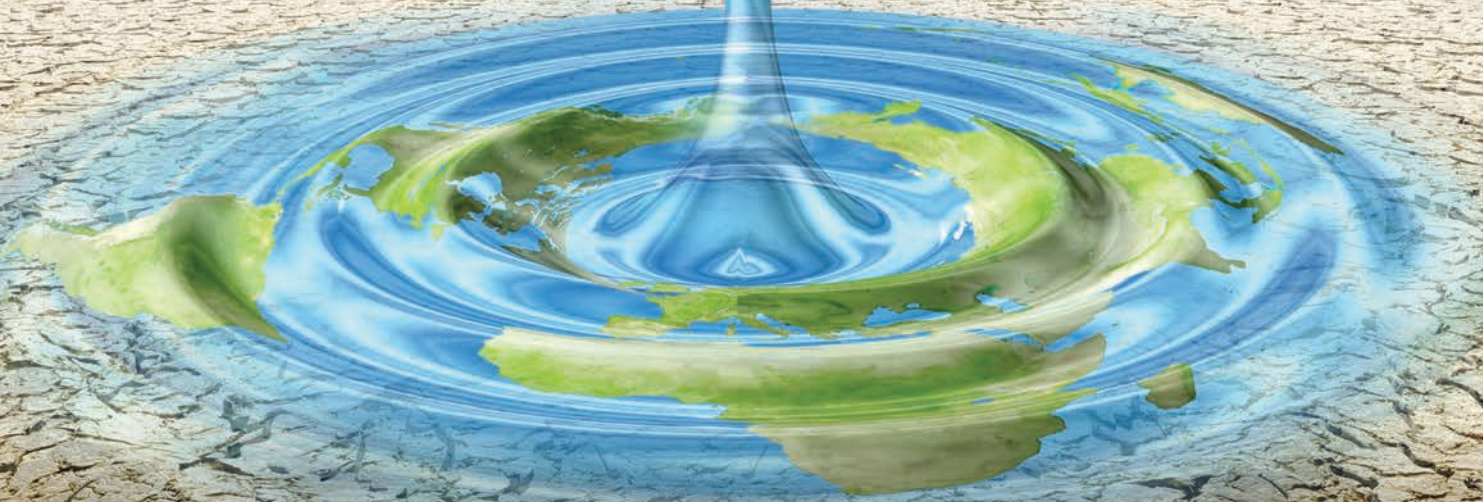


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PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION

SEPTEMBER 2024

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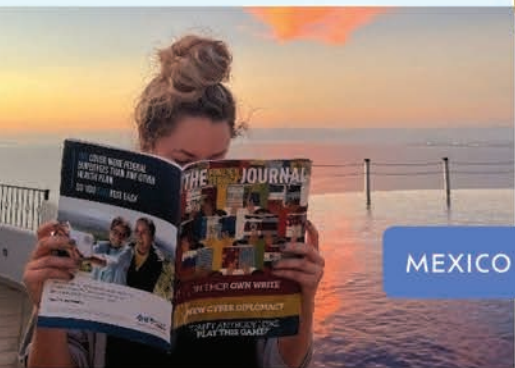
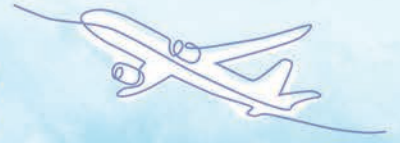
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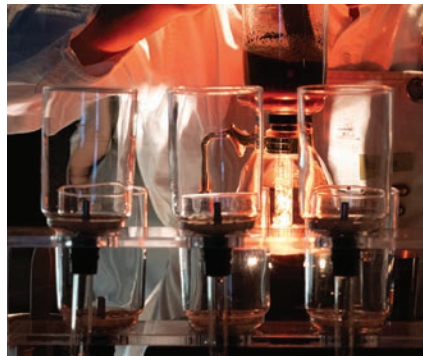
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# Staying True to Ourselves

BY TOM YAZDGERDI

**A**s I write this column in late July, we are entering the latter stage of the 2024 presidential elections. There is much uncertainty and, to be frank, uneasiness about what the future holds for the U.S. Foreign Service. Whichever party wins, we may see another divided Congress that could continue to hamper the ability to compromise and pass legislation.

For Fiscal Year 2025, and perhaps beyond, we can expect flat or declining international affairs budgets that, at best, do not keep pace with inflation, risking the continued robust hiring that is so desperately needed to keep our missions abroad fully staffed and engaged.

There may also be attempts to put in place policies that significantly weaken the Foreign Service and AFSA—based on assumptions that these are partisan organizations working against the intent of the administration.

We all know that such assumptions are false. Throughout its storied history, the Foreign Service has faithfully carried out the foreign policy initiatives of every U.S. president, regardless of party, in some of the most difficult and dangerous places on earth. That will not change, nor should it ever.

It is this nonpartisan and professional orientation that is our greatest strength. It allows us to provide continuity

between administrations and to give presidents and their national security teams our best advice.

We may offer alternatives to current policy, internally and including use of the Dissent Channel that AFSA helped institutionalize in the 1970s. But once we offer this advice, and whether or not it is taken, we implement the administration's policy. If we cannot do that, then the next step is resignation.

Throughout this centennial year of the modern Foreign Service, AFSA has emphasized not only the duty and sacrifice of our members, but the true nature of our Service, which is dedicated to protecting our citizens and U.S. interests and promoting American values overseas.

AFSA is scrupulous about not taking sides in presidential elections, favors neither party, does not engage in foreign policy debates, and issues no political statements. In that sense, we are akin to members of the military.

All this is not to say that AFSA will remain silent if we see policies that threaten the existence of the Foreign Service and the well-being of our members. We have and will continue to stand up for the Foreign Service. AFSA is proud of the legal and moral support, for example, that we provided to FS members who were subpoenaed to testify before Congress during the previous administration.

We have developed our relationships on Capitol Hill to the extent that AFSA is a respected voice on both sides of the aisle.

This has resulted in policy wins that make our Service stronger and more resilient.

AFSA recently supported bipartisan legislation (HR 1002) that would oppose the creation of Schedule F. Introduced by the previous administration, the Schedule F initiative would create a new category of government employees in policymaking positions who would not be provided the same labor rights and protections as those in competitive, merit-based positions.

In doing so, Schedule F would essentially politicize key government positions and would have a corrosive effect on merit-based government service.

HR 1002 would prevent any position in the federal competitive service from being reclassified outside merit system principles unless such positions are placed in the excepted service as in effect on Sept. 30, 2020. There have been several attempts to consider the bill as an amendment to the annual National Defense Authorization Act, but none have been successful so far.

In the hue and cry of a divided America, and in a presidential election year and beyond, we must stay true to ourselves. That means implementing the foreign policy of any incoming administration but also ensuring that we have the space to offer our best, objective advice and that our Foreign Service has the respect and support of the new president and their foreign policy team.

Please let me know your thoughts by writing [yazdgerdi@afsa.org](mailto:yazdgerdi@afsa.org) or [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org). ■



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

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### Lost the Proofs?

It was with great incredulity that I failed to find any “Letters to the Editor” in the July-August 2024 *Journal*. It seems most unlikely to me that you received *no* letters from your readers, active and retired, in the past month or so.

What’s the explanation? Ran out of space? Lost the galley proofs? A decision to eliminate this time-tested feature?

I cannot speak for others, but as a retiree, I find Letters consistently among the most stimulating parts of the magazine, providing readers with interesting and provocative observations, current and historical, from our fellow members.

Please do not let it die.

*Jack R. Binns*  
Ambassador, retired  
Tucson, Arizona

*Editor’s Note: We did not, in fact, have any new letters in time for the July-August edition. Happily, after a brief lull, we are now back to an overflowing inbox.*

### Resigning in Protest

As a retired Senior FSO, I wanted to comment briefly on the remarkable contribution that Stacy Gilbert has rendered to the Foreign Service (see “Gaza Update” in Talking Points, July-August 2024 *FSJ*).

Gilbert recently resigned from the State Department in protest over the failure of the department and the U.S. government to report accurately and honestly to the U.S. Congress on the failure of the government of Israel to meet its basic humanitarian responsibilities to the people of Gaza, in the context of Israel’s military operations there.

She acted in the finest traditions of the Foreign Service in protesting errant U.S. policy, where concerns over human rights and humanitarian needs are subordinated



*Edmund McWilliams*  
FSO, retired  
White Oaks, New Mexico

to so-called national security priorities.

Such errant policy was also evident—and protested—during the Vietnam War and subsequent U.S. policy in Afghanistan.

### “Henry of the Tower” and the Slave Trade

I recently read Ambassador Thomas Hull’s article, “Henry of the Tower Revisited” (June 2024 *FSJ*). I found the article quite helpful for my research: a biography of Henry Laurens.

Amb. Hull’s article highlighted a component I had not yet considered—the pervasive nature of slavery in Laurens’ life. “Henry of the Tower” was one of the wealthiest American colonists of the 18th century. Much of that wealth was derived from his slaving enterprise and numerous Lowcountry plantations. These unsavory aspects of Laurens’ life will certainly feature in my work.

Hull emphasized the connection between these facets of Laurens’ life and his experience in the Tower. Laurens’ longtime friend and business partner in the enslaving business negotiated his release, thus tightly connecting one of the United States’ first ambassador’s freedom to his revolting participation in the commodification of human beings.

Of course, Hull’s point was to counter a 1969 article by Ralph Hilton, written in this journal. Hilton article praised Laurens’ character and ambassadorial role, declaring his values to be the “cornerstone” of the Foreign Service.

Hull not only effectively debunked Hilton but also provided this historian with an important reminder.

*Greg Brooking, PhD*  
Atlanta, Georgia

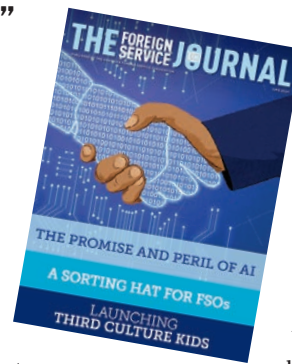
### Revisiting Henry of the Tower

Regarding Tom Hull’s article on Henry Laurens, thanks for this correction to the historical record. Strange, how blind we have been until recently to the slave

owners in our history and the effect of their greed and inhumanity on the rest of us, whether Black or other.

Between outright ownership and the shipping trade, anyone of great wealth in the U.S. prior to the early 1800s was somehow benefiting off the slave trade and slave labor. How did we ignore that for so long?

Thanks for writing this piece.  
*Liz Barnett*  
FSO, retired  
Boston, Massachusetts



### Why Project 2025 Matters

One of the most prominent players in the game of Washington politics is the Heritage Foundation. It is currently engaged in Project 2025, which is designed to profoundly reshape the federal government if a conservative president takes office in January.

Project 2025, which is supported by dozens of other conservative organizations, is Heritage’s game plan for a new Republican administration. In its 900 pages, the playbook for a conservative takeover of government and an agenda to be implemented in the first 180 days is laid out.

Those who wish to become government officials in such an administration have to answer a Heritage questionnaire about their views on fetal rights, union membership, selecting immigrants by country of origin, and racism. While a person can also upload a résumé, there are no questions about education or experience. It is, in essence, a loyalty test to conservatism as Heritage defines it.

There is a chapter on each cabinet agency, and the one on the State Department lays out a vision of how to remake State into a “lean and functional diplomatic machine.” Written by Kiron Skinner, who briefly served as head of the Policy Planning Office during Mike Pompeo’s time as Secretary, it calls for the immediate replacement of all the incumbents in jobs down to deputy assistant secretary level and any other “leadership” positions the moment the new president is sworn in on Jan. 20.

Anyone slated for a position requiring Senate confirmation would be put in place in an acting capacity on that day without waiting for congressional action or, presumably, a security clearance. The chapter mentions a desire to “maximize the value of career officials” but makes clear none of them will be allowed to fill a position above the level of office director.

The chapter also points out that there are no predetermined percentages for the number of ambassadors who are political appointees, Foreign Service officers, and civil servants. Indeed, the Constitution does not specify any percentages, which is why under Trump, the percentage of non-career ambassadors reached 46 percent—the highest percentage since at least the Truman administration.

The percentage could certainly be higher if the next president chooses to ignore qualifications, norms, and the

Foreign Service Act of 1980, and if the Senate consents to that.

Further, the State chapter asserts that the president should be able to withhold foreign aid and suspend visas for all citizens of any country for any reason. And it argues that the U.S. should never act in accordance with any treaty the U.S. Senate has not ratified.

Since the Law of the Sea Treaty is one of those unratified treaties that is nonetheless used as a guide, how territorial disputes in, say, the South China Sea will be settled is left unclear.

This seems to me to be a recipe for groupthink and a return to the 19th-century spoils system. And it will be easy for the next conservative president to put in place, thanks to Heritage.

*Dennis Jett  
Ambassador, retired  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

## **FSI’s People Principles**

At the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), we value *The Foreign Service Journal’s* coverage of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) and recognize the significance of these principles for the Foreign Service in this era of rapid change. Fostering a culture centered on DEIA is more crucial than ever to our mission and workplace. At FSI, we have taken an innovative approach to codifying and embodying DEIA in our classrooms and in our offices.

Over the last two years, FSI conducted several comprehensive studies and enterprise-level assessments of our work environment and training programs. The studies identified strengths in our current DEIA practices while pinpointing areas for improvement. One significant finding indicated that while employees understood DEIA concepts,

they faced challenges in applying them practically in their daily roles.

This prompted the FSI senior leadership team to look at how we could integrate DEIA principles into day-to-day work activities to make them relevant and actionable. We developed a set of guiding principles that form the foundation for how FSI will continue to grow as a community of inclusion and belonging—FSI’s People Principles.

The seven People Principles aim to enhance alignment between training content and organizational DEIA goals, increase employee understanding and application of DEIA principles in daily work, and ultimately contribute to creating a more inclusive and accessible workplace environment.

These principles reflect our collective commitment to action. By (1) respecting all, (2) recognizing and acknowledging who is in the room, (3) establishing the foundations for psychological safety, (4) guaranteeing accessible learning environments, (5) facilitating learning using adult and experiential learning theories, (6) recognizing bias, and (7) responding to harmful conduct, we are taking proactive steps to hold ourselves accountable while creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all employees.

The People Principles recognize that FSI’s DEIA vision requires more than just rhetoric; it demands tangible efforts to embed equity, inclusion, and accessibility into the DNA of our daily operations.

As we navigate the complexities of today’s intercultural work environment at FSI, with our workforce drawn from a wide variety of countries and cultures, the People Principles stand as guideposts, shaping positive behavior and interactions within our organization.

These principles apply to all FSI personnel and students regardless of

employment status and will be posted across the FSI campus as a reference point for the standard of behavior to which we will hold ourselves, our students, and our guest speakers accountable.

Moreover, FSI plans to use the People Principles as the foundation for developing future inclusive leadership curriculum, processes, and policy.

By upholding FSI's People Principles and actively engaging in DEIA initiatives, employees are contributing to a more positive work environment where diversity is respected, inclusion is promoted, and individuals can thrive professionally and personally.

Together, FSI is poised to stand as a champion of diversity and inclusion serving the State Department's entire global workforce.

*Frederick C. Jefferson III*  
Senior Adviser for Inclusive Leadership  
Foreign Service Institute  
Arlington, Virginia

## Wary or Weary?

I welcome Emmalee Gruesen's recognition of the overwhelming similarity in the challenges faced by military and Foreign Service families ("DETO Developments: A Glass Half Empty?" in Letters, January-February 2024 *FSJ*).

Raised a military "brat" and married to a career Army officer, I am personally familiar with and deeply appreciative of the sacrifices of America's military families. I was surprised, though, by Gruesen's perception of Adam Pearlman's observations and concerns (articulated in his letter, "The DETO Landscape: An Optimistic Caution," in the October 2023 *FSJ*) as reflecting a "general wariness of military spouses."



Pearlman's letter and his subsequent Speaking Out piece (November 2023 *FSJ*), "The Quest for Reasonable Civ-Mil Parity," point out that both EO 14100 and the Joining Forces initiative are exclusively focused on military family members, including provisions for preferential consideration of military spouses for federal employment, and directing prioritization of military spouses (exclusively) for federal DETO (telework overseas) agreements.

Pearlman's observation strikes me not as a "wariness" of our sisters and brothers in uniform and their spouses, but rather a "weariness" that—though reassuringly recognized by Ms. Gruesen—the challenges facing Foreign Service spouses are overlooked in such significant initiatives affecting federal employment policy.

*R. Carl Paschall*  
Senior FSO  
Washington, D.C.

## A Terrible Gesture

Throughout the first two years of the Second Gulf War (2003-2005), I was the U.S. consul for labor and economic affairs in Casablanca, the commercial capital of the first country to recognize the United States of America.

Virtually all my Moroccan contacts from labor unions, business associations, academia, and civil society first supported our invasion of Iraq. They well understood that Saddam Hussein and his military regime were a menace to the region and had a stranglehold on the Iraqi people. They only hoped that there would be minimal civilian casualties.

Their attitude changed drastically after confirmed reports about U.S. military personnel abusing and torturing Iraqi

detainees at Abu Ghraib prison. They deeply bemoaned what happened, saying it sullied America's reputation as the world's human rights standard-bearer. They stressed that the U.S. must remain true to its values if it hoped to win hearts and minds in the Middle East and North Africa.

Now, more than 20 years later, over Memorial Day weekend, prominent politician and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, in a brazen and callous publicity stunt, displayed her long-standing anti-Arab animosities by signing an Israeli artillery shell with the words "Finish Them!" in all caps.

She should have known better. The photo op, now widely disseminated, can and will surely add to the number of anti-American jihadists eager for revenge and worsen Israel's isolation and pariah status among its critics.

It won't increase Israel's security by one iota but promises to further endanger our troops, diplomatic personnel, journalists, business representatives, educators, missionaries, NGO workers, and travelers throughout the region.

Words matter—especially coming from a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

*George W. Aldridge*  
FSO, retired  
San Marcos, Texas ■

### Corrections

In the May 2024 USAID VP column, Garnett A. Zimmerly's name was incorrectly spelled. In the July-August 2024 In Memory section, the year of Mr. Christopher Wittman's posting to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations should have read 2001, not 2021 as printed.

We regret the errors.

## Spotlight on Climate Curriculum

The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has significantly expanded its climate and sustainability curriculum since 2021, when President Biden signed Executive Orders 14008 and 14057 requiring climate literacy for all federal employees.

Deepening knowledge of the effects of climate change on the department’s mission and honing the skills needed to advance climate action are critical. To that end, FSI now presents a range of dynamic, interrelated, and expanding courses.

Now available to foreign affairs professionals at FSI are two new five-day climate courses on diplomatic issues and tradecraft, and six advanced two-day workshops covering climate finance, security, resilience, communications, technology, and ambition.

These classes have reached more than 350 students, including all the State Department climate officers. Beyond the classroom, the Office of Management Strategy and Solutions (M/SS), Greening Diplomacy Initiative (GDI), and FSI co-chair a climate literacy and workforce working group to drive progress and maintain an online resource hub of infor-

mation for management professionals on sustainable operations.

FSI, GDI, and the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) aim to continue to equip foreign affairs professionals with the strategic context, science, technology, and management tenets necessary to reduce the environmental footprint of U.S. diplomacy.

FSI’s climate courses aim to better equip the workforce with the knowledge and tools to identify the intersection between job responsibilities, the climate crisis, and the actions everyone can take to make a difference.

## Greening Diplomacy Awards

For more than a decade, the Greening Diplomacy Initiative (GDI) has catalyzed climate and sustainability solutions in State Department operations to conserve natural and financial resources, cut emissions, build climate resilience, and showcase U.S. innovation. Every year, GDI honors teams and initiatives that advance sustainability principles at U.S. missions worldwide.

On April 22, during the State Department’s Earth Day celebration, Embassy Islamabad, Embassy Bogotá, and Embassy New Delhi received the 2024 Greening Diplomacy Initiative awards.

Embassy Islamabad received the Award for Excellence in Team Sustainability Performance for a comprehensive

range of activities including reducing gas consumption, increasing HVAC efficiency, planting a citrus grove to act as a carbon sink, reducing fertilizer usage, and replacing plastic containers in the cafeteria with recyclable aluminum.

Runner-up U.S. Embassy Bogotá sponsored the Carrera Verde de Bogotá (Bogotá’s Green Race), which saw more than 6,500 participants fund the planting of 20,000 trees, and expanded the embassy’s electric vehicle fleet.

The People’s Choice Award winner, U.S. Embassy New Delhi, was recognized for its revenue-generating waste management program that funds other sustainability projects, such as electric motor bikes and solar-powered charging stations for the facilities team.



## Diplomatic Landmark Declared Endangered

To kick off Preservation Month on May 1, as it has done since 1987, the National Trust for Historic Preservation released its annual listing of “America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.”

This year, for the first time, the list includes an overseas property belonging to the American people, the storied Tangier American Legation.



U.S. Embassy Islamabad's Citrus Grove Team in front of the grove on the embassy compound. From left: Muhammad Sohail, Danish Maqsood, Asim Mehmood, Muhammad Irfan Munir, Ali Khan, Zafar Mehmood, and Atta Ullah.

A gift from Morocco's sultan in 1821, it was our nation's first foreign property and served as a U.S. diplomatic mission longer than any other—140 years.

Hours after the announcement, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Richard Verma, joined by National Trust for Historic Preservation President and CEO Carol Quillen, Kingdom of Morocco Ambassador to the United States Youssef Amrani, and Fund to Conserve U.S. Diplomatic Treasures Abroad Director Andrea Cochrane Tracey, came together at the National Museum of American Diplomacy in Washington, D.C., to welcome the legation's inclusion.

Ambassador Verma described the Tangier Legation as a “powerful symbol of American diplomacy and of our nation's longstanding ties with the Islamic world.”

“But,” he continued, “the legation needs help, and this listing will bring needed attention and resources, ensuring it continues to thrive as an active center celebrating the friendship between our countries.”

Director of Overseas Buildings Operations Will Moser, joined by U.S. Ambassador to Morocco Puneet Talwar, sent a recorded greeting to the gathering from Tangier, where they were visiting the legation.

They saw firsthand the structural and systems challenges facing the sprawling, Moorish-style structure, which recently suffered damage when an adjacent building collapsed.

The legation no longer hosts U.S. personnel and has been leased since 1976 to the private, nonprofit Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies (TALIM), which was established in 1976 by former U.S. diplomats. The site is home to a museum, library, and regional



Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Administration Alaina Teplitz accepts the Presidential Federal Sustainability Award on behalf of the State Department from White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory.



State Department recipients of the Presidential Federal Sustainability Award for Advancing Carbon-Free Electricity with Federal Chief Sustainability Officer Andrew Mayock. From left: Andrew Mayock, State Acting Chief Sustainability Officer Caroline D'Angelo, Keith Heffern, Jacob Rocca, Mark Pituch, and Toshiya Ikeda.

PHOTOS: WHITE HOUSE

## GDI-OBO Resilience Innovation Fund Awards

**N**ow in its sixth year, the Resilience Innovation Fund, sponsored by the Greening Diplomacy Initiative (GDI), and funded and managed by the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO), provides up to \$1 million in technical support each year for innovative projects that advance the resilience and sustainability of State Department operations and facilities.

This year, 16 posts received funding for a wide array of projects, including the installation of insulation, electric vehicle charging station infrastructure, irrigation systems, rainwater harvesting systems,

low power consumption light upgrades, bicycle storage, and flood fortifications.

The 2024 recipients are: Embassies Astana, Beijing, Bern, Bridgetown, Budapest, Dar es Salaam, Islamabad, Kigali, La Paz, Lilongwe, Rome, Santo Domingo, Sofia, and Windhoek; Consulate General Monterrey; and the American Institute of Taiwan.

This year's winners showcased innovative initiatives in support of White House, congressional, and State Department mandates, including Executive Orders 14008 and 14057 and the Federal Sustainability Plan.

studies center, but lacks an adequate maintenance budget.

To handle the legation's mounting needs, the nonprofit Fund to Conserve U.S. Diplomatic Treasures Abroad is seeking to establish a \$10 million endowment.

The fund announced an initial \$250,000 gift but stresses the importance of broad participation in the campaign from all who understand the importance of preserving our nation's diplomatic heritage. (For more on protecting America's diplomatic treasures, see the Speaking Out by Glyn Davies in the March 2024 *FSJ*.)

## NATO at 75

**I**n July, leaders from Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and the countries of the European Union met in Washington, D.C., the birthplace of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to commemorate NATO's 75th anniversary.

During a three-day summit, they discussed common security challenges and areas of cooperation, focusing on three main topics: strengthening NATO's deterrence and defense, bolstering long-term support for Ukraine, and deepening NATO partnerships.

## Podcast of the Month: *Babel* (<https://www.csis.org/podcasts/babel-translating-middle-east>)

Join Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, as he hosts *Babel*, a CSIS podcast that goes “beyond the headlines” to reveal what’s really happening in the Middle East and North Africa.



With the support of regional experts, *Babel* provides context, features pivotal developments, and uncovers trends you might have missed.

Particularly noteworthy is the “Climate Diplomacy in the Middle East,” episode, for which Alterman explores the geopolitics of climate change, challenges to climate diplomacy, and the drivers of energy production in the Middle East and North Africa with Karim Elgendy, associate director at Buro Happold, associate fellow at Chatham House, and senior nonresident scholar at the Middle East Institute.

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*The appearance of a particular site or podcast is for information only and does not constitute an endorsement.*

Sweden participated in its first summit as a NATO ally, marking a significant expansion of the alliance. Finland joined in 2023.

Allies reaffirmed their commitment to investing 2 percent of their GDP in defense—two-thirds of the countries already meet this target—and pledged to expand defense industrial capacity.

Among initiatives discussed were enhancing NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defence with new ballistic missile defense assets and boosting cyber defense through a new NATO Integrated Cyber Defence Centre.

Summit participants also agreed to establish NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) and confirmed creation of the NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training, and Education Centre (JATEC).

Additionally, a pledge of long-term security assistance for Ukraine was announced, promising minimum baseline funding of 40 billion euros within the next year and sustainable levels of security assistance in the future.

## AI at State

During a June 28 event on AI and diplomacy, Chief Data and AI Officer Matthew Graviss spoke with Secretary Antony Blinken about current initiatives to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into the work of the State Department.

In his opening remarks, Graviss emphasized AI’s transformative potential to analyze vast amounts of data, identify trends, and provide insights that empower diplomats to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes.

He reiterated the State Department’s commitment to harnessing AI responsibly and ethically, aligning with values of transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights.

Secretary Blinken elaborated on the department’s modernization agenda, which includes the Enterprise AI Strategy released last fall. He highlighted AI’s role in freeing up diplomats’ time by automating routine tasks and improving analysis to unearth new insights.

A focus of Blinken’s address was the challenge of doing “more with less,”

especially in the wake of recent budget cuts.

Blinken noted that AI can summarize and translate research, combat disinformation, and support negotiations in multilateral organizations.

The Secretary acknowledged the challenges and risks associated with AI, including cybersecurity concerns and the potential for bias. “We know that for the most part—and we’ll see AI may be different—technology is amoral, not immoral. It depends on how you use it,” he stated.

He also announced the launch of AI.State, a central hub for all AI-related resources within the department that offers training, tools, and libraries of prompts and use cases, encouraging employees to experiment with AI and share their experiences.

“This technology is not a substitute for us. It’s a complement to our work. It’s an ability to make us more effective,” Secretary Blinken said.

For more information and access to AI resources, visit AI.State on the State Department’s internal network.

## International Religious Freedom Report

The State Department released the 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom on June 26. The report is submitted to Congress annually, as mandated by section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (PL 105-292), to detail instances of religiously motivated abuses, harassment, and discrimination in almost 200 countries.

In his remarks at a press conference announcing the release, Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted that the U.S. has spent more than \$100 million since 2021 to advance religious freedom across the globe.

He lauded the department's work to provide legal assistance to those who are persecuted, to train human rights defenders, and to secure the release of people in prison for exercising their rights to religious freedom, saying that over the last year, 47 such prisoners were freed.

The report is produced by the Office of International Religious Freedom, whose mission is to promote universal respect for freedom of religion or belief as a core objective of U.S. foreign policy. The office monitors global religious freedom, developing and implementing policies and programs to address related concerns.

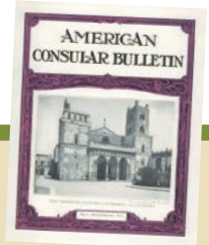
The 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom can be accessed on the Department of State's website.

## 100 Years Ago

### Secretary Grew's Address

However, in whatever degree that prejudice [between the consular and diplomatic services] existed, we now confidently look forward to seeing it completely demolished. We are all members of one big organization, serving the Government with one single intent, namely, to advance its interests in the highest possible degree. And whatever duties we are severally fulfilling, however diverse may be the functions of one office or officer from another, we must now establish and build up a single *esprit de corps* for our united service, which will yield in point of service pride and practical patriotism not only to no other service under the United States Government, but to no other service under the sun. Cooperation will yield its due practical results and through high service spirit we shall attain to high service efficiency. We have a great future before us and let us not forget that our organization must and will be not only cooperative and efficient, but democratic, representative, patriotic and, above all, wholly and essentially American.

—Joseph Clark Grew, U.S. Under Secretary of State, in the *American Consular Bulletin* (precursor to the FSJ), September 1924.



## Panda Diplomacy: Meet Bao Li and Qing Bao

The Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, D.C., has announced the exciting return of giant pandas to the capital. Two young giant pandas, Bao Li and Qing Bao, are set to arrive from China later this year.

Bao Li, a 2-year-old male, has a special connection to the zoo. He is the son of Bao Bao, who was born there in 2013. His grandparents, Mei Xiang and Tian Tian, were beloved residents of the zoo for more than two decades before their departure last year. Qing Bao, a 2-year-old female, will join Bao Li there.

The announcement was made by Chinese Ambassador Xie Feng: "For the well-being of both peoples, and the future of the world, China and the United States should choose to be partners, not rivals," he said.

The Smithsonian has had a long-standing tradition of panda diplomacy, a practice that began in 1972 when China gifted two pandas, Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing, to the U.S. as a gesture of goodwill following President Richard Nixon's visit to China.

Over the years, panda diplomacy has evolved, with pandas now being loaned to zoos worldwide as a part of a global conservation effort. These efforts have led to scientific advancements in panda breeding and habitat conservation.

The pandas are coming on a 10-year lease, with the zoo paying \$1 million annually to the China Wildlife and Conservation Association.

The zoo is currently renovating its panda habitat and plans to restart the

SMITHSONIAN'S NATIONAL ZOO AND CONSERVATION BIOLOGY INSTITUTE/ROSHAN PATEL



Female giant panda Qing Bao at Dujiangyan Panda Base in Sichuan, China.

"giant panda cam." A \$25 million fundraising drive has been launched to support these efforts and the overall panda program.

Read about one diplomat's experience serving in Chengdu—"the panda post"—in the March 2024 *FSJ*.

## A Pitch for Civil Service Reform

In response to potential plans to revive the “Schedule F” executive order, a group of nonpartisan experts and scholars convened a workshop at the National Academy of Public Administration to discuss “Protecting and Reforming the U.S. Civil Service.”

This workshop, spurred by the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025, calls for Civil Service reforms to ensure an effective and impartial federal workforce.

The proposed Schedule F would reclassify numerous federal positions, stripping them of long-standing protections and making them “at-will” positions. This shift could allow employees to be hired or fired based on political loyalty rather than competence or expertise, potentially undermining the quality and objectivity of U.S. government officials.

The working group’s aim was to offer a constructive alternative vision for a more effective federal workforce, structured by five principles: agility, accountability, collaboration, outcomes, and capacity.

The vision involves modernizing the outdated pay and classification system, investing in training and education for federal workers, and maintaining loyalty to the Constitution and the rule of law.

The group asserts that reviving Schedule F would not help an administration execute policies more effectively or achieve these forward-looking goals. Instead, it would undermine the federal workforce’s ability to innovate and take justified risks.

Moving forward, the group plans to further elaborate on how the federal government can evolve to meet 21st-century challenges and ensure a more agile, accountable, collaborative, outcome-driven, and capable civil service.

## Contemporary Quote

**ee** If you look at the history of the last 12 years, it’s a history of some huge conflicts like Ukraine, like Gaza, like Sudan, like Myanmar. And it’s a history of older conflicts not getting resolved. This is a world that has become unable to make peace. The systems put in place after World War II to make peace are so obsolete, so out of date, that frankly, it doesn’t work anymore. And that means that this accumulation of conflicts with all the refugees and displaced people that it carries with it is growing every year. ”

—Filippo Grandi, the high commissioner of the UN’s refugee agency, in an interview with Foreign Policy on June 14.

## State Department Integrity and Transparency Act

Senator Tim Kaine (D-Va.) has introduced the State Department Integrity and Transparency Act, which aims to professionalize the State Department workforce and ensure senior leaders are selected based on merit, not political connections.

Co-sponsored by Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), the bill was introduced in response to controversies surrounding political-appointee ambassadors who lack diplomatic experience.

It is intended to balance the traditional practice of rewarding political donors with ambassadorships and the need for qualified and effective diplomatic representatives.

The legislation mandates that at least 75 percent of assistant secretaries come from the Senior Foreign Service or Senior Executive Service, extends reporting requirements on the qualifications of nominees, and requires presidential certification that competence is the primary qualification for chiefs of mission. It also seeks to limit the assignment of unvetted political appointees to overseas posts.

The move has garnered support from

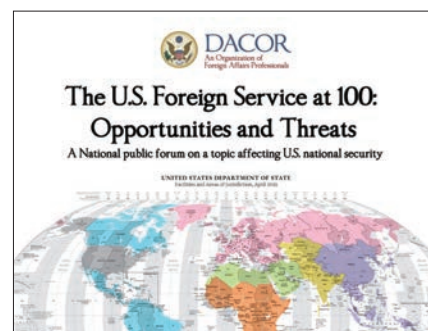
AFSA and the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, both of which emphasize the importance of maintaining a professional and capable diplomatic corps.

According to AFSA’s ambassador tracker, 62 percent of President Joe Biden’s ambassadors are career personnel. Under the previous administration, just 56.6 percent were career diplomats.

## FS at 100: Opportunities and Threats

On June 20, DACOR and George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs hosted the third in a series of roundtable talks on “The U.S. Foreign Service at 100.”

While intended to address broad threats to U.S. foreign policy, the discussion largely focused on Schedule F and its potential ramifications.







President Angela Dickey of DACOR and Dean Alyssa Ayres of the Elliott School of International Affairs opened the event, which was moderated by retired Foreign Service Officer Keith McCormick.

The first session, led by Dr. Joshua D. Botts from the State Department’s Office of the Historian, provided a historical overview of how the competitive Foreign Service system evolved.

During the second and third discussions, speakers included retired Ambassadors Marcie Ries, Ronald Neumann, Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, and Eric Rubin, who discussed opportunities for constructive reform and threats to effective U.S. foreign policy practice.

Valerie Smith Boyd from the Partnership for Public Service and Donald P. Moynihan of Georgetown University added useful perspectives from outside government.

They affirmed the importance of respecting the merit principles that underpin the Civil Service, arguing that policy development benefits from diverse perspectives.

The original Schedule F policy was never fully implemented, making it challenging to gauge its potential impact on the Foreign Service workforce. However, the discussion revealed concerns that Schedule F could have broader and more disruptive effects than anticipated, potentially conflicting with agency diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) programs.

A recording of the event is available at <https://bit.ly/DACOR-FS-100>.

## SIGAR Update: State Department Partner Vetting

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) released an audit report on



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## Heard on the Hill: Centennial Edition

### Getting Out From Behind the Wall

You've heard me say over and over again, we aren't going to out-compete China with our personnel sitting behind embassy walls. They need to get out. As part of this effort, I wrote and got enacted the Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act to help the department open new diplomatic spaces quicker and cheaper and to advance our diplomatic interest.



—Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho), during a May 16 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing “Modernization and Management: Building a Department to Address 21st Century Challenges.”

### A Rare Breed

So, you're a rare breed having served three times as ambassador. You've served at a very difficult time in the Foreign Service. A moment when American foreign policy changes very quickly from administration to administration. It is just an absolute marvel to me, the quality, and commitment of the people who work in our embassies, despite the fact that they may be running one mission before an election, and asked to do something fundamentally different thereafter.

—Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), addressing Ambassador Tracey Ann Jacobson, nominated to be U.S. ambassador to Iraq, during a June 13 Senate Foreign Relations Committee nominations hearing.

### Thank You for Your Service

I am such a big fan of our diplomatic corps, and these interagency teams that I encounter when I travel, and I just thank all of you again for your service, and your families as well. I know you make some sacrifices, and I appreciate it.

—Sen. Todd Young (R-Ind.), during a June 13 Senate Foreign Relations Committee nominations hearing.

### A Show of Appreciation

As governor, I had a chance to take a number of trade missions around the world, and meet with our embassies, and I just can't say enough about the Foreign Service people, who sacrifice time away from your friends and family here in the United States to represent our country overseas. I really appreciate the efforts that you all make to do that.

—Sen. Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.), during a June 13 Senate Foreign Relations Committee nominations hearing.

July 17 finding that two of five State Department bureaus did not properly vet partner organizations in Afghanistan.

SIGAR reviews evaluate the State Department's adherence to vetting policies for implementing partners in Afghanistan. The audits are intended to ensure that U.S. funds do not inadvertently benefit terrorist organizations.

The report found that three out of five State bureaus with active awards in Afghanistan from March 1, 2022, through Nov. 30, 2022, demonstrated compliance with the State's vetting requirements.

The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), and the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA/PPD) all provided sufficient documentation to show adherence to vetting policies.

However, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) lacked adequate documentation for many programs, failing to comply with federal document retention requirements.

In response to these findings, SIGAR has recommended that the Secretary of State take immediate action to ensure all bureaus comply with federal and Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) partner vetting and document retention requirements.

State officials acknowledged the compliance gaps and committed to ensuring all program offices adhere to the required standards.

The full report can be found at <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-24-31-AR.pdf>. ■

*This edition of Talking Points was compiled by Mark Parkhomenko.*

# Pre-Election Homework: Build Our Institution

BY JOHN FER

**W**e lionize bullies. Contrary to our stated policies, regulations, and op-eds in the *FSJ*, we put those who bully others on a pedestal. We leave them unchallenged. We wait them out.

The depth and persistence of the bully problem at State is a stark measure of the department's organizational weakness and the institutional weakness of the U.S. Foreign Service.

Like groups who have resigned themselves to being abused, we've created language that excuses the bully's behavior. We describe them as "tough." We cast them as those who know "when to break china." Or we make the Faustian bargain, conceding their foibles in exchange for their foreign policy "expertise."

You don't have to look far to prove my point. Enter the Harry S Truman building via 21st Street, and you pass by a display celebrating Richard Holbrooke's career as a diplomat. Through it, we tacitly condone his demeaning, philandering behavior in favor of celebrating his skills as a negotiator. He's not the only one.

Another officer, known as a "stapler thrower" (who once tossed one at a

**Strong organizations, those with an established culture of leadership, are not as susceptible to bullies.**

subordinate, also an A-100 classmate of mine), is still writing op-eds and influencing the dialogue. Other bullies had the gall to sign their goodbye letters, "Be kind," when in their career they were anything but, and will probably have a few rooms named for them.

It doesn't have to be this way. Bullies in top positions, after all, are not much different than the Biff Tannen-like characters we see in movies and television. In the context of Foreign Service officers (FSOs), our bullies are usually fakes. Take Holbrooke, for example, who grew up a neighbor of Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

We should never accept the illusion that he went through the same processes we did. He picked and chose the administrations he wanted to work for, hobnobbed with journalists instead of his fellow State colleagues, and existed as a soldier of fortune, somewhat endearingly nicknamed Bulldozer.

Bullies also surround themselves with serial staffers. I once asked a mentor how a certain high-ranking bully was able to be so successful, and they told me: "[X] is a risk taker who surrounds themselves with the risk averse."

Sure enough, you can see many of those risk-averse staffers now reaping the benefits of their fealty, having been given positions leading missions. And how many times have you heard deputy chiefs of mission described as "good shock absorbers," meaning those who can endure the abuse of chiefs of mission and shield subordinates from them?

At a recent roundtable for mid-level officers, when asked what the organization could do to combat toxic bosses, a senior department official acknowledged the problem and said: "Unfortunately, accountability has never been a hallmark of this department."

While honest and accurate, that's like me telling my spouse: "Fidelity has never been a hallmark of our marriage" and thinking that puts the onus on my spouse to adjust to that grim reality. Again, we create language that enables us to be bullied.



*John Fer is the deputy public affairs officer at U.S. Embassy Moscow. With the State Department since 2009, he has served in New Delhi, Managua, Moscow, Riga, Tbilisi, and Washington, D.C. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, he worked as a firefighter/EMT for Montgomery County, Maryland. He is an Air Force veteran and a returned Peace Corps volunteer (Nepal).*

*He and his wife, Victoria, have two sons.*

## Currently, most people see the decision to pursue long-term training as a courageous act of taking oneself “out of the game.”

When we do examine bullying, it tends to be as if it were a brief pest infestation, and one callout (e.g., an op-ed, cable, or acknowledgment by the Secretary) will rid us of “them.”

We do not acknowledge, however, that the reason bullies have been able to hold sway here for so long is that our institutional culture enables them.

Rooting them out requires a hard look at what we incentivize in our leadership structure and how opportunistic people take advantage of it.

We also neglect certain internal aspects of our organization that, if embraced, could help weed out (at best) or isolate (at worst) State’s bullies.

Simply put, strong organizations, those with an established culture of leadership, are not as susceptible to bullies. Nor are they as vulnerable to destabilization on account of the ebb and flow of political appointments and partisan administrations.

Here are three recommendations through which we can build a culture of leadership and strengthen our organization.

### 1. Stop Talking About Training and Mandate More

The State Department only mandates three one-week classes on leadership to the FS-1 level. You’d be hard-pressed to find a good organization of similar size and budget that has fewer mandatory trainings in this vital area.

To develop a culture of leadership,

we need more deliberate, mandatory forums in which we allow our current and future leaders to test and hone their skills, examine our organization, and weed out those who have gamed the system to promote themselves.

Hiring hundreds of new officers will not change the fact that we are not incentivized to seek professional development. Currently, most people see the decision to pursue long-term training as a courageous act of taking oneself “out of the game,” implying that long-term training won’t help toward promotion.

That line of thinking encapsulates why our organization, despite having some of the best people in government, is so bad at developing leaders.

At a December 2023 town hall on modernization, when asked the question, “Why aren’t there more mandatory leadership classes?,” senior leaders variously blamed the budget, said that Secretary Colin Powell “left gaps,” and encouraged us to not “discount on-the-job training [OJT].” (Note: By the very fact that we do not measure OJT in the field, we *are* discounting it.)

These responses all dodge the glaring need to deliberately bring our officers into a training regimen that helps build a better organization. Training should not be seen as “stepping out of the game.” We should make it mandatory, competitive, and deliberate.

Those who get the best training have better opportunities to distinguish

themselves. Senior leaders often pivot to praise the great work of FSI’s Leadership and Management School. They would do better to prove it by making more courses, including FSI’s new core curriculum, mandatory.

### 2. Take Commissioning Seriously

Senior leaders feel no great impetus to make change, because many have found their niche in appealing to the revolving door of political appointees and their staffers who occupy the highest reaches of our organization.

Political appointees are a reality in our branch of government, but we could distinguish ourselves by building a culture that *they* have to adapt to, not vice versa. Instead, we allow appointees to treat our culture as an Etch A Sketch—just shake it and start over.

The bipartisan disregard for career officers as ambassadors, and the preference for “special envoys” for pet projects, grabs headline-level attention. However, there is also a significant amount of disrespect in putting political staffers—many of whom have little more than graduate degrees and committee work experience—in charge of dozens (sometimes hundreds) of career State employees.

One of the ways to combat this is to institute an officer training program, one more robust than the current orientations we provide for Foreign and Civil Service officers.

Commissioned personnel in other branches of government know exactly what it means to have the responsibilities and privileges of officership. That cannot be said in the State Department.

By developing a long-term officer training program, for both Foreign and Civil Service, we would also cultivate an organization in which it is harder for

those conditioned to be “serial staffers” to thrive.

Staff work is essential, of course, and good staffers are necessary; but they should not occupy such a pervasive share of the senior ranks in an organization. Ask a serial staffer to define and model leadership, and you will detect a serial stammer. It’s not in their nature.

### 3. Value Locally Employed Staff

The hallmark of a weak body is its inability to protect its backbone. At State, locally employed (LE) staff make up 70 percent of our workforce: they are our “backbone,” and yet they are given a sliver of the attention, resources, and pathways for development they need.

We underscore our derision for them every time we ask officers during the bidding process, “How many *Americans* have you supervised?”—as if to suggest that FSOs are some rarefied species that requires an entirely different set of management skills that don’t apply to LE staff.

Every geographic bureau should create an office dedicated to LE staff issues. These offices should produce public reports and recommendations for the Secretary and Director General based on constant feedback from the field.

Even if these recommendations are not all implemented, we could at least say that the voices of our institutional knowledge, our LE staff, made it to the

seventh floor. Today the best we can do is offer the usual platitudes about how much we value LE staff, without putting up the requisite resources, time, and attention to prove it.



This article opened by exposing our vulnerability to bullies, one striking characteristic of organizational weakness. The bigger issue, however, is that we have the power to shape, strengthen, and defend our institution—and yet we relinquish it.

Put in place the recommendations above, and the bully problem will recede. And you’ll see us *all* succeed—no matter who is president. ■

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# From FS Kid to FS Champion in Congress

## A CONVERSATION WITH SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

*Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), an attorney and politician, has served as the junior U.S. senator from Maryland since 2017. Prior to that, he represented Maryland's 8th congressional district in the House from 2003 to 2017. He is a founding co-chair, with Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), of the Senate Foreign Service Caucus. The son of a career U.S. ambassador, he grew up in the Foreign Service. Editor in Chief Shawn Dorman spoke with him on June 3.*

**FSJ Editor Shawn Dorman:**

*I'd like to start by asking if you could say anything for our Foreign Service readers about what it meant growing up in the Foreign Service and how that has influenced your work and life.*

**Senator Chris Van Hollen:** Yes, I was very proud to grow up in a Foreign Service family. My father's family is from Baltimore originally, and then he went into the Navy and from there into the Foreign Service. My mother was the daughter of an English teacher, but she became a Russian language expert. She was very good at languages and actually worked at the forerunner of the CIA, the OSS. They met in Washington.

Back in those days, the Foreign Service was not nearly as friendly and



COURTESY OF CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

Senator Van Hollen with Pearson Fellow FSO Catherine Miller-Little.

accommodating of two-career spouses. And that's part of my motivation for the legislation that I've worked on, including the Foreign Service Families Act.

But it was a great experience growing up overseas, like I think it is for most Foreign Service families. We were proud to represent the United States and support the values and principles we stand for. I will say, if you're growing up in a Foreign

Service family, it causes you to hold up a mirror and ask yourself whether we are as good back home as we represent ourselves overseas. And so that has also led me to push for social change here in the United States.

Growing up overseas, as you know, means moving back and forth. I was born in Karachi. We then came back to the United States, then to Türkiye, then back

to the United States, then to Sri Lanka. When my father was posted in Sri Lanka, I went to boarding school in Southern India for ninth and 10th grade and then went back to the United States.

It was a very fulfilling experience to have that exposure to different peoples, different cultures, different religions, and I think it has served me well in a lot of other environments that I operate in. And it certainly means that when I look at U.S. foreign policy, I try to also look at it through the lens of people in other countries who are viewing our words and our actions and asking themselves whether or not we are being true to our principles and values. Growing up in the Foreign Service was a wonderful experience, and it informs a lot of what I do today.

**FSJ:** *Thanks very much. Now let's talk about the GRATEFUL Act that you co-sponsored with Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) that was signed into law in December 2023 as part of the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act. This legislation repurposed a visa program that had been sparsely used in recent years to provide foreign U.S. government employees with at least 15 years of exceptional service to the U.S. abroad, and their families, with an efficient path to immigrate to the United States. A lot of people, even inside the Foreign Service, don't know about this renewed and renamed Government Employee Immigrant Visa (GIV) program. How did the legislation come about?*

**Sen. Van Hollen:** Having grown up in a Foreign Service family, I understand the vital role our hardworking Foreign Service nationals [now called locally employed staff] play in all aspects of our diplomacy.

We set up the Special Immigrant Visa program a long time ago to allow them and their families to come to the United

## Growing up in the Foreign Service was a wonderful experience, and it informs a lot of what I do today.

States after their service. But for a variety of reasons, a huge backlog developed. As a practical matter, it became a broken system. I not only heard from our ambassadors and others at the embassies and consulates but also had a chance to meet with some of these Foreign Service nationals during my travels, and I recognized how important this was.

I was lucky to have a Pearson Fellow as part of our team, [FSO] Catherine Miller-Little. Catherine was familiar with this issue and is a consular-coned officer. And so we got to work on trying

to formulate a solution to this very real problem that was hurting our foreign policy, because America does need to make good on its promises, and this was a promise that we'd made but were not keeping. So that was the genesis of the GRATEFUL Act.

As you know, in Congress it's gotten harder and harder to pass smaller bills on their own. They need to hitch a ride on a larger legislative vehicle. There were significant negotiations with some of the House members, because immigration issues writ large, as you know, are



The Van Hollen family and friends on board the U.S. Navy's USS Sellers. The "delegation" traveled to the Republic of Maldives from Colombo. Back row, from left: Steve Montgomery, E.E. Van Hollen, Ambassador Christopher Van Hollen, Gil Wing, Doris Wing, Nancy Seger, and Ralph Seger. Front, from left: Dick Seger and Christopher Van Hollen Jr.



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very polarizing and sensitive. And so we needed to really explain how this was necessary to advance our foreign policy interests, our national security interests.

The main thing is: The United States made this commitment, and there are a lot of individuals who provided loyal and dedicated service for a long time only to discover that this option was no longer available as a practical matter. That's why we had to make this change.

**FSJ:** *Yes, and thank you for that. Now let's move over to the Foreign Service Families Act, another really helpful piece of legislation for the Foreign Service community. That passed as part of the 2022 National Defense Authorization Bill.*

*The act has helped expand employment options as well as other support services for FS family members similar to those already available to military families to alleviate the challenges that come with life in the Foreign Service, such as frequent moves and language barriers. Can you tell us how you came to advocate for this and how it's going?*

**Sen. Van Hollen:** When I came to the U.S. Senate, I teamed up with Dan Sullivan, a Republican senator from Alaska who had also served earlier in the State Department under the second Bush administration. He had a real interest in national security and foreign policy. Long story short, we formed the [Senate] Foreign Service Caucus to create a bipartisan forum to address the needs of the Foreign Service but also [those of] civil servants within the State Department.

There are lots of other caucuses. There's an Air Force caucus, an Army caucus. Under the umbrella of the Defense Department, you've got multiple caucuses that support the men and women who are part of the military services. So, we thought it was very impor-

tant to create a similar caucus in support of the Foreign Service. And one of the things we got to work on was drafting the Foreign Service Families Act.

I present that background because one of the models we looked at was the kind of benefits that are provided to military family members when they are deployed overseas. The military had established a number of programs to make it easier for spouses of service members deployed overseas to find interesting and productive work.

We decided to apply a similar model to the Foreign Service, and it included a number of provisions to create more opportunities for Foreign Service spouses who are part of the embassy overseas, and also some other very tangible benefits—for example, making sure that Foreign Service families domiciled in a particular state are granted in-state tuition for public universities while posted overseas. The Foreign Service Families Act was sort of the anchor that we wanted to build on.

**FSJ:** *Do you have any related priority issues on your list for 2025?*

**Sen. Van Hollen:** Now we're going back to look at some other areas [where we can help]. For example, making sure that Foreign Service families overseas get internet coverage—we were successful at getting this applied to hardship posts, but we want it to be applied universally.

There's another issue that applies mostly to folks who are involved in diplomatic security: I mentioned earlier the Foreign Service Families Act allows people to get out of rental contracts when they're told to move overseas, but it did not apply when you're required to move from one part of the United States to another, so we're working on extending that protection.





COURTESY OF CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

The Van Hollen family enjoys an audience with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike (center) on July 4, 1975.

**A group of us, years ago, set forward what we thought should be the architecture and funding for a foreign policy budget. It was significantly more robust than what's available today.**

There's an issue with the portability of professional licenses that's come up. There's a childcare subsidy issue. There's a series of additional benefits that we're trying to put together to address some of these issues. Again, the foundation stone was the Foreign Service Families Act, but as issues come up, we try to identify ways we can be helpful, to show support for Foreign Service families and others who are part of our embassies and consulates overseas and the State Department here at home.

**FSJ:** *Can you say anything about the budget picture, and is there anything that AFSA should be doing to be helpful in advocating for an appropriate budget for the foreign affairs agencies?*

**Sen. Van Hollen:** My view is we need to be providing more resources to support the Foreign Service. We need to establish more consulates. My father, when he was ambassador to Sri Lanka, was also assigned to the Maldives. I'm glad to see we now have an ambassador to the Maldives.

As you know, the Maldives is a pretty small country of far-flung islands, but it is of growing significance in the Indo-Pacific region. I think we need to be in more places like this, and we need to make sure we have a robust diplomacy budget to do this. We have a very robust defense budget, but we need to do more on the diplomacy and the development side.

We are still operating under a two-year agreement that the Biden

administration negotiated with the House Republicans. And that does create very real budget constraints that unfortunately are going to limit our capacity to do some of the things we should be doing in the area of diplomacy. But we will do our very best to allocate the resources available in a smart way.

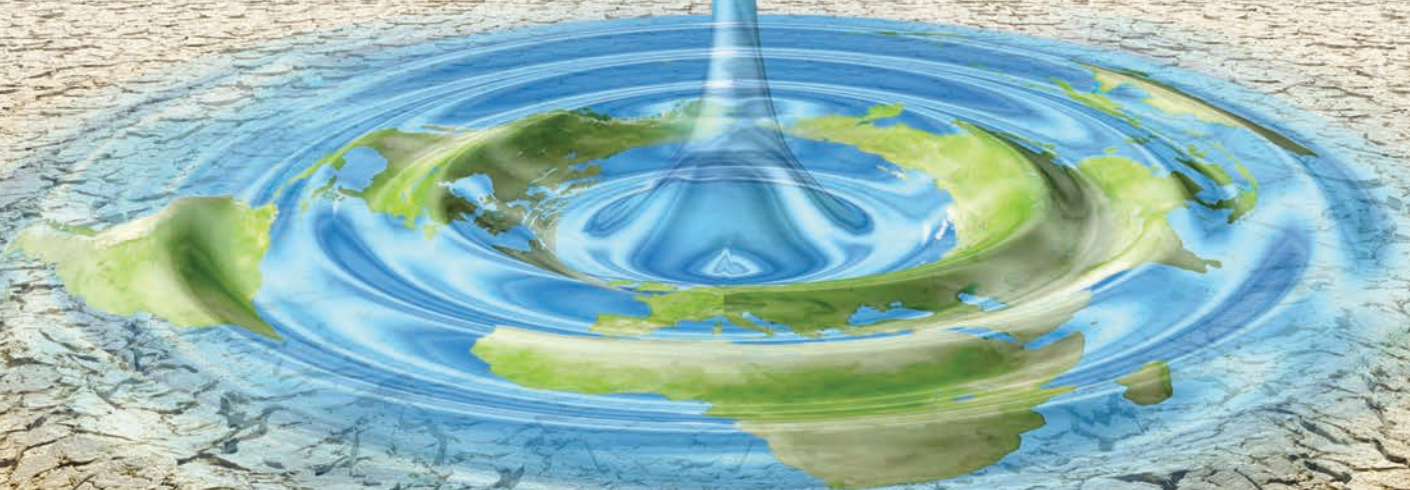
A group of us, years ago, set forward what we thought should be the architecture and funding for a foreign policy budget. It was significantly more robust than what's available today. Again, growing up as part of the Foreign Service family, I've seen firsthand the benefits to our country of having a robust diplomatic presence and engagement. And that's even more true today.

Back at that time, we had a bipolar world. It was the United States and the Soviet Union, and we were competing. And now we're competing for influence in a lot more places and with a lot more players. It's going to be very important that we adequately resource our Foreign Service. ■



# THE CLIMATE CRISIS

How the U.S. Is Leading  
the Global Response





## As climate change alters our planet, the U.S. is leading the way in developing sound global policies to combat the crisis.

BY SUE BINIAZ



In the words of the 2022 U.S. National Security Strategy, the climate crisis is the “existential challenge of our time.” Climate issues already affect nearly every aspect of our foreign policy and national security and will shape geopolitics for decades. Effects to date are likely just a mild preview of what is to come if the world does not act at unprecedented speed and scale, particularly in this critical decade.

The United States is both uniquely capable of leading a global response to the climate crisis and uniquely vulnerable to blame if we are not seen to be doing just that. In that regard, when the parties to the Paris Agreement met last December in Dubai (COP28), they issued their first “Global Stocktake,” an assessment of progress to date as well as needed next steps, with respect to greenhouse gas emission reductions, adaptation to climate impacts, and climate finance.

The Global Stocktake has been hailed as “historic,” charting the course for a temperature-safe, climate-resilient world. In this fourth year of the administration, on the road to COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, it’s a good time to do a “stocktake” of our own climate diplomacy.

So ... have we led the global response? And are we sufficiently set up to do what is needed to keep the world on a climate-safe trajectory?

### The Role of the U.S.

Historically speaking, there is no doubt that the United States has played a leading, consequential role in shaping global action on climate. Extraordinary State Department teams across multiple administrations have shown the best of what the U.S. has to offer in three important ways:

**First, U.S. negotiators have played a singular role in conceptualizing and advancing the framework for global action.** State hosted the first round of negotiations that led to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. And the U.S. climate team has been hard at work ever since. No country was more influential in designing the paradigm-shifting Paris Agreement, with its science-based temperature limitation goal, emissions commitments that are nationally determined, and a nuanced approach that attracted global participation. And we have played a critical role in shaping agreements and decisions, in this forum as well as others, that are setting the direction for decades to come.

**Second, the United States has led efforts to build out a network of multilateral alliances, platforms, and partnerships to deliver on ever-evolving climate goals.** These include bodies like the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, which works to address short-lived climate pollutants; the Clean Energy Ministerial; the Systematic Observations Financing Facility,



*Sue Biniáz is currently the State Department's principal deputy special envoy for climate. As the lead climate lawyer for the United States from 1989 through 2016, she played a central role in all major international climate negotiations, including the 2015 Paris Agreement. During her tenure as a deputy legal adviser, she supervised the Treaty Office and issues related to East Asian affairs, Western Hemisphere affairs, the environment, law of the sea, human rights and refugees, law enforcement, and private international law. Prior to that, she led the department's legal office for oceans, environment, and science as well as the legal office for European and Canadian affairs. Between 2017 and her return to the department in 2021, Ms. Biniáz taught at Yale University, Columbia University, and the University of Chicago and was a senior fellow at the UN Foundation. She continues to be a senior fellow and lecturer at Yale's Jackson School of Global Affairs.*

This work has been a whole-of-government effort, leveraging the diplomatic acumen of the State Department, the development expertise of USAID, and the technical savvy of nearly 20 other interagency partners.

which works to expand access to climate data; and the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership.

**Third, we have pursued strong and deep bilateral partnerships to work shoulder to shoulder with more than 80 countries across all regions to build climate resilience and cut emissions.** This work has been a whole-of-government effort, leveraging the diplomatic acumen of the State Department, the development expertise of USAID, and the technical savvy of nearly 20 other interagency partners.

In January 2021, the Biden administration hit the ground running when it came to the international climate issue. On day one, the president signed the instrument to rejoin the Paris Agreement; a few days later, he issued an executive order that expressly put the climate issue—deemed a “crisis” for both the United States and the world—at the center of U.S. foreign policy and national security. The administration sought to achieve, in essence, three objectives:

- **Get the United States back on track**, which included rejoining the Paris Agreement and expeditiously preparing the U.S. emission reduction target under that agreement (a so-called “nationally determined contribution” or NDC).
- **Exercise U.S. climate leadership**, which included, among other things, appointing former Secretary of State John Kerry as the first special presidential envoy for climate (SPEC); reinvigorating the U.S.-led Major Economies Forum; hosting the Leaders Summit on Climate within the first 100 days; and actively engaging on the climate issue in relevant multilateral fora (G7, G20, various UN bodies, etc.) as well as bilaterally.

• **Promote increased climate action** to keep within reach a 1.5-degree Celsius limit on global temperature rise, particularly through engagement with the world’s major economies.

Under the extraordinary leadership of Secretary Kerry, and with critical support from regional and functional bureaus, embassies, and USAID missions, the SPEC office and the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and

Scientific Affairs (OES) teamed up in 2021 to raise the profile of the climate crisis on the global agenda.

Thanks in large measure to U.S. diplomatic efforts, many countries, including key major economies, increased the stringency of their nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement and joined various emission-reducing initiatives. These included the U.S.-inspired Global Methane Pledge, which has grown into a movement of more than 150 countries dedicated to the global goal of cutting methane emissions 30 percent by 2030, the fastest way to reduce near-term warming.

We also co-hosted the Our Ocean Conference with Palau, focusing heavily on the ocean-climate nexus, and we launched the First Movers Coalition, which aims to build credible early market demand for emerging climate technologies to catalyze their commercial adoption. (See the article by Burkolter on page 43 for more on the First Movers Coalition.)

In terms of the formal multilateral regime, we strongly supported the 2021 U.K.-hosted COP (Conference of Parties), whose outcome was very significant. The consensus Glasgow Climate Pact leaned into 1.5 degrees Celsius as the needed limit on global temperature rise and called for various actions to reduce emissions, increase climate resilience, and enhance climate finance, particularly to help developing countries adapt to climate impacts. The International Energy Agency concluded post-Glasgow that—with full implementation—the combination of formal and informal commitments of states and other actors would put the world on a trajectory toward a 1.8-degree Celsius limit on warming—potentially a serious improvement.

Recognizing that “with full implementation” is a major caveat, the United States approached 2022 as a year of “implementation plus” (i.e., promoting the carrying out of existing pledges while at the same time working to raise ambition even closer to the 1.5-degree Celsius limit).

We brokered an outcome at the International Civil Aviation Organization that sets the international aviation sector on a



Secretary of State Antony Blinken greets the team at the U.S. Center at COP28 in December 2023. Author Sue Biniiaz is immediately to his right.

## We will need the world's major and emerging economies to make ambitious emissions reduction commitments and then deliver on them.

path to net zero emissions by 2050. With Norway, we launched the Green Shipping Challenge, aimed at decarbonization of the international shipping sector through, among other things, the creation of green shipping corridors. Importantly, we also placed a strong emphasis on adaptation, particularly in Africa, given the focus of Egypt—as COP27 host—on the climate resilience of its region. COP27 also answered the call from the world's most vulnerable countries to establish funding arrangements to respond to climate change effects (so-called “loss and damage”).

In 2023, we built on the momentum from the U.K.- and Egypt-hosted COPs. President Biden again convened the leaders of the major economies to galvanize stronger climate action. The United States made major progress toward the president's goal of quadrupling U.S. support for developing country climate action. State and USAID scaled up the President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE), a major whole-of-government initiative working to help more than half a billion people around the world build resilience to climate impacts by 2030.

We unlocked more than \$1 billion in global grant funding for Global Methane Pledge implementation. We concluded

the Sunnylands Statement with China, now the world's largest emitter by a factor of three, in which they made the important move toward an NDC that will cover the entire economy and all greenhouse gases. And throughout the entire year, we worked tirelessly across diplomatic channels to help deliver a clear-eyed, comprehensive Global Stocktake at COP28 in Dubai.

### Looking Ahead

Though we have no doubt come a long way, the most difficult work has only just begun. Success in addressing climate change will involve hitting very ambitious marks continuously over the course of the coming decades. We will need the world's major and emerging economies to make ambitious emissions reduction commitments and then deliver on them. We will need to build the climate resilience of half a billion people under PREPARE. We will need to get the global energy system to zero-carbon by 2050, to end deforestation by 2030, to make major progress by 2030 in slashing emissions of methane and other climate super pollutants, and to dramatically accelerate the deployment of carbon management



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Author Sue Biniiaz discusses final draft language of the multinational agreement emerging from COP21 with then-Secretary of State John Kerry and other advisers in Paris on Dec. 12, 2015. From left: Brian Deese, Biniiaz, Kerry, Clare Sierawski, and Melanie Nakagawa.

technologies. And we will need to unlock trillions of dollars in climate-friendly investment to enable all the above.

To accomplish this, and to maintain a leadership position, we need to make sure that we have the requisite directives, talent, training, and tools in place.

In terms of *directives*, they are currently clear. The State Department has heeded President Biden’s call to put climate at the center of U.S. foreign policy and national security. Climate is a top priority in Secretary Antony Blinken’s Modernization Agenda, and it is one of the six agency priority goals that we report on quarterly to the American public. Nearly 150 overseas posts now include climate change in their integrated country strategies.

For *talent and training*, beyond SPEC and OES, we have created a new cohort of Foreign Service climate officer positions in regional bureaus and overseas posts, with 20 officers thus far working on climate full time. The Foreign Service Institute is developing an extensive new curriculum to provide officers with the tools they need to engage with counterparts on climate. And we have begun rolling out data and analytical tools that give our officers in Washington, D.C.,

and abroad the information they need to advance U.S. climate priorities.

*Tools* may be the most challenging area. Getting the job done, as well as maintaining U.S. leadership, requires that we adequately support countries in their mitigation and adaptation efforts—both bilaterally and through multilateral institutions such as the Green Climate Fund and the multilateral development banks. Their efforts are also in our interest, as they enable the continuation of a livable planet and the avoidance of climate catastrophe.

This year, new challenges await. As we work toward COP29 in Baku, we also need to build on the ambitious outcomes of the Dubai COP, including by advancing real-world actions to triple renewable energy, phase down unabated coal power, halt and reverse deforestation, and pursue other elements of the Dubai road map to keeping a 1.5-degree limit on warming within reach. And when we convene in Baku, the parties will have an opportunity to set forth a new collective goal for finance to promote achievement of the goals of the Paris Agreement.

There is much at stake, and U.S. leadership will continue to be crucial in the years and decades ahead. ■

# UNLOCKING RESILIENCE

## Using Data to Drive Positive Climate Action in Conflict-Prone Regions

**The effects of climate change can intensify security challenges in struggling nations. This bureau is using real-time data to predict and prevent crises in vulnerable areas.**

BY LUNA RUIZ AND KAYLY OBER

**T**he worsening effects of climate change are disproportionately affecting fragile, conflict-affected, and vulnerable (FCV) areas. Resilient states—those that engage constructively with their citizens, maintain functioning institutions, and provide essential services—have the capacity to absorb shocks and manage stresses, maintaining political stability and preventing conflict. In already fragile states, however, the

changing climate can intensify security challenges, overwhelming struggling governments and increasing the risks of violence, instability, and conflict. Within the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO), new programs are being developed to gather real-time data that can be used to advance policy and to predict and circumvent potential crises in at-risk nations.

### Repercussions of Climate Change

Climate change effects are not isolated occurrences. Rather, they interact with additional pressures and contextual factors, resulting in diverse compound risks. This complexity is notably pronounced in FCVs, where the effects of climate change and conflict are mutually reinforcing, creating a dual burden. The factors that make a place vulnerable to conflict (e.g., exclusive political institutions, low economic development, inequitable distribution of vital resources) are the very same factors that make a place vulnerable to climate change. The ramifications of conflict, spanning both physical destruction and institutional breakdown, exacerbate the deterioration of systems crucial for resilience against climate-related shocks.



*Luna Ruiz is a foreign affairs officer in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations Office of Advanced Analytics. She supports the climate fragility portfolio and has a background in energy systems, environmental policy, and data science.*



*Kayly Ober serves as a senior adviser in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. She has worked at the intersection of climate, migration, and conflict issues for the last 15 years in various capacities, including most recently as the senior program officer for the climate, environment, and conflict program at the U.S. Institute of Peace.*



UN EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations Anne Witkowsky speaking at a CRAF'd steering committee meeting in October 2023. To her right is UN Under Secretary General for Policy Guy Ryder, and to her left is Gray Barrett of CSO's Office of Advanced Analytics.

Compound climate-fragility risks include:

- **Resource competition** coupled with high population growth, geopolitical tensions, or intergroup rivalries may increase the likelihood or severity of conflict. Clashes over land, water, or other climate-affected resources may be localized (e.g., farmer-herder clashes in West Africa), regional, or international.
- **Livelihood insecurity driven by changes in weather patterns** can lead to shifting migration routes, increased reliance on illicit income sources, higher rates of gender-based violence, and vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist organizations. For example, in the Karamoja region of East Africa, the decreasing viability of typically male livelihoods has led some men to appropriate women's resources and businesses, sometimes using physical force.
- **Extreme weather events and disasters** increase fragility by decreasing economic opportunities and destroying assets, exposing ineffectual governance, increasing marginalization, or displacing certain populations. Fragile states often lack the resilience to withstand such shocks, and malign actors may step in to fill the void. In some drought-affected countries, insurgent groups are seeking to increase their credibility by mediating resource-related disputes.
- **Transboundary water tension** may be exacerbated between riparian states as increasingly scarce water resources collide with mismanagement in the service of short-term politi-

cal gain. Prominent examples include the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, the Blue Nile River Basin, the Jordan River Basin, and the Lake Chad Basin.

- **Volatile food prices and rising food insecurity**, partly driven by climate change-related decreasing crop yields and disrupted food production, create dangerous cycles of risk. In Burkina Faso, violent extremist organizations have driven farmers out and prevented harvests from being collected, further compounding food insecurity.

### A Data-Driven Whole-of-Government Approach

The Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations leads U.S. efforts in conflict prevention. CSO's climate fragility team works with scientific agencies to identify and mitigate the unintended consequences of climate change and promote peace in vulnerable communities. The team prioritizes work in Libya, Haiti, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, and across Coastal West Africa, including in Togo, Benin, Ghana, Guinea, and Côte D'Ivoire, using a data-driven approach to foster innovation, collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making in addressing climate fragility.

The 2019 Global Fragility Act (GFA) and subsequent U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (SPCPS) recognize the nexus between climate change, environmental degradation, population displacement, weakened governance, and



## Investing in this area enables us to make more informed, evidence-driven decisions.

conflict in four priority countries and the Coastal West Africa region. The SPCPS's 10-year framework facilitates long-term planning, sustains partnerships, and emphasizes adaptation efforts, signaling a commitment to address evolving challenges.

The SPCPS also prioritizes learning, data-driven analysis, diplomacy, and information-sharing to understand local dynamics and target interventions. In service to this, the United States became a founding donor of the United Nations Complex Risk Analytics Fund (CRAF'd), a new multidonor trust fund mechanism to find innovative data solutions to complex challenges through pooled investment.

In April 2023, CRAF'd donor partners invested a collective \$4 million in five new data projects that examine multidimensional climate fragility risks, focusing on environmental early action tracking, multihazard information aggregation, climate-induced

displacement risk modeling, and geospatial climate assessment and early warning dashboards. The five projects are:

- **Environmental Early Action and Risk Tracking Hub (EEARTH)**. Piloted by the International Crisis Group in Somalia and South Sudan, EEARTH will identify climate security risks and pathways to conflict risks, combining quantitative and qualitative information to create a climate-security early warning system.

- **Violence and Impact Early Warning System—People in Need (VIEWS-PIN)**. This program from the Peace Research Institute Oslo fills a critical gap between forecasting natural disasters and conflicts and predicting their effects on nearby populations. The early warning system will estimate the effect of armed conflict and climate shocks on GDP per capita and access to water, health care, education, and food.



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At a CRAF'd meeting in October 2023, from left: Gray Barrett of the State Department's Office of Advanced Analytics; Assistant Secretary Anne Witkowsky; and Mark Slezak, from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.

- **INFORM Warning.** This risk-monitoring tool from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presents multihazard information from a wide range of sources to provide insights on global risk trends, forecasts, scenarios, and events, helping crisis response stakeholders stay ahead of potential complex risks and make informed decisions on resource allocation.

- **CLIFDEW-GRID.** Developed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for use by humanitarian actors, governments and policymakers, researchers, and academics, CLIFDEW-GRID is pioneering the development of the first risk index for forced displacement due to slow-onset hazards in West and East Africa.

- **Geospatial Dashboards for Climate Assessment and Early Warning (GEOGUARD).** Developed by the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs' Innovation Cell and academic partners, GEOGUARD will provide insight on environmental risk factors by coding data points on environmental conditions and geocoded conflict in a database used by the UN and its in situ partners in 29 countries across target regions.

The information gleaned from these five projects will help turn early warning into early action, including in the countries and region selected as priorities under the Global Fragility Act. Although integrating physical and environmental data with social science data poses challenges, investing in this area enables us to make more informed, evidence-driven decisions. The projects funded through CRAF'd exemplify this approach.

The emphasis on collaboration and information-sharing underscores the collective responsibility in addressing climate fragility risks. Through partnerships between governmental agencies, research institutions, and humanitarian organizations, we can foster a holistic understanding of complex risk landscapes. This collaborative ethos not only enhances our capacity for early warning but also facilitates coordinated response efforts, amplifying the efficacy of interventions.

Early warning systems serve as crucial tools for identifying and responding to climate-related threats before they escalate.

By integrating climate and environmental data into decision-making processes, stakeholders can better address climate-related risks, make educated decisions about intervention and support, and promote peace and stability.

### From Data Collection to Policy and Programming

CSO's Office of Advanced Analytics collaborates with interagency partners to conduct comprehensive research on the human security implications of climate change, informing evidence-based interventions and promoting sustainable peace and security. Recent efforts include a partnership with the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense to study herder vulnerability to climate hazards in West Africa. By analyzing patterns of climate-related shocks and seasonal changes, we were able to identify emerging risks and vulnerabilities, empowering communities to proactively mitigate potential conflicts.

This commitment to data-driven policymaking extends to the grassroots level, recognizing the importance of engaging local populations to develop sustainable solutions. An example of this approach is the pilot climate security program launched in border communities in Benin. The program aims to reduce the risk of conflict and promote resilience at the local level by strengthening communication between farmers and herders and incorporating early warning and climate data into traditional mediation processes. The program seeks to empower women as community dialogue facilitators, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and included in conflict prevention efforts.

The interplay between climate change and conflict in fragile and conflict-affected states necessitates a nuanced and data-driven approach to promote stability. By coordinating relevant stakeholders, integrating early warning systems, and promoting local solutions, data miners at the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations aim to not only enhance societal resilience but also save lives and resources. ■

# AI AIR QUALITY FORECASTING

## A State-NASA Partnership

**A partnership with NASA takes the State Department’s already successful air quality monitoring system to the next level.**

BY MARY TRAN

**W**hen *The Foreign Service Journal* published my article about air quality and the Greening Diplomacy Initiative (GDI) in 2021, the world was a different place. We were one year into a global pandemic.

Travel restrictions were in full effect. The race to create a vaccine for COVID-19 had begun. And the sky was clear.

Pandemic-related lockdowns had restricted many activities that ordinarily contribute to air pollution such as industry, transportation, and power generation. A study done by The George Washington University showed significant decreases in nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) in major urban areas such as Detroit, New York,

and Atlanta. The major pollution sources in these areas were heavy commuter routes and international airports; decreases aligned with the reduced vehicle and flight traffic during the domestic lockdown.

There was also unprecedented temporary improvement in air quality around the world. In India, for example, data collected from the European Space Agency’s Sentinel-5P satellite indicated that the levels of air pollution in the northern region of the country were at a 20-year low.

Unfortunately, those temporary gains are now gone, and climate change is worsening air pollution through increased wildfires, drought, and energy demands. And the world still faces massive data gaps, places where no reliable real-time data exists—data that could help forecast potential disasters and allow people to plan their response. (For more on data gaps, please see the article by Ruiz and Ober on page 31.)

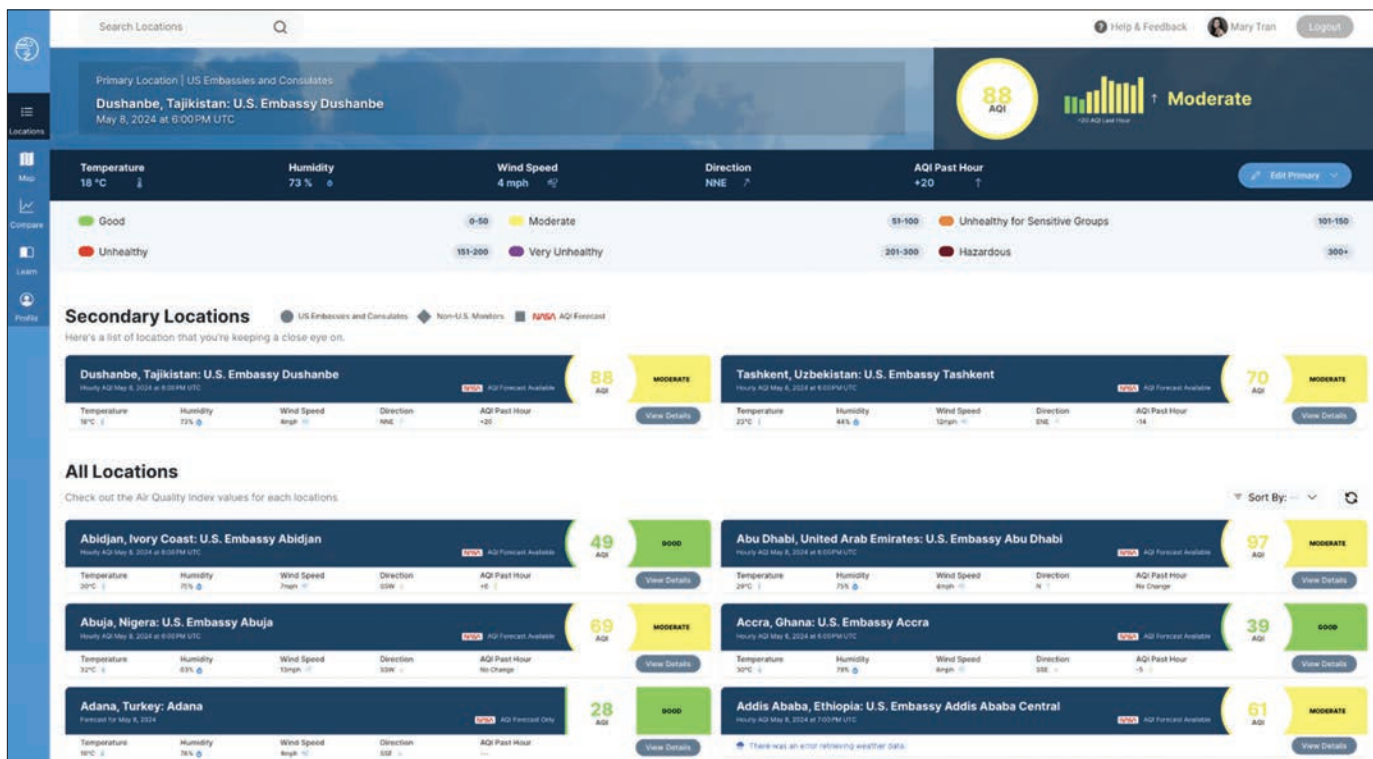
And that’s why we are thrilled to announce a new partnership with NASA that makes the State Department’s ZephAir app, already a game changer in providing real-time air quality data, even more powerful. The project represents a leap forward in data availability for those who do not have sufficient ground-based monitors and/or local expertise to develop forecasts.

Using historical, satellite, and model data, NASA can now produce an AI-generated air pollution forecast, not just for the 80 embassies and consulates that have ground-based monitors,



*Mary Tran is an IT project management consultant specializing in agile transformation, organizational development, and communication. She joined the Greening Diplomacy Initiative in the State Department Office of Management Strategy and*

*Solutions (M/SS) in 2019 to spearhead development of the air quality mobile application ZephAir and to support the Department of State’s air quality monitoring program, DOSAir.*



Customizable home page of ZephAir dashboard.

but for all locations that have embassies and consulates. The implementation of AI ushers in the potential to analyze vast amounts of data to identify pollution patterns and predict future trends. Thanks to machine learning and as we gather more data, the forecasts will improve over time.

This new feature is available now on both the ZephAir mobile app and on the web-based analytics ZephAir dashboard at <https://zephair.statgedi.cloud>.

### Going Global with NASA

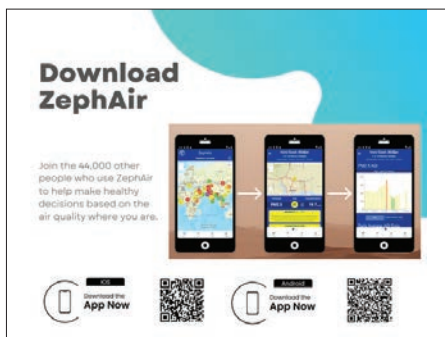
In 2015 the Greening Diplomacy Initiative in State’s Office of Management Strategy and Solutions (M/SS) began tracking air quality at posts through our DOSAir monitoring program. DOSAir collects data on pollutant levels in the air using U.S.-made ground-based monitors that have been tested and verified to return trusted data, referred to in the industry as “reference grade.” The monitoring network provides informa-

tion to the public in areas where there is otherwise a dearth of reliable, public air quality data.

In 2020 we built ZephAir, the department’s first air quality mobile application, to provide an instant look at air quality in the cities where we have air quality monitors.

The air quality monitoring program was a success, but GDI knew that there were still thousands of employees and millions of people who needed air quality information, and we knew we couldn’t meet the need alone. So we turned to another agency with a global—even universal—purview: NASA.

We partnered with NASA Senior Scientist Dr. Pawan Gupta and the health and air quality applied sciences team to compete for a Research Opportunities in Space and Earth Science grant to develop an air quality forecasting capability for more than 260 cities, including all our diplomatic mission locations. The forecast uses artificial



Advertisement for downloading ZephAir on iOS and Android mobile devices.

intelligence to pull from our ground monitors, satellite data, meteorological variables, and aerosol information to provide a three-day air quality forecast, similar to the ones we all use every day to monitor the weather.

According to Dr. Gupta: “The air quality forecast from NASA integrates cutting-edge global model outputs, satellite observations, and embassy air quality monitors into advanced machine learning algorithms. These forecasts significantly enhance the Department of State’s existing monitoring program by offering near-term air quality predictions, aiding in practical planning efforts. This collaboration exemplifies a robust partnership among federal agencies, leveraging NASA’s research and data to meet the needs of U.S. embassies and American citizens residing abroad.”

This is the first time that a government-developed air quality forecast is available at a global scale. The forecast distinguishes itself in the industry by transparency about the types of air quality monitors it uses, ensuring they are reliable, provide scientific data, and are certified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

According to the department’s Acting Chief Sustainability Officer Caroline D’Angelo: “Our partnership with NASA is a game changer for ZephAir. Their cutting-edge use of AI and satellite data alongside our ground-based data is filling in critical



Clockwise from top left, air pollution in Shanghai, Mumbai, Washington, D.C., and New Delhi.

## The world still faces massive data gaps, places where no reliable real-time data exists.

data gaps worldwide. Teaming up makes the best use of both agencies’ resources for a win for public health, the environment, and U.S. science diplomacy.”

Furthermore, as Dr. Gupta points out, the project “presents a unique opportunity for NASA to refine its global air quality forecasting capabilities through collaborations with the Department of State and local partners in host countries.”

### Technological Integration and Eco-Diplomacy

GDI is also working on increasing the availability of indoor air quality information through low-cost sensors using a secure wireless network. We’ve installed indoor air quality sensors (LoRaWAN) in Ottawa, Panama City, Tegucigalpa, London, Baghdad, and Naples to provide alternative, affordable options that still provide reliable data. GDI’s Internet of Things (IoT) network provides a secure, stable, and reliable platform for all devices that support DOSAir and the department’s other greening technologies such as MeterNet—a smart metering program to capture real-time energy consumption data at department facilities—and LoRaWAN indoor air quality sensors.

### Looking Ahead

When the *Journal* published my 2021 article, NASA’s forecasting capability was an inkling of an idea. The project’s funding had only recently been secured and we had just begun discussions on where to send additional sensors. To see the rapid progress made by this collaboration between two organizations in the last three years makes me proud to be part of the team. The project has set a high standard for collection, analysis, and dissemination of air quality data that will change international norms and practices in air quality management.

AI and other technologies can significantly enhance our ability to monitor, predict, and mitigate our environmental impact on the planet. When we embrace and lead innovation, we can ultimately use it for the greater good, improving air quality for all. ■

# FERTILIZER Diplomacy

**The ground under their feet shows diplomats the way to feed a growing planet.**

BY MICHAEL CONLON

**B**y 2050 there will be an estimated 2.5 billion additional people on the planet. To feed them all, we will need to produce 60 percent more food, yet climate change may hinder our ability to produce this food. We will need to feed the growing global population using more nutritious and climate-resilient crop varieties, less water, less agricultural land, and new agriculture technologies and innovations. One important piece of this challenge is already being addressed by diplomats in the United States and Brazil: developing fertilizers that are more effective and sustainable.

The U.S. and Brazil together feed around 25 percent of the world's population. Without the two countries' production, the world's food supply would be critically low. Thus, it makes sense for these two agricultural powerhouses to team up to work for solutions to climate change and food insecurity. As world leaders in agricultural research, the United States and Brazil have made agricultural collaboration a cornerstone of their close relationship over the last several decades, and the work diplomats and scientists are doing now will pay dividends for the future.



*Michael Conlon is the agricultural counselor at the U.S. embassy in Brasília representing the Foreign Agricultural Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.*

At U.S. Embassy Brasília, partnering with Brazil on climate change and food insecurity solutions is a top priority. Brazil will host the Group of 20 (G20) in 2024 and the Conference of Parties (COP) 30 in 2025, giving this partnership a public face and, hopefully, leading to better understanding of the ways fertilizer advancements can make or break climate policy initiatives.

As Brazil prepares for the G20 and COP30, the embassy is promoting greater partnership through two major fertilizer initiatives with global implications: the Fertilize 4 Life (F4L) Initiative and the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS).

## **A Major Climate Issue**

Modern agricultural yields are made possible through fertilizers, which provide the nutrients plants need to grow and thrive. Since the advent of agriculture, perhaps as long as 8,000 years ago, farmers used traditional fertilizers such as manure and wood ash to improve soil fertility. In the 20th century, synthetic fertilizers made from chemical processes became a critical part of modern agriculture, dramatically increasing crop production to feed a growing world population.

Since the 1950s, however, there have been few advances in fertilizer technology, and synthetic fertilizers can wreak havoc on the natural environment due to the heavy carbon footprint of modern fertilizer production methods. Manufacturing of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer relies on natural gas, a nonrenewable source of energy that releases greenhouse gases (GHGs) into the environment.

Fertilizers also produce GHGs after farmers apply them to their fields. Much of the applied fertilizer runs into waterways



COURTESY OF MICHAEL CONLON

Sorghum fields grow in the Cerrado in eastern Brazil, June 2024.

or is broken down by soil microbes, releasing nitrous oxide into the atmosphere. Pound for pound, nitrous oxide warms the planet 300 times more than carbon dioxide. And in recent years in Brazil, farmers have been forced to use more and more fertilizers to maintain current yields—Brazilian soils typically have low fertility compared to U.S. soils, leading to higher application rates.

The difficult task of improving fertilizer-use efficiency is critical. As Dr. Luke Ney, director of development assistance at USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and administrator of the F4L Initiative, has emphasized: “Reducing overuse of synthetic fertilizers is key to keeping agriculture sustainable, both for controlling input costs to farmers and creating a healthier planet.”

### **U.S.-Brazil Collaboration: A Brief History**

Until the 1970s, Brazil had to import most of its food. But in less than 30 years, it has transformed itself into an agricultural powerhouse, going from a net food importer to a major exporter of agricultural products. Known as Brazil’s Green Revolution, this tremendous increase in agricultural production is widely considered one of the most important global developments in the second half of the 20th century. Today, Brazil is among the top five producers of 36 agricultural products and the leading exporter of soybeans, corn, coffee, sugar, beef, poultry, and orange juice.

The United States played a vital role in Brazil’s agricultural development. In 1920 Peter Henry Rolfs, the former dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of Florida, helped to create the Federal University of Vicosa, today one of Brazil’s premier agricultural universities. Nelson Rockefeller provided technical assistance to Brazil in agriculture during his time as a federal government employee—including as assistant secretary of State for Latin American affairs in the 1940s—creating several organizations that continue to assist Brazil today.

In 1973 the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) played an essential role in creating the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa), a main driver of Brazil’s agricultural revolution and widely considered one of the world’s leading research centers on tropical agriculture, which aims to improve agricultural productivity through applied research and technology transfer to farmers.

USAID funded the construction of Brazilian laboratories and research centers and sponsored hundreds of young Brazilian agricultural scientists who obtained advanced degrees at U.S. land-grant universities in the 1960s and 1970s, ushering in the close and enduring partnership between U.S. and Brazilian scientists.

Embrapa’s greatest triumph was its work in the Cerrado, a vast tropical savanna in eastern Brazil covering around 20 percent of the country and the second-largest biome after the Amazon. Until the 1970s, the Cerrado was considered an infertile



COURTESY OF MICHAEL CONLON

University of Florida Professor Jose Dubeux tours a farm in the Cerrado, May 2024.

region for agriculture. But through technologies supplied by Embrapa researchers, Brazil transformed the Cerrado into one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world.

Collaboration and information sharing between Embrapa and USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) also resulted in transformative advances in minimizing tillage, resulting in significant reductions in soil erosion and conservation of soil organic carbon in both countries.

### The Fertilize 4 Life Initiative

In 2022, through its FAS office, U.S. Embassy Brasília recruited four world-class institutions—Embrapa, ARS, the University of Florida, and the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC)—to join forces to develop research projects that will improve fertilizer-use efficiency. The institutions named this U.S.-Brazil collaboration the Fertilize 4 Life Initiative (F4L).

The F4L researchers developed four research streams to improve fertilizer-use efficiency: (1) improve precision management, big data, and artificial intelligence; (2) strengthen biological products, soil biology, and soil health; (3) create new products, including biofertilizers and biostimulants; and (4) make more efficient use of existing nutrient sources through

integrated systems. The initiative was officially launched at the 50th anniversary ceremony of Embrapa on April 26, 2023, in Brasília.

F4L could profoundly influence world agriculture by developing new technologies that increase fertilizer-use efficiency, reduce nutrient losses to the environment, and improve farmer profitability. The research will also lead to more efficient fertilizer application recommendations.

F4L will help reduce dependency on imports, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, and advance sustainable agricultural systems in Brazil, the United States, and worldwide. Africa, in particular, could directly benefit from this research because the soils in Africa are very similar to Brazil.

Scientists from the participating institutions see tremendous potential in the F4L Initiative. “Innovative research is fundamental to overcoming the challenges of food insecurity and climate change,” says Silvia Massruha, president of Embrapa.



COURTESY OF MICHAEL CONLON

Embrapa's Dr. Ieda Mendes at her lab at Embrapa Cerrados in June 2024.



“Reducing overuse of synthetic fertilizers is key to keeping agriculture sustainable, both for controlling input costs to farmers and creating a healthier planet.”

“Countries in the tropics, such as Brazil, are the new agricultural frontier that will play a crucial role in expanding food production. However, the solutions to the problems in agriculture are not unique to the tropics, and integrating research between institutions from around the world is necessary to advance these solutions.”

Dr. Adebola Adesogan, director of the University of Florida’s Global Food Systems Institute, says F4L “has the potential to be truly transformational as it should simultaneously boost crop productivity while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on imports. In addition to improving efficiency and sustainability of U.S. and Brazil agriculture,

the findings will help to reduce food insecurity in developing countries, particularly those in which fertilizer prices have tripled in recent years.”

F4L is supported by a \$1.2 million grant from USDA’s Fertilize Right Initiative, which supports innovative research and training to help countries with high fertilizer usage, enabling them to improve nutrient management and develop alternative fertilizers and cropping systems. In addition to Brazil, the Fertilize Right Initiative is active in Colombia, Pakistan, and Vietnam. The Office of the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate is sponsoring the Fertilize Right Initiative under the Global Fertilizer Challenge.



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The advertisement features a photograph of a man and a young girl sitting on a pink sofa. The girl is smiling and holding a coin over a pink piggy bank. The man is looking at her with a gentle expression. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

The United States and Brazil have made agricultural collaboration a cornerstone of their close relationship over the last several decades.



A U.S. delegation inspects a F4L project in the Cerrado, June 2024.

### Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils

Another U.S. government project with great potential to reduce global food insecurity is Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS), which was launched by U.S. Special Envoy for Global Food Security Dr. Cary Fowler in February 2023. Like F4L, VACS provides an opportunity to strengthen and expand the U.S.-Brazilian partnership by leveraging the unique and complementary strengths of both countries to support innovation in soil health management and develop climate-resilient crop varieties.

Secretary Antony Blinken is championing VACS' focus on more profitable and sustainable land use and production systems. VACS includes a decision framework that can be used to help target investments likely to have the greatest impact at field to national levels, including where to plant, what to plant, what management system to use, and how to apply the management system based on local conditions each year.

The framework highlights the importance of integrating research in crops and soils to provide a broader range of crops adapted to a changing climate and soils. Increasing the diversity of crops and crop varieties to adapt to a changing climate while reducing the costs and environmental effects of agricultural production will also require continued innovation in management, including fertility management.

### The Way Forward

The scientific communities in the United States and Brazil are up to the challenges facing agriculture. As the global

leader for investment in agriculture and climate research, the United States is employing new technologies to make agricultural systems more resilient in a changing climate. The University of Florida, for example, is hiring artificial intelligence (AI) faculty who are applying novel technologies to improve current agricultural systems. In Brazil, more than 300 scientists are participating in Embrapa's climate change research in tropical and subtropical agricultural systems.

The rich bilateral history between our two countries provides linkages to expand our agricultural research efforts to improve climate-smart agriculture and global food security. F4L and VACS are positioned to be the catalysts to usher in a golden age of collaboration in agricultural research between our two countries, and this collaboration will pay dividends in countries across the globe, slowing the rate of climate change while ensuring the planet's growing population has access to nutritious foods. ■

# DECARBONIZING INDUSTRY THROUGH DEMAND

## The First Movers Coalition

**Global companies work to facilitate firm market demand signals for the breakthrough technologies essential for a net-zero transition in “hard-to-abate” sectors.**

BY PABLO BURKOLTER

**F**ollowing years of insufficient climate action, it is becoming increasingly evident that the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius (2°C) and pursue all efforts to limit it to below 1.5°C could be in jeopardy.

Every fraction of a degree of warming carries greater risks of cascading climate tipping points, which society must do all it can to mitigate. About 40 percent of the emissions reductions

necessary to transition the global economy to net zero by 2050 relies on the development of breakthrough technologies and energy solutions, such as bioenergy, renewable hydrogen-based fuels, green methanol and ammonia, sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), or carbon dioxide removal (CDR)—all of which are at a critical period of early deployment and carry a green premium, a higher cost than traditional technology. The window is rapidly closing to demonstrate and commercialize these innovative technologies over the critical 2020s decade, so they become available for massive scale-up to enable net-zero emissions by 2050.



*Pablo Burkolter is lead on Corporate Climate Ambition at the World Economic Forum, supporting business engagement across the organization's climate initiatives, including the Alliance of CEO Climate Leaders and the First Movers Coalition.*

*He previously led the forum's Network of Global Future Councils and supported programming and session development in nature, climate, and energy for top-tier events such as the annual meeting in Davos. Before joining the World Economic Forum in 2014, he worked on policy and academic research on sustainability.*

Recognizing the urgency of bringing these technologies to market, President Joe Biden and the World Economic Forum launched the First Movers Coalition (FMC) at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) in November 2021. The launch was supported by 35 global companies that joined to send a powerful signal that there is firm market demand for the emerging technologies essential for a net-zero transition in “hard-to-abate” sectors. Six economically essential sectors—aluminum, cement and concrete, steel, aviation, shipping, and trucking—currently account for a third of global emissions. If left unabated, these sectors are projected to account for 50 percent

of emissions by 2050, driven by a significant increase in global demand estimated at 80 percent for aluminum, 40 percent for cement and concrete, and 30 percent for steel. While sea freight is predicted to triple, trucking is expected to double by mid-century.

Stimulation of demand is essential to bring about a systemic change across these sectors and accelerate the pace of the transition to low-carbon solutions. FMC works to create the demand signal needed for technologies to go through the pilot-scale demonstration phase and accelerate the timelines to reach the first go-to-market projects on the path to large-scale commercialization beyond 2030.

Former U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry became co-chair of the coalition and continues to drive this initiative forward, rallying top companies with high climate ambition and a willingness to harness their purchasing power to decarbonize heavy-emitting industries. FMC and similar coalitions and initiatives that stimulate market demand, accelerate low-carbon technology deployment, and help facilitate bankable offtake agreements are vital to reducing and eliminating the green premium as well as to jump-starting the market for near-zero emissions products and services to achieve the Paris Agreement's emissions reduction targets.

### **Taking Stock of First Movers in Action**

Since its launch two years ago, and through the dedicated work of its 100 member companies that have made more than 120 commitments under FMC, the coalition has become the largest private-sector-led global demand signal for products and services made with innovative near-zero emissions technologies and energy solutions.

Members make purchasing commitments applicable to a minimum percentage of their existing spend on products and services in one or more FMC sectors by 2030 (e.g., 10 percent of the company's steel procured or 10 percent of the volume of goods shipped overseas). These procurement figures can be small for a company but represent a substantial demand when aggregating all member commitments. It is estimated that the FMC now represents about \$16 billion in aggregate annual demand by 2030, equating to 31 million tons of annual CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions reductions once these purchasing commitments are met.

FMC has evolved from a purely demand signaling initiative to also support members' procurement efforts across all seven sectors. The coalition convenes players involved in the full life cycle of a product such as, say, low-carbon aluminum or steel to foster collaboration and action on breakthrough technologies.

FMC convenes regional workshops, bringing together experts to discuss scaling up the supply of near-zero emission solutions, identify the challenges and barriers to increasing both demand and supply, and develop concrete recommendations for a way forward.

To catalyze the emergence and commercialization of near-zero emissions innovations, the coalition launched two challenges—one on aviation in collaboration with UpLink, the World Economic Forum's innovation platform, and one on steel in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), ResponsibleSteel, and Greenhouse. And in January 2024, the First Suppliers Hub was launched as an online database where current and future suppliers of FMC-compliant technologies can present their products and connect with buyers.

The value of collaboration has been evident in the past two years. FMC has played an important role in connecting players and creating unconventional partnerships between value chain actors (i.e., those involved in the full life cycle of a product) and other industry sectors to bridge the gaps between demand, supply, and essential ecosystem enablers such as policy, finance, and infrastructure. This has resulted in an increasing number of offtake agreements and investments with suppliers, translating purchasing commitments into action and bringing breakthrough technologies one step closer to commercial scale.

For instance, in January 2024, FMC member Ball Corporation announced a collaboration with fellow coalition member Novelis to launch its first-ever low-carbon aluminum cup, made of 90 percent recycled aluminum supplied by Novelis and 10 percent FMC-compliant low-carbon primary aluminum, supplied by Alcoa from the Elysis™ process—an R&D technology that eliminates direct greenhouse gas emissions from the aluminum smelting process.

In the aviation sector, where there is already strong demand for sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), public-private partnerships between governments, airlines, fuel suppliers, and investors are needed to expedite its deployment and deliver net-zero aviation. One example of full value chain collaboration that stands out is the Minnesota SAF Hub, where multiple coalition members from different sectors collaborate with the state government and airport to find solutions to scale SAF global production and replace conventional jet fuel.

In shipping, Amazon, a founding member of the FMC, has been instrumental in getting the Zero Emission Maritime Buyers Alliance (ZEMBA) off the ground. Through ZEMBA, cargo owners can demonstrate demand through forward-procurement of zero-emission maritime freight services. Amazon is supporting joint

## Six economically essential sectors—aluminum, cement and concrete, steel, aviation, shipping, and trucking—currently account for a third of global emissions.

efforts under ZEMBA to ship 600,000 TEUs (20-foot equivalent units) on zero-emission vessels over three years, which will result in close to 1 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction.

Carbon dioxide removal (CDR) is increasingly seen as a critical decarbonization tool if we are to hit the Paris climate goals. Up to 10 billion tons of CDR per year is expected to be needed by 2050, according to the median estimates of scenarios considered by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). FMC decided in 2022 to also launch a CDR program under which members commit to contract for at least 50,000 tonnes or \$25 million worth of durable and scalable CO<sub>2</sub> removal by 2030. To date, while advance purchases for engineered CDR are only at

a total of about 11 million tonnes—a minuscule fraction of what is needed—FMC members and implementation partners represent more than 80 percent of that total.

Microsoft is leading the charge, accounting for more than 60 percent of all engineered CDR purchases made to date. Among the deals concluded is a 2023 agreement with fellow FMC member Orsted and Aker Carbon Capture, committing to one of the world's largest carbon removal agreements—2.76 million tonnes of durable CDR over 11 years.

These collaborations are a testament to the power that demand signals and early procurement commitments can play in accelerating the deployment of emerging clean energy



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## Carbon dioxide removal (CDR) is increasingly seen as a critical decarbonization tool if we are to hit the Paris climate goals.

technologies. The Mission Possible Partnership's Global Project Tracker reveals, however, that the heavy industry transition needs to accelerate sevenfold to meet 2030 climate targets. To reach FMC's goals by 2030, the initiatives that FMC members have taken need to be replicated at scale and supported by adequate infrastructure, financing, and an enabling policy environment.

### The Way Forward

FMC's work has brought to light the challenges of scaling up near-zero emissions products and services, especially at the pace required to get on track for net zero, and the risk that as demand-side signals increase, potential supply shortages might emerge. Some of these challenges are:

- Insufficient renewable energy capacity and grid infrastructure to provide the zero-carbon electricity needed to decarbonize (e.g., to produce green hydrogen).
- Lack of technology at commercial scale, despite significant progress in developing pathways and pilots that could lead to decarbonization. Will a particular technology prove to be the final pathway, or will it just be transitional, leading to a different path altogether?
- Unwillingness to pay for green premiums. Demand remains insufficient, especially at the green premium, to justify the investment required to produce near-zero emissions solutions. For example, zero-emission fuels for shipping currently cost three to four times the price of bunker fuel, while sustainable aviation fuel can cost five times more than traditional jet fuels.
- Insufficient collaboration between suppliers, innovators, financiers, demand-side buyers, policymakers, and others in the value chain.

To spearhead the shift to near-zero emissions products and services and accelerate the demand for net-zero technologies, additional measures could help us move faster and at scale.

First, governments need to enact more supportive policies and regulations that help industry decarbonize, through carbon taxation, tax credits, low-interest loans, subsidies, grants, and other incentives. Policy incentives worth mentioning include the production and investment tax credits envisaged under the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act (2022), or the subventions provided under the European Union's Green Deal Industrial

Plan, and the Emissions Trading Scheme. FMC currently has 13 government partners, in addition to the United States, to support efforts on policy and regulations, with more countries interested in partnering, as well.

Since public procurement represents a significant share of GDP, the adoption of low-carbon procurement practices could also send a strong market signal to suppliers, incentivize investment and supply chains development, facilitate uptake, and reduce the green premium. In the cement and concrete sector, public procurement is responsible for 40 to 60 percent of global concrete sales, highlighting the impact that public procurement could have.

Policy can be leveraged to ensure a broad application of decarbonization targets that can further spur the market by setting mandates for the private sector, for instance. Countries like the United States have signed the Industrial Deep Decarbonisation Initiative (IDDI), co-launched in 2021 by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Clean Energy Ministerial, to tackle carbon-intensive construction materials such as steel, cement, and concrete. But the number of countries signatory to IDDI remains low.

Because the breakthrough technologies needed to decarbonize the hard-to-abate industrial sectors require enormous up-front capital investment and ongoing production premiums but are also exposed to operational risks, international financial institutions, domestic development banks, and commercial banks need to cooperate and accelerate efforts to offer financial products that unlock funding and de-risk investments. These may include blended finance, concessionary loans, sustainability bonds, and first-loss insurance.

Realizing the Paris Agreement means the so-called hard-to-abate sectors have to abate. Addressing the many challenges to the development, financing, and adoption of these technologies is crucial to gain traction and continue making progress. FMC will continue to serve as a platform for companies around the world to leverage their collective purchasing power to accelerate the deployment of near-zero emission solutions. It will continue to drive collaboration efforts across value chains, including through aggregated demand, finance, and infrastructure, as well as sharing lessons in global forums aimed at strengthening the demand signal for low-carbon technology. ■

# Climate Diplomacy

## From the FSJ Digital Archive



### Exporting Conservation

There are no longer any simple problems in the resource field. It used to be that we thought compartmentally and worked compartmentally. But today we have gained the wisdom to realize that resource problems are intertwined. Water pollution or the use of a

pesticide in one part of a river basin or valley can affect people thousands of miles away. ... It is so vital for many countries in the world today to develop the long view. No plan for resource development is any good without the coloration of wisdom. Inevitably involved in this long view of resource planning must be the recognition that resources overlap national boundaries, just as they overlap state boundaries.

—Stewart L. Udall, *U.S. Secretary of the Interior*, July 1964.



### Diplomacy and the Environment: Saving the Tropical Forest

Economic policy reform and environmental issues are directly linked, because deteriorating environments affect economies, and failing economies accelerate environmental degradation. In many developing countries forestry, for

example, depends simultaneously on both the exploitation and conservation of the natural resource base. The common goal in developed and developing countries alike should be to implement policies that balance these competing needs to yield the greatest increase in social welfare by optimizing environmental improvement and income growth.

—USAID FSO Jeff Schweitzer, *October 1990*.



### Eco-Diplomacy: Building the Foundation

The term eco-diplomacy, coined by the Department of State, means: “the practice of conducting international relations by facilitating and advancing a shared commitment to conserving natural resources through sustain-

able operations and responsible environmental stewardship.” It stands on three foundational cornerstones: environmental policy that defines a shared commitment; green buildings that act as tan-

gible demonstrations and platforms from which to communicate; and operational results that record advances in performance.

—Donna McIntire, *chief of the energy and sustainable design unit in State’s Bureau of Overseas Building Operations*, April 2014.



### Toward a Sustainable Arctic

Those of us in the Arctic already feel the effects of climate change, and appreciate that it is a real global threat, growing at an unprecedented scale. ... [W]e need stronger global action and cooperation to reduce emissions, along with increased adaptation efforts, to deal

with the drastic impact climate change is already having on our region. To help us in this battle, we must strike a balance among economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

—Einar Gunnarsson, *Icelandic FSO and chair of the Arctic Council’s Senior Arctic Officials*, May 2021.



### To Lead Abroad, We Must Deliver at Home

Internationally, the knowledge that vulnerable people are disproportionately affected by environmental decisions is critical, and we often focus on the binary “developed” versus “developing” country distinction. But

the reality is that within developed countries, disparities are also often quite pronounced. West Virginia, USA; Taiyuan, China; and Katowice, Poland, must all grapple with the displacement of coal industry workers. If the United States and other countries can manage to move from reliance on fossil fuels while supporting and transitioning sizable sections of the American population, the new world system we are building will have more legitimacy.

—FSO Holly Kirking Loomis, *October 2021*.

FOR MORE ON CLIMATE DIPLOMACY, PLEASE VISIT OUR SPECIAL COLLECTIONS PAGE: [AFSA.ORG/FSJ-SPECIAL-COLLECTIONS](https://afsa.org/fsj-special-collections)

# A Decade-Long Campaign to Reform Assignment Restriction Programs

**A central participant recounts high points of a successful reform effort at State.**

BY MATTHEW ASADA

Assignment restrictions are conditions placed on an employee's security clearance prohibiting the employee from working in a specific country or a portfolio related to a specific country. Assignment preclusions are personnel actions limiting employees from working in specific countries due to issues of privileges and immunities, often linked with an employee's actual or potential claim to dual citizenship (3 FAM 2424.5). Assignment reviews are assessments regarding an employee's suitability for an assignment to a critical human intelligence threat post.

For more than two decades, the assignment restriction, assignment preclusion, and assignment review (also known as "pass-through") programs have degraded our diplomacy and prevented more than 2,000 colleagues from working in or on certain countries. For the past decade, AFSA, together with the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association (AAFAA) and other employee organizations, has waged a campaign to reform these programs.

As a result, in May 2024, the Department of State announced new AFSA-negotiated regulations implementing Section 6110 of the Department of State Authorization Act of 2023, which included the third piece of a solution to this problem and established a new employee right.



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*fellow at the University of Southern California, where he taught and researched public diplomacy with a particular focus on global mega events. This article reflects the author's personal views and not necessarily those of AFSA, AAFAA, or the Department of State.*



In November 2014, AFSA released an “Issue Brief” presenting its concerns with the process of assignment restrictions. The first mention of “assignment restrictions” in the *FSJ*, the brief was used to educate legislators and their staff.

This is the story of three critical moments in this campaign. It reveals how the department’s cultural inclination to the status quo may have contributed to the continued underrepresentation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) within the Senior Foreign Service (SFS) and how employees successfully mobilized for change.

## Establishing the Right to Challenge a Restriction

The first public notice of an “assignment restriction” is Lydia DePillis’ Sept. 24, 2013, article in *The Washington Post*, “At the State Department, Diversity Can Count Against You.” DePillis described how department policies on assignment restrictions disproportionately affected AAPI Foreign Service officers, such as Michael Young, and how these officers had been prevented from serving in or working on Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong. As AFSA State vice president at the time, I spoke with DePillis and noted that the issue did not only affect Asian Americans, but the strength of the AAPI employee organization had brought the issue to the fore. That article spurred the initial inquiries to State on the issue from House Foreign Affairs Committee staff, whose sustained interest would prove critical.

Six years earlier, Foreign Service Officer Richard Jao had partnered with Benjamin Chiang, Mira Piplani, and Julie Turner to reconstitute the defunct Asian American employee organization at State. It was renamed the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association (AAFAA), and Mariju Bofill was recruited as its first president. In December 2010, Bofill raised the issue of assignment restrictions with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

AFSA, too, had been concerned by the length of time, lack of transparency, and justification for security clearance decisions. In 2006, at congressional request, the State Department’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) reviewed Diplomatic Security’s (DS) Revocation Process for Security Clearances. OIG recommended a reasonable time for convening and rendering a decision by the Security Appeals Panel (SAP)—“such as 45 days.”

Although the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) listed the criteria used to determine an assignment restriction (12 FAM 223.5) and a pass-through denial (12 FAM 263.3-2), additional guidance was needed governing their use, review, or appeal. In its 2011 report



on the DS Office of Investigations and Counterintelligence, OIG noted: “The practice [on assignment reviews] has been for the Director General (DG) to defer to DS.”

In September 2013, AFSA requested disaggregated demographic data from the State Department to determine whether any groups were being adversely affected. The DS assistant secretary briefed AFSA on the programs, and DS subsequently supplied some aggregate numbers of affected employees and countries of restriction. AFSA summarized its concerns for a November 2014 AFSA News Issue Brief, the first mention of assignment restrictions in *The Foreign Service Journal*. AFSA President Bob Silverman and I used that piece in our engagement with congressional members and staff.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) and Ranking Member Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) were supportive of improving diversity within the Foreign Service. During an April 23, 2015, hearing, Sen. Menendez said to Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Heather Higginbottom: “The State Department has one of the worst records of diversity of all the federal agencies. ... Assignment restrictions and preclusion programs ... only exacerbate the problem.”

## Assignment Restrictions Programs: A Discussion on Reform

More than 50 colleagues packed into an overflowing room on May 21 to learn about and offer feedback on the Department of State's assignment restriction and pass-through programs, which govern how and when an employee's security clearance may be restricted to preclude them from serving in certain countries or working on certain issues.

These programs are driven by the department's interest in protecting employees from potential undue foreign influence. However, their execution often has undesirable effects on the lives and careers of Foreign Service employees (see the November 2014 AFSA News).

The event—sponsored by the American Foreign Service Association, the Asian-Americans in Foreign Affairs Association and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—came on the heels of an exclusive May 13 briefing on the same



Foreign Service members packed into the Marshall Center briefing room listen to colleagues' personal experiences with the assignment restriction and pass-through programs. At table, from left: AAFAA President Tom Wong, AFSA State Vice President Matthew Asada and AFSA Staff Attorney Andrew Large.

Pacific Islanders.

AFSA State Vice President Matthew Asada, EEOC Associate Director Dexter Brooks and AAFAA President Tom Wong led the conversation.

While all three supported DS's ability to apply heightened security screening, they urged that improvements be made to the current system (e.g., creating robust appeal mechanisms).

obtaining the reasons for assignment restrictions is challenging because DS policy requires employees to submit Freedom of Information Act requests to release their information.

For some, the event represented their first opportunity to speak directly with DS and HR representatives. One officer said she found out she was not able to serve at

In May 2015, at AFSA's invitation, officials from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Office of Personnel Management, and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI) met with members of the Foreign Service in the Marshall Center briefing room to discuss the assignment restriction programs, as reported in the July-August 2015 AFSA News. Shown here, from left: AAFAA President Tom Wong, AFSA State Vice President Matthew Asada, and AFSA Staff Attorney Andrew Large.

About a year later, in October 2016, President Barack Obama put forth a "Memorandum on Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in the National Security Workforce," which included a directive to national security agencies to implement a review process for decisions related to assignment restrictions. And the State Department issued a brand-new FAM section instituting a higher-level review in November 2016, but did not authorize an appeal (see the September 2017 *FSJ*).

The story would have ended there had Sen. Corker not succeeded in an 11th-hour maneuver. On Dec. 5, 2016, he obtained the Senate's unanimous consent for a bipartisan Department of State Authorities Act, Fiscal Year 2017, which included a new statutory right to appeal any assignment restriction (Section 414) and a mandate that State report on the *number and nature* of employees affected by the assignment restrictions in the previous three years.

### The Semantics of an Independent Appeals Process

In 2018, when transmitting its required report on employees affected by assignment restrictions, the State Department noted: "HFAC [House Foreign Affairs Committee] do[es] not believe that [12 FAM 233.5] fully adheres to the legislative requirements."

That year, I had been elected president of the 800-member AAFAA. Our board's focus was "full implementation of an independent appeals process." On Feb. 22, 2019, we sent Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan Jr. a letter requesting that the department fully implement the statutorily required independent appeals process. The response—"AAFAA tries to draw a semantic distinction between the law's use of the word 'appeal' vice the department's use of the word 'review'"—indicated that this was not going to be easy.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's State Department had a record number of AAPIs at senior levels: At one time, three AAPIs were serving in the six under secretary positions. While the political leadership was supportive, progress at the working- and senior career-staff level remained slow. AAFAA built coalitions with the other race, ethnicity, and national-origin employee

By the spring of 2015, we had bipartisan language at the committee staff level for a draft State Department authorization bill that included AFSA-supported items, such as extension of some provisions of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act and assignment restriction reform. A State Department authorization bill institutes or changes department programs, but there was no indication it would ever become law: A State authorization bill had not been passed since 2002, and many, including at AFSA and the department, were pessimistic about passage at the time.

Complementing the congressional engagement, we discussed the problem with other civil rights stakeholders in the spring of 2015. Japanese American Citizens League Executive Director Priscilla Ouchida wrote an April 22, 2015, letter to the Director General of the Foreign Service about "the lack of diversity at Embassy [Tokyo and] ... whether the department's current assignment and security clearance policies contribute to [AAPI] underrepresentation."

A May 13, 2015, meeting of the Diversity Governance Council with then-Deputy Secretaries Antony Blinken and Heather Higginbottom proved pivotal. There, AAFAA President Tom Wong and I described the personal impact of assignment restrictions in an emotional hour-long discussion that humanized this problematic personnel policy, which led to the department's first policy review of the issue. Days later, at AFSA's invitation, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Director of Federal Sector Programs Dexter Brooks, OPM Acting Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager Sharon Wong, and White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI) staff member Maureen Tariq visited the State Department for a May 21, 2015, conversation on assignment restriction programs.

Four presidents of the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association won AFSA's 2017 William R. Rivkin Award for Constructive Dissent by a Mid-Level Officer for their work to reform the assignment restriction programs at State, as reported in the September 2017 AFSA News. Shown here, from left: Former AAFAA presidents Mariju Bofill, Cecilia Choi, and Thomas Wong, with current President Christina Le at the AFSA Awards ceremony.

organizations. In May, we sent the department three diversity issue papers requesting barrier analyses, improved data, and review of the Foreign Service assignments process's impact on workforce diversity. And at AAFAA's 10th anniversary celebration in May 2019, Acting Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Michelle Giuda shared her Vietnamese American story to underscore the power of narratives.

On July 25, 2019, the House passed the FY19 State Authorization (HR 3352) on a bipartisan basis. The legislation included Section 311, a mandate to fully implement an independent appeals process, but the bill died at the end of that congressional session. In a July 31, 2019, letter to State, HFAC Chair Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) and SFRC ranking member Sen. Menendez urged more transparency and oversight and underscored their commitment to seeing this employee right fully implemented.

One of the reasons for the success of this multiyear campaign has been the continued involvement of AAFAA leaders. In June 2020, former AAFAA President Christina Le and several AAFAA members affected by assignment restrictions briefed Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun on the issue. Several months later, Biegun established an internal taskforce to review assignment restrictions and audit all existing cases.

To inform the discussions, newly elected AAFAA President Tina Wong sent a July 27, 2020, information memorandum to the Bureau for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) describing bias and errors in the application of assignment restrictions that had come to light through AAFAA's 2020 assignment restriction survey spearheaded by AAFAA member Joshua Shen and others. Wong and AAFAA's senior adviser met with the under secretary of State for management, Director General of the Foreign Service, and Diplomatic Security in early September to discuss these concerns.

AAFAA President Shirlene Yee and Vice President Liz Liu wrote about the association's "Historic Year of Advocacy" in the October 2021 issue of *State Magazine*. That historic year of advocacy and outreach had resulted in articles in CNN, *Politico*, and *The Hill*. CNN reporter Nicole Gaouette profiled Rep. Andy Kim (D-N.J.),



whose own assignment restriction while a State Department employee "felt like a very clear signal ... that they didn't trust me fully." In December 2021, AAFAA, now led by Liz Liu, sent EAP a final memo, "Assignment Restrictions' Negative Impact on EAP Staffing, Capabilities, and Public Messaging."

To address the continuing employee concerns, HFAC Chair Gregory Meeks (D-N.Y.) and ranking member Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas) again added assignment restriction appeal language to the Department of State's 2021 Authorization Act. The legislation, which confirmed the independent appeal and established a 60-day decision timeline, was signed into law (PL 117-81).

### Confirming the Employee Right

The 2021 legislation mandated a report on "a rationale for the use of assignment restrictions by the Department of State" (22 USC 2734e). The data, shared exclusively with Congress, indicated that even after more than 60 percent of all restrictions were lifted, Asian Americans were proportionally three times as likely as white colleagues to have a restriction.

On March 23, 2023, Secretary Blinken announced the end of new assignment restrictions and a process for employees to appeal existing assignment restrictions. In an internal email to employees, he said the change "allows us to unlock the full



Secretary of State Antony Blinken attends a virtual roundtable with the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association, moderated by AFAA President Shirlene Yee (at left), at the State Department in July 2021.



FSO Joshua Shen received the State Department's 2022 Edward J. Perkins Memorial Award for Outstanding Leadership in Diversity and Inclusion for his advocacy work on assignment restriction and pass-through reforms. Here, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley personally presents him with the award during a trip to Jakarta in 2023.

potential of our workforce while upholding the highest standards of security," according to a report in *The Washington Post*. Unfortunately, this policy decision did not end the process of assignment reviews (aka pass-throughs) nor did it provide employees with an independent appeals mechanism for the assignment reviews.

AAFAA and AFSA's sustained decade-long advocacy and congressional action led to major policy discussions, an internal audit, and a reduction in the number of active assignment restrictions from more than 2,000 in 2020 to 636 in 2023, potentially freeing up almost 10 percent of the diplomatic workforce to redeploy around the world.

As State wound down its use of new assignment restrictions, however, AAFAA received reports that members were increasingly being held up in the pass-through process, which had been retained. In 2010, according to the 2011 OIG report on the DS Office of Investigations and Counterintelligence, three of 700 employees had failed pass-through; by contrast, according to a Nov. 21, 2023, letter from the under secretary of management, in 2022 nine of 391 failed. AAFAA held firm in its belief that the 2016 legislation required State to institute the appeals process for pass-throughs as well. As AFSA State vice president at the time, I negotiated the text with congressional staff to ensure the appeal rights would apply to *any* type of assignment restriction.

Congressman Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) continued his focus on the issue as well. At a June 13, 2023, hearing with State’s Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, he raised the issue of assignment restrictions and their impact on morale and diplomatic readiness. The previous year Lieu and Reps. Andy Kim (D-N.J.), Joaquin Castro (D-Texas), and Chrissy Houlahan (D-Pa.) had introduced HR 5275, the Accountability in Assignment Restrictions Act.

President Biden signed the Department of State Authorization Act of 2023 into law on Dec. 22 of that year. Its Section 6110 provides employees with an independent appeals process for any assignment restriction or assignment review; codifies the Security Appeals Panel (SAP) as the final, independent appeals mechanism; and includes an annual reporting requirement on the cumulative number of individuals impacted by assignment restrictions as well as any pending assignment restriction or review open for more than 30 days.

## Lessons and Next Steps

This campaign, like previous personnel reforms, was successful because we raised awareness through media and external partners, engaged career and political leadership at the department, and educated congressional partners on potential legislative fixes. In her 2023 oral history for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, AFSA’s General Counsel Sharon Papp proudly notes that AFSA’s advocacy on assignment restrictions had resulted in a “big, big win.”

In 2024 AFSA Vice President Tina Wong successfully negotiated the implementation of the new law. Both 12 FAM 230 and 12 FAM 260 specify that SAP membership includes the Office of Civil Rights and confirm that the State Department will not apply any new assignment restrictions to the workforce.

With the new statutory right, implementing regulation, and reporting requirements, it is perhaps time for an external (OIG or GAO) review of these programs as the last one was conducted in 2011. This should include workload analysis, examination of the demographic composition of DS program staff, and assessment of the security clearance adjudicative guidelines, which may assume widespread foreign influence and blackmail concerns without sufficient supporting data.

Also, the State Department has acknowledged that Asian Americans are underrepresented at the SFS levels. Asian Americans were represented at Department of Labor–defined reasonable entry- and mid-levels (6.61 percent) but underrepresented at the Senior Foreign Service levels (2.36 percent) in 2012. Data from State’s own online interactive “Demographic Baseline Report”

## Barrier Analysis at State

**B**arrier analysis—required by equal employment opportunity (EEO) management directives but rarely conducted by the State Department across multiple administrations—involves the identification and analysis of obstacles to diversity and equal opportunity and the development of appropriate remedies.

Both the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and State’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) had identified concerns with State’s Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR), responsible for barrier analysis, repeatedly over the years (in 1989, 1993, and 2006).

In a 2016 deposition, Director of the Office of Civil Rights John Robinson confirmed that barrier analysis was not done as required by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and recommended by GAO in its 1989 report.

In 2020 GAO concluded in its report “State Department: Additional Steps Are Needed to Identify Potential Barriers to Diversity” that the department “should look at the long-standing issues ... and do a better job of addressing barriers to equal opportunity in its workforce.” —M.A.

notes that Asian Americans are underrepresented in the SFS as compared to their representation at other grades, suggesting a barrier analysis is needed to identify why and how best to address.

Meanwhile, a Jan. 2, 2024, *New York Times* front-page article, “Asian American Officials Cite Unfair Scrutiny and Lost Jobs in China Spy Tensions,” reminds us that the problem persists more broadly. Several employees from across the foreign affairs and national security agencies who were approached for the article declined to speak, not wanting to “rock the boat” and afraid of adverse career consequences, including fears of retaliation related to their current assignments or security clearances.

It is worth remembering that the progress made so far at the State Department started when one young diplomat, who had exhausted all internal efforts to redress his grievance, found the courage to speak out publicly. Michael Young’s 2013 interview in *The Washington Post* helped spur the AAFAA and AFSA campaigns and subsequent congressional action. We at State joined our voices together, each with his own personal motivation. For my part, I spoke up then and now to honor my Japanese American grandparents, who were born as American citizens yet deprived of their constitutional liberties during World War II.

But a colleague said it best, speaking for us all: “I spoke out because I know that the Department of State can do better ... and I felt I had a moral obligation. The department needs to acknowledge an inconvenient truth, that race has been and is a factor in these decisions.” ■

# Employee Organizations Advance Religious Inclusion at State

**Three faith-based employee organizations are making strides in the realm of religious diversity and inclusion at the State Department.**

BY THOMAS LYONS



**AMFAS**  
AMERICAN MUSLIMS  
AND FRIENDS AT STATE



**B**en, a Foreign Service officer serving overseas, was happy to go to training. Serving in back-to-back overseas assignments and having arrived at post with no time for training during his permanent change of station, Ben felt lucky that post had authorized him to return to the Foreign Service Institute. The week of leadership training went well, and he got some time to catch up with some former colleagues.

The trouble arose after he returned to post and filed his travel voucher. “Voucher returned,” said the notification from E2. The comment read: “Traveler is not authorized lodging on Saturday following the end of training. Lodging should be paid at traveler’s expense.”



*Thomas Lyons is a Foreign Service officer serving as political-economic counselor in La Paz. He also serves on the board of directors of the GRACE employee organization and is an ordained deacon in the Global Methodist Church. Note: FSO Ben’s account is an anonymized version of an actual reported incident.*

Rather than traveling back to post on Saturday, the first available travel day after training, Ben had indeed delayed until Sunday. In most normal circumstances, the comment from the voucher examiner makes sense. However, Ben, a practicing Orthodox Jew, could not travel on Saturday, the Jewish sabbath.

Prior to the trip, he had requested a religious accommodation from his supervisor, who was happy to comply when approving his travel authorization. The voucher examiner, however, was adamant there could be no exceptions. It was only after filing an EEO complaint, a lengthy and onerous administrative process, that Ben's voucher was accepted and paid.

This situation, while perhaps not common, occurs more often than one might think and highlights the challenges many employees face when trying to maintain their professional work life while adhering to their religious beliefs. Adherents of many faiths—such as Seventh-day Adventists who also observe a Saturday sabbath, Sikhs who have special clothing requirements, and Muslims whose prayer times occur during the workday—may observe religious traditions that conflict with standard working hours and procedures.

As much as State Department officialdom stresses the need for inclusion and acceptance, many people of faith routinely feel their convictions are not respected, and in many cases, they are actively discouraged—often via social or even professional exclusion—from even *revealing* their religious beliefs at work.

### Why the Exclusion?

There are a number of likely reasons for this, including a widespread misperception that because the State Department is a federal workplace, it must also be a completely secular one. There is also a belief that one's freedom of religion is limited to private worship practices or personal belief, and not the free and open exercise of one's faith.

Two other examples highlight this phenomenon. Some Muslim employees were stymied for years when they asked for a room at the Harry S Truman Building to be dedicated for Friday midday prayers. Department officials repeatedly told the group that such a prayer room, even if it wasn't labeled as such, could not be allowed because "Main State is a federal government building."

At around the same time, a Christian Diplomatic Security agent working in SA-20 asked a colleague if he wanted to meet up sometime for Bible study and prayer. His colleague

informed him that a "secret" Christian group was already meeting, but it had strict "Fight Club" rules about discussing the existence of the group—because "if management finds out we're praying at the office, they will shut it down."

For both these groups, simply meeting together to pray during their breaks—something explicitly permitted under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, the 1997 Clinton Guidelines on Religious Exercise and Religious Expression in the Federal Workplace, and the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998—was discouraged or even outright denied.

Much of the frustration many religious employees feel stems from misunderstandings and a lack of awareness about the rights that all employees enjoy. Fortunately, this situation is changing within State. The changes can be attributed in great measure to the hard work of the department's three faith-based employee organizations (EOs): GRACE, Jewish Americans for Diplomacy (JAD), and American Muslims and Friends at State (AMFAS).

### GRACE: The First Faith-Based EO

These three groups, all relatively new, have worked together to bring about a better understanding of the need for religious diversity and the inclusion of people of faith within the Department of State.

GRACE, the employee organization for Christians, faced significant backlash in its struggle to become the first recognized faith-based EO. Employees involved in the group's creation even received hate mail. *The Washington Post* published an article that was at best skeptical, if not critical, of the new organization.

For years, many within the department, including at the top levels of leadership, felt an organization that represented the rights of religious employees had no place. Fortunately, in 2018, GRACE received formal recognition by State and opened the door for the formation of other faith-based groups.

### Common Ground and Codification

While differing in religious convictions, the three faith-based EOs have found common ground in several areas that affect all people of faith within the department. One issue of particular importance to all three groups is codifying the department's rules around religious accommodation.

Previously, requests for religious accommodation were dealt with rather arbitrarily by the individual's immediate

supervisor. As highlighted in the travel voucher example above, in several cases, supervisors had an inadequate understanding of the law and the department's policy on this issue. They also lacked significant understanding of their employees' religious beliefs and practices.

In one real-world example, a member of JAD requested a day off to observe a lesser-known Jewish holiday. His supervisor told him: "I researched this, and only a very small percentage of Jews celebrate this holiday, so unfortunately, you'll have to work." Although the supervisor's comments and actions were clearly inconsistent with EEO law, because the department's policies at that time were unclear regarding requests for religious accommodation, the employee had little recourse to rectify the situation, outside filing an EEO complaint.

To remedy this and other similar situations, GRACE, JAD, and AMFAS worked together to help draft and clear a new department regulation in the Foreign Affairs Manual—3 FAM 1530—to ensure a fair process for religious accommodation requests. The revised FAM chapter was published in October 2023.

Key to this effort was the cooperation among the three religious EOs. Together, they collaborated, researched relevant laws, and consulted with the offices of Diversity and Inclusion, Civil Rights, and the Legal Adviser. They then approached the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) with one voice.

After the EOs shared common concerns and contributed to the draft of the new FAM chapter, the department published the new policy and then announced it through a department notice and an ALDAC cable. This was a significant win, not only for people of faith but also for the religious EOs, which, after once being told they could not exist, now have their voices heard by department leadership and are making positive changes for the workforce.

The new FAM chapter on religious accommodation states that frontline supervisors may approve religious accommodation requests, but denials of religious accommodation requests may only come from bureau Executive Office (EX) directors, and decisions must be made "as soon as practical." Denials from bureau EX directors must be in writing, with an explanation based on objective standards.

Even so, employees maintain the right to appeal the denial through the EEO process. The new steps outlined in the FAM

## In 2018, GRACE received formal recognition by State and opened the door for the formation of other faith-based groups.

add more accountability to the process, bring the State Department's policy closer in adherence to federal law, and afford greater protections for employees to live out their beliefs.

### Abiding by Key Tenets

Employees' right to religious expression in the workplace is derived from the First Amendment to the Constitution. Those rights, including the right to free speech and religious expression, do not disappear simply because one chooses to work for the federal government. In fact, the federal workplace, primarily comprising people who have taken an oath to support and defend the Constitution, should be the one workplace in America where an individual's constitutional rights are most protected.

The respect for employees' religious freedom is also a critical part of the department's diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives. People of faith who work for State should feel included and valued—not in spite of their faith but because of it. No one should feel as if expressing their faith at work would be a source of exclusion.

The department's DEIA tenets consistently emphasize the need for the department's workforce to "look like America." According to a 2022 survey on Statista, 74 percent of the U.S. population identifies with some religious belief. Of those, 41 percent regularly attend religious services. Broadening State's religious diversity, including affirmative measures to include and celebrate our religious colleagues, is crucial to meeting our DEIA goals and makes the department more representative of the people we serve.

### Raising Awareness

Although the FAM revision was a significant step toward greater inclusion and tolerance of religious faith in the workplace, the next step is to raise awareness. The three faith-based EOs are again sharing in this work and doing it both formally and informally. Informally, their members are unapologetically being their authentic selves and simply being more open about faith at work. Even the mere existence of the three employee organizations is a tangible sign of greater acceptance of religious diversity.

In particular, the department's formal recognition of employee organizations based on religion sends a clear signal



to all employees that these organizations and the people they represent are legitimate and valued parts of the workforce.

The organizations are making themselves visible in other, more formal ways as well. Following the terrorist attack by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023, JAD, AMFAS, and GRACE came together to organize a “Moment of Silence for Unity and Peace” on Oct. 30 and a “Gathering of Solidarity for Peace” on Nov. 29.

Held at State and attended virtually by posts around the world, these two events demonstrated the groups’ shared values of condemning hate and terrorism while exemplifying a spirit of interreligious harmony. One included readings of scripture from each religion, as well as other faith traditions, and served as a clear example of how employees can visibly and explicitly express their faith in the workplace.

Finally, the three employee organizations are working closely with department leadership—including the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, FSI, and GTM—to ensure all employees and managers are aware of best practices to accommodate employees of faith in the workplace.

### The Aim—and Hope

In January and February 2024, the governing boards of JAD, GRACE, and AMFAS met with GTM’s Chief Labor Management Negotiator Steve Polson and Dean of FSI’s Leadership and Management School Tom Vajda to discuss the role of the three EOs in the department’s broader DEIA initiatives and the development of professional training for employees on religious inclusion and accommodation.

The hope of the EOs is that these efforts will ultimately educate and inform the department’s workforce and ensure that religious employees are treated fairly and consistent with their constitutional rights and that managers, in particular, are better equipped to manage requests for religious accommodation.

Employees of faith make up a valued part of the mosaic of diversity within the department. Allowing those employees to express their faith freely, consistent with the First Amendment, and have their requests for religious accommodation fairly and equitably adjudicated is integral to the department’s DEIA initiatives.

These faith-based employee organizations are working hard—and, critically, working together—to raise the profile of people of faith and to advocate for greater religious inclusion in the workplace. GRACE, JAD, and AMFAS are proud to take their place alongside other identity-based employee organizations to protect the rights of individual employees and improve the diversity of the department. ■

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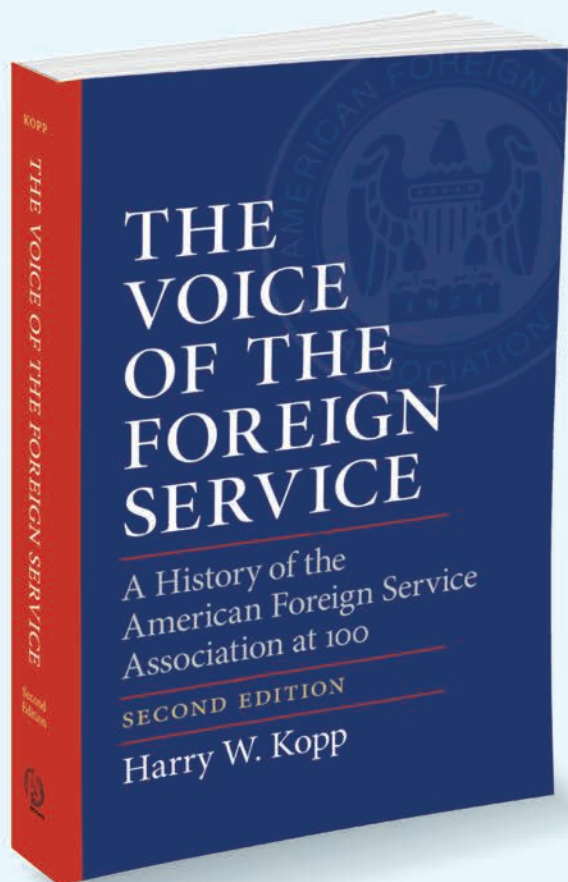
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# In honor of the Foreign Service and AFSA Centennial ...



The U.S. Foreign Service  
and the American Foreign  
Service Association  
were born together  
in 1924, the direct and  
indirect progeny of  
an act of Congress.  
This is their story.

“Marking the centennial of AFSA and the Foreign Service, *The Voice of the Foreign Service* is a must read for those who want to learn more about both.”

—*Ambassador Marie “Masha” Yovanovitch*

“Anyone concerned with reform of the State Department or American diplomacy needs to read this history of AFSA.” —*Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann*

“This book makes clear the inestimable importance of AFSA and the reason it is imperative to support the organization’s efforts on behalf of the U.S. Foreign Service.” —*Ambassador Ruth A. Davis*

“Harry Kopp educates us all about the valuable work AFSA has done in the past century.”

—*Ambassador Lino Gutiérrez*



## Celebrating 100 Years in Style

On the evening of May 21, AFSA, alongside Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Global Talent Marcia S. Bernicat, co-hosted a centennial gala for the Foreign Service in the State Department’s Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room. The gala marked a century of modern American diplomacy, celebrating the unwavering dedication and sacrifice of the men and women of the U.S. Foreign Service.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken headlined the list of distinguished speakers, which also included USAID Counselor Clinton White and CIA Director William Burns (for Burns’ comments, see box on page 63). More than 250 guests—Foreign Service veterans and newly commissioned diplomats, representatives from all the foreign affairs agencies, Foreign Service retirees, and AFSA officials and professional staff—gathered to reflect and raise a glass to a century of global service.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi opened the formal part of the evening with heartfelt appreciation for the men and women of agencies represented at the event, showcasing the strong sense of community and dedication within the Foreign Service. He proudly noted that more than 80 percent of active-duty Foreign Service employees are members of AFSA, emphasizing its critical role as



Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivers keynote remarks.



Gala attendees raise a glass to 100 years of global service.



USAID Counselor Clinton White shares a childhood experience that prompted his commitment to international development.

## CALENDAR

Please check [afsa.org/events](https://afsa.org/events) for the most up-to-date information.

September 2  
Labor Day  
AFSA offices closed

September 10 & 11  
10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.  
Employee Organization  
Onboarding Fair at State

September 12  
4:30-6:30 p.m.  
AFSA Centennial  
Happy Hour

September 18  
12:00-1:30 p.m.  
AFSA Governing  
Board meeting

September 26  
7:00-8:00 a.m. or  
12:00-1:00 p.m.  
Early to Mid-Career  
Retirement Planning  
with John Naland

September 27  
7:05 p.m.  
FS Night at  
Nationals Park

the unified voice of the U.S. Foreign Service.

“1924 saw the birth of AFSA as the professional association of this Service. It is thus fitting that tonight, we are here together, the State Department and AFSA, as the joint stewards of the Foreign Service since 1924,” he said.

Yazdgerdi expressed gratitude to Director General Bernicat, AFSA staff, and the Department of State for their indispensable support and paid tribute to the late Ambassador Esther Cooper-smith, who was a member of

*Continued on page 63*



## Understanding Assignment Restrictions and Denials

September marks the Summer 2025 bidding season, when about one-third of the Foreign Service workforce applies for onward assignments.

Notable in this year's bidding instructions is the State Department's prioritized staffing of hardship and high differential posts, posts with small sections, and other mission-critical areas.

To further address the problem of having 400-plus more jobs than bidders, a predetermined number of jobs across FS-3, -2, and -1 generalists, and some specialist categories, are again frozen at the bureau level.

Mandarin, Arabic, and other "super-hard" languages remain high staffing priorities.

Did you know, however, that a segment of our Foreign Service workforce is barred from bidding on certain posting(s) or may not get paneled to that assignment? These are known as assignment restrictions and assignment review (or pass-through) denials (learn more in Matthew Asada's article on page 48).

AFSA recently negotiated with the department to implement reforms, including a congressionally mandated independent appeals mechanism and the accompanying procedural steps for those employees facing Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) assignment restrictions or assignment reviews.

### Why This Matters

Members across the Foreign Service agencies should know that those in any employment category (Foreign Service, Civil Service, contractors, eligible family members, or interns) can face delays in DS clearance adjudications or notification of restrictions on a specific country of assignment.

For more than a decade, AFSA has been at the forefront of helping affected members—many with deep cultural knowledge and linguistic talents—navigate these processes.

As former president of the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association (AAFAA) and now AFSA State vice president, I have been on an advocacy journey that has not only focused on achieving independent appeals but also on continuously calling on the department to reduce adjudicative errors, increase case review timeliness, and improve predictability of these processes.

### What Did We Win?

One of the most tangible outcomes of AFSA and AAFAA advocacy was establishment of the 2020-2021 Assignment Restrictions Task Force (ARTF), whose work included an audit that resulted in a two-thirds reduction of assignment restriction cases from more

than 1,200 to fewer than 600 today.

We are grateful for the efforts of former DS Office Director for Personnel Security and Suitability Erin Smart, whose team worked hard over several years to resolve and reduce those cases.

AFSA and AAFAA successfully encouraged the department and found allies on the Hill to advocate for improved outcomes. The department's decision to end issuance of new assignment restrictions in March 2023 marked another success for AFSA members.

The department anticipates that the rest of the grandfathered assignment restriction cases will gradually be lifted over time.

Some employees who do not have restrictions or whose restrictions were newly lifted may encounter assignment review denials. (See the newly negotiated 12 FAM 230 for Assignment Restrictions and 12 FAM 260 for Assignment Reviews appeals procedures.)

### A Glass Half Empty or Full?

I'd be the first to admit that I worried about the department's decision to continue the assignment review program and its potential chilling effect on many of our bidders who want to serve in certain critical high-threat countries.

But I found a glimmer of hope when connecting with an entry-level officer who has been approved to serve in a region where he has living foreign relatives.

We traded stories about our family histories and learned a lot about what we had in common, particularly in going through the assignment review process. We went through the assignment review process exactly 10 years apart, and it seems to me that the regulations were applied consistently in our cases.

Thus, I am calling for those critical missions looking to attract more bidders to showcase the diversity in their current workforce.

The bottom line for bidders: Don't count yourself out solely because you happen to check the family-ties criteria listed in 12 FAM 263.2(b)(1-2).

For more questions about bidding, contact the specific regional bureau or your career development officer.

### The Appeals Recourse

For those who have been waiting for resolution of their cases, there is finally an independent appeals mechanism, the Assignments Security Appeals Panel (A-SAP).

We sent out a detailed AFSAnet in June about AFSA's negotiated wins on the A-SAP procedures,

*Continued on page 75*



## Transition Anxiety

July 2024. Sitting in a hotel room while the U.S. swelters, looking to escape the noise, I find it hard not to be drawn into the never-ending news cycle and speculation about November. I have had more chats, emails, and calls with family and friends in the past few weeks than I can count. They worry about the future. The inevitable question: What are you going to do if ...?

What am I going to do if ...? As Foreign Service officers and U.S. government employees, we have a choice that's binary: (1) Continue to do the job we were hired to do to the best of our ability and at the highest level of quality and integrity, or (2) Retire/resign.

There is no gray area here, there is no work to rule, keep your head down, or slow roll. Regardless of where we serve, our job is to implement the foreign and development policy outlined by the White House and funded by Congress. That includes utilizing the breadth and depth of our experience and knowledge to engage with political leadership in constructive dialogue and dissent.

If you or I reach a point of personal exhaustion, and are no longer able to do our jobs, then we must choose option 2. Most who choose to resign or retire do so in private, but some choose to make their decision more public, and that choice, too, is theirs and set by their values.

### Regardless of where we serve, our job is to implement the foreign and development policy outlined by the White House and funded by Congress.

#### Change at the Top

Since I joined USAID in 2004, we have had 12 Administrators—seven confirmed and five acting. That's one every 1.6 years. Each of these transitions, coupled with four presidential transitions, brought anxiety, angst, and uncertainty.

With each shift at the top, the infrastructure below it, career Civil and Foreign Service staff bent, flexed, strained, expanded, contracted, and in the end, they remained—all while successfully implementing the policies and programs that defined each president and Administrator, regardless of political affiliation. This is our core! Our power! We get things done!

For the 395 Foreign Service officers and 407 Foreign Service Limited employees who joined since 2021, welcome aboard the transition rollercoaster. Please ensure your seat belt is fastened and keep your arms and legs inside at all times! The ride will end.

#### Transition Plans

With two months left in the election cycle, USAID has established a transition

team to begin drafting a set of strategy, policy, and budget briefers and has convened working groups. Posts, bureaus, and independent offices may be strategizing various scenarios, and many of you are likely doing the same ahead of the 2025 general assignment cycle.

What will the transition bring? Status quo, or change? For better or worse, we have a basic understanding of each. The change is what keeps some up at night.

The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 lays out proposed changes for a next conservative president. You can read it online: Chapter 3 details the institutionalization of Schedule F, expansion of political appointments, creation of new "special" hiring categories, limitation or elimination of access to unions, and alteration of the merit promotions system.

Chapter 9 outlines a new vision for USAID: eliminate gender programming, limit humanitarian assistance, change the focus of our health portfolio, and increase the number of political appointees. Some of this takes us back to 2017-2021, while some goes further.

Regardless of what will be implemented, knowing what the future may bring helps us all prepare for that transition as we consider our options.

#### AFSA's Plans

What is AFSA doing about it? For 100 years, AFSA has been and will remain a non-partisan organization. But we will continue to engage with other federal unions to support and defend our collective bargaining units.

This past June, AFSA joined more than 20 other federal employee associations advocating legislative changes to permanently limit Schedule F and protect the career Service.

Further, we continue to push for reforms in the nomination process for career FS officers to senior leadership positions and limits to the number of political appointees; engage with USAID leadership to strengthen merit promotion, programs for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and the assignment process; and consistently communicate the importance of the professional Foreign Service in implementing U.S. policy, regardless of party.

Throughout this period, I will be engaging with, promoting, and, when necessary, defending the USAID Foreign Service corps. Option 2 is available, but it is not my future. ■



## Reviewing Your Retirement Plan

Did you take any fun trips over the summer? Do you have anything interesting planned for the fall? As you make the most of your well-deserved retirement, the former management officer in me encourages you to pause briefly to take stock of the financial and bureaucratic aspects of your retirement plan. Here are important action items:

**Review your investment portfolio.** If some of your retirement income derives from the Thrift Savings Plan, an IRA, or other financial investments, it would be prudent for you to check how they have been doing in the last few years in the face of high inflation.

Investing in stock funds with relatively high average rates of return will increase the chances that your investments will generate gains that outpace inflation over time, but they also put you at risk of short-term losses during stock market downturns.

To set the risk-versus-reward balance in your investments, consider your time horizon (i.e., how long do you or your survivor expect to depend on that income?) and your risk tolerance (i.e., would a sudden market downturn keep you awake at night?).

### **Brief your survivors.**

Because our family members are often unfamiliar with offices and functions in the foreign affairs agencies, AFSA created a list of steps

to take in the event of the death of a Foreign Service retiree, spouse, or ex-spouse.

That list is included in the 2024 AFSA Directory of Retired Members and is posted in the Retirement Resources section of the AFSA website at <https://afsa.org/retirement> under “Directory of Retired Members 2024, select sections.”

AFSA recommends that you make a copy of the list, show it to your next-of-kin, and file it with your will.

### **Watch for age milestones.**

Are you approaching age 62 and need to decide when to file for Social Security? Are you approaching 65 and need to decide whether to sign up for Medicare Part B? Are you approaching 73 and need to figure out what to do about required minimum distributions from your investments?

The Retirement Resources page of the AFSA website has information on these topics, including videos of presentations by experts.

**Act after a relationship change.** Post-retirement marriage relationship changes, such as divorce or death of spouse, are occasions to take actions such as changing your survivor annuity election or updating your beneficiary designations. Some of those steps have deadlines for action.

For more information, see the Department of State Office of Retirement’s Annual Annuitant Newsletter posted at <https://RNet.state.gov>

under the “What’s New?” tab. A copy is also posted on the Retirement Resources page of the AFSA website.

### **Review your FEHB plan.**

Many Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) plans have recently, or will soon, implement substantial changes affecting Medicare-eligible retirees. Even if you have had the same FEHB provider for years and have been happy with it, changing to another plan next year could potentially save you money.

When the next FEHB open season starts in early November, AFSA will help you weigh your options by giving you access to The Checkbook, a great tool for comparing FEHB plans. Members will receive an email providing online access in mid-November.

**Keep informed.** If you have not at least skimmed through the Office of Retirement’s 2024 Foreign Service Annual Annuitant Newsletter, please take a few minutes to do so. It contains important official information regarding your federal retirement benefits.

In addition, AFSA’s Retirement Resources webpage

has nearly 100 documents, videos, and links to information on retirement benefits. AFSA’s annual retiree directory includes 20 pages of guidance on retiree issues.

Finally, AFSA periodically offers programs on finances, such as last March’s program, “Investment Primer: Managing Your Retirement Portfolio for Income, Growth, and Safety,” with Certified Financial Planner William Carrington. This webinar can be found on AFSA’s Retirement Resources webpage under “Getting Ready for Retirement.”

**Support AFSA.** Help AFSA defend both the active-duty Foreign Service and your earned retirement benefits by maintaining your AFSA membership.

If your membership depends on you writing a check each year, please consider switching from annual billing to paying dues via annuity deduction. Switching will save AFSA money and ensure that your membership does not inadvertently lapse due to lost or unnoticed mail.

Email [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org) for more information. ■



## AFSA Governing Board Meeting, June 12, 2024

The Governing Board met on June 12, 2024.

While there were no items to vote on, the board discussed upcoming issues and events of interest, such as Foreign Service Night at Nationals Park on Friday, Sept. 27. ■

Gala  
Continued from page 59

AFSA's honorary centennial committee until her passing on March 26, 2024.

Special recognition was given to the American Foreign Service Protective Association and Ambassadors John Negroponte and Rozanne Ridgeway for their generous support of the gala.

Yazdgerdi also recognized Virginia General Assembly members Paul Krizek and David Reid for their sponsorship of Resolution 206 honoring the Foreign Service (see story on page 66).

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the evening's keynote speaker, expressed admiration for AFSA and its members, acknowledging the professionalization and progress of the Foreign Service over the past 100 years. "Through hot and cold wars, democratic waves, and technological revolutions, our diplomats, our development experts have adapted to meet every single challenge," he said.

Secretary Blinken concluded by comparing Foreign Service officers to George Bailey from the film "It's a Wonderful Life." Through their dedicated efforts, he said, America's diplomats make the world a better, brighter place.

Counselor Clinton White of USAID reflected on the journey that led him to the Foreign Service.

*Continued on next page*



CIA Director William Burns reflects on his Foreign Service career.

AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA

## William Burns on Serving with Honor

It was my extraordinary good fortune to serve for nearly three and a half decades as a career diplomat. The Foreign Service shaped my life, professionally and personally. ...

I can't imagine a luckier ride in American diplomacy than the one that I had. I saw the end of the Cold War and the depressing road that Vladimir Putin shaped for Russia. I saw endless challenges in the Middle East, with occasional glimmers of hope and more frequent dead ends. And by the end of my time as a diplomat, I saw the re-emergence of fierce major power competition and a revolution in technology that is changing how we live, work, fight, and compete.

I shared that ride with an incredible group of professionals, many of whom are in this room tonight. Their commitment to doing hard jobs in hard places always inspired me. I continued to learn from them and draw from their examples right up until my last day in the Foreign Service.

Not a day goes by when I don't think with pride about my time as a career diplomat. And not a day goes by when I'm not reminded of the significance of American diplomacy on the most crowded, competitive, complicated, and combustible international landscape I've seen in my lifetime. ...

There is, of course, much that is different about life and work on either side of the river between our two great institutions. But the most important things are the same—courage, community, and commitment to service. We share a conviction that it's only by staying in the arena that we can advance American interests and values, whether the tool is diplomacy or intelligence. ...

On behalf of all my colleagues at CIA—and from this very proud old guy—congratulations on the 100th anniversary of the Foreign Service and of AFSA. And congratulations on the deep commitment to public service that we share. ■

Gala  
Continued from page 63

He shared his “10-second moment” from childhood when his mother caught him attempting to throw away his Brussels sprouts. She showed him a picture of a *Time LIFE* magazine cover depicting a famine in eastern Africa. In reaction, White was inspired to collect money for UNICEF during Halloween, ultimately finding his passion for international development.

He praised recent USAID efforts, including the Feed the Future initiative, and spoke about the historical roots of USAID in the Marshall Plan and the Green Revolution: “Our 1,910



AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi exchanges words with Secretary Blinken.

Foreign Service officers are posted in nearly every country in the world. Remarkable people who leave home to tackle some of the world’s most difficult challenges.”

CIA Director William Burns—himself an AFSA member—reminisced on his own career, which began 42 years ago when he was sworn in as an FSO in the same room where he was now speaking. He witnessed

the end of the Cold War, challenges in the Middle East, and the resurgence of major power competition.

He praised Secretary Blinken for his leadership, positive global influence, and commitment to our diplomats.

Burns also shared his experiences as the director of the CIA, pointing to the agency’s role in supporting American diplomats and

addressing the conflict in Ukraine, technological advancements, and strategic competition with China and Russia.

He concluded with advice his father had once given him: “Nothing can make you prouder than to serve your country with honor.”

A video recording of the event is available at <https://bit.ly/FSGala>. ■

## Party in a Box!

In honor of the Foreign Service and AFSA centennials, AFSA wanted to celebrate with members around the world. To foster a sense of shared celebration, AFSA sent out special “Party-in-a-Box” packages to the first 30 posts requesting them.

These centennial-themed boxes were packed with exclusive AFSA swag, including notebooks, notepads, pens, coasters, and lanyards.

Each box also contained a few special merchandise items (such as hats and coffee tumblers, which were intended as raffle prizes), AFSA trivia questions, and a social media toolkit to encourage posts to share the celebrations online.

Check out AFSA’s social media toolkit at <https://afsa.org/centennial-social-media-toolkit>. ■



CONSULATE GENERAL IN CALGARY

The team at U.S. Consulate General Calgary celebrates the centennial.

Centennial celebrations in Taipei.



AMERICAN INSTITUTE IN TAIWAN



## A Birthday Party of the Century



AFSA staff close out the evening as the sun sets over the Potomac.

On May 30, AFSA marked its 100th anniversary with a spectacular celebration at the Top of the Gate rooftop venue at the iconic Watergate Hotel.

The event offered breathtaking views of the Washington skyline as AFSA members and friends mingled over light hors d'oeuvres and drinks while celebrating this milestone.

Proceeds from ticket sales supported AFSA's Fund for American Diplomacy, a nonprofit dedicated to



AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi leads a toast celebrating 100 years of service.

*Continued on next page*

*Birthday Party*  
Continued from page 65

educating Americans about the vital work of the Foreign Service.

Whether longtime members or recent joiners, attendees created a vibrant atmosphere honoring the past and looking forward to a bright future. ■



AFSA members mingle on the Watergate hotel rooftop.

AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA



DS Agent and former FSJ Editorial Board Member Jessica McTigue (left) and FSO Sharen Kitterman.

AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA



From left: FSJ Editorial Board Member Ambassador Robert Beecroft, AFSA Labor Management Counselor Colleen Fallon-Lenaghan, AFSA's Manager of Outreach and Internal Communications Allan Saunders, AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi, and former AFSA Executive Director Ian Houston.

AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA

## FS Retiree Makes Resolution 206 Happen

In March 2024, the Virginia Legislature passed House Joint Resolution 206, honoring the U.S. Foreign Service.

The resolution, sponsored by Delegates David Reid (D-28th) and Paul Krizek (D-16th), was initiated by Foreign Service retiree Jim Meenan, who proposed the idea to Del. Reid during a visit to Meenan's retirement community in Ashburn on Jan. 5, 2024.

Passage of the resolution signals a meaningful recognition of the contributions and sacrifices made by Foreign Service members.



Delegate David Reid speaking to Jim Meenan's retirement community.

COURTESY OF JIM MEENAN

Delegates Reid and Krizek, who attended AFSA's May 21 centennial gala, brought with them a framed copy of the resolution to commemorate the occasion.

Special thanks are

extended to Jim Meenan for his dedication and efforts in bringing Resolution 206 to fruition.

The full text of the resolution can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/Resolution206>. ■



AFSA's Director of Advocacy Kim Sullivan and Policy Analyst Sean O'Gorman hold a copy of the resolution at the centennial gala on May 21, 2024.

AFSA/SHAWN DORRMAN

## AFSA Hosts Chiefs of Mission



U.S. Chiefs of Mission at AFSA, June 4.

On June 4, AFSA hosted its annual Chiefs of Mission Breakfast at headquarters, coinciding with the Chiefs of Mission (COM) Conference. This year marked a milestone as the event was officially included in the COM conference schedule. Some 35 career diplomats chiefs of mission participated.

The early morning gathering provided an informal, off-the-record platform for U.S. career Foreign Service ambassadors in from around the world to discuss pressing issues and share insights with one another and with AFSA leadership.

AFSA President Tom Yazgerdi kicked off the event



AFSA State VP Tina Wong, left, with Ambassadors Julie Chung, Michele Sison, and Hugo Yon on June 4.

with introductory remarks about AFSA's current pri-

orities, and then opened the floor for discussion. ■

## Op-Ed Voices Celebrate Centennial

As part of the centennial celebration, AFSA launched a public outreach initiative to raise awareness about the vital role of the U.S. Foreign Service.

A central component of the initiative was a retiree op-ed campaign that successfully placed 15 op-eds and letters to the editor across more than a dozen states. These pieces were further amplified through AFSA's social media channels and shared with

members and contacts on Capitol Hill.

One article reflects on the transformation brought about by the Rogers Act, which professionalized the Foreign Service a century ago, enabling individuals from varied backgrounds to serve their country abroad.

Another op-ed tells the author's journey from waiting tables to joining the Foreign Service. A third piece celebrates the enduring non-partisan ethos of the Foreign

Service, essential for effective diplomacy and the promotion of U.S. interests globally.

To read these articles, please visit <https://afsa.org/learn-more>.

As AFSA continues to commemorate this milestone throughout the year, we invite members and supporters to share their stories and contribute to this important conversation.

For more information or to participate in this effort, please contact AFSA Com-



Featured publications as part of AFSA's op-ed campaign.

munications and Outreach Director Nikki Gamer at [gamer@afsa.org](mailto:gamer@afsa.org). ■

**AFSA SCHOLARSHIPS**

**Meet the 2024 AFSA Merit Award Winners**



AFSA/JOAQUIN SOSA

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi and Director General Marcia Bernicat with this year’s merit award winners.

Founded almost 100 years ago, in 1926, the AFSA Scholarship Program awarded \$396,000 in 2024. In need-based financial aid scholarships, \$248,000 was divided among 75 students. In merit awards, \$148,000 was divided among 43 students, with 48 merit awards given.

This year’s youth awards ceremony took place in the State Department’s George C. Marshall Center, featuring remarks by AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi and Director General of the Foreign Service Marcia Bernicat.

Here are the 2024 AFSA merit award winners, listed alphabetically by last name. Winners received \$3,500, honorable mentions \$2,000, the best essay \$2,500, second-place essay \$1,500, and third-place essay \$1,500.

AFSA thanks all the judges and donors who made this year’s AFSA Scholarship Awards possible.

**Academic Merit Scholarship Winners**

**Ben Barwig**—son of Andrew (State) and Jill Barwig (State), graduated from Meridian High School, Falls Church, Virginia. Plans to attend New York University to study film and television production. Ben is also the winner of the Art Merit Scholarship.

**Abigail Hosanna Bills**—daughter of Thomas (State) and Rebecca Bills, graduated from American International School of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania. Plans to attend Brigham Young University to study psychology.



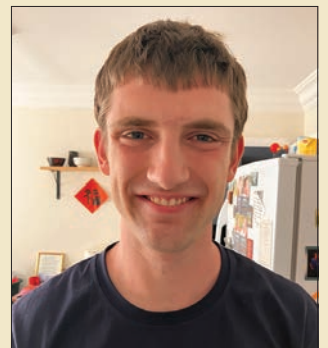
Ben Barwig



Abigail Hosanna Bills



Dora Bowen-Glazeroff



Silas Brock



Diana Domenica Carlson



Carmen Henick



Sasha Friefeld



Liam Price Higgins



Becca Green



Carolyn Hultman



Naima Haidara



Erik Hurst

**Dora Bowen-Glazeroff**—daughter of Josh Glazeroff (State) and Melanie Bowen, graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia. Plans to attend Carnegie Mellon University to study civil engineering.

**Silas Brock**—son of David (State) and Charlotte Brock, graduated from the International School of Beijing, Beijing, China. Plans to attend Harvey Mudd College to study computer science.

**Diana Domenica Carlson**—daughter of Robert (State) and Miryam Carlson, graduated from Fairfax High School, Fairfax, Virginia. Plans to attend William & Mary to study international affairs.

**Sasha Friefeld**—daughter of Christopher Friefeld (State) and Sara Woodring, graduated from George C. Marshall High School, Falls Church, Virginia. Plans to attend the University of Virginia to study biology.

**Becca Green**—daughter of Eric Green (State), graduated from Jackson Reed High School, Washington, D.C. Plans to attend University of California, Berkeley, to study philosophy and economics.

**Naima Haidara**—daughter of Malick (USAID) and Alexandria Haidara (State), graduated from Seneca Valley High School, Germantown, Maryland. Plans to attend University of Maryland College Park to study economics.

**Carmen Henick**—daughter of Jonathan Henick (State) and Dominique Freire, graduated from UWC Atlantic College, St. Donats, Wales. Plans to attend Columbia University to study economics.

**Liam Price Higgins**—son of Ana (State) and Scott Higgins (State), graduated from Academia Cotopaxi American International School, Quito, Ecuador. Plans to attend the University of Virginia to study economics.

**Carolyn Hultman**—daughter of Darren Hultman (State) and Vourneen Clifford-Hultman, graduated from Walter Johnson High School, Bethesda, Maryland. Plans to attend the University of California, Los Angeles, to study economics.

**Erik Hurst**—son of Bradley (State) and Katrin Hurst, graduated from Portsmouth High School, Portsmouth, Rhode Island. Plans to attend the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to study electrical engineering.

**Eileen Kosnar**—daughter of Margaret (State) and Stephen Kosnar, graduated from Rabat American School, Rabat, Morocco. Plans to attend McGill University to study environmental economics.

**Laszlo Elvis Lawless**—son of Bleu Lawless (State), graduated from Frankfurt International School, Oberursel, Germany. Plans to attend Vassar College to study English and music.

**Catherine Martz**—daughter of David (USAID) and Robin Martz (USAID), graduated from New England Innovation Academy, Marlborough, Massachusetts. Plans to attend University of Michigan to study international studies.

**Cesar Leonel Miranda**—son of Leonel (State) and Raquel Miranda, graduated from Frankfurt International School, Oberursel, Germany. Plans to attend Boston College to study operations management.

**Josilyn Miranda Xia Hokulea Neel**—daughter of James (State) and Jaimee Neel (State), graduated from Kahuku High and Intermediate, Kahuku, Hawaii. Plans to attend Brigham Young University to study neuroscience.

**Evdoxia Owen**—daughter of Evan (State) and Joanna Athanasopoulos Owen, graduated from Thomas A. Edison High School, Alexandria, Virginia. Plans to attend the University of California, Los Angeles, to study engineering. Evdoxia is also the winner of a Community Service Honorable Mention Scholarship.

**Leslie Payne**—daughter of Dexter (State) and Ellen Payne, graduated from James Madison High School, Vienna, Virginia. Plans to attend the University of Massachusetts, Boston, to study psychology.

**Avery Pike**—daughter of Craig (State) and Liana Pike, graduated from Meridian High School, Falls Church, Virginia. Plans to attend William & Mary to study public policy.

**Annalia Rodriguez**—daughter of Hugo (State) and Karen Rodriguez (State), graduated from Oakton High School, Vienna, Virginia. Plans to attend the University of Florida to study economics and business.

**Layla Samouie**—daughter of Louay Samouie (USAID) and Tamara Salem, graduated from Clovis West High School, Fresno, California. Plans to attend Pepperdine University to study biology.

**Maddie Selinger**—daughter of Thomas (State) and Kirsten Selinger (State), graduated from Yorktown High School, Arlington, Virginia. Plans to attend Carleton College to study biology.

**Anjali Kathleen Seshadri**—daughter of Anne (State) and Srikanth Seshadri, graduated from George C. Marshall High School, Falls Church, Virginia. Plans to attend William & Mary to study neuroscience and literature.

**Marie Lynn Sheets**—daughter of Jason (State) and Akiko Sheets, graduated from American Community School Amman, Amman, Jordan. Plans to attend the University of Edinburgh to study history and politics.

**Mackenna Show**—daughter of Jason (State) and Carrie Show, graduated from Santa Barbara Senior High School, Santa Barbara, California. Plans to attend the University of California, Los Angeles, to study ecology, behavior, and evolution.

**Samuel Sievers**—son of Marc Sievers (State), graduated from the American Community School Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Plans to attend the University of Maryland to study mechanical engineering.

**Jayde Springs**—daughter of Mary Brett Rogers-Springs (State) and Richard Springs, graduated from Washington Liberty High School, Arlington, Virginia. Plans to attend James Madison University to study nursing.

**Angela K. Stables**—daughter of Sandra Giraldo-Stables (State) and John Stables (State), graduated from the American School of Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Plans to attend the University of Texas at Austin to study international relations.

**Anjali Tegenfeldt**—daughter of Mark (USAID) and Kathrin Tegenfeldt, graduated from the American Embassy School New Delhi, New Delhi, India. Plans to attend William & Mary to study psychology. Anjali is also the winner of a Best Essay Honorable Mention Scholarship.



Eileen Kosnar



Josilyn Miranda Xia Hokulea Neel



Laszlo Elvis Lawless



Evdoxia Owen



Catherine Martz



Leslie Payne



Cesar Leonel Miranda



Avery Pike



Annalia Rodriguez



Marie Lynn Sheets



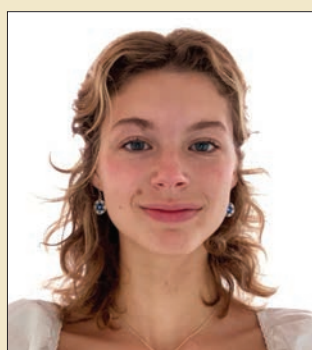
Angela K. Stables



Kalyana Dey



Layla Samouie



Mackenna Show



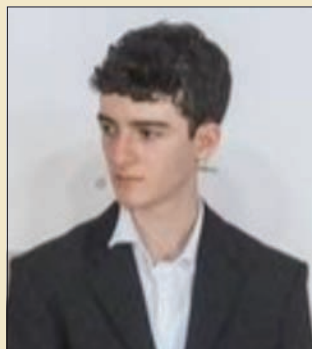
Anjali Tegenfeldt



Miriam Fabrycky



Maddie Selinger



Samuel Sievers



Charles Whitby VanHorn

**Charles Whitby VanHorn**—son of Nancy (State) and Phillip VanHorn (State), graduated from Meridian High School, Falls Church, Virginia. Plans to attend the University of Texas at Austin to study aerospace engineering. Charles is also the winner of Honorable Mention Scholarships for Best Essay and Community Service.



Anjali Kathleen Seshadri



Jayde Springs



Julia Wolf

**Julia Wolf**—daughter of Thomas Wolf (State) and Tanya Teschke, graduated from Meridian High School, Falls Church, Virginia. Plans to attend Amherst College to study history.

**Art Merit Scholarship Winner**

**Ben Barwig**—see biography under academic merit.

**Art Merit Scholarship Honorable Mentions**

**Kalyana Dey**—daughter of Bryn Sakagawa (USAID) and Chayan Dey (State), graduated from the American School of Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Plans to attend the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, to study international relations.

**Miriam Fabrycky**—daughter of David (State) and Laura Fabrycky, graduated from Woodson High School, Fairfax, Virginia. Plans to attend Wake Forest University to study history, political science, and international affairs.

**Tessa Gonzalez-Ferrette**—daughter of Holly Ferrette (USAID) and Fernando Gonzalez, graduated from Albert Einstein High School, Kensington, Maryland. Plans to attend the Pratt Institute to study fine arts.

**Olivia Lampel**—daughter of Michael (State) and Ikuyo Lampel, graduated from California School of the Arts, San Gabriel Valley, Duarte, California. Plans to attend Occidental College to study diplomacy and world affairs.

**Fiona Skye Neff**—daughter of Rebecca (State) and Andrew Neff, graduated from James Madison High School, Vienna, Virginia. Plans to attend Berklee College of Music to study professional music.

**Community Service Scholarship Winner**

**Sandhya Rose Stapleton**—daughter of Sean (State) and Vandana Stapleton (USAID), graduated from the American Embassy School New Delhi, New Delhi, India. Plans to attend Southern Methodist University to study English.

**Community Service Scholarship Honorable Mentions**

**Ezra Jordan Clark**—son of Jeremie (State) and Stephanie Clark (State), graduated from the International School of Suva, Suva, Fiji. Plans to attend George Fox University to study business management.

**Elisabeth Karnes**—daughter of Joshua (USAID) and Simone Karnes, graduated from the International Community School of Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Plans to attend Calvin University to study elementary education.

**Abigail Madden**—daughter of Sean (State) and Kimmarie Madden, graduated from American Community School of Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Plans to attend Emmanuel College.

**Evdoxia Owen**—see biography under academic merit.

**Charles Whitby VanHorn**—see biography under academic merit.

**Best Essay Scholarship**

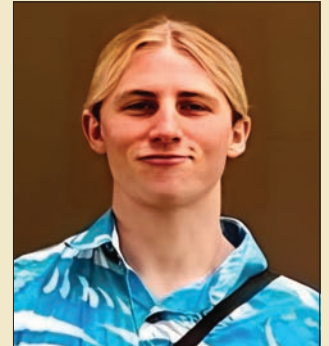
**Charles Whitby VanHorn**—see biography under academic merit.

**Ava Rose Higgins**—daughter of Ana (State) and Scott Higgins (State), graduated from Academia Cotopaxi American International School, Quito, Ecuador. Plans to attend the University of Virginia to study political philosophy, policy, and law.

**Anjali Tegenfeldt**—see biography under academic merit. ■



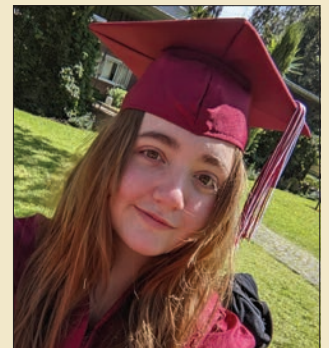
Tessa Gonzalez-Ferrette



Ezra Jordan Clark



Olivia Lampel



Elisabeth Karnes



Fiona Skye Neff



Abigail Madden



Sandhya Rose Stapleton



Ava Rose Higgins



## 2024 AFSA Strategic Writing Award Winner: Mark Gul

Mark Gul, a Foreign Service officer and recent National Defense University (NDU) graduate, has been awarded the prestigious AFSA Strategic Writing Award for his insightful and timely paper, “Lessons from the Russo-Finnish and Serbo-Croatian Wars for the Battlefields of Ukraine.”

The AFSA Strategic Writing Award (formerly known as the George F. Kennan Strategic Writing Award) recognizes the best essay on strategy or policy from among the current Foreign Service cohort of NDU graduates.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi presented Gul with the award at AFSA headquarters on June 26.

In 2006 Gul joined the State Department as a civil servant. He was an operations specialist in the Operations Center before becoming an operations officer in State’s Crisis Management Support Office, covering the Near East and South-Central Asia portfolios.

He entered the Foreign Service as a political officer in 2010 and has served in Moscow, Tel Aviv, Lisbon, and Belgrade. His next assignment is as political-economic chief at the U.S. embassy in Ashgabat.

Gul’s essay explores the Russo-Finnish War (Winter War) of 1939-1940 and the Serbo-Croatian War (1991), drawing parallels between the two and extracting lessons for the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

He argues that while each conflict is uniquely influenced by local contexts and geopolitical realities, historical case studies provide invaluable insights for modern strategists and policymakers.

Gul highlights the Russo-Finnish War as a pertinent case study for Ukraine, providing lessons in leveraging local knowledge, speed, mobility, and guerrilla tactics to counter a superior adversary.

He draws comparisons to Ukraine’s current defensive strategies and stresses the critical role of external support, paralleling the aid Finland received with Ukraine’s international backing, writing: “The war reminds us of the critical role of external partners, both in warfighting and in conflict resolution.”

Similarly, Gul examines the Serbo-Croatian War, illustrating



Mark Gul (right) receives his award from Tom Yazdgerdi at AFSA HQ on June 26.

how Croatia built up its military strength and reclaimed occupied territories despite facing a superior military. The deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in Croatia provided critical breathing room for the country to rebuild and prepare for future phases of the conflict.

Originally from L’viv, Ukraine, Gul grew up in Virginia Beach, Va. He earned his BS from Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service (2006) and his MS

from the Joint Advanced Warfighting School, Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University (2024).

Gul speaks Ukrainian, Serbian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian. He and his wife, Olya, have two children, Sofiya and Nestor. ■

## Guidance on In-State College Tuition

The AFSA-supported 2021 federal law granting in-state college tuition rates to Foreign Service members, their spouses, and dependents in their state of domicile is now fully in effect.

While some states implemented the policy last year, all remaining states are required to comply starting with the first college enrollment period after July 1, 2024.

Foreign Service families seeking in-state tuition in their state of domicile should review guidance on the AFSA website regarding domicile determination. If applicable, families are encouraged to take steps to strengthen their case for qualifying.

Additionally, AFSA provides a fact sheet on its website to assist members in explaining their qualification for in-state tuition to public college admissions offices.

AFSA members who receive an adverse determination regarding in-state tuition from a public college or university, despite presenting clear evidence of past and continuing ties to their state, can ask AFSA to write a letter on their behalf to help make the case for in-state tuition in accordance with federal law. Contact AFSA at [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org) for assistance. ■

## Governing Board Welcome

AFSA welcomes two new members to its Governing Board: Evan Mangino, the new AFSA vice president for the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and Kimberly McClure, a State representative.

**Evan Mangino** joined FAS in 2007 and is proud of his work on behalf of U.S. farmers, ranchers, foresters, and food producers. Most recently, he served as the agricultural counselor in San José, Costa Rica.

He has also served as the FAS deputy chief of staff, agricultural trade office deputy director in Tokyo, and senior agricultural attaché in Ottawa.

Evan is a restless advocate, tireless communicator, and committed listener. He is perpetually working to make organizations more efficient, more effective, and more rewarding places to work. He has served on a string of FAS organizational improvement initiatives, providing thoughtful solutions to challenges.

Evan has been unofficially representing his cohort, his staff, and his Foreign Service colleagues for years, and he is excited to serve full-time as the FAS vice president. He looks forward to concluding FAS' first collective bargaining agreement negotiations in 30 years.

Evan is a New Jersey native, a returned Peace Corps volunteer (Kingdom of Tonga 2003-2005), and a graduate of Middlebury

College and the Global Social Change and Development Program at Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies. He earned his commission in Japanese, is proficient in Spanish, and remembers enough Tongan to crack jokes.

Evan is grateful his partner, Kate, and their two children, who have supported (or at least tolerated) his passion for agriculture in Tonga, Japan, Canada, and Central America.

**Kim McClure** joined the State Department as a Foreign Service officer 21 years ago. She has served in India, Afghanistan, and South Africa, at the United Nations in New York, and in Washington, D.C.

Kim also completed the Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellowship and is a proud alumna of the Thomas R. Pickering Fellowship.

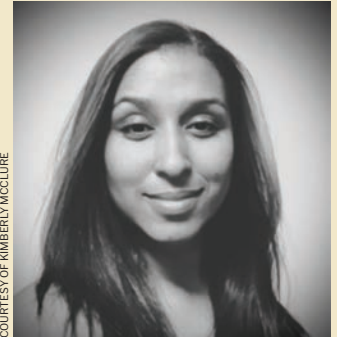
Kim holds a BA in international relations from Stanford University and a master of public policy from the Kennedy School at Harvard University.

She grew up in Memphis, Tenn., and Louisville, Ky., and speaks Portuguese, Spanish, and Dari (Farsi). She will soon add French, in preparation for her next assignment as deputy chief of mission at U.S. Embassy Lome.

"I am thrilled to have this opportunity to serve as a State representative on the AFSA Governing Board and be of service to my col-



**New FAS Vice President Evan Mangino.**



**New Governing Board member Kimberly McClure.**

leagues at a critical moment in the modernization and evolution of the Foreign Service," says Kim.

She adds: "As I often tell audiences and mentees, change does not come easily in big bureaucracies, but I have seen more of it in the past three years at State than

I witnessed in the preceding two decades. This is proof that—with effective advocacy—even large bureaucracies can modify organizational cultures, policies, and practices to accommodate the needs of a dynamic workforce and rapidly evolving world." ■

## New Name, New System, Same Great Service to Members

AFSA's Labor Management (LM) Office has a new name: Office of the General Counsel. OGC better represents the comprehensive legal and advisory services provided to both AFSA staff and AFSA members, such as labor relations, contract review, legal counsel, and various forms of member assistance.

In addition, AFSA OGC is excited to introduce a new case management system to enhance service delivery to its members. A key feature of the new system is its efficient intake process.

Members seeking assistance will fill out an intake sheet, capturing all necessary information, which will then be automatically populated into the system and quickly assigned to the appropriate staff member. Members seeking assistance will also gain access to in-depth guidance and templates for their most asked questions.

To contact AFSA's Office of the General Counsel, visit the AFSA website and search for the OGC page. ■

**NEWS BRIEF**

## Caucus to Shine a Light on Road Safety Abroad



AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi joins Ambassador Marc Grossman (back left) and ASIRT President Rochelle Sobel (front left, red jacket) at a congressional briefing on June 4.

On June 4, the Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT) held a congressional briefing, “Protecting Overseas Employees and Travelers: Organizational Responsibility for Road Safety,” to raise awareness and increase membership in the Global Road Safety Caucus.

The caucus, relaunched on March 13, 2024, by Representatives Richard Hudson (R-N.C.) and Steven Cohen (D-Tenn.), aims to bring more attention to the cause and boost programs to improve road safety globally.

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi presented the results of AFSA’s 2023 survey on global road safety, for which nearly 800 members provided input regarding their road safety experiences. The survey revealed that many Foreign Service members and their families had been involved in serious crashes overseas, often due to poor

road conditions, reckless driving, and speeding. Respondents called for better road design, stronger law enforcement, and improved road maintenance.

According to the World Health Organization, road crashes are the leading cause of death among young adults and children worldwide, with approximately 1.3 million fatalities each year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that road incidents are among the top causes of death for Americans aged 1 to 54 and are the leading cause of non-natural death for U.S. citizens abroad.

Besides data on road safety, the panel of representatives from government, international, corporate, and education sectors discussed how road safety information is conveyed to travelers in advance of their trips and presented draft plans to lessen the threat. ■

## Assignment Restriction Appeals A New Victory

AFSA is pleased to announce the successful completion of negotiations with the State Department on new appeal procedures for assignment restrictions and assignment reviews, as mandated by the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

These updates are now reflected in 12 FAM 260 on “Counterintelligence” and will soon be included in 12 FAM 230 on “Personnel Security.”

Affected employees can now appeal both an assignment restriction sustained by Diplomatic Security and the Director General’s denial of an assignment review appeal to an expanded security appeals panel (SAP).

The new SAP includes the principal deputy assistant secretary from the relevant geographic bureau and the director of the Office of Civil Rights (S/OCR), alongside the three existing members.

During negotiations, AFSA ensured that the S/OCR office became a voting member of the SAP, aligning with congressional intent. AFSA also won inclusion of language in 12 FAM 230 clarifying the department’s Assignment Restriction policy that, as of March 22, 2023, DS is no longer imposing any additional restrictions.

AFSA’s guidance will be updated to reflect these changes, ensuring that employees are well informed of the new appeal procedures.

For more information on AFSA’s work to reform assignment restrictions, read State VP Tina Wong’s column on page 60. Contact [AFSA@state.gov](mailto:AFSA@state.gov) if you have any further questions. ■

### NEWS BRIEF

State VP Voice  
Continued from page 60

particularly the inclusion of the Office of Civil Rights as a voting member of the panel (read more above).

Know your rights to appeal. You can appeal an assignment restriction and an assignment review denial. Write to [AFSA@state.gov](mailto:AFSA@state.gov)

if you need further support through the appeals process.

As we continue this advocacy journey, we may not get every case lifted, but we are here to support you along the way. Good luck with bidding! ■

## AFSA-FSI Town Hall on Modernization

AFSA President Tom Yazdgerdi was joined by Foreign Service Institute Director Joan Polaschik and FSI leadership on June 13 for a discussion of FSI governance innovations, new course offerings, and expanded student resources being made available to bolster the Foreign Service.

Yazdgerdi pointed to AFSA's support for Secretary of State Antony Blinken's modernization agenda, highlighting the importance of continuous training and the challenges posed by a constrained budget.

He emphasized the need for hiring above attrition to avoid past issues of feast-or-famine hiring cycles, which directly impact training effectiveness.

Polaschik provided an in-depth update on FSI's efforts to transform its programs and build a culture of continuous learning. Inspired by Secretary Blinken's modernization agenda, FSI has initiated the development of new training programs in critical mission areas such as climate, global health, emerging technology, and economic statecraft.

To further this transformation, FSI has launched newsletters and a new learning policy aimed at encouraging up to 40 hours of annual learning, incorporating nontraditional methods like coaching and attending think-tank events.

Additionally, said Polaschik, significant investments are being made in new buildings and digital systems, along with a comprehensive

reorganization to ensure FSI programs are aligned with departmental strategic objectives.

Dean of the Language School Eliza Al-Laham discussed efforts to address unconscious bias in language testing and the development of a new rubric emphasizing fluency over accuracy. She also highlighted the ongoing curriculum alignment initiative aimed at tailoring language training to specific tradecraft needs.

FSI has combined orientation programs for generalists and specialists into a unified six-week program. This change addresses a long-standing equity issue and fosters a better understanding of different roles from the start.

During the Q&A session, one audience member asked

whether FSI has considered dropping European language instruction in countries where English is widely spoken.

Al-Laham noted the periodic review process and ongoing discussions with regional bureaus on this matter.

Another audience member asked about AFSA's collaboration with the retention unit. Yazdgerdi and State VP Tina Wong highlighted efforts to improve exit interviews and make rehiring more attractive.

Finally, a question was posed on how FSI plans to incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) into its training programs. Polaschik and her colleagues detailed the integration of AI into various curricula and the establishment of an FSI-wide working group to facilitate this process. ■

## USGLC's Annual Global Impact Forum

### NEWS BRIEF

The U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC) hosted its annual Global Impact Forum on June 3 and 4, bringing together a broad network of leaders from the private and public sectors.

USGLC is a coalition of 500 businesses and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), national security and foreign policy experts, and community leaders from all 50 states. They advocate for strategic investments in development and diplomacy to build a safer and better world. AFSA works closely with USGLC and is a member organization under the USGLC umbrella.

The event culminated in the Global Impact Expo on the evening of June 4, where members of the AFSA and FSJ team participated.

At the AFSA info table, AFSA staff provided forum attendees information about advocacy efforts, educational resources, and the evolving role of the Foreign Service in global affairs. Highlights included a raffle for AFSA's bestselling book, *Inside a U.S. Embassy*.

The forum attracted hundreds of attendees, including prominent figures such as National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and U.S. Ambassador to South Africa Reuben Brigety. ■

## Embassy Paramaribo Honors Fallen Diplomats, Best Practice for Missions Worldwide

Near Post 1, just outside the hardline of Embassy Paramaribo's beautiful chancery building that opened in 2016, is a memorial plaque positioned in a prominent place on the wall honoring Henry Sawyer and Osmon E. Henryson.

Dedicated on May 5, 2023—Foreign Service Day—by U.S. Ambassador to Suriname Robert J. Faucher, the plaque serves as a permanent reminder of the ultimate sacrifice made by Sawyer and Henryson, Foreign Service personnel who both perished on duty while in Suriname, in 1877 and 1944, respectively.

Henry Sawyer began serving as the U.S. consul in Paramaribo in 1858. His actions in support of the Union cause during the American Civil War were notable, including facilitating the enlisting of 123 Surinamese into the Union Army and alerting the Union Navy of the presence of a Confederate ship that had come for supplies to Paramaribo.

He also played a prominent role in formulating a plan (that never came to fruition) for the migration of freed African Americans to Suriname. Sawyer was reportedly injured by a “ruffianly sailor”—most likely an American—whom Sawyer had to detain as part of his duties as U.S. consul. He later died because of these injuries. He is also honored on

the AFSA Memorial Plaques at the State Department.

Osmon E. Henryson entered the Foreign Service in July 1942 and was on a plane that crashed east of Paramaribo, killing all 35 on board. It was the worst loss of life in a Western Hemispheric aviation accident up to that time. Secretary of State Cordell Hull called Henryson the first State Department casualty of the Second World War. Henryson is also honored on the AFSA Virtual Memorial Plaque.

At the dedication ceremony, embassy staff held a moment of silence for Sawyer and Henryson as well as all Foreign Service personnel who lost their lives on duty overseas. The plaque was also the site for this year's Foreign Service Day commemoration and moment of silence.

“Having this plaque placed here was something I'd been thinking about even before my arrival here,” Ambassador Faucher said. “It's not only a wonderful way for the current staff to remember those that came before them and the sacrifices that were made, but it serves to remind everyone that comes to our embassy, whether it's our staff every day or one-time visitors, of the long, historic connections between the United States and Suriname.”



Deputy Chief of Mission Priyadarshi Sen (a former *FSJ* Editorial Board member) and Consular Chief Marc Melino stand before the Embassy Paramaribo memorial plaque for a moment of silence during Foreign Service Day, May 3, 2024.



AFSA Governing Board member Kim Harrington visited the plaque in June 2024.

Ambassador Faucher continued, with input for other U.S. missions: “The response to the plaque has been uniformly positive, so I would strongly encourage other posts with similar stories to consider doing something along the lines of what we did.”

AFSA Governing Board

member Kimberly Harrington visited the plaque at Embassy Paramaribo and sees this as a “best practice” for posts to honor those who have died while in service to the United States overseas, as well as a complementary effort to AFSA's Memorial Plaques in the C Street lobby. ■



### Introducing Readers to Life and Work in the Foreign Service

## Foreign Service Books

The first edition of AFSA's book *Inside a U.S. Embassy: How the Foreign Service Works for America* was published in 1995 and 1996. The 98-page volume offered up firsthand accounts from U.S. missions around the world, with profiles of who works in an embassy including then-Refugee Coordinator Linda Thomas-Greenfield (Nairobi), Labor Officer Thomas Shannon (Johannesburg), Political Officer Michele Sison (Abidjan), and Ambassador Tom Pickering (Moscow).

In 2003 AFSA published a second, completely new edition with a similar format but all fresh content. At 136 pages, that edition, and the revised 2005 edition, sold more than 100,000 copies. The book was a popular resource for U.S. embassies worldwide, military institutions, and universities, as well as Foreign Service candidates.

"The State Department ordered 10,000 copies initially, and every time we reprinted, they purchased thousands more," says Shawn Dorman, who compiled that edition for AFSA and is currently AFSA publications director and *FSJ* editor in chief. "For some time, State was sending a copy to every person who passed the written test—21,000 people used to take the test each year, so that added up."

When it came time for a

new edition, says Dorman, "I shopped the book around to publishers, and found strong interest." Georgetown University Press, Cornell University Press, McGraw Hill, and a couple others offered to



publish it in a traditional publishing deal. Dorman did the math and, in consultation with AFSA leadership, determined that it made more financial sense for AFSA to publish the book independently.

Acting as publisher, AFSA retains about 70 percent of sales revenue instead of the 10 to 14 percent that a typical publishing contract would offer. "So, we turned them all down and created an AFSA imprint, Foreign Service Books," says Dorman, adding, "All the proceeds go to the Fund for American Diplomacy."

The third edition, subtitled *Diplomacy at Work*, was published in 2011 with all-new content. It was expanded to 280 pages and includes a chapter on joining the Foreign Service and another on FS work and life featuring family members and local staff perspectives.

### AFSA's Good Works

Each edition during our centennial year, *The Foreign Service Journal* is profiling an AFSA program that advances the collective or individual interests of its members. This edition we feature *Foreign Service Books*, AFSA's publishing imprint.

Both the second and third editions are available in print and e-book format. Altogether, AFSA has sold more than 200,000 copies of the book. The third edition is now in its 10th printing and continues to sell well at a rate of hundreds of copies each quarter.

Along the way *Inside a U.S. Embassy* has won awards and accolades and remains one of AFSA's best outreach tools. The 2011 edition received the 2012 Independent Publisher Book Award gold medal in the category of Current Events-Foreign Affairs/Military, as well as the 2012 Axiom Business Book Award bronze medal in the Career category. It has been adopted for more than 70 university courses and is available in more than 2,100 libraries worldwide.

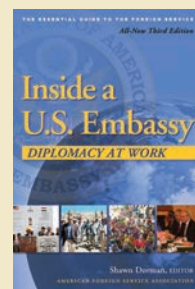
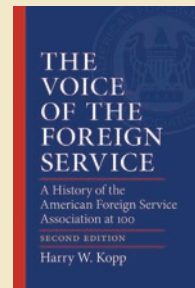
The success of *Inside a U.S. Embassy* supports the development of other books about the Foreign Service. In 2015 the first edition of *The*

*Voice of the Foreign Service: A History of the American Foreign Service Association*, written for AFSA by Harry Kopp, hit the scene. A second edition was published in May to coincide with the AFSA and Foreign Service centennials.

While *Inside a U.S. Embassy* helps readers understand what it's like to serve in today's Foreign Service, *The Voice of the Foreign Service* takes readers through the early history of diplomacy, from Benjamin Franklin to the Rogers Act of 1924 and the Foreign Service Acts of 1946 and 1980, as it traces the evolution of the Foreign Service and AFSA over time.

The process of getting a book to market—from concept to writing, editing, production, promotion, and distribution—takes a lot of work from many contributors. AFSA's small but mighty publications team makes it happen, helping ensure that the public gains a better understanding of the history and the importance of today's Foreign Service.

—Donna Scaramastra Gorman





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# A Soft-Spoken *Institution Builder*

## Lars Holman Hydle 1940-2023

BY THOMAS BOYATT

**T**his year both the Foreign Service of the United States and the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) celebrate their centennials. I would argue that the decade between the introduction of unions into the federal service (1969-1973) and passage of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 was the most critically important period in the 100-year histories of both organizations.



*From 1970 through 2019, Ambassador Thomas Boyatt served on various AFSA Governing Boards as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer (multiple times), retiree vice president, and retiree representative. An FSO from 1959 until 1985, he served as ambassador to Colombia and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and chargé d'affaires in Chile, in addition to postings in Nicosia, Luxembourg, and Antofagasta (Chile). In Washington, D.C., he served as chief of staff for the assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs and as director of the Office of Cypriot Affairs.*

My colleague, my opponent, and my friend Lars Hydle was one of the most important and effective leaders of that decade described by Ambassador Eric Rubin, former president of AFSA, as AFSA's "Heroic Age."

Lars and I met under combat conditions in 1970. He was the president of the Junior Foreign Service Officers Club (JFSOC), and I was vice president of AFSA. We represented our organizations in the negotiations to establish the terms and conditions for unions in the Foreign Service that were to be incorporated in a presidential executive order. The other negotiating parties were the under secretary of State for management (or his representative) and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the union for 200,000 federal Civil Service employees.

In the ensuing debates before an administrative law judge, Lars and I both strongly supported an employee-management system in which there would be a single, worldwide bargaining unit for all Foreign Service personnel wherever located, and that negotiations would deal with personnel policies and procedures that governed all FS members in the system. The resulting Executive Order 11636 contained both provisions. Of the two million federal employees today, only those in the Foreign Service



negotiate personnel policies and procedures on an agencywide basis. This remains the case today: The elements of EO 11636 became chapter 10 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980.

Lars and I (and AFSA and JFSOC) disagreed in those initial negotiations on two critical issues: Should AFSA be both a union and a professional organization (the AFSA position), or just a union (the JFSOC position)? And, should the ultimate authority of the employee-management system be the Secretary of State (the AFSA position) or the Secretary of Labor (the JFSOC position)? The AFSA position on that latter question was incorporated into EO 11636. But the professional association/union disagreement became the defining issue of the 1971 AFSA Board elections.

Again, Lars and I were on opposite sides. I was a member of the Participation slate and Lars was one of several JFSOCers on the opposing Members' Interests slate. The election campaign was vigorously fought but without personal malice. In the event, the Participation slate clearly prevailed, winning all seats on the AFSA Board. Over the decades, AFSA has maintained its dual character as both a union and a professional organization, an approach that has been dramatically successful.

Later, in the 1975 AFSA elections, Lars became the vice president under uniquely difficult circumstances. In the change to the direct election of AFSA Officers and Board approved in 1972, the drafters of the new bylaws did not provide for a runoff election in case there was no candidate with a majority. In the 1975 elections, John Hemenway, a brilliant, but bitter and erratic officer, who had been selected out for poor performance, was elected AFSA president with a plurality of 35 percent, a score-settling agenda, and no support on the AFSA Board.

Almost immediately on assuming office, Hemenway began issuing statements and spending funds without Board approval. The AFSA Board reacted strongly, and a tense stand-off developed. It was a dangerous moment for AFSA, which had not yet fully established the employee-management system and its role in that system. It was a situation that called for calm, determined, and knowledgeable leadership.

Lars Hydle possessed these qualities in abundance and took the lead in meeting the challenges. Within a year, AFSA had

It was a situation that called for calm, determined, and knowledgeable leadership. Lars Hydle possessed these qualities in abundance and took the lead in meeting the challenges.

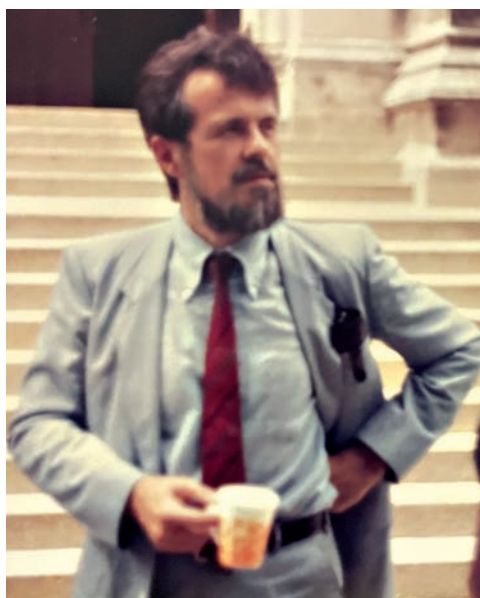
established recall procedures and held a worldwide recall vote of all members that Hemenway lost overwhelmingly. Lars served out the remainder of Hemenway's term and then, in the 1977 AFSA elections, won the presidency in his own right and with his own slate. His presidency (1977-1979) reestablished AFSA's momentum in shaping the new employee-

management system and provided opportunities for contributions in the early stages of the evolution of the Foreign Service Act of 1980.

After 10 tumultuous years of major contributions to the formation of the modern AFSA, Lars resumed State Department-directed assignments. Prior to 1970, he had served with distinction in Vietnam. After 1980, he continued his distinguished service in challenging posts in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East until his retirement in 1993. In retirement, he became an active member of the Former AFSA Presidents caucus, and I had the joy of collaborating with him again for years until his untimely death in November 2023 (see the obituary in the May 2024 *FSJ*).

While working on this appreciation of Lars' history and achievements, I found my mind often turning to his personal qualities that so endeared him to our AFSA generation. The soft voice, the impish smile, the good counsel, the tenacity, and the clear thinking will be sorely missed in the extended Foreign Service family.

Rest in peace, my brother. You made a huge and enduring difference. ■



FSO Lars Hydle in 1980.

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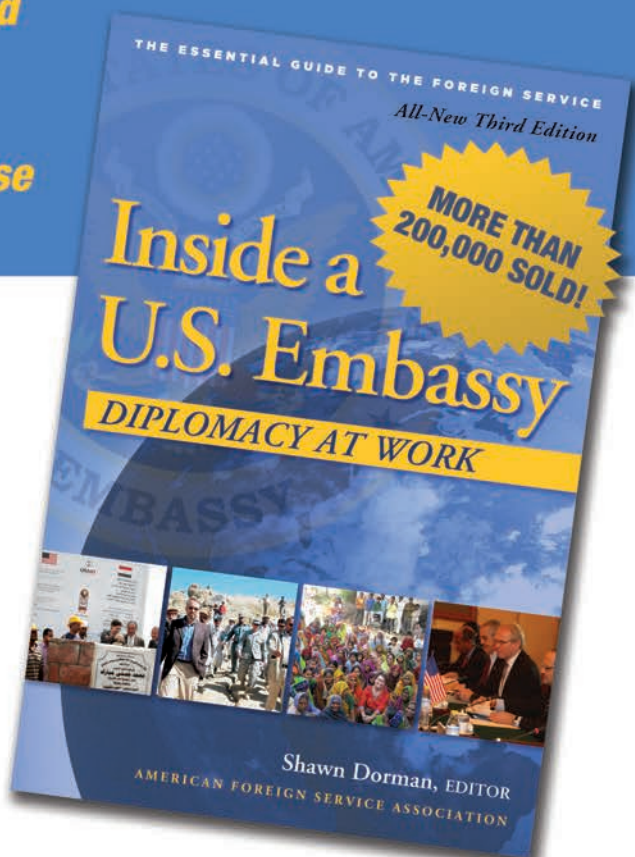
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■ **Ibrahim S. Ahmad**, 58, a Foreign Service spouse and a retired Foreign Service National, died on April 25, 2024, in Salt Lake City, Utah, of pancreatic cancer.

On Dec. 19, 1965, Mr. Ahmad was born in Bethlehem, in what was then Jordan. He was not even 2 years old when he and his family fled in 1967 due to the war and eventually reached Amman, where he lived as a child with his parents and four siblings.

Mr. Ahmad worked for the U.S. embassy in Jordan, first as a Foreign Service National (now called locally employed staff) for the United States Information Service, from 1986 to 1988, and later for USAID in Amman. Mr. Ahmad was with USAID as a GSO assistant from 1989 to 1999.

In January 1999, he married Foreign Service Human Resources Officer Sharon Nichols and accompanied her to Riyadh (1999-2002), where he worked in several positions at the embassy.

The couple then transferred to Nairobi (2002-2004), where he worked as a refugee assistant, logistics assistant, and residential security coordinator, and Brussels (2004-2007), where he was a technical logistician in the regional security office.

In 2007 Mr. Ahmad and Ms. Nichols retired to Salt Lake City, where he worked in landscape construction and then as a medical courier. He enjoyed meeting people (and made new friends easily), traveling, and experiencing new cultures.

Remembered as a beautiful soul with many friends, Mr. Ahmad was outgoing and gregarious. He spoke fluent Arabic and English and could converse in Swahili, French, Spanish, Circassian, and Turkish.

Mr. Ahmad was predeceased by both of his parents.

He is survived by his wife of 26 years, a sister in Jordan, a brother in Michigan, a sister in Virginia, and half-brothers and half-sisters in Lebanon whom he only discovered in 2012 when they were found via Facebook. He is also survived by nieces and nephews in the United States, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

■ **Jo Ann Hardee Collinge**, 85, a retired Foreign Service officer, died on June 15, 2024, at an assisted living community in Shoreline, Wash., after a long illness.

Ms. Collinge was born in Detroit, Mich., on Aug. 14, 1938. She graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in English in 1960. From 1960 to 1967, she worked as a *Detroit News* reporter, moving from the women's department to the city room and then to Vietnam, where she was assigned in 1966 to write a weekly column.

While in South Vietnam, she met Robert A. Collinge, a USIA officer serving in the public affairs office in Saigon. They married in April 1967, after which Ms. Collinge resigned from her position.

From 1967 to 1975, she accompanied Mr. Collinge to assignments in Kolkata, New Delhi, Johannesburg, and Washington, D.C.

Ms. Collinge aspired to become an FSO but was thwarted until the barriers keeping women from remaining in the Service after marriage were dropped. She was commissioned in 1976 and became part of a first wave of tandem couples. Her first assignment was to the Bureau of Public Affairs (PA). She next served as a vice consul in Bridgetown from 1978 to 1980 in tandem with her husband.

Ms. Collinge was awarded an Una Chapman Cox Fellowship to study the nuclear freeze movement in the

Pacific Northwest. From 1983 to 1984, she conducted research in Seattle, where she lived with her spouse and their daughter, Lee.

In 1984 Ms. Collinge returned to the PA Bureau, working in the Office of Opinion Analysis and Plans closely with Office Director Bernard "Bernie" Roshco, whom she considered a professional mentor. In 1986 she received State's Superior Honor Award.

At this point in her career, Ms. Collinge began to seek assignments that could accommodate the medical needs of her husband, and in 1988 she was advised to take a foreign assignment, convert to Civil Service, or resign. Offered a posting to Wellington as the labor officer, she made the difficult decision to resign.

Ms. Collinge and her family moved to Bellingham, Wash., where she became the assistant director of the Office of Communications at Western Washington University.

Upon retiring from Western in 2003, Ms. Collinge dove into community work, serving on the board of the YWCA and playing an active role in the League of Women Voters.

In 2020 her failing health and a desire to be nearer to family compelled her move into assisted living in Seattle.

Ms. Collinge was predeceased by her husband, Rob, in 1998; her daughter-in-law, retired Senior FSO Zandra Flemister, in 2023; and her beloved niece, retired Senior FSO Barbara Aycock, in 2017.

She is survived by her brother, retired Major James Hardee; daughter Lee Collinge; John and Deborah Collinge, her children by her husband's first marriage; granddaughters Rachel Ruder and Olivia Sinclair; grandson Samuel Collinge; two great-granddaughters; and a great-grandson.

■ **Stephen Martin Ecton**, 85, a retired State Department Senior Foreign Service officer, died in Washington, D.C., on June 5, 2024, surrounded by his family.

Mr. Ecton was born in Lexington, Ky., on March 22, 1939, the son of Evelyn Martin Alvis and stepson of Thomas Lucian Alvis. He attended a one-room schoolhouse through the third grade. His family moved to Bowling Green, Ky., when he was 12, and he graduated from Bowling Green High School, where he was president of the class of 1957.

Mr. Ecton briefly attended Western Kentucky University before graduating in 1961 from Southern Methodist University, where he majored in English. While a student at Western, he served as minister at the Rockfield Methodist Church.

For his noteworthy accomplishments and service to his community, Mr. Ecton was recognized by the governor of Kentucky as a member of the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels.

In 1963 Mr. Ecton joined the Army and was assigned to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif., for 64 weeks of Mandarin Chinese. He was then posted to Okinawa, where he developed a lifelong interest in foreign policy and the country of Japan.

Following his discharge from the Army, Mr. Ecton settled in New York City and worked part-time as a youth counselor for the New York City Youth Board. While in New York, and for the remainder of his life, he wrote numerous short stories and novels.

There, he also met his future wife, Catharine Hollister, whom he married in 1966. That same year he joined the Foreign Service and embarked on a 35-year career, advancing to the rank of Minister Counselor in the Senior Foreign Service.

Mr. Ecton's first assignment was to Bogotá. After two years in Colombia, he returned to Washington, D.C., for Japanese language training and then spent the next two years in the economic section of U.S. Embassy Tokyo.

He then completed a year of intensive Japanese language study in Yokohama, in preparation for what turned out to be the main focus of his career. After, he served as consul general in Sapporo, where he was a recipient of the Superior Honor and Meritorious Honor Awards.

Upon his return to the United States, Mr. Ecton took additional language training, this time in French, and was assigned to the U.S. delegation at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris.

Next serving as consul general in Perth, he was part of the activities for the famous America's Cup Race in 1986.

He returned to Washington, D.C., first as country director for Australia and New Zealand and then as director of the Office of Finance and Economic Development in the State Department's Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs.

In 1990 Mr. Ecton returned to the U.S. delegation to the OECD as deputy chief of mission. During his three-year assignment in Paris, he managed the delegation and contributed to U.S. initiatives to bring Central European countries that had been part of the Soviet bloc into the OECD.

He then served in Washington, D.C., as country director for Japan, followed by assignments in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

In 2000, Mr. Ecton retired, and he and his spouse moved to New Orleans to be close to their daughter and her family.

While there, he served on the board of the Tennessee Williams Festival and the Loyola University Library.

He also pursued his passion for writing. His published works are included in *The Kansas Quarterly*, *The Phoenix*, and *The Little Magazine*.

Mr. Ecton often expressed his appreciation for the adventures, professional contacts, experiences, and lifelong friendships that came with being in the Foreign Service.

Mr. Ecton is survived by Catharine, his wife of 58 years; daughter Rebecca O'Reilly (and spouse Brian); son Thomas Lucian Ecton (and spouse Donna); and grandchildren Tyler Winstead, Thomas Lucian Ecton Jr., Garrett Hollister Ecton, Juliet Catharine O'Reilly, Tappan Louise O'Reilly, Sisson Marie O'Reilly, and Marshall Patrick O'Reilly.

He is also survived by his brother, Henry Glenmore Ecton (and spouse Barbara), and his sister, Kathryn Louise Hall.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Senior Living Foundation at <https://www.slfoundation.org/support.cfm> or to the Tennessee Williams and New Orleans Literary Festival at <https://tennesseewilliams.net>.

■ **David Warren Larson**, 71, a Foreign Service spouse, passed away at home in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., on June 27, 2024.

Mr. Larson was born on May 22, 1953, to Warren Phillip Larson and Joan Louise (Ohlrich) Larson in Rockford, Ill., the third of four sons.

He earned a BS in geology at the University of Illinois in 1975 and an MS in geology at the University of Wisconsin in 1977. He also completed graduate studies at Yale. His early teaching career

included stints at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa., and Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y.

In 1985 Mr. Larson joined the Peace Corps and was assigned to Seychelles Polytechnic, in Mahe, where he instructed aspiring high school science teachers. While on assignment in Seychelles, he met his future spouse, David Buss, a diplomat at the U.S. embassy.

The couple returned to the U.S. in 1988. To enhance his credentials for future overseas assignments with Mr. Buss, Mr. Larson enrolled in early childhood education certification programs at George Mason University in Arlington, Va.

In 1994 Mr. Buss was assigned to the newly independent nation of Estonia. Mr. Larson accompanied him and became a founding director and educator at the new American International School in Tallinn.

When Mr. Buss was assigned to Vienna in 1996, Mr. Larson taught kindergarten at the American International School of Vienna, a position he occupied until the couple's next overseas transfer to Paris in 2000.

Unfortunately, because the U.S. did not at the time recognize same-sex members of household as legitimate spouses, as a matter of reciprocity, the government of France denied Mr. Larson a visa that would have allowed him to teach in Paris.

What would otherwise have been a dream assignment was professionally unsatisfying, and the couple curtailed after two years of a four-year assignment.

In 2002 Mr. Buss was assigned to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations. While in New York City, Mr. Larson earned an MS in education at Hunter College and was employed at

the Brooklyn Heights Montessori School from 2004 to 2007.

With Mr. Buss' retirement from the U.S. Foreign Service in 2006, the couple relocated to Poughkeepsie, N.Y., where Mr. Larson's father joined them for several years. In May 2010, after same-sex marriage was made legal in the U.S., the couple wed in Springfield, Mass.

Their large house and property in Poughkeepsie afforded ample opportunities to host siblings, cousins, nieces, and nephews; pursue Mr. Larson's passions for baking, gardening, and entertaining; and eventually adopt a beloved pet boxer named Sophie.

Mr. Larson continued to teach at the Randolph School in nearby Wappingers Falls until 2011.

He is survived by his spouse, David, and boxer Sophie; brothers Tim, Dan, and Eric, and their families; and beloved cousin Robin and her daughter, Jean.

Consistent with his lifelong dedication to education, Mr. Larson's remains have been gifted to the Albany Medical College to educate health care professionals of tomorrow and to investigate important questions of medical science.

Donations in Mr. Larson's name may be made to the American Cancer Society or a charity of one's choice.

■ **Howard Dean Pittman**, 67, a retired Foreign Service officer and former ambassador, died suddenly at his residence in Washington, D.C., on June 4, 2024.

Born in Norfolk, Va., on Aug. 31, 1956, to Paul Howard Pittman and Betty Pittman, Mr. Pittman was 6 years old when the family moved to his father's hometown of Tylertown, Miss.

Growing up in a small town with sisters Shane and Elise, he had a childhood filled with going to his grandmother's

house for Sunday dinners, playing neighborhood games of kick the can, scouting adventures, and sneaking off to the bakery in the early morning hours before school.

Perhaps working as a cub reporter and photographer for the family business, the *Tylertown Times*, sparked his interest in politics. Considered one of the nation's best small-town newspapers, the paper was a principled voice for equality and progress during the tense Civil Rights Movement. His mother was active in promoting tolerance and fairness.

Moved by the example of his parents, Mr. Pittman developed a love for political participation and a strong sense of place, service, and ethics.

While earning a BA in political science from Millsaps College in Mississippi, he interned with Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.). After graduation, he entered the Peace Corps and taught English in a remote village in Gabon.

Next, he headed to Washington, D.C., and dove into politics, working as a legislative assistant for U.S. Representative Wayne Dowdy (D-Miss.) for eight years and subsequently as his reelection campaign manager. He earned an MA from The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies before joining the State Department in 1989.

Throughout his Foreign Service career, Mr. Pittman served in numerous senior leadership positions within the State Department, at the National Security Council, and overseas. He sought out opportunities to serve in conflict-affected states, promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation.

His early postings included Guyana, Mozambique, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as a year as a diplomat in residence with the National Democratic

Institute, where he focused on democracy-building initiatives.

From 2000 to 2002, Mr. Pittman served at the National Security Council as the director for Balkan affairs, coordinating U.S. government efforts to bring stability to the region.

While special assistant to Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Mr. Pittman volunteered to go to Iraq, where he served as deputy director in the governance office of the Coalition Provisional Authority. There he met his future husband, USAID FSO Chris Milligan.

From 2004 to 2007, Mr. Pittman served as consul general in Belfast, where he furthered peace and reconciliation by engaging with political and community leaders and building intercommunity cooperation. His efforts contributed to a power sharing arrangement and increased stability, a legacy that is still seen today.

While a member of the Secretary's Office of Policy Planning, Mr. Pittman was appointed senior diplomacy adviser to the department's first quadrennial diplomacy and development review, instituting reforms to improve the effectiveness of the State Department and USAID.

Next, as principal deputy assistant secretary and then as acting assistant secretary of State for the Bureau of International Organization Affairs, Mr. Pittman leveraged the contributions of multilateral organizations and allies to advance U.S. foreign policy goals.

Mr. Pittman returned to Mozambique as the U.S. ambassador in 2016. He was thrilled to be back in a country that meant so much to him, embracing the culture, music, and natural beauty.

Amb. Pittman retired in 2019. He read extensively, particularly about

American history, and enjoyed traveling, tennis, and cooking with and for friends. His friends remember his gumbo and martinis, wit and intelligence, and warmth and character.

Ambassador Pittman is survived by his spouse, Chris Milligan; his mother, Betty Pittman; and his sisters, Shane and Elise Pittman.

■ **Joan "Joanie" Hill Schifferdecker**, 89, a Foreign Service spouse, passed away peacefully on July 4, 2024, in Washington, D.C., from complications related to Parkinson's disease.

Ms. Schifferdecker was born on Feb. 25, 1935, to Robert Hill and Edith Hesli, in Minneapolis, Minn. Raised in Whitehall, Mont., Ms. Schifferdecker graduated from Whitehall High School in 1952 and subsequently went on to study music (voice) at the Boston Conservatory of Music, becoming a member of Pi Kappa Lambda, a national musical honorary society.

After graduating with honors, Ms. Schifferdecker started singing with the San Francisco Opera Company, appearing in more than 300 performances and 35 operas. Concurrently and for much of the rest of her life, she worked a wide range of jobs, from editor to office manager.

In 1962 Ms. Schifferdecker married Robert "Bob" Fajardo in San Francisco, Calif. They moved to Chicago and had two children, Matthew and Susanna. Ms. Schifferdecker performed in community concerts and theater productions, a pastime she relished. They later divorced.

In 1979 she married Arnold "Arnie" Schifferdecker, a Foreign Service officer. The couple spent the next couple of decades overseas, including extended postings in Türkiye, Pakistan, and Morocco.

In 1995, on Mr. Schifferdecker's retirement from the Foreign Service, the couple returned to Washington, D.C., to enjoy a life of family, friends, and travel.

While overseas, Ms. Schifferdecker immersed herself in the language and culture of the countries she visited, taking part in horseback riding and musical productions wherever she found the opportunity.

She also took an active role in support groups and cultivated many deep and enduring friendships, which spanned the globe and time.

Ms. Schifferdecker was predeceased by her husband, Arnie, in 2003, and by siblings Andrea, Linda, and Nicolas Hill. Arnie was *FSJ* Editorial Board chair from 2002 to 2003.

She is survived by her children, Matthew Fajardo and Susanna (and spouse Anton Pav) Fajardo; grandchildren Isabel and Zoe Pav; and cousin Peggy (and spouse Bob) Hoekenga.

Memorial donations may be made to the Parkinson's Foundation of the National Capital Area, 3570 Olney Laytonville Road #490, Olney MD 20830-7521.

Condolences and tributes can be posted in the online guest book at [www.devolfuneralhome.com](http://www.devolfuneralhome.com).

■ **Rufus Grant Smith**, 85, a retired State Department Foreign Service officer and former ambassador, died on April 6, 2024, of complications from a heart attack.

Mr. Smith was born on Sept. 8, 1938, during a hurricane in Mineola, N.Y. As a child, he lived with his father, who was in the Foreign Service. He attended Woodstock School, a Christian missionary school in India, and graduated from Bethesda Chevy Chase High School in Maryland.

Mr. Smith went on to graduate from Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs and then received his master's degree from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

He joined the Marine Corps and transitioned to reserve status when he passed the State Department's Foreign Service exam and joined the U.S. Foreign Service in 1963.

Specializing in South Asia, Mr. Smith served in Pakistan and Nepal and served three tours in India, the last as deputy chief of mission. He also served in the Central African Republic, Belize, and New York, where he spent a year at the Council on Foreign Relations.

His final overseas assignment was as ambassador to Tajikistan, which had recently become independent from the Soviet Union and was consumed by civil war.

He ended his career as a fellow at the Peacekeeping Institute at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pa.

For many years, he was a senior fellow at The Johns Hopkins Central Asia-Caucasus Institute in Washington, D.C. After retiring from the State Department, Ambassador Smith moved to Jefferson County, W.Va., where he continued his commitment to public service.

In 2001 Amb. Smith joined the board of the Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle, later becoming its president, and worked to secure conservation easements on properties all over West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle. He was instrumental in saving many acres of land, including sites associated with Civil War battlefields and other historic properties.

For many years, he taught a Foreign Policy Association Great Decisions course with Shepherd University's Lifelong Learning Program.

Amb. Smith is survived by his wife, Renny Travers Smith; his children, R. Justin Smith and C. Adair Smith; their spouses, Pamela Phan and John Bender; and two grandchildren.

Donations in his name to the Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle can be made at <https://landtrustepwv.org/join-us/>.

■ **Elizabeth "B.J." Wesoloski, 87**, a Foreign Service nurse practitioner, passed away on Jan. 12, 2024, at the Rose Arbor Hospice Home in Kalamazoo, Mich.

Ms. Wesoloski was born on May 28, 1936, in Vicksburg, Mich. A 1954 graduate of Vicksburg High School and then Borgess School of Nursing in Kalamazoo, she worked as a nurse at Franklin Memorial Hospital in Vicksburg and at Borgess Hospital, where she became an assistant to the director of nursing.

Ms. Wesoloski then left for two years to attend the University of Colorado in Boulder, where she earned a bachelor of science in nursing (BSN). She later returned to Michigan and joined the faculty of Borgess School of Nursing.

In 1963 Ms. Wesoloski set off on a new adventure, accepting a position at St. Luke's Hospital of Nursing in San Francisco, Calif., before joining the Department of State as a Foreign Service health practitioner, providing essential health care services to American personnel and their families stationed at various U.S. embassies.

Ms. Wesoloski was assigned to Afghanistan, Nigeria, Ecuador, Nepal, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Pakistan, Poland, Sri Lanka, and Georgia. She received several professional accolades, including a letter of commendation from then-First Lady of the United States Hillary Rodham Clinton.



If you would like us to include an obituary in In Memory, please send text to [journal@afsa.org](mailto:journal@afsa.org).

Be sure to include the date, place, and cause of death, as well as details of the individual's Foreign Service career. Please place the name of the AFSA member to be memorialized in the subject line of your email.

Her friends and family remember her generous spirit, unwavering determination, and independent nature.

Ms. Wesoloski retired in 1996. In retirement, she took pleasure in creating culinary delights inspired by her travels, often treating her family and friends to meals infused with flavors from the countries she once called home.

Her scrapbooking skills brought cherished memories to life and will be appreciated by generations to come. She was also an avid reader and accomplished seamstress who made many of her own clothes.

Ms. Wesoloski was predeceased by her parents: Ignace "James" and Eva Mary (Rapacz) Wesoloski; brother Jim Wesoloski; sister-in-law Jo Wesoloski; and brother-in-law Michael J. Ambro Jr.

She is survived by siblings Walter (and spouse Jane) Wesoloski, Edward "Butch" (and spouse Karen) Wesoloski, and Lou Ann Ambro, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Those who wish to may make contributions to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) of Southwest Michigan. ■



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# Life After the Foreign Service

## *From U.S. Diplomat to Diplomatic Educator*

**This retired FSO made the move from diplomat to international educator. Here's how it happened.**

BY RICHARD W. MUELLER

**T**he following exchange took place in November 1997 in Hong Kong:

**Bill:** I'd like to ask you a serious question. Please don't say no right away!

**Richard:** Sure.

**Bill:** You know that our head of school of Northfield Mount Hermon School [NMH] is retiring next summer after 10 years. You should put your hat in the ring to replace her. You have experience and skills that could make you the right leader for the next chapter of our school's history.

**Richard:** Bill, I'm a diplomat, not an educator!

**Bill:** Richard, I assure you that diplomacy will go a long way in the world of education.

Bill Rhodes was chair of the Board of Trustees of NMH and senior vice chair of Citigroup. I was a 32-year career Foreign Service officer, Senior Foreign Service, FEMC, who had just finished up his tour as American consul general in Hong Kong and was awaiting an ambassadorial assignment. In the interim, I served

as director of the Asia Society Hong Kong Center.

How did we ever get to this conversation? In a word: serendipity. Shortly after becoming consul general, I had lunch with Bill to discuss China, Hong Kong, and the looming 1997 reversion of Hong Kong to China.

Toward the end of the meal, Bill said he needed to catch a flight to New York, where he would chair a meeting of the trustees of a New England boarding school. I asked which school. Bill replied, "Northfield Mount Hermon School, do you know it?" I laughed and said in fact I was a graduate of the school. Bill was visibly surprised as he took in the news that we were both alumni.


Bill and I stayed in touch. It never occurred to me that my next "assignment" might be as head of school.

After our meeting in 1997, Bill invited me to meet with the school's search




*Richard W. Mueller joined the Foreign Service in 1966. He served two tours as a political officer at Embassy Saigon during the Vietnam War, as an economic officer at the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing and in Hong Kong, and as deputy executive secretary and deputy assistant secretary in Legislative Affairs. His final assignment was as U.S. consul general in Hong Kong. After retirement, he served as head of school at Northfield Mount Hermon School, Hong Kong International School, and Shanghai American School. He and his wife, Claire—also retired Foreign Service—currently live in Golden, Colorado. Learn more about this experience in his memoir, *From American Diplomat to Diplomatic Educator: Building Global Bridges to Understanding* (2023).*

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COURTESY OF RICHARD MUELLER

Author Richard Mueller participating in a “pie race challenge” in 2002 while head of school at Northfield Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. He won a pie!

committee in New York. Claire and I decided it was worth the trip to see if there was enough common interest on both sides. I was prepared for a committee decision that I wasn't who they were looking for and for me to decide I'd rather wait for my next Foreign Service assignment.

It turned out otherwise. They were intrigued with my unusual Foreign Service and international background. I had the glimmerings of a feeling that NMH could be a positive move for us.

We traded a wide variety of ideas about international education and experience, leadership styles, and relationship-building with a community of students, faculty, trustees, alumni, and parents. I knew we might be in the ballpark of a match when one of the

senior trustees started a question by saying, “If we were so fortunate to have you as our head of school ...”

The committee offered me a spot as one of three strong finalists. I would next have to visit and survive the gauntlet of 25 interviews in two and a half days.

Claire and I arrived at the school some weeks later for an energizing but exhausting round of interviews. The questioning ran the gamut of my experience as a student, my international experience over the years, my involvement as a trustee and board chair at Hong Kong International School, how I might deal with controversy, and what kind of collaborator I would be.

We explored what relationship I would establish with the faculty—namely, a partnership and not an auto-

## What factors led the trustees to choose me as a nontraditional candidate?

cratic, top-down approach. I particularly loved the gatherings with students who weren't shy about asking tough questions or candidly sharing their views.

In the end, what factors led the trustees to choose me as a nontraditional candidate? At the top of the list, they felt I could be a credible leader of a complex 1,155-student boarding school on two campuses separated by the Connecticut River.

I showed promise of helping the school chart new strategic directions while also overseeing management of the myriad day-to-day issues of hiring faculty, setting the right academic tone, resolving disputes, fundraising, and collaborating with the trustees. Like a chief of mission, you are on duty 24 hours a day, prepared for the inevitable crises and emergencies.

I had broad experience in the Foreign Service with all such issues and was an enthusiastic proponent of strengthening the school's deep roots, going back to our founder, D.L. Moody, in international education. They said they were convinced I was still a lifelong learner who could adapt to a school environment.

How did it all work out? In a nutshell, the experience was wonderful. Our seven years living on campus, mingling every day with students, engaging in vigorous academic debate, attending concerts and sports events, building



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Richard and Claire Mueller with students at Hong Kong International School in 2007.


bridges among differing community groups, and bringing our knowledge of the world directly to everything we did was exceptional and rewarding.

Claire was an invaluable co-pilot in so many ways, including serving as host of our Ford Cottage “bed-and-breakfast” and enthusiastically involving herself in myriad school activities. We never forgot our motto: *It’s all about our students!* Decisions were driven by what was good for their education.



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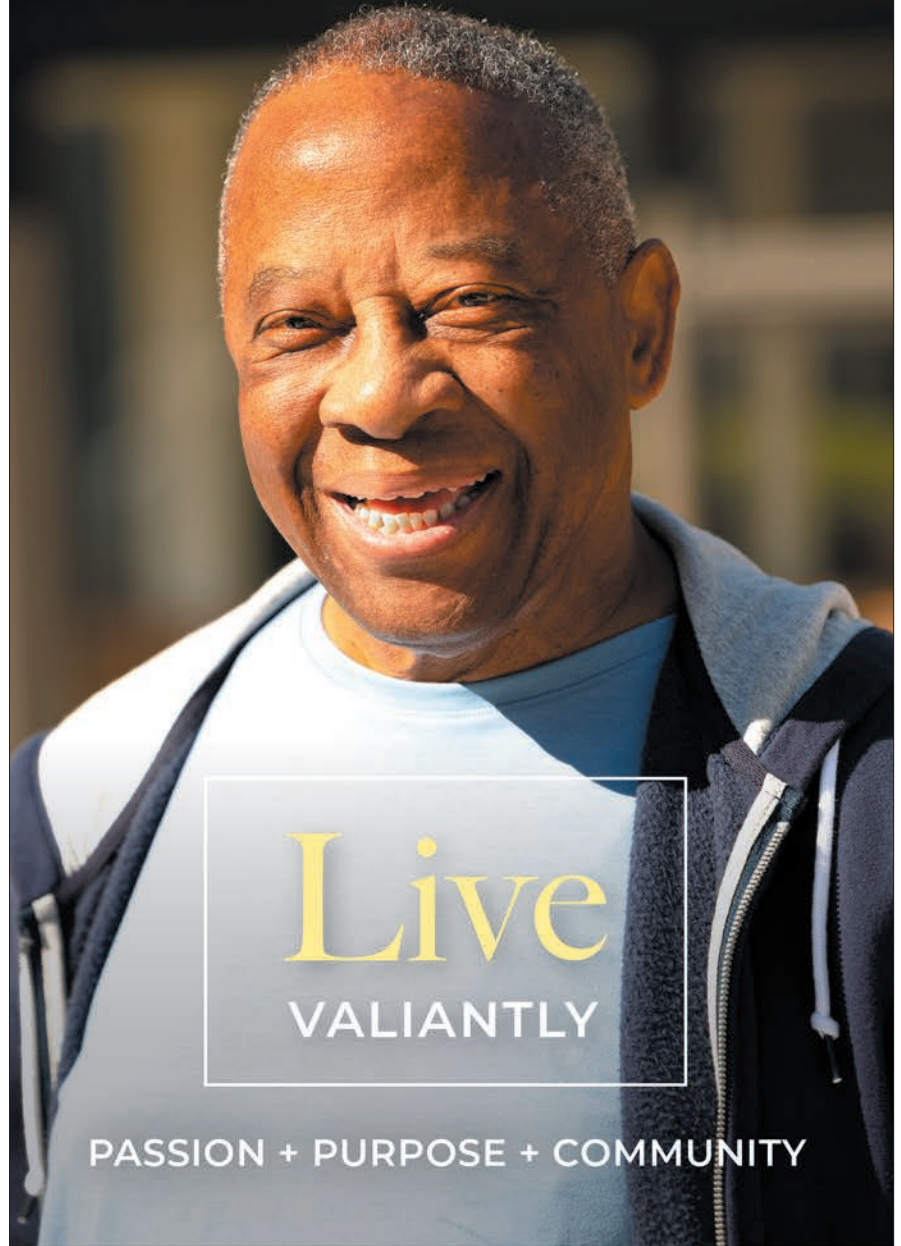
We set a new strategic direction for the school to make it a smaller community on one campus (that was a profound and extended leadership effort), and we broadened and reinforced an already strong educational program. Claire's and my experience served well as I subsequently became head of school of Hong Kong International School and then Shanghai American School.

I learned that Foreign Service colleagues with deep experience in leading embassies, consulates, and Department of State bureaus; using diplomatic skills to conduct successful negotiations; and bringing groups together could be strong candidates to be head of school at an international or independent school.

It is a different role than becoming a university teacher or diplomat in residence. More and more trustees these days are willing to consider candidates with demonstrated skills in leading large organizations, bringing creativity, new ideas, and synergy in partnership with faculties and trustees.

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Frank, defender of freedom



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## The Iraq War: Competing Narratives

### Confronting Saddam Hussein: George W. Bush and the Invasion of Iraq

Melvyn P. Leffler, Oxford University Press, 2023, \$27.95/hardcover, e-book available, 368 pages.

### To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America Into Iraq

Robert Draper, Penguin Books, 2021, \$16.99/paperback, e-book available, 496 pages.

REVIEWED BY DENNIS JETT

The 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq last year has prompted some reconsideration of that decision. There are many opinions on why it was taken, but there are mainly two competing narratives trying to gain space in the history books.

Those who supported the war say it was the right decision, based on good intentions but bad intelligence. They lay the blame on the intelligence community for not knowing that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

They assert Saddam Hussein was a threat, and it was worth the cost of eliminating him despite the fact that the toll amounted to hundreds of thousands of people killed and wounded, millions displaced from their homes, and trillions of dollars expended.

The second narrative is that President George W. Bush, for whatever reason, decided to take military action long before Secretary of State Colin Powell gave his Feb. 5, 2003, speech to the United Nations justifying the move.

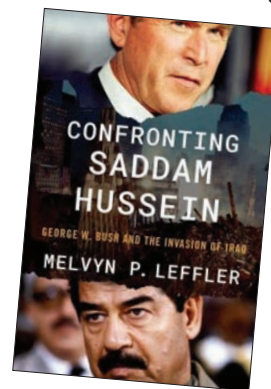
The arguments offered in that speech

were largely false, and those who adhere to this narrative think the intelligence supporting them was deliberately cherry-picked and stovepiped in order to sell the war to the American public. The UN speech was simply part of a campaign to do that, which included hundreds of false and misleading statements by top administration officials.

## A Journalist and a Historian

Two recent books that examine the decision—*To Start a War* by Robert Draper and *Confronting Saddam Hussein* by Melvyn Leffler—both provide a detailed account of the process that led to invasion. Both relied on interviews with many of those involved. Even though those accounts are very similar, the books reflect the dueling narratives described above. This difference illustrates why it matters who the author is.

Draper is a veteran journalist and the author of several books, including one on the presidency of George



## Where Draper and Leffler differ is in their assessment of the chances that the war could have been avoided and whether it was justified.

W. Bush. He is used to interviewing multiple sources at various levels in government to discern the difference between what top officials say, what they do, and why.

Leffler is a distinguished historian who has also written a number of books.

But, as he admits in his preface, he had never before relied on interviews. He then states: “I wondered how much I would gain from talking to former policymakers whose ability to spin, I wagered, might exceed my ability to probe.” It did.

A historian would have difficulty relying on the written record on Iraq when much of it has been destroyed or remains classified. And interviewing those who participated in the process, and therefore have a vested interest in defending it, is difficult for someone who deals mostly with documents.

Despite their different backgrounds, Leffler and Draper reach the same conclusion with regard to the

execution of the war: It was a short-term military success but also a long-term fiasco with disastrous consequences.

They both describe how disbanding the Baath Party and Iraqi army created hundreds of thousands of dangerous men who kicked off a civil war rather than

simply go home and watch their families go hungry.

They note how there was no plan for what to do after a military victory was secured other than to turn things over to the Pentagon’s favorite exiles and get out. Those Iraqis were far more popular

in the Department of Defense than they were in Iraq, however.

## Differing Assessments

Where Draper and Leffler differ is in their assessment of the chances that the war could have been avoided and whether it was justified. Leffler repeats ad nauseam that Saddam Hussein was evil and wanted WMD, as if that alone was reason enough.

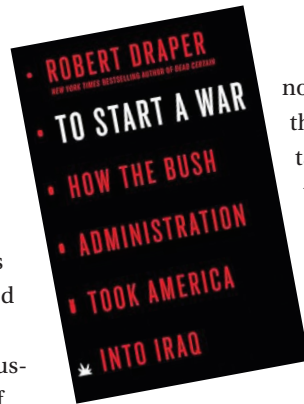
This was the same dictator who was so much in favor during the Reagan administration that a special envoy named Donald Rumsfeld was sent to see if there was any way the U.S. could help him kill more Iranians.

Draper does not presume to know what Bush was thinking, but he makes the case for the second narrative by pointing out that in the spring of 2001, Bush confided to his CIA briefer that military action against Saddam was not “a question of if, but only a question of when.”

Leffler also adds fear of a new attack, regret over 9/11, and the enormous power that America possessed as other motivations for the invasion. At the same time, he portrays Bush as an amiable frat boy who never grew up, lacked intellectual curiosity, and oversaw a government without bothering to manage it.

He is remarkably credulous, however, in accepting the reasons offered by some of his interlocutors for why the war was necessary. He claims that Bush wanted to confront Hussein but that war would have been avoided if it were proven beyond any doubt that there were no WMD.

Vice President Dick Cheney once said that even if there were a 1 percent chance that Saddam had such weapons, an invasion would be justified. Since



nothing is ever more than 99 percent certain when assessing the intentions of a foreign leader, this was just a way of saying that war was inevitable.

In a review of Draper's book

that Leffler did for *Foreign Affairs*, he chastises Draper for being more skeptical. “One should neither fault a president for lacking the wisdom of hindsight nor judge him on the basis of information he did not possess,” Leffler insists.

But it is certainly fair to fault Bush for lacking foresight. Neither author describes a meeting where the decision to launch the invasion was actually made or where the potential negative consequences were seriously considered.

That's because, as the National Security Archive and others established years ago, there never was one. And the information that Bush was provided was only that necessary to justify what he had wanted to do.

If you want to understand how we got into the mess that Iraq became, read the journalist's book first. And then make your own decision as to which narrative is more plausible. ■

---

*Dennis Jett served as U.S. ambassador to Peru and Mozambique and on assignments in Argentina, Israel, Malawi, and Liberia during his 28-year Foreign Service career. He is a professor of international affairs at Penn State University and the author of American Ambassadors: A Guide for Aspiring Diplomats and Foreign Service Officers (2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).*

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# Prying Open a Closed Society in Poland

BY DICK VIRDEN

The Iron Curtain was still up and looming when my family and I lived in Warsaw in the late 1970s. The communist authorities then running the country regarded ours as a hostile embassy, so we had reason to feel like a besieged outpost.

But in fact, we were far from abandoned or without resources. A surprising number and variety of guests came to Poland during those years, enriching our diplomatic relations as well as our personal lives as described in the following series of vignettes.



President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn led the way. Their visit at the very end of 1977 was rich in both meaning and low comedy. It was made infamous by a translator quoting the president as “lusting after Poland in his heart.”

But high-level talks improved understanding with the Polish government while other words and gestures inspired leaders in the Roman Catholic Church, the underground media, and on the factory floor.

Within three years, an emboldened opposition would create “Solidarnosc,” the historic trade union and political movement that was born in a Gdansk shipyard and went on to rid the country of a despised regime.

At a New Year’s Eve wheels-up party



*Dick Virden is a retired Senior Foreign Service officer. His assignments abroad included Poland both before and after the fall of communism.*

the night the Carters left, we watched “Annie Hall” (courtesy of a U.S. Information Service projector and the military film circuit) and told stories about an exhausting, yet exhilarating, few days that we sensed had bent the arc of history in the right direction.



That momentum would take off like a rocket in June 1979 during a very different sort of visit, the first return home by the Polish pontiff, Pope John Paul II. An estimated 15 million Poles—nearly half the country’s population—turned out to see him during a triumphant eight-day pilgrimage that made clear to all that the people’s fealty was to the Catholic Church and Western values, not to Moscow’s minions or doctrines.

(Before that, a delegation of Catholic bishops had come to meet with Polish church leaders, including Krakow Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, little knowing that he would soon become Pope John Paul II—and their boss!)

Not all visits were so notable. There were routine stops, for example, by Cabinet members and members of Congress (including Senators John Kerry and George McGovern as well as Representative Clement Zablocki). One of the latter distinguished himself by asking the mayor of a major Polish city whether the communists were still giving him so much trouble. The mayor’s answer was not recorded.

Stanley Frank “Stan the Man” Musial, one of baseball’s greatest players, turned up to help start the sport in his father’s homeland. And a string of world-class pia-

nists dropped by to visit Frédéric Chopin’s ancestral home in Zelazowa Wola and perform at festivals staged in his honor.

I recall other prominent figures: writers (James A. Michener, for one), boxers, jazz musicians, scholars (Arthur Link, a historian and the leading authority on President Woodrow Wilson), filmmakers, journalists, and many others.

The list goes on.



The visit of Dr. Myron Malkin, a senior NASA official and designer of the space shuttle, was especially memorable. He came to inaugurate Poland’s space research center and to honor Nicolaus Copernicus, the fabled Polish scientist who established five centuries ago that the Earth revolves around the sun, not vice versa.

After a sojourn to Warsaw and Copernicus’ hometown of Torun, Dr. Malkin sat down for an interview with a reporter from Voice of America (VOA). No sooner had they started to tape the interview than the VOA man’s recorder went on the blink. The radio interview was apparently doomed.

But hold on, Dr. Malkin said, let me take a look at your machine. And so he did. Quickly producing a small tool—doesn’t everyone carry one?—he tinkered a bit and soon had the equipment working again. Day saved, interview carried out, VOA’s reputation intact.

Balky tape recorders don’t normally require the expertise of a rocket scientist, but it sure was nice to have one of the best in town to do the job! ■

## LOCAL LENS



A coffee chemist is at work on the observation deck of Taipei 101, the world's tallest building until Dubai's Burj Khalifa was completed in 2010. Taipei was my mother's first posting, as a consular officer, and my introduction to the world of third culture kids in 1996. I was able to return just before taking up my own first assignment as a consular officer. ■

*Noah Rose is a political officer serving in a consular-political rotation in Ankara. He took this photo in October 2023 on a Nikon Z6.*

Please submit your favorite, recent photograph to be considered for Local Lens. Images must be high resolution (at least 300 dpi at 8" x 10", or 1 MB or larger) and must not be in print elsewhere. Include a short description of the scene/event as well as your name, brief biodata, and the type of camera used. Send to [localens@afsa.org](mailto:localens@afsa.org).

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