York Times* reported on Feb. 2.

The letter’s authors call on their governments/institutions to, among other things, “develop a strategy for lasting peace that includes a secure Palestinian state and guarantees for Israel’s security, so that an attack like 7 October and an offensive on Gaza never happen again.”

U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford, who resigned in 2014 over the Obama administration’s Syria policy, told the *Times* that in three decades at the State Department, he had never seen a dissent letter coordinated by diplomats from multiple countries. But “when war is looming that is very problematic on

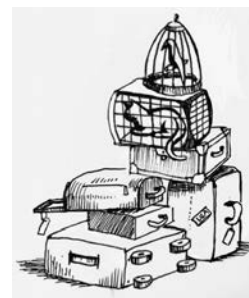
many levels, I can see why people are speaking out,” he said.

About 80 of the signers are from the U.S., and most of those are with the State Department, according to the *Times*. The majority of signers are from the European Union. The E.U. does not have a formal dissent channel.

Berber van der Woude, a former Dutch diplomat who did not sign the letter, told the *Times* that dissent by civil servants is justified. “Being a civil servant doesn’t absolve you from your responsibility to keep on thinking,” she said. “When the system produces perverse decisions or actions, we have a responsibility to stop it. It’s not as simple as ‘shut up and do what you’re told’; we’re also paid to think.”

New Problem for Pet Owners

Last year AFSA members celebrated the news that, thanks in part to AFSA’s advocacy, traveling with pets was going to become easier and less expensive as new regulations were released giving allowances for pet transport.



But according to *The New York Times*, there’s a new wrinkle for pet owners to contend with. IAG Cargo, a cargo-handling company that ships pets abroad for multiple U.S. airlines, announced that it will be raising rates to ship animals along some of its routes beginning in March 2024.

Pets Abroad UK told the *Times* that costs to transport pets between Britain and the United States were increasing 400 percent.

U.S. Is Soft Power Superpower

The U.S. has been selected as the world's soft power superpower for the third consecutive year by Brand Finance.

This year the London-based consulting group ranked all 193 United Nations member states based on eight "soft power pillars" and 35 "nation brand attributes." The U.S. earned the top spot in attributes such as "leader in science," "influential in arts and entertainment," and "helpful to countries in need."

But it dropped in the rankings in "great place to visit," "safe and secure," and "good relations with other countries." The report's authors explain this decline is due to "internal security challenges around gun violence and police

Contemporary Quote

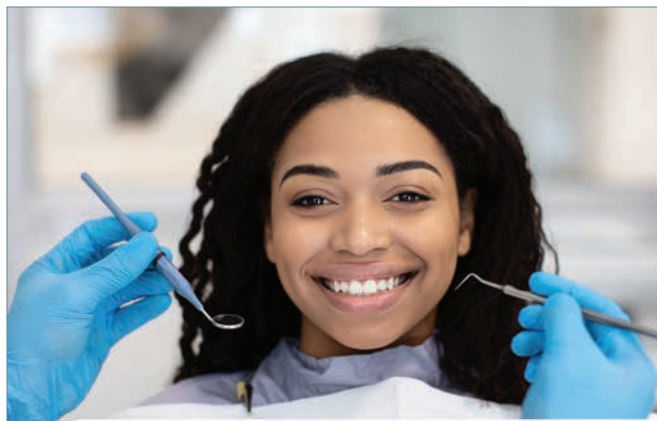
China's rise and Russia's revanchism pose daunting geopolitical challenges in a world of intense strategic competition in which the United States no longer enjoys uncontested primacy and in which existential climate threats are mounting. Complicating matters further is a revolution in technology even more sweeping than the Industrial Revolution or the beginning of the nuclear age. From microchips to artificial intelligence to quantum computing, emerging technologies are transforming the world, including the profession of intelligence.

—CIA Director and Career Ambassador William J. Burns, in "Spycraft and Statecraft," Foreign Affairs, Jan. 30, 2024.

brutality, as well as involvement in international conflicts."

Laurence Newell, a managing director at Brand Finance Americas, said in a release: "As we approach the 2024

elections, there's growing concern about the integrity of democratic values. This uncertainty reflects ongoing polarization and the lingering impact of past events, such as the January 6th Capitol attack.



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Selling Embassies

The revelations surrounding Herbert Kalmbach's guilty plea on February 26—that he had proffered ambassadorships in exchange for explicit levels of contributions—has once again brought to public light the urgent need to do something serious and constructive about a long-standing abuse. The fact is that every administration, irrespective of party, has seen fit to reward large contributors with ambassadorships whether they had any qualifications for the job or not. And if this has usually been done without the price tag being displayed quite so prominently as in Mr. Kalmbach's case, the principle nonetheless has been the same: contributors don't contribute for nothing, and one way you can pay them off is with an embassy.

This nation has been fortunate to have been able to draw on the talents of a large number of remarkable individuals from outside the career service who have made major contributions to American foreign policy. The Foreign Service is not the sole repository of talent in the field of foreign affairs in this country, and the nation should continue to be able to count on the services of distinguished non-career Ambassadors.

Political contributors are another matter. With a few exceptions, the best that can be said about the vast bulk of them is that while Ambassadors they did little damage to American foreign relations. Yet every officer knows of incidents where non-career Ambassadors of the major contributor sort have done real damage to our national interests. ...

As citizens we, like the rest of the American public, have the right to expect that the processes of government will work with integrity.

AFSA believes, therefore, that the time has come to bring a halt to the practice of selling Embassies.

—From the Editorial, *The Foreign Service Journal*, April 1974.



Intelligence agencies including the CIA concluded that no hostile foreign power was responsible for the mysterious illness that struck U.S. diplomats and others in Cuba, China, Russia, and elsewhere.

Instead, their investigations found that the illness was likely triggered by “environmental causes, undiagnosed medical conditions or stress,” according to a Feb. 12 article in *The New York Times*.

The House committee will focus on the integrity of the agencies' investigations and on “allegations of improper suppression” of information regarding AHI.

Attorney Mark Zaid, who has represented some of the victims, told the *Times*: “There is no doubt in my mind based on the years I have represented AHI victims that the executive branch is covering up what it actually knows about these incidents, to include the cause and foreign perpetrators. ... We look forward to the truth finally being made public and accountability, both for the perpetrators and the U.S. Government deniers, occurring.”

Meanwhile, AFSA continues to advocate for those affected by the mysterious illness.

Return to Pre-Pandemic Passport Processing Times

On Dec. 18, the State Department announced that passport processing times have returned to pre-pandemic levels. According to the press release, “passport applications will be processed within 6-8 weeks for routine service and 2-3 weeks for expedited service.”

According to *The New York Times*, as recently as last summer, the estimated wait time to get a passport was 10 to 13

Despite these challenges, the U.S. has historically been resilient, and it is hoped that its commitment to democratic principles, cultural diversity, and historic leadership will see it through.”

The U.K. took second place in the rankings. China, the fastest-growing nation brand, rose from fifth to third place. Russia, Ukraine, and Israel all fell in the rankings due to military conflicts.

Latest on Havana Syndrome

The House Intelligence Committee informed Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines on Feb. 8 that they have launched an investigation into how U.S. spy agencies investigated purported cases of anomalous health incidents (AHIs), known as Havana syndrome, in the workforce.

weeks, with expedited service taking seven to nine weeks.

Between October 2022 and September 2023 (the federal fiscal year), the department issued more than 24 million passport books and cards—the most in any fiscal year to date.

Kurt Campbell Confirmed

On Feb. 6, the U.S. Senate confirmed Kurt Campbell as Deputy Secretary of State. Campbell was sworn in as the 22nd Deputy Secretary on Feb. 12. He replaced Wendy Sherman, who left that post in July 2023. Since then, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland has served as acting Deputy Secretary. She announced her

Podcast of the Month: *State Magazine's* "Making a Statement" (<https://statemag.state.gov/mas/>)

In May 2022, *State Magazine* launched a multimedia feature called "Making a Statement."

The video series amplifies the voices of Department of State employees in short clips that highlight their motivations for choosing public service careers at the department.

In multiple monthly releases that feature Foreign Service, Civil Service, and locally employed Foreign Service staff serving in various capaci-



ties around the world, "Making a Statement" reflects the diversity of the department's

workforce. Storytellers share honest reflections of the varied career paths available at the department and the talent contained therein.

Interviews are ongoing, both in person and virtually. To schedule a "Making a Statement" interview of your own, contact StateMagazine@state.gov.

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Foreign Service Legislation: The Rogers Bill

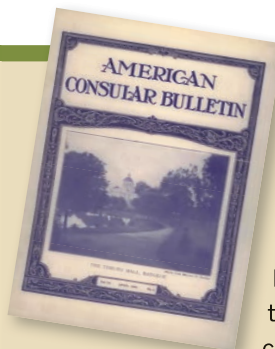
The Rogers Bill, which to the minds of many in the field seems on the verge of becoming a perennial topic, if not indeed a service tradition, is in the Department a matter of intensive activity. The hearings began on January 14 and closed on January 18, the bill being reported to the House by the committee on February 5. As some amendments were made in the committee the bill which took the number H.R. 17 at the time of its introduction was reintroduced in its amended form as H.R. 6357 and reported to the House under that number. In substance it contains everything that was embodied in the bill of last year with certain improvements in the language and several additions. ...

As of great interest to many who have experienced the financial burden of returning to the United States on sixty-day leave there is now a section which authorizes the Secretary of State whenever he deems it to be in the public interest, to order to the

United States on statutory leave of absence any foreign service officer who has performed three years or more of continuous service abroad. In such cases the expenses of transportation and subsistence of the officer and his immediate family would be paid under the same rules and regulations applicable in the case of officers going to and returning from their posts under orders. ...

A special fund, known as the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability Fund, is created, and the administration of the entire system is placed in the Department of State. ...

The President having endorsed the bill and recommended legislation for the reorganization and improvement of the foreign service in his first message to Congress, the project is considered as an administration measure and therefore is entitled to preferential treatment over others of lesser importance in Congress. In other words, instead



of awaiting its turn on the House Calendar it may be brought up at any time under a special rule. Naturally with such issues as

tax reduction, the bonus bill, and the appropriation bills in the way ... the bill has been waiting for an appropriate moment. ... As this article is being written the prospect looks pretty good for such a moment to arrive before the Bulletin reaches the field.

To those who may have felt a tinge of discouragement let it be said that there is no formidable obstruction to the bill and that it is almost certain of enactment in due course. ... This, of course, is a pardonable optimistic view but it is based upon the fact that very little opposition to the bill is known to exist in any quarter.

—From “Foreign Service Legislation,”
American Consular Bulletin
(precursor to the FSJ), April 1924.

plan to depart the State Department at the end of March.

Campbell previously served as deputy assistant to the president and coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs on the National Security Council. He was assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific affairs from 2009 to 2013. He is the author or editor of 10 books on foreign affairs and politics.

“Today’s challenges are truly global,” Campbell stated during his confirmation



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell

hearing. “What happens in one region affects the others. Our competitors are collaborating—just look at China, Iran, and North Korea’s support for Russia’s war of aggression. We are stronger across-the-board due to our alliances and partnerships.”

This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Donna Scaramastra Gorman. ■

The Surprising Secret to Powerful Leadership

BY JOHANNA VILLALOBOS

Being a good leader in the Foreign Service comes with a hefty amount of pressure. Will they respect me? Am I getting through? Do they get me? These are some of the questions constantly running through our heads.

It makes sense—the stakes are high. It's vital for leaders to set the right tone for the sake of our teams but also for the greater mission of the State Department. Whether we're leading an intern, a section, or an entire embassy, leadership means inspiring others to achieve their best.

But how do we get “there”? It would be tempting to just recommend additional training and professional development books. Do keep doing those things, as they are important and help us grow both personally and professionally.

Here's the real secret though: It has nothing to do with external factors and everything to do with you. The surprising secret to powerful leadership is *your* happiness. Yes, happiness.

According to a 2019 article in *Forbes* magazine, “The happiest people make the best leaders, and conversely, unhappy people don't make good leaders. In fact, the best leaders put their

The culture of self-sacrifice at the State Department is widely accepted and well ingrained.

own interest ahead of others and are happy as a result of doing so.”

Before you skip ahead to the next piece, indulge me for a couple more minutes.

I, like some of you, had reached the breaking point in my career after almost two decades in the Foreign Service. I was burned out. I questioned the intensity with which I had been pushing my career. I couldn't seem to keep up with my life. No amount of yoga and self-care would be enough to reset and recover when an ever-growing workload, turnovers, and constant understaffing meant almost always having to do two (or more) jobs at once. As my frustration grew, so did my unhappiness. I felt stuck.

Prioritize Yourself

What changed? Externally ... well, nothing. At least nothing outside my control.

But what did change was my per-

spective, and that changed everything. I chose to prioritize myself and do the work to become happier—because happiness isn't something that “happens” to me. It is something I have to create.

Thanks to the Una Chapman Cox Sabbatical Fellowship, I have had a year to learn and grow while exploring the relationship between leadership and happiness. You may be asking, “Isn't good leadership all about self-sacrifice?” No, it is not.

But the culture of self-sacrifice at the State Department is widely accepted and well ingrained. I strongly believed, and many of us still do, that the best leaders are selfless and put other people's interests ahead of our own. But I was wrong.

Decades of research, as presented in Robert Waldinger and Marc Schulz's *The Good Life* (2023), has shown that focusing on our own happiness directly correlates to more success, better health, and greater kindness, which benefits not just ourselves but others around us, too. *Happiness leads to well-being, and well-being sustains happiness.*

Why Your Happiness as a Leader Matters

Happy people are more productive and innovative, they inspire others, and they effect real and lasting change.



Johanna Villalobos is a Foreign Service officer and a 2023 Una Chapman Cox Sabbatical Fellow. Her fellowship year is devoted to personal and professional development while working with the private sector and academia to explore the relationship between leadership and happiness. She most recently served at U.S. Embassy Paraguay as long-term acting deputy chief of mission and public affairs officer. A public diplomacy officer, she has also served in Ecuador, Bolivia, Morocco, and Nicaragua, as well as at the Department of State and the Foreign Service Institute. Follow her journey on Instagram: @leading.happiness.

Leadership—specifically, how a leader behaves day to day—is directly related to the organization’s performance. Your well-being as current or future leaders in the Foreign Service has a direct global impact.

So, how do we become happier and, in turn, improve our well-being? The first step is to recognize what happiness is not. Most of us in the Foreign Service look for happiness in all types of places like our dream post, the perfect job, or the next promotion. But even when we get all those things, happiness still eludes us. Why? We are so busy looking for it in achievements and temporary pleasures, we miss the fact that *happiness is a direction, not a destination*, as stressed by Harvard professor and social scientist Arthur C. Brooks.

Science has made great progress in understanding happiness, and research in the fields of psychology, neuroscience, and sociology has uncovered important insights about what makes people happy. Building a happy life requires hard work and intentional effort. It boils down to prioritizing key areas of your life, including fulfilling relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners; pursuing meaningful goals and having a sense of purpose while being engaged in work and activities that align with your values; and focusing on your physical and mental health.

In short, happiness is about a wholeness of being that includes work—but is not limited to it. Because life is not just work. Life is also relationships, well-being, and purpose.

Leading with Happiness

Research by social scientists, including Tal Ben-Shahar, the creator of Harvard University’s most popular course on positive psychology (and my

Right now is the time to elevate employee well-being to the top of the policy agenda.

current professor of Happiness Studies), and Arthur C. Brooks, bestselling author and professor on the science of happiness, brings into clear focus why happy people make better leaders. It is because they lead with:

- **Emotional Intelligence:** Happy leaders are more adept at understanding their own emotions as well as those of others, leading to stronger interpersonal relationships and effective communication.

- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Happy leaders foster a more collaborative and supportive work environment. They encourage teamwork, cooperation, and inclusivity, leading to psychological safety and better group dynamics.

- **Increased Productivity:** Happy leaders create a more engaging work culture, boosting morale and job satisfaction. This leads to increased productivity and better performance.

- **Adaptability:** Happy people are able to adapt to change. In our constantly shifting work environment, leaders who remain positive and adaptable can guide their teams more effectively through transitions.

The best leaders manage their own well-being and *normalize* it as accepted behavior. They prioritize their health, delegate work, and establish and reinforce boundaries. The best leaders lead by example, and, as a result, individual and organizational well-being improves.

The Role of the Organization

Maintaining your well-being should not be solely your responsibility; your home agency also has a critical role to play. Focusing on employee well-being would be, as Secretary Antony Blinken has said, “an investment in the future of America’s leadership in the world.” By helping employees improve their lives outside the office, your employer has the potential to increase employee motivation and productivity exponentially. Research from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology finds that well-being at work is not just an afterthought but is pivotal in an employee’s decision whether to take, stay at, or leave a job.

There is a gap, however, when it comes to helping keep employees happy, healthy, and productive. Measures taken to improve employee well-being often occur after they reach burnout or are on the verge of leaving. Valuable measures are underway in wellness, innovation, and employee well-being at the department through TalentCare, CEFAR, and GTM, among others, to improve things, but they are not fast enough or at a scale to make an enterprisewide difference.

Instead of being reactive, taking a more proactive role in improving employee well-being would go a long way. These measures could include, but are not limited to, incentivizing and recognizing leaders who support employee

well-being in promotion and senior-level performance pay requirements; making early access to individualized health support and other specialist sources available to all employees, such as physical training, leadership/well-being coaching, and nutritionists; establishing metrics to examine and manage workloads; building a robust organizational framework to promote good mental health; and, most important, creating an executive-level position whose sole focus is employee well-being, as our colleagues in the CIA have recently done through the establishment of a “chief well-being officer.”

Embrace Our Common Humanity

In the end, maintaining our overall well-being boils down to embracing our common humanity. Those of us fortunate enough to have worked under Secretary of State Colin Powell can attest to why he was such an exceptional leader. He was the first to admit that he wasn't perfect. He was human. As are we.

Think about past and present leaders who inspire you. Leaders who motivate you, demonstrate resilience and integrity, and are deeply committed to their values. Leaders who talk the talk and walk the walk. Are you that leader? If not, what needs to change? Can prioritizing your own happiness and well-being help?

We are living through extremely challenging times. Prioritizing our happiness and well-being inside and outside of work takes on a greater sense of urgency. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all formula on exactly how to begin our own journey. Science can't predict what will work for each individual; that will come from personal reflection and figuring out what works for you.

Trying doing an audit on your relationships, sense of purpose, and health.

Speaking Out is the *Journal's* opinion forum, a place for lively discussion of issues affecting the U.S. Foreign Service and American diplomacy. The views expressed are those of the author; their publication here does not imply endorsement by the American Foreign Service Association. Responses are welcome; send them to journal@afsa.org.

Consider what brings you the most joy, and compare that with what you actually do every day. For me, it looks like being fully present in each moment, seeking out jobs and projects that bring me a sense of pride and purpose, and being an active participant in my family's life. What works for you?

Meeting in the Middle

The department has a distinct opportunity to better balance the work of its mission while putting its employees first. The will for change is there. When laying out the Modernization Agenda, Secretary Blinken said: “We have a window before us to make historic, lasting change, and we're determined to seize it. ... No one at the State Department expects their jobs to be easy. ... But many have asked whether it has to be quite this hard.”

Right now is the time to elevate employee well-being to the top of the policy agenda.

In the meantime, we as individuals can recognize that to become powerful leaders, we need to put on our own oxygen masks first to better serve others. Prioritizing ourselves will make us stronger leaders who are more equipped to confront head-on the challenges we face every day as foreign affairs professionals living and working around the world. But achieving that requires our action—to demand what we need and to create real boundaries for ourselves.

So, let's choose wisely, let's choose our own humanity, and let's call it happiness. ■



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Straight from the Source Office of the Ombuds Takes on *Bullying* at State

A decade after its establishment, this office is finally getting funding to address bullying and incivility.

BY BRIANNA BAILEY-GEVLIN

MARK SMITH

The following is a true story of conflict conquered in a country that shall remain renamed. ... In the faraway Kingdom of Kabau, the U.S. embassy's public affairs (PA) section was plagued by all the markers of an ineffective and undesirable workplace: outbursts, shouting, lack of adherence to boundaries, and failed communication.

The PA section had a dozen staff members, was within a midsize embassy, and was under constant pressure because of high-level visits to this popular and prominent kingdom. The office leadership was exasperated, without solutions; and these issues were negatively affecting their ability to deliver on their mission.

Does this situation sound familiar? If so, you can do what the embassy in Kabau did. They recognized that temporary

fixes were not enough, and to find a long-term solution, they needed to get some outside, objective support. PA leadership contacted the Office of the Ombuds (S/O). S/O staff listened attentively, assessed the situation, and swiftly identified an action plan.

Leveraging their expertise in mitigating workplace conflict, S/O staff scheduled several one-on-one coaching calls with members of the PA team over the next few weeks. S/O then traveled to Kabau to meet with the full PA section, conducted skills-building sessions, facilitated conversations, and provided specific recommendations on the positive path forward.

Following the monthlong intervention, staff described feeling "supported and trusted," and the next VIP visit was a conflict-free success.



Brianna Bailey-Gevlin joined the State Department Foreign Service in 2017. After completing two tours (in Lagos and Bridgetown), she transitioned to Civil Service and now works in the Office of the Ombuds. Her spouse, Sarah, is an FSO currently posted to Copenhagen. They have one child together.



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Workplace conflict is broadly defined as any disagreement that disrupts the flow of work.

The Department of State’s mission at home and abroad is complex and challenging, involving stressors that can lead to workplace conflicts and issues that necessitate a robust internal conflict resolution resource. The Office of the Ombuds (S/O) handles workplace conflicts that are not currently in a formal process and provides an array of services to benefit all department personnel, including direct hires, locally employed staff, employed family members, and contractors. The purpose of an ombuds is to provide opportunities for individuals and organizations to harness problem- and conflict-solving skills to unlock their collective potential.

The position of Ombudsman for Civil Service employees was established at State in 1995 to ensure the ability of Civil Service employees to contribute to the achievement of the department’s foreign affairs responsibilities and to represent the career interests of Civil Service employees. Over time, the goals and responsibilities of that position evolved and expanded.

In 2014 the Office of the Ombudsman was established and was intended to include a Workplace Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (wCPRc). Until now, there were no resources dedicated to stand up the wCPRc. This year will see a consequential new change: S/O has been provided the resources necessary to staff the wCPRc to address bullying and incivility in the workplace. (In 2023 the title of “Ombudsman” was officially changed to “Ombuds.”)

Addressing Workplace Conflict

Workplace conflict is broadly defined as any disagreement that disrupts the flow of work. All offices may—at any moment—experience workplace conflict; professional conflict in the Foreign Service can be especially poignant and, when left unresolved, equally destructive. The prevalence of multiple agencies with related (albeit varied) core mission statements coexisting in a U.S. embassy or consulate—sometimes a building with antiquated technology and/or unreliable HVAC and/or lacking ample office space for a growing workforce—in a foreign country can exacerbate challenges that may lead to conflict both inside and out of the office.

S/O offers support and resources to informally address such conflict at the interpersonal, organizational, and systemic levels. S/O has four guiding principles—that its work is confidential, informal, impartial, and independent. Its mission is to promote conflict prevention and resolution in the workplace. It is an independent and impartial resource for department personnel seeking early reconciliation and assists personnel to work toward mutually agreeable solutions.

How does S/O work? On the interpersonal front, S/O staff and the ombuds herself engage in conflict education, mitigation, and

Straight from the Source is the *FSJ* space for the foreign affairs agencies to inform the FS community about new policies or innovations in operations. What are your thoughts about the Office of the Ombuds’ new Workplace Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (wCPRc)? Please send your feedback as letters to journal@afsa.org or comment on *FSJ* LinkedIn.



S/O has a unique ability to serve as a “zero barrier” office for personnel across the department, where they can get support without fear and without judgment.

management at the earliest opportunity and the lowest possible level to enhance workplace communications, collaboration, and culture. To address organizational concerns, S/O provides skills-building sessions and conducts climate surveys and analysis to help organizational leadership with information, options, and tools to effectively address workplace conflict issues. With a broader, systemic view, S/O also collects and analyzes data, tracks trends, and develops proposals for institutional change as an adviser to senior department leadership.

For example, if an individual or a post reaches out for assistance, S/O may begin with one-on-one conversations with affected parties to figure out the root of the problem. If appropriate, a facilitated conversation could come next, giving each a structured and respectful environment to try to move forward in a positive direction. If it becomes clear that the effects of interpersonal conflicts extend well beyond two poorly communicating colleagues, S/O may provide further services. These could include consultations and coaching sessions or perhaps an office or missionwide climate survey, gathering information on what is working well and where there are challenges for the team. When S/O conducts a climate survey, it analyzes the information and provides insights and actionable recommendations that acknowledge challenges, ensure individuals’ voices are heard, and address the underlying causes of conflict.

S/O staff members have received extensive training in conflict management, coaching, mediation, and other means of alternate dispute resolution. The team is small but growing, and it is having a positive impact across the department. In 2023 S/O provided services to more than 500 individual department personnel at all levels, conducted 22 climate surveys, visited a dozen countries, and delivered numerous presentations, training, and skills-building sessions domestically and abroad. In a survey of its individual clients in 2023, more than 90 percent expressed their satisfaction with the services received, and more than 80 percent stated they’d recommend S/O’s services to others.

A “Zero Barrier” Office

Why is confidentiality so vital? Fear of potential retaliation can often limit one’s willingness to come forward and seek assistance with workplace conflicts. When that happens, conflict can fester, bad behavior can go unchecked, and it can negatively affect others in the workplace. For these reasons, S/O strictly adheres to its principle of confidentiality, which allows for frank and honest engagement.

For example, names of those who engage with S/O and communications they have with the staff are kept confidential, shared only with the permission of the client. Likewise, information gathered during climate surveys that identifies issues, relays feedback, and provides recommendations is relayed to leadership in a way that is nonattributable.

The goals of S/O include minimizing and mitigating conflict and helping those with whom they work to bring about positive change. Staying true to the principles of confidentiality and impartiality is essential to achieving those goals. As a result, S/O has a unique ability to serve as a “zero barrier” office for personnel across the department, where they can get support without fear and without judgment.

S/O staff are not advocates for individuals or for management; nor is the office an investigatory body or enforcer of action. Rather, the S/O team serves as an independent resource for personnel at all levels to find the best path forward for themselves and for the mission.

Staffing Up to Prevent and Address Bullying

In 2024 a key goal of Ombuds Jeanne M. Juliao is to fully staff the Workplace Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center. Thanks to the support of senior department leadership, that goal is about to be achieved. According to Ombuds Juliao: “Fully staffing the wCPRc is a vital part of the department’s strategic effort to address conflicts rooted in failed communications, bullying, and incivility.”

In his Feb. 1, 2024, email to staff, Under Secretary of State for Management John R. Bass emphasized that State is committed to maintaining a workplace where everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Respondents to last year’s Stay Survey were clear, he added, that the department needed to do more to hold employees accountable for misconduct. Additional professionals are being added to S/O, he stated, and the office will work closely with the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) and with the Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR), which oversees the department’s Anti-Harassment Program as well as its Equal Employment Opportunity Program. The three offices will work

together to determine the right resource to address concerns about bullying, harassment, and accountability.

An anti-bullying policy, including a definition of bullying, is being published in the FAM—it will be 3 FAM 1540—which will help ensure consistency in addressing the issue and underpin the rationale for any disciplinary action taken, Bass explained.

Once staffed, the wCPRc will function within S/O as an independent and impartial resource for department personnel dealing with non-EEO-related workplace conflicts, seeking to address behaviors like bullying through informal means. In addition to S/OCR and GTM, they will work with other stakeholders, including bureau executive offices across the department, providing direct services to clients, offices, and missions worldwide to promote prompt, informal resolution of workplace conflicts and address the effects of workplace bullying.

As part of its proactive approach, S/O has been integrated into regularly scheduled courses at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). In addition, it partners with FSI's Leadership and Man-

agement School to incorporate possible solutions to commonly heard concerns into fundamental courses, such as the deputy chief of mission and principal officer course and seminar, human resources and management tradecraft, and Civil Service orientation. At each of these skills-building sessions, S/O underscores the value of conflict resolution as well as direct and effective communication, which may begin with leadership but can be strengthened and harnessed by all personnel.

The Office of the Ombuds is a critical resource for all department personnel seeking to develop prompt, informal solutions to workplace conflict. Its impartiality and confidentiality create a foundation for candid insights, a requisite for productive conflict management. While workplace conflict may be inevitable, it is not insurmountable. Armed with specialized skills, the support of department leadership, and strong cross-bureau partnerships, S/O is assisting the State Department to become the best and most productive version of itself.

Contact the Office of the Ombuds through its confidential email box at Ombuds@state.gov. ■

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Questions? Contact Theo Horn, Awards & Scholarships Manager, at horn@afsa.org or (202) 719-9705.

Setting the Table for Inclusion Five Things Leaders Can Do to Interrupt Toxic Behaviors

An ambassador shares a few lessons learned about creating norms of inclusion and respect in the workplace.

BY ANA ESCROGIMA

MARK SMITH

The most pivotal moment of my career occurred at your average State Department morning meeting several years ago. Newly arrived in Washington from the field, I was navigating a new job that had me leading on a bigger and more intimidating stage than the intimate conference rooms I had inhabited overseas.

When it was my turn to speak, I barely made it through the first sentence of my briefing when the principal interrupted me with a question. While I was answering the question, they inter-

rupted again and asked my colleague next to me to clarify something I had said. Others around the table began jumping in to add input, with some repeating exactly what I thought I had just said.

It was all I could do to wrest my brief back and get to the end of it, by which time the principal had lost interest and clearly wanted to move on. I was crestfallen and managed to make it to my office, closing the door before angry tears began rolling down my face. Then emails began hitting my inbox; friends who were present at the meeting were asking if I was okay.

No, I was not okay. What had happened? What had gone wrong with my brief that invited that behavior? What was it about our organizational culture that allowed this to happen? I thought about curtailing. I thought about resigning. I thought about writing the principal a strongly worded email or asking someone more senior to do that. In the end, I did none of those things. But I did vow to seek answers to these questions. I also resolved that I would never let something like this happen to me again, or to anyone else at a meeting where I was present.

It's Not Just About "Executive Presence"

In the time since this transpired, I had the opportunity to participate in an executive education opportunity offered by the State Department. As a leadership fellow with the Inter-



Ana Escrogima joined the State Department as a Foreign Service officer in 2003 and is currently the U.S. ambassador to Oman. She has also served overseas as principal officer at U.S. Consulate Montreal, and in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Iraq, the UAE, and

Syria. She served as a Rusk Fellow at Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy and is the 2020 recipient of the Arnold L. Raphel Memorial Award for her work supporting entry-level officers in diversity and inclusion efforts. She was the Pickering and Rangel Fellows Association president in 2010, the year it was founded. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent those of the Department of State or the U.S. government.

national Women's Forum, I focused on "executive presence" at State and undertook to better understand how our organizational culture shapes perceptions of competency and what it takes to look, sound, and behave like a leader at the department. Working with Executive Women at State, we organized a series of workshops attended by more than a thousand participants who reviewed how acting with confidence and demonstrating good judgment and preparedness—both for a meeting's audience and its substance—positively affect outcomes and everyone's ability to contribute. This topic really resonated with people, and we all benefited from discussing how to lean into executive presence at State.

Yet, it was clear from audience feedback that the experience of many—honestly expressing their views if they did not align with those of their leadership, showing up to work as their authentic selves, or otherwise challenging the status quo—was a risky endeavor best avoided. Given promotion statistics and experiences on the job, audience members questioned whether employees who don't fit the mold in one way or another were fairly assessed and perceived as deserving of promotion to the highest ranks—even if they prepared fully and succeeded in strengthening their executive presence.

I have to believe this circumstance is shaped in part by bullying behaviors that disproportionately target people perceived as other, different, and less worthy of sitting at the table.

Set Operational Norms of Respect

If we're ever really going to end the behaviors that employees continue to report as a major concern, leaders have a responsibility to "set the table" and create operational norms of respect, humility, inclusion, and empathy. Even when we are busy. Even when the issues are urgent. This is not something leaders must do to be "nice"; it's something we do because it helps draw out good ideas, retain the best people, and protect those among our teams who may be more vulnerable to toxic behavior.

I count among my greatest mentors those bosses who understood this and brought out the best in me. I shamelessly borrow from their playbooks as I continue to develop my own competency in this area of norm creation and pay their investment forward. I also rely on verbal and nonverbal feedback from my team and mentees to gut-check how I'm doing at setting that table.

In my current assignment, I have the honor of serving as ambassador to Oman. I have been entrusted by the president and the Secretary of State to lead and care for a fantastic team dedicated to advancing our national interests here. I am

determined to foster an embassy workspace and culture where inclusion, candor, and mutual respect are the norm, and where we all flourish by denying bullying behavior the tacit permission it requires to persist.

Lessons Learned

Here are a few leadership lessons learned that I share in the spirit of the resolution I made at my desk years ago:

Be self-aware. Take the time to consider and convey what successful communication looks like at meetings you lead.

Often, we hit the ground running and don't make the time to set up our teams for success in working with us. Convey clear expectations so everyone on your team understands how you prefer to receive information and how you expect them to communicate with you and one another. In our hierarchical organization, the norms you establish will trickle across and down.

Set an example. Be the change you want to see. Really listen to people and what they are trying to say, and put yourself in their shoes. Imagine where they are coming from and how intimidating or difficult it might be for them to brief in an unfamiliar environment. This is a core tenet of servant leadership: Never interrupt when people are attempting to make a point. Also, when someone briefs you, thank them. Indicate that you have listened and absorbed what was just said. This goes double if they have initiated a difficult conversation, challenged your beliefs, or provided honest feedback—all gifts of trust that are increasingly rare and valuable as you enter positions of greater authority.

Context matters; none of our interaction with staff happens in a vacuum. It's important to explain the reasoning for your decisions and trust that your staff will understand, whether they are related to policy, budget, or personnel. In a vacuum, absent firsthand data from you, people will make assumptions about your intentions. It is vital that senior leaders keep their finger on the pulse and hold their middle managers accountable for table setting, because members of your team will assume that tolerance for bullying or toxic behaviors they experience from peers or direct supervisors may on some level channel your tacit acceptance.

Give constructive and specific feedback and do it privately ... Ninety-nine percent of the time, a public situation is not the place to give negative feedback to an employee. But if we have feedback to give, I believe we are on the hook to deliver it, as uncomfortable as it might be. A mentor once pulled me aside after a meeting to give me feedback on a briefing I had delivered and ways in which I could strengthen my presentation. I am forever grateful to that person.

... except when you are interrupting bullying behavior. The one exception to the previous point is bullying, which needs to be interrupted publicly sometimes to reinforce the norm against that behavior. This responsibility is on everyone. There is no precise formula for doing this. I am not suggesting we need to go around policing each other. However, I do wish that someone had jumped in when everyone was piling on at the meeting I mentioned above. While multiple people approached me privately afterward, it would have meant a lot more if someone had intervened to back me up in the moment. For the target of bullying behavior, there is no substitute for someone naming or interrupting what is happening as it unfolds.

Lead from wherever you sit. I often use conversations on executive presence to point out moments where a member of the team shifted the course of a meeting with more senior colleagues (including some at the very top of the State Department) through timely, thoughtfully delivered, pitch-perfect questions, ideas, challenges, or suggestions. Those brave souls are my heroes. Can it be frightening? Absolutely. Can you prepare in advance to help

ease the stress of engaging with peers or leaders you know in advance will be difficult and intimidating? Absolutely. I encourage everyone to run your points past trusted listeners, build alliances in advance of meetings, and listen for good ideas that are being lost in the ether and seek to reinforce them.

Every so often, I look up and reread Secretary Blinken's April 2022 remarks on diversity, equality, inclusion, and accountability. Doing so reinspires me to work toward the broad cultural transformation the Secretary called for in that speech. I believe we can all build workspaces of which we are proud, using whatever span of control each of us can exert. Obviously, accountability for senior leaders is a key component in addressing a culture of bullying behavior. That said, enduring change will come only from the collective efforts of a critical mass of Foreign Service, Civil Service, EFM, contractor, and locally employed staff who model and carry forward new norms of behavior into our hundreds of offices, missions, and consulates worldwide. This is a challenge we can all embrace to change our organization for the better. ■

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First-Generation Professionals Another Dimension *of* Diversity

A new employee organization at State spotlights the challenges commonly faced by first-generation college students, graduates, and professionals.

BY SCOTT B. WINTON

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Did you know that in 2021 more than half of all children under 18 in the United States lived in households where no parent had a college degree? More than half of today's college students are "First-Gens." Yet only about a quarter of them go on to complete their college degree. The social and financial barriers they contend with in college often continue to burden them even after graduating and entering the workforce.



Scott B. Winton, one of the founders of the Department of State's employee organization FirstGens@State, served as its president from November 2022 to March 2024. He is a first-generation college graduate and TRIO alum from Branson, Missouri, joining the

U.S. Foreign Service in 2009 through the Thomas R. Pickering Graduate Foreign Affairs Fellowship. He holds a BSBA from the University of Missouri-Columbia and an M.S. in Foreign Service from Georgetown University. He is currently on detail to the Office of the Vice President as the special adviser to the vice president for the Western Hemisphere. The opinions and information presented are solely the author's and do not necessarily reflect or characterize State Department policy.

Founded in November 2022, FirstGens@State is a new employee organization that heightens public and workforce awareness of the challenges commonly faced by first-generation college students, graduates, and professionals (FirstGens), as well as employees from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

United by a shared experience, FirstGens@State is a diverse community that envisions a world in which the insight and socioeconomic understanding of FirstGens strengthen the U.S. government's ability to advance our national interests. Their experiences help inform diplomacy, aiding the State Department to better understand and communicate with socioeconomically disadvantaged communities abroad, providing unique expertise on domestic socioeconomic challenges, and broadening the department's representation of our country.

We are creating an environment in which employees can tell their stories, find mentors, and offer support to fellow FirstGens@State members, thus fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. After one year, more than 400 members call FirstGens@State home.

First-Generation Challenges

The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines a first-generation college student as "an individual ... whose parent(s) did not



FirstGen Isaiah Roland (center) protects Queen Máxima of the Netherlands (right) as the Diplomatic Security Service special agent in charge during her U.S. visit to San Francisco and Austin in September 2022. He is currently serving as regional security officer, U.S. Embassy Kingston.

complete a baccalaureate degree.” FirstGens@State has expanded this definition to include first- and second-generation immigrants who were first in their family to have a U.S. college experience.

Lack of income compounded with financial uncertainty contribute to a long list of obstacles that frequently confront first-generation students. This type of pressure can become insurmountable and often affects the student’s academic performance, and for first-generation professionals, these challenges may remain throughout their career.

The invisible barriers faced by FirstGens can include not just financial concerns but also social stigma, classism, discrimination, lack of expertise and advice on navigating an academic system and profession, absence of a professional network, and psychological challenges like shame, family guilt, and anxiety. Moreover, as first-generation professionals enjoy the benefits of upward

The State Department now actively recruits FirstGens and community college students through targeted outreach with educational institutions.

social mobility, they are learning to live in a new environment that is dissociated from their home. As a result, they may feel a lack of belonging to both their professional environment and their family and friends of origin, creating greater feelings of isolation.

A study by Dick Startz, professor of economics at the University of California–Santa Barbara, found that first-generation students are more likely to come from lower-income families (with an average income of \$58,000) than continuing-generation students (i.e., those with at least one college-educated parent or guardian and a family income averaging \$120,000). First-generation students often work 20 hours or more a week to finance their education, which can come at the expense of classwork, studying, and extracurricular activities that strengthen a job résumé.

These financial concerns remain a psychological impediment for first-generation professionals, who generally avoid jobs where financial security is not guaranteed, including federal employment. A government shutdown with furloughs represents the pinnacle of anxiety for many first-generation federal workers. Moreover, first-generation Foreign Service officers and specialists often feel compelled to choose maximum compensation through hardship and danger assignments overseas to achieve financial stability, forgoing professional opportunities in Washington, D.C.

Social Barriers

FirstGens also face social barriers. Startz’s research found that first-generation students are more likely to choose a less selective school than their peers. This can be attributed to fewer selective schools having open admission policies, charging lower tuition and fees, and requiring less knowledge to navigate the admissions process. Furthermore, according to Mikhail Zinshteyn in a March 2016 *Atlantic* article, “around 90 percent of lower-income first-generation students don’t graduate within six years, far below the national average.”

Says Zinshteyn: “The ‘hidden curriculum’—the mix of bureaucratic know-how and sound study skills that can make or break a student’s first year in college” hinders their ability to complete college. First-generation students are also less likely to participate in career fairs or use college résumé services than their

peers, according to data from NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education).

While parental income matters, the importance of an educated parent/guardian cannot be undervalued. It affects the child's educational outcomes and continues to provide benefits for the remainder of the person's life, including throughout a career. These social benefits include exposure to wide-ranging vocabulary in the household, access to quality primary and secondary schools, professional networks, the privilege of legacy admissions, access to quality health care, and food security, to name a few examples.

To overcome these challenges, FirstGens have developed many valuable skills and abilities. Often, because they lack a financial safety net, they are dedicated and driven to succeed. They have no option to fail, because many fear adding to the burden of family members who are themselves sometimes struggling financially. Many juggled multiple jobs while attending college and thus developed advanced multitasking, customer service, time management, and organizational skills. As a result, FirstGens may enter the professional environment with a wider skill set than those who have not had to work early in life. Many have learned to source and compete for scholarships, learning to tell their personal stories in a way that prepares them to share American stories to the world.

Progress at State

The State Department, as part of its efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity, now actively recruits FirstGens and community college students through targeted outreach with educational institutions. On Nov. 8, 2023, the department marked FirstGen Celebration Day and Week for the first time in its history. In November, the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) hosted FirstGens@State members for a virtual "Ask Us Anything" session targeted at first-generation student employee candidates. In addition, GTM highlighted on social media the inspiring story of Marta Youth's journey from a first-generation student to principal deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

In June 2023, GTM's national recruiter for first-generation students invited FirstGens@State members to participate in NASPA's Student Success Conferences to share their professional journeys into the State Department with academics, college career advisers, and students. GTM and FirstGens@State representa-

As first-generation professionals enjoy the benefits of upward social mobility, they are learning to live in a new environment that is dissociated from their home.

tives discussed how this new employee organization was working to make the department the employer of choice for FirstGens. The national recruiter has also fostered partnerships with organizations serving FirstGens, including the Council for Opportunity in Education (<https://coenet.org/>), NASPA's Center for First-Generation Student Success (<https://firstgen.naspa.org/>), and regional, state-level, and university programs that support FirstGens throughout their academic careers in an effort to attract these underrepresented populations into federal service.

Our members share the goal of fostering respect, dignity, and inclusion within the federal government. In August 2023, FirstGens@State held its first listening session with experienced members of the department who are FirstGens. Members



FirstGens@State VP for Membership and FirstGen Flory "Yazmin" Ore receives an award from Ambassador Jeffrey L. Flake at U.S. Embassy Ankara during a rotation as his staff assistant in 2023.

COURTESY OF SCOTT WINTON

CENTER FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS

AN INITIATIVE OF NASPA AND THE SUDER FOUNDATION

@FirstgenCenter

firstgen.naspa.org

#FirstgenForward



COURTESY OF SCOTT WINTON

FirstGens@State members Elsanor Lam and the author participate in the 2023 First-Generation Student Success Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, representing State at a GTM-sponsored recruitment event. Lam is a foreign affairs officer in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs' Office of Global Programs and Policy.

created an open and empathetic space for employees to hear the personal stories of successful achievers, the adversity that shaped them, and the obstacles that remain. One FirstGens@State global session featured Tiffany Henderson, who serves as the department's first-ever specialist advocate. U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho Maria Brewer presented a session titled "Maximize Your Success."

Since its founding in 2022, FirstGens@State has advocated for members' priorities, aligned activities with the unions representing federal employees of the foreign affairs agencies, launched a quarterly newsletter, and developed financial literacy guides for new employees.

Ways to Improve Representation

"The Federal Government should have a workforce that reflects the diversity of the American people," states Executive Order (E.O.) 14035 (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce), adding that more representative and inclusive workplaces "yield higher-performing organizations." Here are some ideas to improve representation in the State Department, create more inclusive foreign affairs agencies, and reflect the interests of America's working class in our foreign policy.

Recruit for national representation. Increase recruitment from nonselective schools to improve representation in U.S.

foreign affairs agencies. Ultimately, this would increase our talent pool of candidates and reduce the U.S. government's dependency on feeder schools, many of which employ legacy admission policies. Reinforce GTM's engagement with colleges that host U.S. Department of Education Federal TRIO programs, which are designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO alums make excellent recruits, building off the Education Department's and Congress' long-standing investment in first-generation students (FirstGens@State also serves as an alumni organization for TRIO alums working at the State Department).

Seek authenticity, not an election campaign poster.

End the popularized but inauthentic phrase "look like America" as the litmus test for diversity. At best, it's a marketing gimmick that perpetuates historical stereotypes. At worst, it's a cheap endeavor that reinforces visible biases about what marginalized communities "look" like. We need to "represent America."

Thanks to the Secretary of State's Office of Diversity and Inclusion and GTM, we have data, so let's use it. Using demographic data, including the categories defined by E.O. 14035, is a starting point and will help ensure foreign affairs agencies reflect the various communities that represent our nation. Moreover, we should publish disaggregated self-identification data on socioeconomic indicators, including FirstGen status,

geographic origin, and educational background of employees' parents/guardians. We should also ask new hires to voluntarily provide these indicators during the onboarding process to track the effectiveness of recruitment efforts.

Fight invisibility. Adversity faced by FirstGens is not always visible. In fact, first-generation students, graduates, and professionals spend much of their lives hiding identifiers that may indicate to their peers that they grew up socioeconomically disadvantaged. This needs to change, but it will take time: Socioeconomically disadvantaged children experience shame at some point in their childhoods, if not the entirety of their childhoods, despite having no control over their circumstances. First-generation professionals may feel ashamed about telling their personal stories even though they are authentic examples of the American dream and the social mobility our democracy fosters. Leaders should encourage stories of FirstGens within foreign affairs agencies, highlight their achievements, and promote their recruitment from both rural and urban communities to the U.S. foreign affairs fellowship programs.

Leaders should encourage stories of FirstGens within foreign affairs agencies.

Provide financial aid for new hires with need. New hires from outside the capital region accrue moving expenses and debt to relocate to Washington, D.C., an urban area with a high cost of living. If Congress wants the U.S. foreign affairs workforce to reflect the geographic diversity of our country, then arm these agencies with relocation assistance to support new hires with financial need.

This is not just a matter of representation for diversity's sake; rather, it shows the strength of our democratic form of government, which deploys diplomats and development professionals who fully reflect the country they serve. ■



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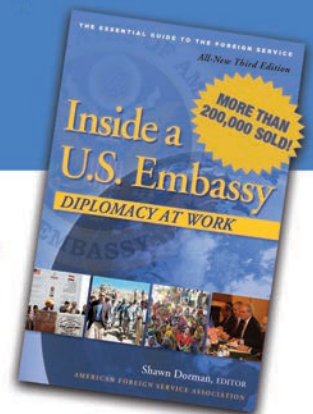
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The Department of State's Reception Centers

Back to the Future

Revisiting State's mid-20th-century reception centers generates practical ideas for today, especially when it comes to engaging the American public.

BY MATTHEW ASADA

In 1977, one of the most sought-after political appointments in President Jimmy Carter's State Department was a job that cannot be found in today's Plum Book or on any State Department Foreign or Civil Service staffing pattern. A hotel heiress, philanthropist, and political kingmaker were among the six top candidates vying for the position, with competition, advocacy, and lobbying so fierce that Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher wrote on April 16, 1977, to Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs Joe Duffey: "This position seems to have at least as much interest as the ambassadorship to the United Kingdom!"

What was it about this job—director of the State Department's San Francisco Reception Center—that made it so popular? What ever became of it?



Matthew Asada is an FSO currently assigned as a visiting senior fellow at the University of Southern California, where he teaches public diplomacy and conducts research on global mega events (e.g., World's Fair, World Cup, and the Olympics).

USC's Center on Public Diplomacy supported the author's research for this article in the Special Collections at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The views expressed are the author's alone and not necessarily those of the U.S. government.

Today, almost a half century later, with a recently passed congressional directive to enhance the State Department's domestic engagement (Section 6605 of the FY24 State Department Authorization Act) and an administration focused on city and state diplomacy, it's worth revisiting State's reception and foreign press centers to see what lessons can be learned from previous administrations' engagement with the American public. What happened to these domestic offices? Might it be time to resurrect and reimagine them for the 21st century?

Welcoming International Visitors

The first State Department reception center was established in 1942 by Nelson Rockefeller, then coordinator for inter-American affairs, in Miami, Florida, to manage and meet exchange program visitors from Latin America (see page 40 for a map of the reception centers and their years of operation). Reception centers in New York (1943) and New Orleans (1945) followed, with State assuming responsibility for their administration in 1946.

With passage of the Smith-Mundt Act (1948) and the establishment of worldwide exchange programs, centers were opened in San Francisco (1950), Honolulu (1956), and Seattle (1957) to support international visitors from Asia. The Washington International Center was established in 1950 to arrange programming for international visitors, and it became part of a separate nonprofit, Meridian House International, in 1960. That same year the

Six Front-Runners for a Glamorous Job



Mary Abbott



Bernice Behrens



Lig Belli



Barbara Pelosi



Sue Pritzker



Roselyne Swig

They all want to be chosen director of the State Dept.'s S.F. reception center

the exchange of... put our guests in close... people who would be m... them.

"I envision the position, with the day probably more 'imp... social phase."

Sue Pritzker, 44, said like the job because she... American image needs... and because hospitality...

Pritzker operates fr... sion in Woodside, and... in San Francisco, the Hy... and the Hyatt Union...

Pritzker, whose hus... aid, was president and... chief of the Hyatt chain... died of a heart attack... at the age of 39, think... not better serve her cou... by making foreign visit... "welcome and comfortable..."

"I see them so often... hotels," she said, "and... concerned because they seem... ease and awkward."

Although she was a... ment major at Radcliffe a... involved in local and nation... Pritzker made no men... "educating" foreign visitors...

Pritzker has met top di... on their home turf, lasto... those in the Orient becau... speaks an almost fluent... and has received them at che... hotels both here and abroad.

She said, a little diffic... that she planned the opening... 32 Hyatt hotels in the United... thinking in terms of thro... rather than the hundreds she... be required to entertain a... State Department hosts her...

The small, chic, dumpy... herself almost...

the Reception Center job... she has described the... as a "pittance."

like meeting interesting people that... they lend a financial helping hand... when social emergencies arise.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington, D.C. 20520

MEMORANDUM

TO: Potential Candidates for the Position of Director for the Reception Center in San Francisco

FROM: CU- Joseph D. Duffey

RE: Job Description

A number of people have expressed interest in the job of Director for the Reception Center in San Francisco. In considering future appointments special attention will be given to Number 8.

Candidate qualifications will be evaluated in conjunction with the following job description:

SUMMARY OF DUTIES:

Under general supervision of the Chief, Reception Centers Division, serves as Director of the Reception Center and is responsible for developing, planning and directing all functions of the Center, which is a field office of the Department similar to a consulate or consulate general overseas. Receives and assists foreign visitors arriving in the United States through this port of entry, including those arriving under the programs of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (CU) and the Agency for International Development (AID); high-ranking foreign government officials; and others in whom the Department of State is interested. Formulates, develops and carries out professional programs in the area on behalf of the visitors and arranges for them to participate in community activities and hospitality in American homes to better their understanding of the United States.

DUTIES:

1. Is responsible for the reception and care of CU grantees, AID participants, high-ranking foreign government officials and other foreign visitors in whom the Department is interested. The Center Director either meets these foreign visitors personally or delegates this responsibility seven days a week. Messages are received from embassies and other parts of the Department...

SUMMARY OF DUTIES

Under general supervision of the Chief, Reception Centers Division, serves as Director of the Reception Center and is responsible for developing, planning and directing all functions of the Center, which is a field office of the Department similar to a consulate or consulate general overseas. Receives and assists foreign visitors arriving in the United States through this port of entry, including those arriving under the programs of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (CU) and the Agency for International Development (AID); high-ranking foreign government officials; and others in whom the Department of State is interested. Formulates, develops and carries out professional programs in the area on behalf of the visitors and arranges for them to participate in community activities and hospitality in American homes to better their understanding of the United States.



The State Department Reception Centers and Foreign Press Centers have played an important role in engaging the American public in U.S. diplomacy. This map shows where they were and when.

Washington Reception Staff office was created to meet and assist Department of State international visitors at the airport.

In a 1962 memorandum titled “Future Role of Reception Centers,” the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs examined expanding the reception centers into “State Department field offices” with regional geographic responsibility, as well as adding an additional five centers. It was the heyday of diplomatic and domestic engagement, with passage of the Fulbright-Hays Act that authorized the operation of the reception centers and the launch of USAID and the Peace Corps.

In 1963 the State Department established a two-person (FSO and office management specialist) Cultural Affairs Office in Los Angeles, which operated for almost five years to better engage the creative community there and advise on international visitor support in Southern California. At the time, international visitors were being managed by the World Affairs Council of Los Angeles and the Center for International Visitors at the University of Southern California. But relations between the two were fraught, and there was a general consensus that opportunities were being missed, leading both the chancellor of UCLA (in 1961) and the mayor of Los Angeles (in 1966) to request State to open an official reception center. But it never happened.

Though the budgetary challenges that began to emerge in the mid-1960s undercut efforts to expand what was arguably an

effective program—proposed centers in Boston, Denver, and Chicago were never opened—the existing reception centers continued to operate. Their role in engaging the American public was significant.

“A Field Office of the Department”

More than 30 candidates applied for the 1977 San Francisco opening. In the position description (see page 39) ECA Assistant Secretary Duffey described the center as “a field office of the [State] Department, similar to a consulate or consulate general overseas,” and as far as supervision was concerned: “The relationship with the bureau is similar to that of a principal officer of a consulate to the embassy.”

ECA Deputy Assistant Secretary Jacob Canter described the position of the director of the Miami Reception Center in 1966 as an “ex officio member of a variety of local organizations concerned with the reception of visitors ... on a first name basis with almost anyone of consequence in the Greater Miami area.” Long before public-private partnership was so named, Canter noted that the State Department had recognized the value of a strong officer in Miami for “obtaining from the institutions and outstanding individuals in the area extensive services for these foreign visitors at no cost to the government.”

Director of the New York Reception Center Elaine Heifetz

said it best, in 1976: “For the local public, our office—not Passport, Security, Despatch, or USUN—is the State Department” (emphasis added).

The centers represented the State Department in engagements with local officials, cultural institutions, and media publications; they met, managed, and curated visits of officially sponsored exchange programs, not just those funded by the department but also for other agencies; and they provided protocol services when requested by U.S. embassies and consulates or the Department of State. The representational budget was minimal, requiring them to rely heavily on private individuals and organizations for entertaining. They were staffed by a mixture of Foreign and Civil Service personnel, with an average of six positions per center. In 1977 the director of the San Francisco Reception Center was the sole political-appointee position.

In 1977, despite intense lobbying among high-powered applicants, President Carter appointed Joan Brann, whose late husband had been a prominent San Francisco lawyer, to that coveted position. New to politics and diplomacy, Ms. Brann had beat out Barbara Newsom Pelosi (former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s sister-in-law and Gavin Newsom’s aunt) and Hyatt hotel heiress Sue Pritzker (former U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker’s mother), among others (see page 39). The appointment was controversial on many fronts: Brann’s husband had allegedly been delinquent in paying taxes, and her son from a previous marriage had allegedly killed a New Mexico state policeman in 1971, hijacked a plane to Cuba, and lived there as a fugitive. Brann resigned in 1979, and her successor, Nancy Honig, not without controversies of her own, led the center until its closure in 1982.

Succumbing to the Budget Bludgeon

Over the decades, reception centers were closed because of budget cuts and a perhaps mistaken belief that the private sector could do it better and cheaper. The centers’ responsibilities were picked up by a local organization, usually an affiliate of the National Council for International Visitors (now known as Global Ties U.S.). The 1960s saw the closing of the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Office (1968) and the Seattle Reception Center (1969).

In 1978, the five-center, then 20-person network was transferred wholesale to the U.S. International Communications Agency (USICA), when the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs was made a part of that new agency. USICA reverted to its previous name, the United States Information Agency (USIA), a couple years later. Coinciding with ECA’s transfer, USAID withdrew its funding for the reception centers, exacerbating budgetary pressure.

Over the decades, reception centers were closed because of budget cuts and a perhaps mistaken belief that the private sector could do it better and cheaper.

The 1980s saw a number of significant changes, including passage of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and the Foreign Missions Act of 1982 and the closure of the San Francisco (1983) and New Orleans reception centers (1987). In 1988, USIA noted in a response to Congress that the three remaining reception centers cost \$1 million and were necessary to provide “an adequate level of service”—there was no cheaper private option—and that USIA still provided financial support to the local organization in San Francisco, the International Hospitality Center later known as the International Diplomacy Council, to cover its expenses.

President Ronald Reagan opened a Foreign Press Center in Los Angeles in advance of the 1984 Summer Olympics. USIA had previously established Foreign Press Centers in New York City and Washington, D.C., to serve foreign journalists, which still operate today as part of the State Department. The Los Angeles center was shuttered in 2008 due to a reorganization and accompanying reduction-in-force.

Finally, Congress’ 1990s search for a peace dividend at the end of the Cold War resulted in the closure of the Honolulu (1990) and Miami (1992) reception centers. By 1999, at the time of USIA’s merger with the State Department, only the New York Reception Center remained. Today, it operates as a branch unit of ECA’s Office of International Visitors. The functions of the former reception centers have been dispersed to other State Department entities and offices: international visitor support (external nonprofit organizations), department liaison (Office of Foreign Missions), recruitment (Diplomats in Residence), public outreach (Bureau of Global Public Affairs and regional bureaus), cultural organizations (ECA), media engagement (Offices of Press Relations and Foreign Press Centers), and federal and local elected officials (Bureau of Legislative Affairs and Office of Global Partnerships).

Still, throughout the years, public diplomacy insiders and outsiders have asked whether the New York City model could

Throughout the years, public diplomacy insiders and outsiders have asked whether the New York City model could and should be extended to other parts of the country.

and should be extended to other parts of the country. In 2012, for instance, the Office of the Inspector General recommended ECA consider whether the New York program branch office could effectively support other bureau offices and programs (see Recommendation 27). This year, a former ECA principal deputy assistant secretary of State told me that if he had his druthers, he would have a half dozen of these ECA branch offices, beginning with Los Angeles.

The Case for “Diplomatic Engagement Centers”

Unlike other federal departments and agencies domestically, the State Department does not maintain a standardized domestic organization framework or designated senior department official for the government’s 10 federal regions. Now that the administration (through dedicated Office of Personnel Management [OPM] funding and positions) and Congress (through proposed legislation, the Federal Executive Boards Act of 2023) seek to improve the federal government’s domestic coordination through enhanced Federal Executive Boards, it begs the question whether the State Department should reconsider its own domestic organization and coordination.

One idea to consider is the creation of domestic geographic districts aligned with the 10 federal regions. Could a “Diplomatic Engagement Center” in each district, or spanning multiple districts, bring together existing offices and personnel to better implement exchange programs; coordinate public outreach and media engagement; create public-private partnerships; liaise with regionally based city, state, and federal officials; and support foreign embassies and consulates?

Los Angeles has been identified numerous times for enhanced public diplomacy representation. With the pivot to Asia and the Indo-Pacific, and a new era of geopolitical competition, the nation’s most populous state and largest

economy is an ideal place to pilot such an initiative. Moreover, with the 2026 men’s soccer World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics on the horizon, now is the perfect time to invest in the nation’s domestic diplomatic capacity. What better place to begin than the nation’s second-largest city, Los Angeles—home to the country’s largest concentration of foreign diplomats and domestic personnel outside Washington and New York?

Over the past two years, my colleagues and I have brought together State’s diplomatic personnel across offices and positions in Southern California into an informal network to improve information sharing, visitor support, and public engagement and, in the process, build a stronger sense of community. However, this informal model has its limitations. For instance, when a local partner implementing exchange programs ceased operations, a new partner had to be found, resulting in a loss of institutional knowledge and expertise. In another case, the remit of the local implementing partner is limited to only one aspect of the department’s public diplomacy activities (international visitors)—and not another (sports diplomacy)—preventing further synergies.

Further, while not an issue in Los Angeles, the department’s lack of a single geographic point of contact in other federal regions results in irregular and inconsistent participation in OPM’s Federal Executive Boards. Finally, there is no internal clearing house to coordinate domestic travel by department principals and engage department personnel assigned or working remotely in a geographic region to help tailor and amplify these engagements.

State is already spending money to accomplish these functions; however, the funding is dispersed through grants and reimbursement to nonprofit organizations or across existing department full-time personnel. Might it be more effective to consolidate that expenditure, use existing department-leased real estate from the General Services Administration for a mailing address, and expand State’s presence by using a combination of assigned and remote-work employees to coordinate operations and represent the department?

In 1962, when State assessed the future of its reception centers, the United States happened to be hosting the World’s Fair in Seattle. Seattle’s Reception Center noted a fivefold increase in workload (number of programs/persons/programming days). In advance of the global mega events descending on Los Angeles and the expected accompanying increases in official visitor counts, press engagements, and public diplomacy opportunities, now is the time for State to plan for enhanced domestic engagement that builds on past successes. ■

On the Road with AFSA's President

It's been a busy travel season for AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi. In January, Yazdgerdi traveled to Sarasota, Miami, Boca Raton, and Jupiter, Fla., for a whirlwind trip that had him meeting with audiences ranging from college students and recent graduates interested in the Foreign Service to retired FS professionals and World Affairs Council members.

In Sarasota, Yazdgerdi joined more than 70 FS retirees and spouses as the guest speaker at the annual meeting of the Foreign Service Retirees Association (FSRA). This was Yazdgerdi's first time visiting the group since becoming AFSA president in 2023. He shared AFSA's upcoming plans to mark the Foreign Ser-



Tom Yazdgerdi, second from left, front row, and MDC's Magda Castinyera with students from Miami Dade College in January.

vice centennial and outlined AFSA's recent advocacy work on the Hill. He also discussed AFSA's recent success stories, including its work to increase the number of mental health professionals in the Bureau of Medical Services, expansion of emergency

backup care, exceptions for government-financed air transportation, and support for tandem spouses in the Foreign Service.

He then traveled to Miami, where he took part in a roundtable with honors students at the Miami Dade College (MDC) Wolfson campus. He was joined at the college by Diplomat in Residence Mignon Houston and Yamilee Bastien, a commercial officer at the Miami U.S. Export Assistance Center, who helped organize the meeting. Yazdgerdi also got an assist from his sister, Kristen Rosen-Gonzalez, a Miami Beach city commissioner and professor of communications at MDC, and from Magda Castinyera, MDC president of the Honors College dual language program.

Yazdgerdi talked about the excitement of a Foreign Service career and about AFSA's nonpartisan stance, explaining that "a nonpartisan AFSA ensures that the focus remains on the professional

CALENDAR

Please check <https://afsa.org> for the most up-to-date information.

April 1
Deadline: High School Essay Contest submissions

April 15
Federal and State Taxes due
AFSA Tax Guide:
www.afsa.org/taxguide

April 17
12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board meeting

May 2
AFSA Foreign Service Day event

May 3
Foreign Service Day

May 21
AFSA Centennial Gala

May 27
Memorial Day AFSA Offices closed

May 30
AFSA Centennial Birthday Party

June 12
12-1:30 p.m.
AFSA Governing Board meeting

FSJ Centennial Writing Competition And the Winner is ...

In September 2023, as part of our centennial outreach, the *FSJ* launched a writing competition asking AFSA members to submit 1,000-word essays describing the ideal Foreign Service for the next 100 years.

We received 65 thought-provoking essays in response. So many of them were excellent; it was tough to narrow them down. But our judges have selected their top three essays, all of which will run in upcoming issues of the *Journal* beginning next month.

Congratulations to:

First place: Thomas "Toby" Wolf

Second place: Darrow S. Godeski Merton

Third place: Joshua Morris

We thank our judges and all the writers who took the time to share their thoughts about the ideal Foreign Service. ■



needs of diplomats, such as fair working conditions, career development, and adequate resources." However, he noted, nonpartisanship "must go both ways." While AFSA does not take sides in political or policy battles, "we expect our elected and appointed leaders to respect the career professionals of the Foreign Service and we expect them to refrain from equating well-considered dissent with disloyalty."

Continued on page 49



Implementing the NDAA

AFSA is closely tracking all aspects of the provisions of the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) related to State Department personnel policy priorities. Many of the provisions have 90- to 120-day implementation deadlines, but here I want to focus on actions mandated by NDAA 2024 that are linked to AFSA's broader, collaborative work with the department and employee organizations.

First, AFSA continues to engage with the department to improve transparency and processes involving restriction appeals and assignment reviews. In February I spoke with *The New York Times* about assignment restrictions and reviews, as did several affected employees who recently won appeals.

NDAA 2024 mandates a status update on all those assignment restrictions or reviews (or "pass through objections") pending for more than 30 days and the establishment of a right to appeal, along with a process for employees to do so. It also states that a Security Appeals Panel is to be convened within 120 days of an appeal filing. AFSA is pushing the department to share these implementation details for our review.

Second, we were pleased to see the February announcement of the launch of the Workplace Conflict Prevention and Resolution

Center within the Ombuds Office (S/O). This implements the NDAA 2024 provision (see section 6211) to increase department efforts to improve employee retention and prevent retaliation by establishing a single point of initial reporting for allegations of discrimination, bullying, and harassment. We look forward to learning more as this office becomes fully staffed and operational. (See the related article from the Ombuds Office on page 26.)

Third, AFSA will be joining the American Federation of Government Employees (the Civil Service union at State), in a walkthrough of lactation spaces in the Harry S Truman building and will continue to monitor the department's implementation of the NDAA 2024 provision to report on breastfeeding accommodations overseas. Write to member@afsa.org to report any changes in demand for such spaces.

Fourth, we sent an AFSAnet on Feb. 8 regarding the department's first-ever knowledge transfer effectiveness survey, an effort to assess workforce views and current practices of predecessors providing job knowledge, briefings, and other mentoring to their successors during transfer and onboarding overseas. We encouraged all active-duty State FS members to share their related experiences. We

will request a briefing on the department's survey results this spring, as the report is due to Congress in the first quarter of 2024.

Fifth, we sent out an AFSAnet regarding the department's launch of the congressionally mandated Mid-level Lateral Entry Pilot Program (LEPP) on Jan. 29. My priorities during this period are to monitor LEPP implementation, communicate updates to members, and press the department to outline its measures to assess the success of the program. We also continue to advance specialist issues, including advocating for career development opportunities for specialists and consular fellows. (See page 47 for more.)

Thank you to those members who have written in to share questions and views. It is critical for both department leaders and members of Congress to hear your concerns, and we will continue to be your voice on this matter.

Some members reached out with concerns that many of the "critical needs" outlined in the LEPP describe skills they already have, especially economic-coned officers. We would not want LEPP hiring to further reduce already problematic promotion and retention rates for economic officers.

Nevertheless, in NDAA 2024 Congress does rec-

ognize the need to retain talent, including a provision mandating the department's report on recruitment, retention, and promotion of economic officers. AFSA will continue to press the department to examine how LEPP will affect promotions for FS generalists and specialists.

Last, but not least, I am deeply engaged in further reform of our promotion precepts. We welcome congressional interest in incorporating Foreign Service experiences at multilateral organizations, service in hardship posts across various geographic regions, experience in critical and emerging technologies, and trainings and details into our promotion considerations.

We are concluding negotiations on the new cross-functional competency—a sixth area that will be scored alongside the five existing core precepts—for generalist classes FS-2 and above. We want to ensure that all adjustments made to the scoring rubric will be clearly defined and explained.

During the celebration of this Foreign Service centennial year, I could not be prouder of our AFSA labor management team as we work to foster an environment that embraces innovation and change. ■



It's Past Time to Stop the Bullying

Tease (v.): *To worry or irritate by persistent action which vexes or annoys (Oxford English Dictionary).*

I'm a middle child. My brothers and I were expert teasers; we gave and we received in equal measure. We all laughed—most of the time. When we didn't, we stopped. We grew up, and the teasing declined. Looking back, the laughter seems less funny.

According to the Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network, teasing becomes bullying when:

- The content of the teasing turns from affectionate to hostile.
- There is a power imbalance.
- The teasing occurs repeatedly.
- The person teasing means to harm.
- The person being teased is harmed.

Bully (v.): *To behave in an overbearing, intimidating, or aggressive manner; to seek to harm, intimidate, or coerce (OED).*

In high school, my friends and I did our best navigating the early 1980s Breakfast Club suburbia—no shame there. Largely ignored, we survived, but during sophomore year, I was targeted, and that year, I spent every morning break and lunch

period in dread, hiding from and avoiding my bullies.

I'm not sure what my friends thought. A few connected the dots, but we never talked about it, and I never told anyone. Miraculously, the bullying stopped junior year. Maybe they got bored.

Looking back, I had it easy. For three years, my classmate Mike couldn't outrun his bullies, and he was often dumped into the nearest trash can while the rest of us looked on and school administrators looked away.

According to a 2019 study by the National Center for Education Statistics, middle schoolers (grades 6-8) report bullying rates between 26 and 28 percent, while high school seniors reported a lower bullying rate of 15 percent. You'd think the decline would continue as we enter adulthood and the workforce. You'd be wrong.

Everyone has a USAID story: Mine is about a boss who loved tossing furniture and an ambassador who verbally attacked and berated staff in meetings. The excuses—it's a rite of passage, I survived it, it builds character, it makes you stronger—are still commonly thrown about.

According to the 2021 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey, 30 percent of workers suffer abusive conduct at work, 19 percent witness it, 49 percent are affected by

it, and 66 percent are aware that workplace bullying happens. The report goes on to show that men are more likely to be bullies than women, but that women are more likely to be bullied by women than men.

The data doesn't note differences between the private and public sector, but it's no leap to say that our experience mirrors this study. You'd think at these rates, bullying would be illegal. Except for cyberbullying, again, you'd be wrong.

Harassment (n.): *Unwarranted speech or behavior causing annoyance, alarm, distress, or intimidation, usually occurring persistently (OED).*

The distinction between bullying and harassment is that when the bullying behavior is directed toward someone in a protected class, it becomes harassment.

Harassment is illegal. The federal government has laws to protect employees from harassment. At USAID, the Office of Civil Rights is responsible for protecting employees and adjudicating harassment complaints, while the Employee Labor Relations Office handles misconduct, including bullying. The bar is high in both cases and proving that bullying has crossed over to harassment and/or discrimination takes time and effort.

You'd think prevention would be simple, but it isn't. USAID has been making a concerted effort to tackle bullying and harassment through its Staff Care program, which offers a suite of resources. We have a misconduct reporting portal; employees undergo annual anti-bullying, anti-harassment, and anti-discrimination training; and there is a new deputy mission director mentoring program.

Yet bullying persists. At AFSA's USAID office, we regularly hear from FSOs seeking solutions to bullying problems. I am encouraged by these calls as people seek guidance to file complaints, support their colleagues, and stand up to the bullies. But I'm also disappointed that there is a need to have these conversations. No one should have to face this issue.

Mike came into his own senior year, and the bullying finally stopped. Forty years on, some of my high school friendships got stronger and some faded as we went to college, started families, and lived our varied lives, but these experiences still guide me.

If you or someone you know is experiencing bullying or harassment, don't hesitate to reach out, call it out, and provide support. ■



Two Quirks in Federal Retirement Benefits

Members occasionally ask AFSA about two seemingly unfair aspects of federal retirement benefits. One affects retirees covered by the Foreign Service Pension System (FSPS)—the so-called “new” system for people hired after 1983. The other concerns retirees covered by the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System (FSRDS)—the “old” system for people hired before 1984. Below is an explanation of each aspect and why it is unlikely that Congress will ever revise them.

Diet COLA

When Congress created FSPS and its parallel Civil Service retirement plan 40 years ago, it gave those retirement systems a lower annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) than is given to retirees covered by FSRDS and its parallel Civil Service plan. Congress did that in recognition of significant differences between the old and new retirement systems.

The only benefit in the old system is a monthly pension, but that pension is higher than for those covered under the new system (for example, 70 percent of the high-three average salary after 35 years of service under the old system, versus 49 percent under the new). Since that is the only federal retirement income received by those participants, Con-

gress decided to give those pensions a full COLA each year.

However, participants in the new systems receive significant additional retirement income from outside the pension. FSPS participants (unlike FSRDS) receive Social Security, which is adjusted annually for inflation. More significantly, FSPS participants (unlike FSRDS) receive free government matching payments into their Thrift Savings Plan. At retirement, those matching funds typically comprise 30 percent of the participant's TSP balance.

Additionally, if TSP participants invest a significant portion of their portfolio in the stock market, over time the growth of their portfolio will far outpace inflation. Thus, since FSPS participants enjoy the added benefits from Social Security and TSP, Congress decided that FSPS pensions merited a lower annual COLA than FSRDS participants receive.

If Congress opted to change that by raising the FSPS annual COLA, it would increase outflows from the Foreign Service retirement trust fund. To keep the fund solvent, Congress would have two options: enlarge the federal deficit by increasing payments from the U.S. Treasury into the trust fund, or require current employees to contribute more of their salary into the trust fund.

WEP and GPO

A second piece of federal retirement law was also adopted by Congress 40 years ago. It applies to people covered by FSRDS or its parallel Civil Service retirement plan who, before and/or after their federal service, worked in the private sector long enough to earn Social Security benefits.

Their Social Security retirement benefits are subject to the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), and any Social Security spousal or survivor benefits are subject to the Government Pension Offset (GPO). Both provisions lower their Social Security payments from what they otherwise would have been.

The reason for this reduction dates back to Social Security's founding in the 1930s. Congress designed Social Security to give lower-income workers a higher percentage of their income back as Social Security benefits than higher-income workers get.

Thus, for example, someone with average annual lifetime earnings of \$40,000 gets a significantly higher percentage of those earnings back in Social Security payments than does someone with average lifetime earnings of \$150,000. This is done to help lower-income workers cover essential costs of living such as food and shelter.

Because Social Security calculates average lifetime earnings by looking at 35 years of earnings covered by Social Security, all the years that FSRDS employees did not pay into Social Security show up as zero earnings in Social Security's calculations.

This makes them look like lower-income workers, which they were not. WEP and GPO remove that windfall in their Social Security benefit calculation to restore the equitable distribution of benefits between higher and lower income levels.

Were Congress to repeal those provisions, it would increase outflows from the Social Security trust fund. As things stand now, the Congressional Budget Office projects that Social Security trust fund reserves will be depleted in 2033.

At that point, Social Security benefits will need to be reduced, Social Security taxes will need to be increased, and/or benefits will need to be funded in part by borrowing and increasing the federal deficit. Repealing WEP and GPO would advance the date of Social Security insolvency. ■



AFSA Advocates for FS Specialists

Out of roughly 14,000 Foreign Service employees, more than 40 percent are specialists, with specialist work comprising a majority of AFSA's labor management services. From construction engineers to Diplomatic Security agents, from office management specialists to medical laboratory scientists, there are 19 different specialist types, all providing vital support to the department at home and abroad.

But not all specialties have home bureaus looking out for their needs, and it can be challenging to develop policy that benefits all 19 specialties equally. To address these challenges, AFSA and the department established a pilot program in July 2023 to dedicate one of the six State AFSA Governing Board representatives to work full-time on specialist issues—a role I'm proud to be filling.

This happens at a time of other improvements in specialist support from the department, including a pilot program placing a specialist advocate in the under secretary for management's (M) office.

These two new positions marked the beginning of a great year for specialists. AFSA was delighted to see the development of an Office Management Specialist Program Unit in M's Office of Strategy and Solutions. Similarly, AFSA worked with

the department on a new professional development plan for office management specialists, ensuring a clear career trajectory for one of our largest specialist groups.

We've also successfully engaged to protect security engineering officers, ensuring that new hiring incentives don't disadvantage existing employees. And every day AFSA's labor management team works on numerous individual issues involving specialist promotions, benefits, assignment reviews, discipline, pay and overtime, and other matters.

But there is much more to be done. The specialist-focused AFSA State representative is only a pilot program until 2025, and we need to extend it. Similarly, the specialist advocate position in M's office will expire during the summer of 2024, but has not been extended.

While the new Office Management Specialist Program Unit is a wonderful step in permanent support for one specialty, making the specialist advocate a permanent part of M's office will ensure that even the smaller specialties have a voice.

In support of this goal, AFSA worked with employees enrolled in the Secretary's Leadership Seminar, who recently met with the Director General, the under secretary for management, and others to recommend a new Specialist Advocacy

Council, a permanent specialist advocate position, and the creation of professional development plans for all specialties.

AFSA is also working on several targeted specialist topics. We are concerned about limited opportunities for advancement in some specialties and how that might affect time-in-class (TIC) calculations.

For instance, we were delighted to see that, after many years of AFSA advocacy, the TIC for FS-4 diplomatic couriers was extended to 20 years. Likewise, we enthusiastically supported extending the TIC for FS-3 DS agents to 20 years. In the coming months we will review TIC limits for other specialists to see if similar changes are warranted.

AFSA supports the department exercising its authority to extend TICs for those who were recommended for promotion but not ultimately promoted. Specialists who perform well should be retained, benefiting the Foreign Service with their expertise, regardless of the lack of available promotion slots.

AFSA is also concerned that some specialists reach pay and overtime caps quickly when working in high threat posts, but do not have access to the same differential pay as generalists. It isn't acceptable to provide specialists fewer benefits

than generalists when they work in the same dangerous environments, often in the same positions. We need new recognition packages for specialists, or we send the wrong message about their comparative value to the Foreign Service.

AFSA is also advocating for a better FS entry path for consular fellows. Fellows have already demonstrated successful service overseas, and those who have performed well represent a diverse, secure, well-established pool from which we should aggressively recruit to fill our generalist ranks.

AFSA has requested consular fellow inclusion in the Mustang Program, which exempts eligible Civil Service employees and specialists from the Foreign Service Officer Test. AFSA is also reviewing proposals for the use of consular fellow evaluations as an alternative to the qualifications evaluation panel during the Foreign Service testing process.

In these and dozens of other issues, AFSA has been working steadfastly for its specialist members, something we will continue to do. In the meantime, please feel free to reach out to us at afsa@state.gov or floyd@afsa.org if you have any questions or suggestions related to AFSA's specialist-focused work. ■

2023 AFSA Treasurer's Report

I am pleased to report that AFSA continues its track record of keeping the organization on a solid financial footing. AFSA's reserves are sufficient to cover expenses beyond the six-month window recommended for nonprofits. We ended 2023 in the black, with revenue rising higher than expenses. At the end of the year, we were honored to receive a clean audit—the highest possible standard for a nonprofit organization—for the 14th consecutive year.

AFSA's \$6.8 million planned operating budget for calendar year 2024 is funded primarily from membership dues and advertising revenue. AFSA's membership base stood at approximately 16,873 as of year-end 2023. That number represents about 80 percent of active-duty employees across the foreign affairs agencies, plus approximately 25 percent of Foreign Service retirees. Dues increased by 3.7 percent for 2024 to match the third-quarter consumer price index.

Advertising revenue continues to be a bright spot for AFSA, rising to \$578,000 in 2023 (up from \$556,000 in 2022).

Drilling down into the financial details, AFSA ended 2023 with reserves totaling \$16.8 million in the following funds:

The **Operational Reserve**, which supports regular operations, salaries, etc., stood at \$3.5 million. In all cases, declines in fund balances can be almost exclusively attributed to the challenging investment environment in 2023.

The **Scholarship Fund** stood at \$11.6 million, up from \$10.8 million in 2022. In 2023, AFSA provided \$405,000 in scholarships and awards to Foreign Service children, an increase of 24 percent. The fund annually withdraws 4.5 percent of its five-year average value to fund scholarships and partially underwrite the program's operational expenses.

The **Fund for American Diplomacy** balance was \$503,000, down from \$515,000. This fund supports all AFSA's outreach and public education efforts, including the speaker series, Road Scholar programs, the national high school essay contest, the AFSA awards and plaques programs, and member event public events. Revenue from AFSA's *Inside a U.S. Embassy* book sales continues to support the FAD. More than 2,200 books were sold in 2023.

The **Sinclair Fund** provides funding for the association's hard language awards, stemming from a generous bequest

At the end of the year, we were honored to receive a clean audit—the highest possible standard for a nonprofit organization—for the 14th consecutive year.

in the early 1980s. Its balance at the end of 2023 was \$503,000, up from \$482,000.

Finally, the **Legal Defense Fund** balance was \$342,000 vice \$376,000 at the end of 2022. The LDF supports AFSA members who are facing legal or regulatory issues that may affect the Foreign Service as a whole and in cases where AFSA does not possess the specific expertise needed for such cases.

AFSA's investment portfolio recovered from the 2022 downturn, and the association's overall financial strength remains excellent.

As we look toward the remaining months of 2024, we will continue supporting our members in a variety of ways, including through scholarship funds, Sinclair language awards, bipartisan support for our legislative agenda, and other efforts.

—John O'Keefe, AFSA Treasurer ■



AFSA Governing Board Meeting, February 21, 2024

Board Chair

The board voted to reappoint Tom Yazdgerdi to serve as chair for six months.

Resignation

The board accepted the resignation of David Josar, effective immediately. ■

AFSA Meets with Employee Organizations

There are currently almost three dozen employee organizations (EO) in the State Department, and AFSA leaders meet with them on a regular basis to learn about their concerns and discuss ways we can work together in our advocacy.

On Dec. 14, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, State AFSA VP Tina Wong, and AFSA staff met with representatives from **Singles at State**. Yazdgerdi outlined AFSA's advocacy on the National Defense Authorization Act and other areas of advocacy affecting single members of the Foreign Service. Singles at State leaders raised concerns about potential discrepancies between single and married members of the Service when it comes to the availability of remote work agreements versus DETO opportunities, the lack of access to reproductive health options, workplace flexibility and its relationship with eldercare issues, and more.

According to the group, single employees represent 27 percent of the department's direct-hire workforce; Singles at State seeks to raise awareness of how department policies affect our unmarried, divorced, and widowed employees, including single parents. For more information, contact SinglesAtState@state.gov.

On Jan. 11, Yazdgerdi and Wong met with leaders of the **Disability Action Group** (DAG). DAG representatives provided an update of recent changes in the department's worldwide availability policy and expressed concern about the perceived slow pace of change. They noted a department focus on initial hiring, but not on an expansion of the new, more equitable worldwide availability principles to assignments for existing employees, and a general lack of transparency in the medical (MED) clearance process, asking for AFSA's assistance in

implementing a transparent process that better addresses the needs of new employees.

DAG strives to promote the full and equal participation of people with disabilities department-wide, improve disability awareness, and provide a platform for discussing issues of accommodation. For more information, write to DAGCouncil@state.gov.

On Feb. 5, Yazdgerdi and Wong met with members of the board of **Parallel Professionals**, an organization focused on the professional development and careers of Foreign Service spouses and partners. A relatively new employee organization, it already has more than 700 members, including Civil Service, contractors, family members, and a small number of interagency personnel.

The group's biggest goal is to support passage of the Readiness Act, proposed legislation that includes both FS and military spouses and offers a menu of options for spouses faced with a PCS (personnel change of station) move, including consideration for Domestic Employee Teleworking Overseas (DETO) status, reassignment to a job in the new region/post, or conversion to leave without pay (LWOP) status. Members are also working to tally DETO and remote work agreement (RWA) denials in both the Foreign and the Civil Service, and advocating for NCE (noncompetitive eligibility) parity with military spouses. Group attendees noted the persistent low pay/low grades for spouses at post and the need to track how many FS spouses are able to use their non-competitive eligibility (NCE) for employment when returning to D.C.

For more information, contact ParallelProfessionalsBoard@state.gov. ■

*On the Road with AFSA's President
Continued from page 43*

In Boca Raton the next day, Yazdgerdi visited Florida Atlantic University, once again meeting with students interested in learning about the Foreign Service as a career, first at the Boca Raton campus and later at the Jupiter campus, where he joined students



Tom Yazdgerdi, center front, in blue shirt, with retired AFSA members at annual meeting of the Foreign Service Retirees Association in Sarasota, Fla., on Jan. 26.

in an advanced diplomacy class. The Foreign Service, he told them, is "a demanding profession and one of sacrifice.

"Members join the Foreign Service not for the money or the public glory; they join because of a sense of duty to their country and a desire to contribute to America's continued security and prosperity." ■

AFSA Welcomes Newest FS Members

We've been busy welcoming new FS members to the Foreign Service and to AFSA HQ, where we're talking to them about the various benefits they will enjoy when they join AFSA.

On Jan. 30, USAID Vice President Randy Chester welcomed 24 members of USAID's Career Candidate Corps Class 39. USAID AFSA Representative Christopher Saenger and Sue Bremner, AFSA's USAID labor management adviser, also met with the class.

The 24 class members combined speak 17 foreign languages and have worked or studied in 64 countries.

Seventeen have prior experience working for USAID.

On Feb. 13, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi and other senior AFSA staff welcomed an incredible 227 new State Department Foreign Service members from Generalist Class 217 and Specialist Class 171—so many that we had to divide them into multiple events just to get them all into the building!

A special thank you to the numerous AFSA members who joined us to offer advice to these new FS members, including Ambassadors Maureen Cormack, Michael Dodman, Jennifer Galt, Lino Gutierrez, and Eunice Red-

The 24 class members combined speak 17 foreign languages and have worked or studied in 64 countries. Seventeen have prior experience working for USAID.

dick; and Scott Bellard, Karen Christensen, Joel Maybury, John McNamara, Larilyn Refett, and Darren Thies.

Classes 217 and 171 include 20 Civil Service members who are joining the FS as generalists and specialists, along with 10 former consular fellows. Women make up 40 percent of the class, which includes four diplomatic couriers, five regional medical officers,

11 information management specialists, 22 office management specialists, and 59 Diplomatic Security special agents. Class members speak more than 50 languages between them, including every official United Nations language and languages spoken in each of the six geographic bureaus.

No matter your agency or role, we welcome you all to the Foreign Service. ■

LM Shows the Love

On Feb. 14, the AFSA Labor Management team celebrated Valentine's Day by hosting an open house for their State Department counterparts, clients, and colleagues from various employee organizations that work alongside AFSA. Guests wrote notes of appreciation and wandered through offices decorated for the big day. We ♥ our LM colleagues! ■



AFSA/SHIVANE NAND



AFSA/SHIVANE NAND

First Happy Hour of the Next 100 Years



AFSA/ASGEIR SIGFUSSON

AFSA's centennial happy hour on Feb. 21 drew the largest crowd ever.

On Feb. 21, AFSA invited members and friends to join the centennial kickoff happy hour at AFSA headquarters.

More than 150 members turned out for what some are calling AFSA's best happy hour ever. New hires and retirees mingled. Friends and colleagues reunited to chat, snack, enjoy a variety of special beverages, and enter a raffle for AFSA's new Foreign Service swag.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi offered welcoming remarks. Clements sponsored the event and had representatives on hand to help members with insurance questions. Just about the entire AFSA team was on hand to greet members.

Everyone had a great time catching up with old friends and new. ■



AFSA/DONNA GORMAN

Foreign Service swag was raffled off—details on AFSA's new online storefront coming soon.



AFSA/JULIE NUTTER

High school buddies Maggie Hug, who works at the State Department, and Shawn Dorman, editor in chief of *The Foreign Service Journal*, reunite at the happy hour.

Save the Dates: May 2 & 3

AFSA's Foreign Service Day Programming

This year, Foreign Service Day will be held on Friday, May 3. The AFSA Memorial Plaque Ceremony will also take place on that day.

Each year AFSA commemorates Foreign Service Day through a series of events and activities throughout the week. We ask embassies and consulates to participate in a rolling moment of silence to recognize those lost in the line of service. We also ask our members to take to social media to draw attention to the work of the Foreign Service using the hashtags #FSProud and #ForeignServiceDay.


On Thursday, May 2, as has become tradition, members are invited to stop by AFSA headquarters during our Open House. We'll have food trucks and a professional photographer on hand to take free professional headshots. AFSA staff will also be available to answer questions. Come meet up with friends and colleagues! In the evening, AFSA will co-host a reception for members with DACOR.

AFSA members will receive more information about all these initiatives later this month. In our centennial year we look forward to a special celebration.

Members interested in receiving information about events taking place at the State Department on May 3 should email foreignaffairsday@state.gov. ■

NEWS BRIEF


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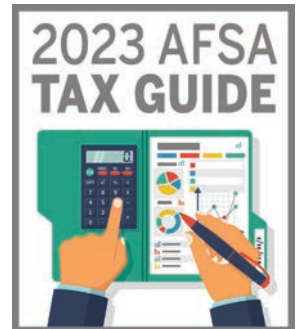


VISIT US AT WWW.WINDECKERFP.PRO

NEWS BRIEF

Consult AFSA's Tax Guide Online

Don't forget! The filing deadline to submit 2023 tax returns or an extension to file and pay tax owed is April 15, 2024, for most taxpayers, with an automatic two-month extension to June 17 for U.S. citizens and resident aliens living outside the United States.



To help you navigate filing both federal and state tax returns, AFSA's 2023 Tax Guide, which summarizes many of the tax laws that members of the Foreign Service community will find relevant, is available online at www.afsa.org/taxguide.

★ **FOREIGN SERVICE DAY** ★



★ **May 3, 2024** ★

Email foreignaffairsday@state.gov for information.

Please save the date for AFSA's complementary Foreign Service Day programming on Thursday, May 2.

Seeking Employment Verification?

We occasionally receive inquiries from our members requesting Foreign Service employment verification for bank loan applications, rental contracts, and other circumstances. Because AFSA is not your employer of record, we are unable to provide such verification.

We can, however, point you to the resources you need to obtain official verification:

- **State:** 23 STATE 92386.
- **USAID:** <https://bit.ly/USAID-employment-verification>.
- **FCS:** <https://bit.ly/FCS-employment-verification>.
- **FAS:** <https://bit.ly/FAS-employment-verification>.
- **APHIS:** <https://bit.ly/APHIS-employment-verification>.

AFSA can provide letters that supplement agency verification with additional details, such as your AFSA membership. Remember that the release of employment information, especially sensitive details such as salary, position, grade/step, and length of service, is governed by the strict guidelines of the Privacy Act of 1974.

For questions, contact member@afsa.org.

Honoring Courageous Colleagues AFSA's Constructive Dissent Awards

AFSA's four awards for constructive dissent are unique in the federal government, and likely in the world. They honor intellectual and moral courage as exhibited by challenging the system from within to change a substantive policy or administrative procedure for the better.

The awards were created at the height of the Vietnam War, when officers in the political section at U.S. Embassy Saigon saw their reporting cables edited to remove negative information. As AFSA's unofficial historian Harry W. Kopp observed, "By denying itself honest reporting, the [Johnson] administration confirmed its preconceptions and magnified its mistakes."

In December 1967, AFSA announced the creation of two awards for intellectual courage and creativity: the W. Averell Harriman Award for an entry-level officer and the William R. Rivkin Award for a mid-level officer. Two years later, the Christian A. Herter Award for reasoned dissent by a senior officer was added. Finally, in 2000 AFSA initiated the F. Allen "Tex" Harris award for constructive dissent by a

Foreign Service specialist.

These awards encourage Foreign Service members to question the status quo and take a stand, but to do so within non-public channels such as meetings, emails to superiors, memoranda, telegrams, or via the State Department's formal Dissent Channel (created four years after AFSA's dissent awards).

During its first decades, most AFSA constructive dissent award winners challenged some aspect of U.S. foreign policy. In recent years, most recipients have challenged an administrative

procedure. There are undoubtedly multiple reasons for this trend, but a likely factor is that the success rate for changing agency or embassy management practices has been significantly higher than for changing an administration's foreign policy stand.

Constructive dissent awards are conferred each year at AFSA's annual awards ceremony, along with winners of AFSA's several exemplary performance awards. Usually held in the Benjamin Franklin Diplomatic Reception Room on the eighth floor of the



AFSA's Good Works

Each month during our centennial year, The Foreign Service Journal is profiling an AFSA program that advances the collective or individual interests of its members. This month we feature Constructive Dissent Awards.

State Department, the ceremony draws a large crowd, often including the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of State. Recipients make brief but heartfelt acceptance remarks, often thanking the colleagues who supported them.

Many entry-level and mid-level recipients of AFSA dissent awards have gone on to have highly successful careers. Previous winners include Geoffrey Pyatt (current assistant secretary for energy resources); Anthony Quainton (former Director General of the Foreign Service); Daniel Russel (former assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs); Janet Bogue (former deputy assistant secretary for European affairs); Diana Putman (former USAID deputy assistant administrator for East Africa); Ambassadors Joel Ehrendreich and Michael Gonzalez; and Ambassadors (ret.) Thomas Boyatt, Ryan Crocker, John Limbert, Luis Moreno, Eric Rubin, and Douglas Silliman.

Colleagues who have received the award as senior officers include Thomas Shannon (former undersecretary for political affairs); Jeffrey Feltman and Robert Pelletreau (former assistant secretaries for Near Eastern

affairs); Herman "Hank" Cohen (former assistant secretary for African affairs); and Ambassadors Michael Guest, Dennis Hays, Dennis Jett, and Kenneth Quinn.

Foreign Service specialists winning the Tex Harris Award include Frontis Wiggins (former State Department chief information officer).

AFSA is proud to have upheld the tradition of constructive dissent for more than half a century and will continue to recognize colleagues who have the courage to stand up for their beliefs. Each year, AFSA issues a call for nominations of those who have had the courage to dissent within the system. Some years, awards are not given in all four categories due to lack of submissions.

AFSA encourages members in all Foreign Service agencies to nominate a colleague so they can receive the recognition—including a \$4,000 cash prize—that they richly deserve. The nomination deadline for 2024 is May 13. Nominations must be submitted through the AFSA website. For details, including a list of past recipients, see <https://afsa.org/awards-and-honors>.

—John K. Naland

Life After *the Foreign Service*

Here are stories—and tips!—from three retired diplomats who found success and fulfillment after careers in the Foreign Service.



COURTESY OF LADD CONNELL, ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ELENA EMCHUK

The Nonprofit, Environment Route

BY LADD CONNELL

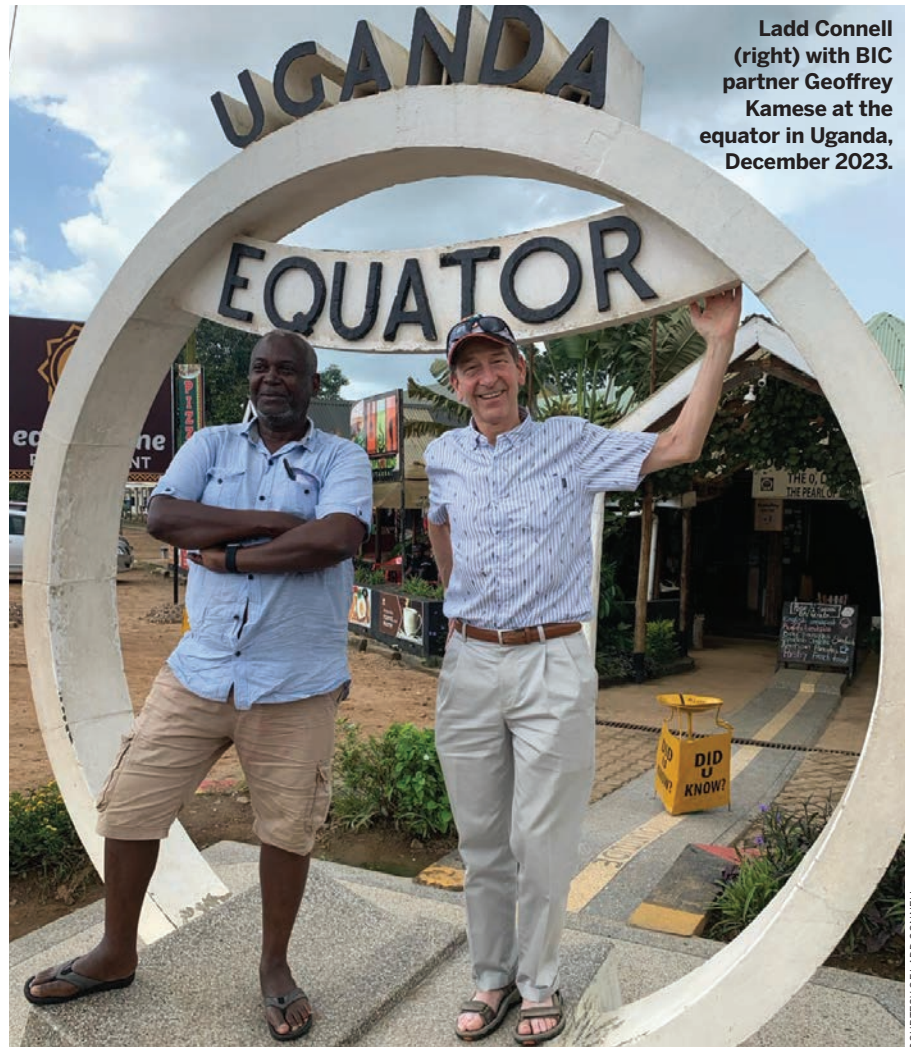
A longtime State Department colleague, Robin Delabarre, was fond of saying that virtue is its own, and sometimes only, reward; but for me, working for environmental causes in the nonprofit sector, the rewards have been multiple.

First, I've learned a tremendous amount. Retiring out of the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs' Office of Development Finance at the end of 2008, at 53, I was hired by Conservation International (CI) as director for multilateral relations. While I had had some prior experience in conservation, my expertise was development finance and multilateral institutions. But CI had a large cutting-edge science team, which held regular brown-bag lunches to share their work.

I learned about natural capital accounting, marine areas management, and rapid biodiversity assessment. CI overseas country staff also presented their work in places from Suriname to South Africa and from Cambodia to Kiribati. I then applied this learning in promoting CI's work and advocating for policies and programs to advance its goals.

At the same time, I was able to share my expertise and contacts, so that CI staff were empowered to work directly with the World Bank, other multilateral development banks (MDBs), and the trust funds they operate. We had success as CI was chosen to implement a World Bank program for sustainable management of tuna fisheries and a global grant program for Indigenous peoples, among others.

Left: Ladd Connell with villagers near Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, December 2023.

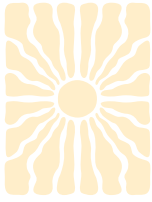


Ladd Connell (right) with BIC partner Geoffrey Kamese at the equator in Uganda, December 2023.

I left CI after more than eight years, as CI shifted the focus of our office purely to fundraising, and I preferred the policy piece. Through contacts from my CI years, I landed first at the International Union for Conservation of Nature, consulting on World Bank safeguards, and in early 2018, at the Bank Information Center (BIC) as environment director.

Although small, BIC is able to “punch above its weight” thanks to its focus on

MDBs, its location close to the headquarters of two banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank), and its close contact with U.S. government staff involved in MDB policies and programs. This includes a monthly meeting, known as Tuesday Group, with the interagency staff and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). BIC also serves as the MDB expert in several NGO coalitions, such as one devoted



I may be on the opposite side of the table from where I sat before; but many of the values we promote as diplomats are ones that the NGO community promotes, as well.

to ending public finance for fossil fuel development.

Looking back on 15 years of post-FS life, I'd say I've enjoyed multiple rewards:

- Financial—NGOs pay less than government or the private sector. But with my annuity, I came out ahead in total income, compared to what I'd have earned staying in the Service.

- Family—I never had to be separated from my family; we were able to stay in our home; and my wife was able to continue her career as a real estate agent without interruption (also important financially!).

- Values—I've been able to work for organizations where my values and theirs are fully aligned, and the work further informed my commitment. Learning about and advocating for policies and programs critical for our planet has been important.

- Travel and contacts—Although in leaving the Foreign Service, I gave up the chance to be posted overseas, I have enjoyed significant travel. Work has taken me to Ecuador, Peru, Brazil (twice), the Philippines, Madagascar, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Togo, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (three times), Tunisia (three times), Morocco, Dubai, and multiple European capitals (Madrid, Rome, Brussels, Paris, and London). And when not traveling, I'm still in touch (via Zoom and WhatsApp) with colleagues and counterparts around the globe.

- Change and continuity—Serving as an advocate for people and places underrepresented by their governments, I may be on the opposite side of the table from where I sat before; but many of the values we promote as diplomats are ones that the NGO community promotes, as well. I'm able to point to these shared values when I meet with U.S. government colleagues.

Contacts from State Department days

have often been helpful, whether still serving in the department, or at embassies, or in post-FS positions at the MDBs.

In this post-Foreign Service journey, I'm glad that I started young enough to make what I consider a full second career, building on contacts and knowledge gained in my 22 years at State. They continue as important foundations.

Ladd Connell was a Foreign Service officer from 1986 to 2008, serving overseas in Zagreb, Bermuda, Bangui, and Casablanca, and domestically on the Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Haiti country desks, as well as in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs and on the staff of the under secretary for economic growth, energy, and the environment (E).

From Diplomatic Security to Corporate Security

BY JOHN RENDEIRO

It is rare to hear anyone who has spent a full career in the United States Foreign Service complain about it, and I am no exception. My years of service included full tours of duty in the USSR, Switzerland, and Russia, plus a number of assignments of shorter duration in several other countries. I served at the Department of State in the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS), heading up the offices of Special Investigations, Intelligence and Threat Analysis, Antiterrorism Assistance, and finally serving as assistant director of DS for international programs. I was also privileged to spend a full academic year at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, studying instruments of national power with U.S. and foreign military colleagues.

Retiring from the Foreign Service in 2006, I accepted a position as vice president for global security and intelligence at International SOS, the world's largest provider of security and medical assistance for travelers, expats, the U.S. Department of Defense (e.g., TRICARE Overseas Program), and pretty much anyone else in need of risk management services. While it was not an easy call for me to leave the department, it turned out to be a good move—more than 17 years later, I'm still contributing here and maintaining ties with DS through our participation in the Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council.

Another huge plus of my job is that I've been able to stay in touch with many former government colleagues in their private sector roles. This would be my first



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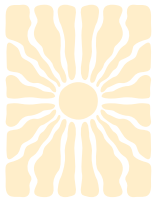
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It is important to create a self-inventory of skills, interests, and particular capabilities, with an eye toward explaining exactly what these skills can do for your prospective organization.

bit of advice to Foreign Service officers approaching or at retirement eligibility: “Be flexible!” Keep your feelers out, know what your areas of interest are for a follow-on career, and adequately prepare yourself to explain what you can bring to a company, nongovernmental organization, academic institution, think tank, or any other organization you may want to join.

While the transition to the private sector was complicated, my new organization was very supportive. And it helped that we were doing a lot of the same things we did in DS: threat analysis, preparation of travelers going outside their comfort zones, implementing security programs, and following up and

responding to travelers and expats with particular needs, both in everyday situations and emergencies. And, just as in DS, it has always been necessary to keep up on current events and be aware of what is happening throughout the world.

It is important to create a self-inventory of skills, interests, and particular capabilities, with an eye toward explaining exactly what these skills can do for your prospective organization. Think of foreign area expertise, foreign languages, crisis management, analytical research, oral/written communication, leadership/organizational management, and other valuable skills that you may possess that are practiced in the Foreign

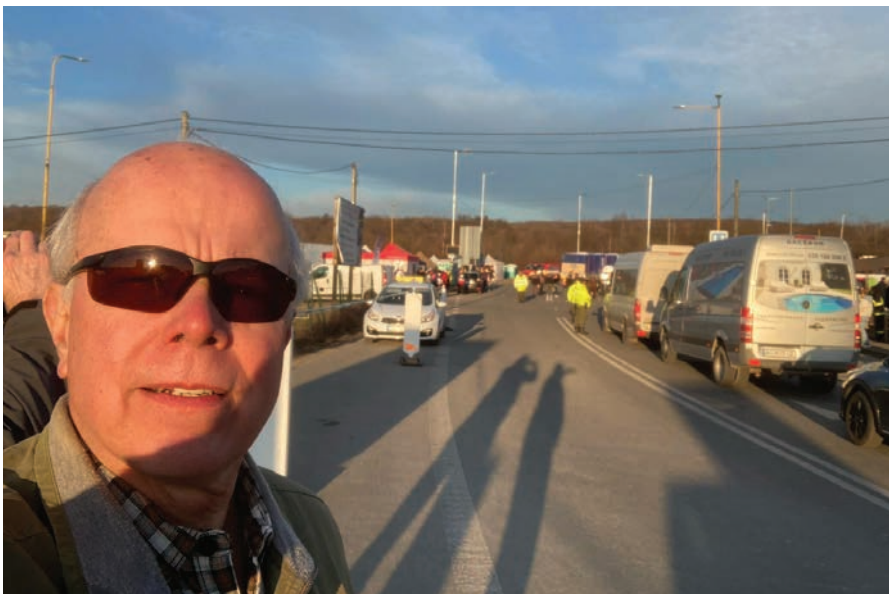
Service—they could prove very valuable to a prospective organization.

Much of my work at International SOS has mirrored what I did at State. For example, I’ve had the privilege of working with extremely capable and highly motivated people, who also have foreign area and language knowledge and a genuine passion for what they do to help people and save lives. There has never been a dull moment in my time with the company, and I’ve learned so much from my colleagues. Our network of 26 global assistance centers and thousands of medical and security providers worldwide has a true global reach.

A couple of my most memorable moments with International SOS include entering Georgia via Azerbaijan with the help of one of our providers in Baku in 2008, joining our team in Tbilisi to support local clients. Another was venturing into Haiti after the earthquake in 2010, again working with a provider and our medical team in Santo Domingo, both overland and by helicopter, to reconnoiter routes and extract clients. In both instances, my Russian (thank you, FSI and Embassy Moscow!) and French were of value, and our missions were a success.

In the end, most of my job has involved building relationships with security clients and assisting them in implementing their programs. I’ve enjoyed a tremendous follow-on career with International SOS, and I fully recognize it wouldn’t have been possible without the Foreign Service.

John G. Rendeiro Jr. served 21 years as a Diplomatic Security special agent, retiring from the Senior Foreign Service at the grade of Minister Counselor in 2006. Prior to that, he served in the U.S. Army as a military intelligence officer. He has been with International SOS as vice president, Global Security and Intelligence, and senior adviser, for more than 17 years.



JOHN RENDEIRO

John Rendeiro at the border crossing into Ukraine at Vysne Nemecke, Slovakia, on March 12, 2022.

Conflict Stabilization Consultant

BY PATRICIA HASLACH

had not planned on retiring in November 2017. My husband (a British diplomat) and I had discussed his following me on a diplomatic mission or my following him. We met in Baghdad in 2009 and married in 2015. I thought I would make it to 65, but circumstances beyond our control caused us to change our plans.

After I left Ethiopia in July 2016, I moved to Washington, D.C., as principal deputy assistant secretary (PDAS) in the Bureau of Economics and Business

Affairs, a position I thought I would continue to occupy through the next administration. When Donald Trump was elected president in 2016 and Rex Tillerson was appointed Secretary of State, I knew I had limited time before a political appointee was confirmed as assistant secretary and I was out the door, with prospects of another senior position unlikely. I committed to stay a short period to help guide the bureau through the transition and attempts to downsize the State Department. Mean-

while, my husband was posted as U.K. ambassador to Iraq.

It is important to recall what the situation was like in the department in the first year of the Trump administration. It was chaotic and scary, with our loyalty, professionalism, and patriotism being questioned, and it soon became untenable with senior officers being let go. Implementing the administration's trade policy (threats of the U.S. pulling out of the North American Free Trade Agreement and implementing other protectionist trade measures) became impossible for me. The last straw was when I accompanied the former deputy assistant secretary to a meeting on steel at the White House and witnessed firsthand the president's determination to move forward on steel tariffs on our allies.

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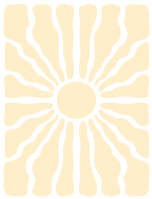
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Stay current on the places you served, and stay connected with former colleagues to see if there might be a role for you.

I was fortunate to be in a relatively good financial position, and I could afford to retire early. With the help of career colleagues on the Seventh Floor, I was able to recommend a good officer to replace me. After taking the retirement course and settling my affairs, I moved to London to start my second career.

Advice: Plan for retirement early by investing in the Thrift Savings Plan and other retirement plans. Take the retirement course while you are still employed.

I was hired by AKTIS, a U.K. consulting firm specializing in conflict stabilization. I led the conflict practice and worked on the peace building component of the United Nations Development Programme's Stabilization Facility for Libya and for the Dutch government. I also worked on a European Union-funded project to reduce tensions between Lebanese residents and Syrian refugees. I was team leader for the Danish International Development Agency's

assessment of stabilization funding for Iraq and Syria.

It was a new experience to be on the consulting side. Most of the staff were younger than I was, and we worked in an open office space. While the staff were great and the coffee excellent, it did take adjustment on my part. A few months later, I moved to Chemonics, which was setting up a London office, and did similar work. I also joined a friend who started a boutique consulting firm, Brooch Associates.

When my husband returned from Iraq, he was assigned to Qatar as U.K. ambassador. We left for Doha in March 2020.

Advice: Be flexible, be realistic, and give yourself time to adjust. When I left government, I was told I would have no

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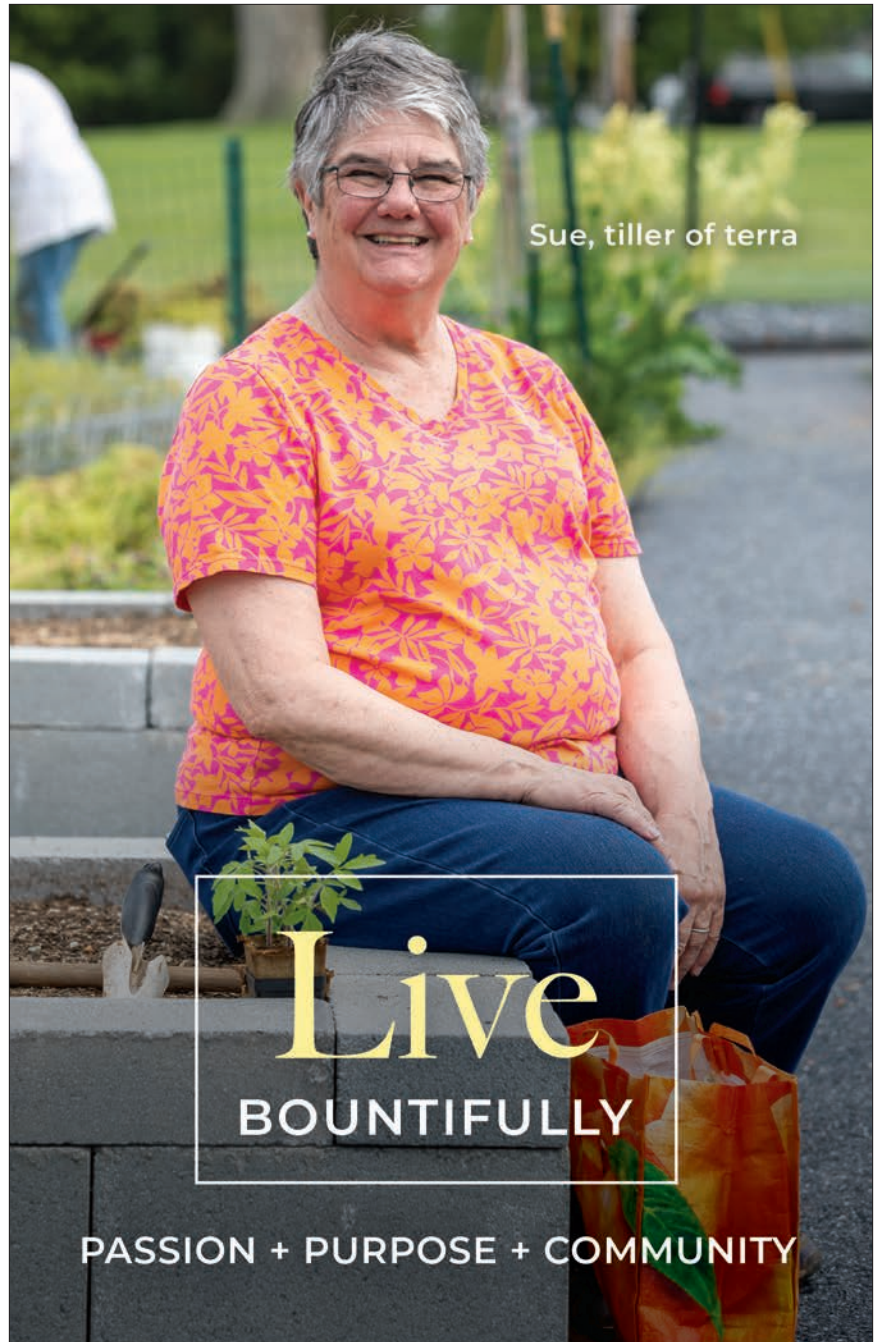
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problem switching careers. In reality, while many of our skills are transferable to the private sector and academia, it is not always an easy fit.

Taking on the role of spouse of the ambassador was another challenge. We arrived in Qatar two weeks before COVID-19 restrictions were put into place. Fortunately, the embassy and the residence were colocated, and we faced few shortages. I was able to support my husband and the community. I worked closely with the community liaison office coordinator (CLO) to assist the staff and their families. I even received an award for morale when I set up a roster for the residence swimming pool when other pools were closed.

My experience on both sides, as an ambassador and then spouse, came in handy when we celebrated Queen Elizabeth's platinum jubilee and commendations for her funeral and, later, the coronation of King Charles. I had a supporting role when Qatar hosted the World Cup in 2022, and our embassy had two teams—England and Wales—in the same league as the United States. When the teams competed, though, I waved the U.S. flag.

Over our four years in Qatar, I continued to stay involved in foreign affairs. I worked remotely with a team at the American Academy of Diplomacy, advising the Biden administration on trade issues. I joined former ambassadors to Ethiopia in efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Tigray and find a political solution to the civil war. I wrote to the deputy prime minister, who I had worked closely with on drought relief in 2015, to urge the government to provide food assistance to Tigray. I joined another group of former ambassadors to Laos to urge the Biden administration to reconsider sending cluster bombs to Ukraine. While we supported Ukraine, we had seen the detrimental effects of



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COURTESY OF PAT HASLACH

Pat Haslach with her husband, Jon Wilks, and grandson Noah at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

cluster bombs on the civilian population in Laos.

In August 2021, I asked to help with the evacuation of Afghan refugees through Qatar. I wanted to use my experience on Afghanistan as the first director of Afghanistan reconstruction after 9/11 and, later, as PDAS in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. The U.S. senior coordinator for Operation Allies Refuge in Qatar brought me on for several weeks to help identify Afghans who had connections to countries other than the United States, including 300 unaccompanied minors. I used my contacts in the diplomatic community and Qatar government to find places for these refugees.

Advice: You never know when your experience might be useful. Stay current on the places you served, and stay connected with former colleagues to see if there might be a role for you.

Another way to stay involved is to volunteer and serve on boards. I was on the advisory board for King's College in London, International School for Government. I joined three other organizations as a senior adviser. One of those was Pathfinder, which focuses on

women and children's health issues.

Advice: Try something new. I followed a long-dormant passion for art and took courses, including one online on how to write a children's book for our grandsons.

In December 2023, my husband retired from the diplomatic service, and we moved to Oxford, where he is the registrar at the Islamic Studies Centre. I am busy setting up our new home and unpacking, I hope for the last time.

Enjoy your retirement. ■

Pat Haslach's Foreign Service career with the State Department spanned 30 years and a wide variety of postings. She served as ambassador to Ethiopia, Laos, and APEC; as acting assistant secretary and principal deputy assistant secretary (PDAS) for the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs; PDAS in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations; deputy coordinator for the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative; and as director for the Office for Afghanistan. She also worked on Iraq reconstruction and the transition from a military to civilian operation under Deputy Secretary Tom Nides. Her other postings included Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and the U.S. Mission to the European Union.

The Story of American Diplomacy in Art

America's Collection: The Art and Architecture of the Diplomatic Reception Rooms at the U.S. Department of State

Virginia B. Hart et al., *Rizzoli Electa*, 2023,
\$100.00/hardcover, print only, 352 pages.

REVIEWED BY JANE LOEFFLER

Congress has never been keenly interested in funding the business of diplomacy, particularly those aspects of the craft associated with entertainment. Thus, it surprised no one that when the State Department built its postwar headquarters in Washington, the utilitarian office block, known as the Truman Building, contained no spaces deemed suitable for diplomatic exchanges.

The story of how a small group of committed collectors and preservationists transformed the ordinary office interiors of the seventh and eighth floors of that building into the State Department's Diplomatic Reception Rooms, now a showpiece of American art and architectural know-how, is told in a sizable new coffee-table book edited by the rooms' curator, Virginia B. Hart.

With a foreword by John F. Kerry, the book is divided into two sections, each comprising five essays by noted experts. The first five detail how the collection was formed and how it came to be displayed as it is, and the second group focuses on highlights of the collection. Curators from major U.S. museums have contributed the essays here. Each is devoted to one portion of the collection—painting and sculpture, works on paper, furniture, ceramics, and metals (silver).

The essays are illustrated with art objects ranging from mahogany desks

and oil paintings to exquisite hand-painted dinnerware imported from China, sterling silver teapots, grandfather clocks, maps, and consular seals.

As an added plus, the book contains documentation of provenance for all items shown. This adds greatly to its authoritative stance as a reference work, not simply a picture book.

No one who visits the Diplomatic Reception Rooms can help but be amazed at the incongruity of discovering ornately furnished period rooms, 42 in all, tucked atop a high-security installation in the middle of Foggy Bottom. But in the early 1960s, when Deputy Chief of Protocol Clement Conger first proposed creating appropriate settings for receiving foreign dignitaries, and then launched the effort to make that happen, the Truman Building was essentially open to the public and not the inaccessible bastion that it is today.

What Conger envisioned was realized over a period of some 30 years as the modern “motel-style” interiors of Main State's top two floors were transformed into classically detailed spaces inspired by elegant interiors of colonial- and federal-era public buildings and country houses. This was accomplished by a team of architects and artisans trained in traditional building crafts.

Looking to the past for inspiration, the design team still used ingenuity and imagination to entirely transform the shoebox rooms into workspaces where period artifacts can be exhibited in context to their best advantage. From generous donors, Conger was able to amass paintings, ceramics, silver, and furniture that make the rooms feel instantly old and authentically grand.



In her essay, managing editor Carolyn Vaughn traces the origins of “the Americana Project” to the 1960s, a decade that “began with a spirit of optimism,” she says, “of looking forward to a boundless future, of the promise of progress.”

It is ironic, perhaps, that such promise led Conger and his colleagues to seek inspiration in the period decor of Monticello, Philadelphia's Powel House, and Kedleston Hall in England rather than in the modern masterpieces that were at the very same moment inspiring the design of U.S. embassies worldwide as part of a major postwar foreign building program that featured glass walls, sunscreens, sleek modern furnishings, and little overt ornamentation.

This architecture made a point of looking to the future for inspiration, not to the past. By the 1960s, prominent American architects had designed major new U.S. embassies in Havana, Rio de Janeiro, London, New Delhi, The Hague, Accra, and Karachi.

But within the same time frame that it took to refurbish the diplomatic reception rooms, those embassies and many more became obsolete as a dramatically changed security landscape rapidly overwhelmed their openness and accessibility.

Embassy architecture turned defensive. And as it lost its welcome, it lost its ability to convey a positive diplomatic message. The ongoing effort to place fine art in embassies abroad may be the last effort linking embassies to public diplomacy, because there is little or no value in trying to showcase the work of American artists in settings no longer accessible to the public.

As the diplomatic reception rooms now find themselves in a building that is

also increasingly difficult to access, this new book is a way to bring both the architecture and the artifacts to the public.

The well-illustrated volume would be a welcome addition to any library that features American art. It is particularly welcome to those of us unfamiliar with the work of contemporary classical architects, including Edward Vason Jones and Allan Greenberg.

Additionally, the photographs are stunning. The essays are informative, but a timeline would be a helpful addi-

tion, as would a better link between text and photos.

The book also lacks floor plans, so each room stands alone with occasional glimpses into the next but no way to know how people might move through the spaces or how they are sequenced. That may be intentional, but it makes processing the whole a challenge. It would also be interesting to know how the 42 rooms, as such, are actually used.

America's Collection provides a first-class armchair tour, but only a peek, so to speak. As David Rubenstein astutely

points out in his afterword, there is no substitute for seeing great art in person, particularly seeing it in context. That is why, he says, one must visit to appreciate this collection.

One can only hope that tours remain an option at this location and that this treasure trove does not find itself off limits entirely, losing its purpose along the way.

*Jane Loeffler is an architectural historian and author of *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2010).*

The Insiders' Account

The Unfinished History of the Iran-Iraq War: Faith, Firepower, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards

Annie Tracy Samuel, Cambridge University Press, 2023, \$29.99/paperback, e-book available, 322 pages.

REVIEWED BY JOHN LIMBERT

In this valuable work, historian Annie Tracy Samuel carefully traces how the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) became Iran's major fighting force in the long and bloody war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988.

The story of the IRGC begins in the late summer and early fall of 1979 in Tehran, when an elected "Assembly of Experts" was debating a new constitution. It was a televised scene of vigorous debate, free speech, and multiple voices urging competing paths for a new order that was emerging from the ruins of the Pahlavi monarchy.

One session, which I was able to attend, involved a debate about the IRGC—a body that emerged soon after

the February overthrow—and whether it should be codified in the new document. One delegate, Rahmatollah Moghaddam-Maraghe'i, argued eloquently against the proposal, saying that the assembly, by recognizing such a body, was creating a monster, a private army, an Iranian version of the Praetorian Guard not answerable to any elected official or body.

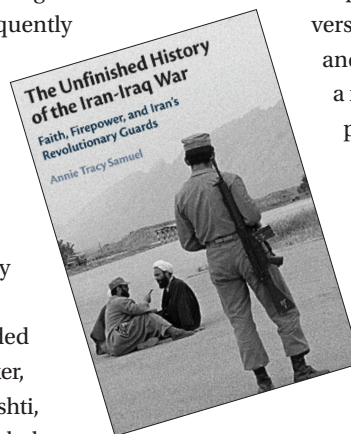
The assembly, firmly guided by its powerful deputy speaker, Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, approved the measure overwhelmingly. Moghaddam-Maraghe'i went on to lead the so-called "Radical Movement" within the anti-theocratic Muslim People's Republic Party and to serve in the Islamic Republic's first parliament representing a district in Azerbaijan. His political career came to an end, however, when documents captured at the U.S. embassy revealed him to be a CIA asset with the code name of SD-Plod.

But, as Samuel observes, Moghaddam-Maraghe'i's words were prophetic, and the IRGC grew into the body that he had

foreseen in his argument—an entity with its own security service, contracting company, media outlets, university, and air force, army, and navy. The IRGC became a major force in Iranian politics, society, and economics. When it began operating in 1979, it was an arm of the "parallel state" that existed alongside (and eventually overpowered) the "official state" of ministers and governors called the Provisional Government of Iran.

Although the new forces did abuse their power, their presence also meant that Tehran and other Iranian cities remained mostly peaceful and orderly in the absence of a uniformed police force, which had melted away in the revolutionary chaos. As a result, in 1979, Tehran saw nothing of the anarchy and looting that characterized Baghdad in 2003 after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Taking a page from other militaries, the IRGC has undertaken to document



The Guards' mission to memorialize themselves may be useful as a work of history—but futile in a larger sense.

the history of its role in Iran's eight-year "sacred defense," the 1980-1988 war with Iraq. Its multivolume *The War Chronology*, which is thorough and careful, reveals (or claims in hindsight) planning and forethought in the guards' action. Samuel shows how the IRGC's history makes clear that it was far from the Western stereotype of a band of rag-tag crusaders' hangers-on left to be slaughtered by the enemy while the real fighters looked on.

With *The War Chronology* as a primary source, her studies find that, after the Iranians' successful offensive in the spring of 1982 had expelled Iraqi forces from Iranian soil, Khomeini himself was inclined to accept a cease-fire that would have restored the status quo ante. According to the Guards' own account (and contrary to other histories), IRGC commander Mohsen Reza'i convinced a reluctant Khomeini to continue the war on the basis that a cease-fire would leave Iran vulnerable to subsequent attacks. The decision to continue that way had disastrous consequences for Iran.

What are we to make of this effort to create a thorough historical record? The IRGC veterans can be proud of their role in defending Iran against a better-equipped invader, who had struck at a country weakened by international isolation and months of revolutionary turmoil. Now that these veterans are aging—and knowing much of Iran's young population has no memory of the war—they are working to preserve the record of their accomplishments. Younger Iranians, however, have more immediate concerns.

The Guards' mission to memorialize themselves may be useful as a work of history—but futile in a larger sense. Reading Samuel's excellent account, I was struck by similarities to what we saw in Algeria in the mid-1980s, just before the end of single-party (FLN) rule that had gone on since independence in 1962. It was clear then that most Algerians—with no memory of the bloody events of the 1950s and 1960s—felt little connection to their elders' independence struggle against France.

For most Iranians today, a history of the IRGC's heroism does not ease their economic situation or make their government any less odious. Nor does it lessen pressure to conform to the ossified social views of aging theocrats whose only response to questions and protest is more repression. Like Algeria, the events carefully chronicled may have been heroic; but today most people have other and more immediate concerns. For them *Illa tunc. Haec nunc.* (That was then. This is now.) ■

*John Limbert is a retired U.S. Foreign Service officer, novelist, and academic. He was among the last American diplomats to serve in Iran and spent 14 months as a prisoner of those occupying the U.S. embassy from 1979 to 1981. He has written widely on Iranian subjects, including *Negotiating with Iran: Wrestling the Ghosts of History* (2009) and the historical/espionage novel (co-written with Marc Grossman), *Believers: Love and Death in Tehran* (2020).*

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Get That Man a Chair

BY MICHAEL VARGA

In 1995 at the G-7 Summit in Halifax (Canada), Secretary of State Warren Christopher was meeting with the Japanese finance minister. Somehow the official notetaker did not show up, and I, lingering at the site as the control officer for U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, got pulled into the meeting to take notes.

When I entered, the two delegations were already seated. I saw no vacant chairs, so I crouched down in a corner and opened my notebook. Secretary Christopher started to welcome the Japanese delegation, then stopped mid-sentence, and said in a loud voice, “Get that man a chair!”

After the meeting ended, the two delegations marched off to their limousines, and I stood on the curb. I was unsure about my next step. I was serving as the economic officer at U.S. Consulate General Toronto and had been sent on temporary duty to help the team at the summit. I knew I had to write up the meeting immediately and send a cable back to Washington, but the how and where of that was not obvious. Then, a window rolled down and Secretary Christopher said to me, “Michael, get in the car.”

I wrote up the report and felt like I was at a high point in my Foreign Service career. Earlier in the month, a short story I’d written had won first prize in a competition sponsored by *The Toronto Star*.



After a stint in the 1970s in the Peace Corps in Chad, Michael Varga became a Foreign Service officer, serving in Dubai, Damascus, Casablanca, and Toronto. He served as the desk officer for Lebanon and was a Pearson Fellow at the World Trade Center in Miami. He is a playwright, actor, and writer of fiction whose columns have appeared in many newspapers and journals. To read more of his work, visit www.michaelvarga.com.



Michael Varga (far right) escorts the Lebanese delegation into the State Department for peace talks with Israel, 1992.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL VARGA

On June 4, Canadians woke up to my face on the front page of the newspaper. It was a heady time. But I also knew that things were likely to take a turn very soon.



I had tested HIV-positive in the 1980s, and my doctors had already warned me that my life expectancy at that point was a mere 18 months. There was no effective treatment for AIDS or HIV. It was a grim time, and I had no reason to think

I would be any different than the hordes of patients who had already succumbed, who were deprived of a normal life span and the opportunity to grow old.

I had applied for a disability retirement but knew it was going to take months for the State Department to approve it. When the approval came through, I moved to Cape May, New Jersey, to write my Peace Corps novel. I knew I had a limited window to get the novel written before I became too gravely ill to care about it.



Then the miraculous happened. New drugs became available. Suddenly I could imagine living beyond 1997. Maybe even make it to 2000. Ah, to dream of a few more years.

I looked into returning to the Foreign Service, although I suspected the State Department would balk. Diplomats must be available worldwide, and with my compromised immune system and the substandard health care in many nations, the bureaucracy was not likely to want to post me overseas.

When it became obvious that there were too many bureaucratic hurdles to overcome, I knew my Foreign Service chapter was over.



One morning in 2020, a Florida resident, I woke up and could not swallow. A biopsy confirmed that I had stage 3 cancer of the tongue and lymph nodes. I endured a brutal surgery that removed more than half of my tongue along with 31 lymph nodes. Nerves from my arm were sewn together to reconstruct a new tongue. COVID-19 restrictions barred visitors from the hospital.

Subsequently, I underwent 33 targeted radiation treatments, which left me with impaired speech and sense of taste, burning sores in my mouth, and the inability to swallow any food that required chewing.

It was a hard time, and I begged my friends to visit. Not so much as a death-watch but for support. I needed help getting nutrition into the feeding tube. My weight had gone from a plump 204 pounds to a skeletal 135.



What my friends did next still astonishes me. They organized a schedule of caregiving that included people I love from almost every chapter of my life—high school, college, the Peace Corps, graduate school at Notre Dame, and the Foreign Service.

Many of them didn't know each other, but that didn't stop them from creating

I never expected to still be around to appreciate nature in 2024.

a text group that could plan a blanketing schedule. One friend even built a device so nutrition could be more easily delivered to my feeding tube. These friends are the reason I made it through radiation and am recovering.

The hardest part now may be my relationship to nutrition. Eating is such a big part of our culture. Not being able to swallow food or taste anything is a major drawback.

To keep socially involved, I signed up with a nonprofit agency to teach an Eng-

Despite the challenges, I feel blessed just to wake up and walk around my neighborhood, to marvel at a family of brown ducks traversing my street or the noisy, green parrots squawking above me in the trees. A butterfly floats among the pink impatiens on my patio. Yes, I'm on a hard road. But I never expected to still be around to appreciate nature in 2024.

There's no telling how or when my story will end. AIDS could have killed me but hasn't so far—although, since the radiation treatments decimated my



Michael Varga (left) attends an end of Dubai tour send-off with Consul General David Litt, 1987.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL VARGA

lish conversation class for refugees over Zoom. Most of my students are women from Syria and Afghanistan. Many are nursing newborns and do not turn on their cameras, which makes understanding their speech a challenge. My speech is slow and slurred, a lingering effect of the reconstruction of my tongue.



T-cells, I am technically an AIDS patient once more. Cancer, too, may kill me yet. It's an open question.

But when I'm feeling low, I close my eyes and see that FSO Michael crouching in the corner of the conference room in Halifax, and I hear Secretary Christopher's voice again, "Get that man a chair." I ease back and know that I can doze in peace. ■

LOCAL LENS



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A bird of prey soars above dense rows of colorful buildings in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. This view is from Swayambhunath Temple, also known as the “Monkey Temple” because of the troops of animals that have inhabited it for generations. Set atop a hill west of Kathmandu city (see inset), the ancient complex is an important religious site for Buddhists and Hindus alike. ■

Andrea Nagy joined the Foreign Service in 2016 and has completed tours in Chengdu, Brasilia, and Erbil. She is a management-coned FSO currently serving as a consular officer in Istanbul. She took this photo in April 2017 with her Nikon D5200.

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