

**STATEMENT
OF
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**BEFORE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF MANAGEMENT, THE
FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**HEARING
ON
“A NATIONAL SECURITY CRISIS: FOREIGN LANGUAGE
CAPABILITIES IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT”**

MAY 21, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of State's efforts to build the foreign language skills we need to fulfill our mission and deliver on America's foreign policy agenda.

The Bureau of Human Resources (HR) has the critical responsibility of building and maintaining an effective civilian workforce that can fulfill its role in strengthening the security and prosperity of our nation. Our highest priority is assigning our people to places and positions where we believe they can best achieve our foreign policy goals. We are thankful for the funds that Congress appropriated in recent years to increase our ability to accomplish this mission in a rapidly changing environment worldwide. This funding has helped set us on the right path to address the global challenges of today and tomorrow.

The United States and the world face great perils and urgent foreign policy challenges, including regional conflicts, wars, the global economic crisis, weapons of mass destruction, climate change, worldwide poverty, food insecurity, pandemic disease, and terrorism. State Department employees are working diligently toward solving the problems that these issues have created.

As Secretary Clinton emphasized in the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, managing these threats depends as much on diplomacy and development as on the use of military force. Therefore, we have increased the number of positions at difficult, hazardous posts that are vital to our foreign policy agenda. And we now have close to 4,000 language-designated positions (LDPs). We have worked hard to ensure that qualified language speakers encumber these positions. The percentage of worldwide language-designated positions (LDPs) encumbered by fully language-qualified personnel has increased to 74 percent in 2012 from approximately 61 percent in 2009. Of our Foreign Service employees assigned to LDPs in FY 2011, 78 percent either met or exceeded the language requirements for their positions. This is a major achievement.

Over the past several years, we have had to make critical choices about whether to leave a position vacant for the time it takes to train a fully language-qualified officer or curtail all or part of the language training. These were difficult choices.

The Department makes every effort to ensure that Foreign Service Officers are fully trained in and meet the language requirements needed for the position, but there are cases where a medical emergency or other problem has forced us to curtail the assignment of someone serving in a language-designated position. When that occurs, it is often hard to find someone with the requisite language skills who can fill the position immediately.

A similar situation can occur when someone volunteers to serve in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Pakistan. Filling those positions meets critical service needs, but that can create a gap elsewhere. The Department may need to send an officer to fill the gap who does not have full language training, but who possesses the other required skills to meet the needs of the position.

Fortunately, that has begun to change for the better. With the additional hiring authorized by Congress, we launched Diplomacy 3.0 in March 2009 and have now increased the Foreign Service by 17 percent and the Civil Service by 7 percent. We used a significant portion of that increase to double the size of our long-term training complement allowing us to leave employees in training longer without suffering staffing gaps overseas.

Meeting our Foreign Language Needs

It is challenging to uphold the Department's high standards for foreign language capability. Over the past decade, there has been a significant shift and growth of positions to the Near East, South Asia, and East Asia.

Overall, positions have tripled in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) where LDP requirements have increased tenfold and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) has doubled regular positions and the corresponding language requirements.

Comparing December 2002 to November 2011 data, overall LDPs have increased by 46 percent, with Chinese (65 percent) and Arabic (125 percent) among the languages with the highest growth rates. These languages are among the hardest to learn, each of them requiring two years of training to reach a level of general professional proficiency. Meeting our Arabic needs has

been particularly challenging, since much of the growth in Arabic LDPs has been at one year assignment posts. This means that we must commit three officers for each one-year Arabic-speaking position; one currently in the assignment, one in the first year of training and one in the second year. For cases such as these, the Department pays on average an additional \$252,000 in salary and benefits for the two officers in training.

The shifting focus, mirroring our shifting foreign policy, has also required additional training in other languages from these parts of the world, including Pashto, Hindi, Urdu, Dari and Farsi, all of which require one year of training to reach general professional proficiency.

The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has expanded its foreign language training capacity to raise the proficiency of existing foreign language speakers. In addition, to meet increased demand, FSI is also running a two-shift schedule and expanding on-line offerings. Currently, FSI offers training in 65 different languages.

More targeted recruiting, however, can help address the current challenges, and we are recruiting aggressively for certain priority language proficiency skills at this time. Those with these language proficiencies who pass our stringent Foreign Service Officer Test are given preference points in the hiring process.

To address increasingly complex national security challenges, the State Department must have robust foreign language capabilities. Therefore, we strongly encourage young people to study languages earlier in life, starting in middle and high school and continuing in college.

In addition, the Department has established incentives to encourage employees to strengthen their language skills – particularly in the so-called “hard and superhard languages” such as Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Korean, and Hindi. For example, employees receive extra time in service for studying and achieving fluency. We also have a Language Incentive Pay (LIP) program under which proficiency in certain languages provides additional compensation for employees who have achieved proficiency and who are serving in a country where the language is the primary spoken language. And, in 2009, we established the Asymmetric Language

Incentive Pay (ASLIP), a pilot program wherein employees may receive compensation for uneven proficiency (for example, where the employee's spoken language is strong and deemed more important than reading) in several strategically important languages (including Arabic, Russian, and Korean). Such incentives underscore the value placed by the Department on obtaining capacity in our most difficult and needed foreign languages.

Conclusion

While we work aggressively to recruit and retain the talented staff needed in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, we also must guarantee that our employees have the foreign language skills necessary to succeed in these challenging environments. But the need is not limited to a handful of countries. No matter where in the world they are serving, our employees must have the language skills to gather information, explain and advocate U.S. policies, establish and maintain our diplomatic platforms, build and maintain trust, and create relationships. In today's rapidly changing world, the need for these skills has never been more critical. In fact, we believe that our country's future well-being and security depend on them.