

**STATEMENT
OF
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**BEFORE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF
GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE,
AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**HEARING
ON
STATE DEPARTMENT TRAINING: INVESTING IN THE WORKFORCE
TO ADDRESS 21ST CENTURY CHALLENGES**

MARCH 8, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the State Department's efforts to ensure that our people are trained effectively to address the increasingly complicated and difficult foreign policy challenges of the 21st century. I appreciate your interest in the issues raised by the GAO report we are considering today, "Additional Steps Are Needed to Improve Strategic Planning and Evaluation of Training for State Personnel." We worked closely with the GAO team over a period of almost a year and a half, and we welcome their recommendations.

The State Department carries out U.S. foreign policy priorities in increasingly complex and often perilous environments. The last decade has been marked by a growing number of global threats to our security, including violent extremism, criminal networks trafficking in narcotics and persons, natural disasters, and pandemics. Effectively managing these threats depends on building productive partnerships with other countries to help strengthen their capabilities. We recognize that we must continue to expand our efforts to reach out to influence public opinion and build our diplomatic presence where our interests are most at stake.

In December, the State Department issued the first-ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), which provides a blueprint for elevating American civilian power to better advance our foreign policy interests. This includes, among other things, directing and coordinating the resources of America's civilian agencies to prevent and resolve conflicts. The QDDR also calls on the Department to deploy additional personnel and resources to emerging powers and 21st century centers of global and regional influence, such as Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, South Africa, and Turkey.

The changing foreign policy environment and our efforts to address it proactively have resulted in an increase in language-designated positions. Proficiency in languages such as Arabic and Chinese is required in greater numbers to conduct outreach to foreign audiences, negotiate and consult with other governments, and effectively assist American citizens at United States' embassies and consulates around the world. An even greater challenge for us is posed by the fact that our personnel are serving in more remote, more dangerous locations. We must ensure that they receive the support and training they need to succeed in these posts, as well as when they move on to their next assignment or return home.

While our mission has grown over the past 10 years, our staffing has not kept pace. This resulted in difficult decisions that often affected training. For example, we sometimes had to choose whether to leave a position empty for the many months it takes to train a fully language-qualified officer or to cut part or all of the language training. With the support of Congress, we launched Diplomacy 3.0 in March 2009, which has enabled us to hire nearly 1,400 Foreign Service employees and increase Civil Service employment by roughly 300 in 2009, with similar levels in 2010. We have also increased the size of our training complement, which will allow the placement of more employees in long-term training with fewer staffing gaps at posts.

We are grateful to Congress for its increased support over the last few years, and I am confident these new resources have set us on the right path to train our employees to address the diplomatic challenges of today and tomorrow.

Meeting our Training Needs

The Bureau of Human Resources (HR) is responsible for the State Department's greatest asset – its personnel – the Civil Service, Foreign Service and Locally Employed Staff who advance the interests of the United States. HR's mission spans the full course of employee services from before employees are hired and continuing to after they have retired. We are responsible for recruiting and hiring new employees; providing benefits, compensation and support for those employees and their families; handling assignments and transfers of Foreign Service employees; coordinating training for employees throughout their careers at the State Department; and maintaining contact with employees after retirement.

HR matches the diverse skills and capabilities of nearly 66,600 American and foreign national employees with positions domestically and at more than 270 posts worldwide to increase the security of our country and advance our foreign policy objectives. We work hand-in-hand with the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) to ensure that the employees of our three different workforces – Civil Service, Foreign Service and Locally Employed Staff – are well-equipped to handle the diverse demands of their jobs.

We have long welcomed GAO's interest in the training and development of our employees, and we appreciate the variety of perspectives with which they have approached the Department's training in their recent reports. For example, a report on inter-agency national security collaboration (GAO-11-108) highlighted State's leadership among civilian agencies in promoting interagency understanding via a myriad of FSI courses, rotations, and temporary assignments. In response to GAO's report on foreign language programs at the Department (GAO-09-955), we developed a strategic language plan as well as a model to help us determine how

best to address the Department's resource needs in language training, which will be the precursor of a second model for overall training.

In its most recent report on training – the subject of today's hearing – GAO recognized the wide variety of training available at FSI and through distance learning that helps provide our people with the knowledge and skills to address today's diplomatic challenges. We are pleased to note that of the 32 attributes of our training programs reviewed by GAO, the vast majority were found to be satisfactory, with only 5 areas in which recommendations for improvement are pending. A sixth recommendation, addressing curriculum design guidance, has already been closed.

I would like to briefly discuss what HR has done to strengthen our training program as a whole. My colleague, FSI Director Dr. Ruth Whiteside will provide greater detail about FSI's programs. Effective training is essential to the success of our people in meeting our foreign policy objectives. We agree with GAO that training programs, whether they be for our Foreign Service employees, our Civil Service employees or our Locally Employed Staff, will not succeed unless we first fully assess our training needs.

To better assess our Foreign Service training needs, HR completed a comprehensive job analysis for Foreign Service Generalists in 2007 and one for Specialists in 2009. FSI used the results of these analyses to modify its course offerings. We have developed the Career Development Program (CDP) for Foreign Service Generalists and Specialists that describes the areas of knowledge, skill, and expertise that Foreign Service employees need throughout their career and to compete for the senior ranks of their disciplines. The CDP provides a

“career roadmap” for all our Foreign Service Officers and Specialists. It also encourages Foreign Service Officers and Specialists to broaden their experience by serving in more than one career track, in more than one region, and at our more difficult posts. Additionally, the CDP requires them to be experienced in crisis management. We are aiming, among other things, to better prepare them for senior positions.

The situation with our Civil Service employees is a bit different. We have well-defined position-based training plans for entry-level employees. Many of our Civil Service employees enter through highly structured federal internship and fellowship programs that have their own training requirements. However, we recognize that training is important throughout each employee’s career. We are developing a formal needs assessment which will allow us to develop strategies to ensure that employees receive the necessary training at the appropriate points in their careers.

For our 43,000 diverse Locally Employed staff in 270 different posts around the world, we require flexibility in assessing needs and planning and administering training, whether taken at FSI or via the myriad of distance learning opportunities. We have increased training for our Locally Employed staff at our regional centers in Frankfurt, Bangkok and other locations. This allows our local colleagues to take many of the same professional courses offered to U.S. staff. Supplementing these routine offerings are professional conferences, workshops, and post-specific in-house training programs to build language, technical, and computer skills.

Another challenge that we face as we bring in large numbers of new Foreign Service and Civil Service Employees is the experience gap within our workforces.

This is an issue that the American Academy of Diplomacy mentions in its recent report on State Department training. Ruth Whiteside and I worked closely with the Academy on the report and welcome their suggestions. Let me outline the problem for you. Approximately 33 percent of Foreign Service employees and 36 percent of Civil Service employees currently have less than five years of experience with the Department, and 61 percent of Foreign Service employees and 59 percent of Civil Service employees have less than 10 years of experience with the Department. This makes effective training critical, but we also recognize that training alone is not enough to compensate for the experience gap, which is why we have developed formal and informal mentoring programs to help guide these new employees so they can be successful. We also emphasize to our senior Foreign Service and Civil Service employees the importance of mentoring and providing “on the job training” to their employees.

Meeting our Foreign Language Needs

I want to take a minute to touch on another training issue that I know is of interest to you, Senator Akaka – strengthening the foreign-language capabilities of the State Department. Foreign language skills are not optional for the State Department. Foreign Service officers must possess foreign language proficiency to safeguard American citizens, to prevent and respond to crises, to engage local population on issues such as human rights, and to negotiate agreements with foreign governments in support of our foreign policy goals.

However, foreign language ability is just one of many skills that we expect in our Foreign Service personnel. In addition, employees must also have leadership, managerial, analytical and communication skills, and substantive knowledge of

their jobs. We must balance language training with the need to develop other skills and also keep in mind resource constraints.

To define our language needs and priorities and the best way to meet them, we have recently completed a strategic plan for foreign languages. Foreign-language capabilities are central to achieving our nation's foreign policy goals. Strong language skills help our employees establish trust with foreign interlocutors and advocate effectively for U.S. policies. The language strategy also aligns our tools—recruitment, incentives, career requirements, assignments policies, staffing, and training—to ensure that we have language-capable employees equipped to advance, protect and defend U.S. interests.

Sustaining the Department's high standards for foreign language capability has become increasingly challenging. We are encouraging our employees to enhance their skills in languages, such as Arabic and Chinese, which require at least two years of study to achieve a minimum professional level of proficiency. We have also increased the number of language-designated positions by 42 percent since 2002.

In recent years, FSI has expanded its language training capacity. The number of students enrolled in full-time Arabic language courses, for example, has dramatically increased since 2004. FSI, which is running a two-shift schedule, also uses overseas immersion opportunities to supplement classroom training, and is expanding online offerings. In addition, recruiting and targeting candidates with strong language skills has helped us fill our language-designated positions.

Conclusion

With the news highlighting how our world is changing and increasing the complexities of the State Department's mission, it is highly appropriate that we are talking about training today. Our people are our greatest asset, and we must ensure that they are fully equipped to handle not only today's challenges but are prepared to meet tomorrow's as well. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to address you today and I would be happy to answer your questions.