

TESTIMONY

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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
SENATE GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, PROLIFERATION, AND
FEDERAL SERVICES
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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

I welcome the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee on behalf of Under Secretary for Management Grant Green and the Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources Amb. Ruth A. Davis. Mr. Green is making a long-planned trip to Africa, and Director General Davis is in the hospital. I am therefore appearing on their behalf.

Mr. Chairman, in commenting on the particular bill under consideration by this subcommittee, I would like to provide you with a few general comments about what the State Department is doing – right now, with money Congress appropriated last fall – to improve our ability to recruit and retain the top talent we require to further our nation’s diplomatic interests.

The most important point I would like to make, Mr. Chairman, is that our diplomacy must be seen as part of the U.S. national security strategy. If anyone had any doubt about this, I hope that the events of September 11 have erased them permanently.

Our diplomats and our diplomacy are an essential part of our great nation’s security and prosperity. Whether it is in Afghanistan or Zimbabwe, our diplomats are defending our interests and telling America’s story. Secretary Powell likes to say that our diplomats are the country’s “first line of offense.” As you know, he doesn’t like to play defense.

Secretary Powell has also said that we can not subordinate the needs of people to the demands of policy. He pays enormous attention to the management and morale of our people, from presiding at swearing-in ceremonies for new officers to swearing in our ambassadors. The Secretary is a very visible presence among his “troops,” and the energy and sense of loyalty and commitment his leadership has generated is palpable throughout the Department.

Last winter, when the Secretary looked over our “corporate balance sheet,” he saw that the Department faced a serious shortage of people. There were not enough people to give the Department a “training float,” something the military has built into its staffing pattern, for example.

If you will allow me a brief personal digression here, I can tell you that as deputy director of the Foreign Service Institute from 1997 to 2001, I was constantly faced with the problem of ambassadors or deputy chiefs of mission calling up to ask that someone be pulled out of training in order to fill an urgent staffing gap in the Department or overseas. I long ago concluded that this “rob Peter to pay Paul” approach is neither healthy for the institution nor good for the officer’s effectiveness and morale, so I was delighted to see the Secretary tackle this issue from his very first weeks in office.

The Secretary also determined that we didn’t have enough people to deal with the

cutting edge issues of diplomacy, such as the environment, transnational crime, narcotics, HIV/AIDS, critical infrastructure protection, and of course terrorism.

Last spring, well before the events of September 11, he sent the Congress a three-year plan – the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative -- to deal with the problem. The Congress responded favorably, passing Year One of the Initiative last fall. All of us in the Department thank you for this.

We are now busy implementing that program. It has meant ramping up our recruitment, hiring, and training effort. It has meant finding more mentors and guides for our new officers. It means thinking of innovative ways to make the Department more family friendly, and to help spouses who accompany our people overseas to find employment opportunities. It has allowed us to do what we have long wanted to do – train more in such vital areas as languages, tradecraft, science and technology, and leadership and management. This latter issue is one which is getting attention like never before.

We are eager to show you that this vote of confidence in the Department is fully justified. We are determined to use the new resources wisely to recruit widely, train more effectively, represent U.S. interests appropriately, and be prepared to meet new challenges.

Mr. Chairman, this is the context in which the Student Loan Repayment Program fits, at least with regard to the State Department. It has to be seen as part of our overall recruitment and retention effort.

The Department continues to attract a large pool of patriotic, talented, and committed people. It is a source of particular pride and satisfaction that the events of September 11 have if anything increased the number of people willing to serve our country. I can report to you that over 12,000 people took last September's Foreign Service entrance exam, including the largest number of minority applicants ever. For this April's iteration of the exam, we are also experiencing a high level of interest.

It is clear that some of these applicants come to us with fairly heavy education bills. We all know that a first-class education in the U.S. can be very expensive. Many of our applicants and employees have student loans, and the prospect of assistance with those obligations is indeed a valuable and useful tool for us, especially as we work to implement the Secretary's goal of making the Department of State "look more like America" by increasing access to the Foreign Service for Americans from modest financial backgrounds. At present, we are designing our Student Loan Repayment Program to target recruiting and retention in chronically difficult to staff skills and positions.

We support fully this Committee's efforts to help Federal agencies attract and retain certain skilled employees through a student loan repayment program. We would also like to urge you to give consideration to the following factors: First, it may be simpler and more efficient to modify the existing Student Loan Repayment Program rather than create new or overlapping different programs. Second, for the legislation to be really effective, it needs to give the respective agencies sufficient discretion to frame their eligibility and participation criteria, and administer their programs in order to deal with their unique recruitment and retention problems. This is one area where one size definitely does not fit all.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to the graduate fellows program in the legislation we applaud the intention; I would like to describe how we use current such programs for recruitment. On the Foreign Service side, we have the Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellows. The Secretary likes to call this his "ROTC for the Foreign Service." It allows us to fund education for outstanding young people who then

commit to serving in the Foreign Service. It has been a very effective recruitment tool for us, especially in attracting minorities into the Foreign Service. We also have the Fascell Fellows program which allows Fellows at the graduate school level in certain foreign languages and area studies to serve in Embassies abroad on limited appointments. We consider this a recruitment tool and encourage Fascell Fellows to seek permanent employment with the Department in both the Foreign Service and Civil Service. We also draw heavily on the Presidential Management Intern program, which produces outstanding new Civil Service employees who have relevant masters degree-level education.

I would like to refer you to another outstanding current program--the National Security Education Program (NSEP). The NSEP has an international focus, and the program includes a foreign language requirement. One in four of the awards is in areas such as engineering, the applied sciences, or health.

In considering the intention of the legislation before the committee, and our experiences, we believe that the key to these programs is for there to be Department control over the process so that selection of positions and employees can be best tailored to the Department's needs. We also note that programs which pay for education are better benefits for the agency when they are linked to permanent employment.

With regard to the National Security Service Corps portion of the legislation, we believe the concept of the proposal is sound. We do have authorities to allow for and encourage cross-pollination between the national security agencies. We believe this is important and therefore send our employees on details to other agencies - as advisors to regional Commanders in Chief, to the National Security Council, to Congress - as well as participate in exchange agreements, such as with the Department of Defense, so that we benefit from having their employees here. We believe that these are very beneficial programs that should continue to be encouraged.

You asked us to address the Department's needs in the areas of math, science and languages. Language skills are essential for many of our thousands of overseas American positions, and to a much lesser, but growing, extent science expertise is important. However, because of the generalist nature and worldwide availability required for all candidates, these particular skills are not a requirement for hiring of our Foreign Service employees. However, we do recruit heavily among groups where language-qualified Americans are likely to be found, such as at universities with strong language programs, and at annual meetings of the Foreign Language Association.

Likewise, we are now recruiting actively people with science and technology credentials to strengthen S&T literacy in our diplomatic corps. We work closely with the Department's Science Advisor to identify recruitment targets. For example, we recently sent recruiters to the annual career fair in Boston of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The response was overwhelming. As we recruit, we also seek applicants for domestic Civil Service positions at the Department, where we do have some positions that require language skills and some that require science skills as a prerequisite for employment.

I would note, however, that the proposed legislation singles out the physical sciences but excludes many areas of study critical to national security, some of which are particularly relevant to the Department of State's needs, in areas of study such as international affairs, political science, and economics. In the coming decades, we believe that we will need not only people with certain special skills, but also people with the critical general skills for diplomacy: creativity, flexibility, leadership. This is what we are seeking in an increasingly complex world with changing requirements.

Further, I would like to remind the committee that these creative approaches to Federal workforce management sometimes unintentionally leave out the considerations of the Foreign Service. We are always available to discuss the particular needs of our workforce.

Finally, I would like to encourage the Congress to pass promptly the Administration's Managerial Flexibility Act, which will benefit the State Department and other Federal agencies. We are already using to great effect the available recruitment and retention incentives; in fact, OPM has cited our IT recruitment and retention program as a "best practice." We would welcome and benefit from further flexibility in these programs. We could potentially benefit from a streamlined and simplified process for human resources demonstration projects as we look for ways to further integrate Secretary Powell's team, which consists of employees in three different personnel systems.

Mr. Chairman, I end my remarks with the following: A request for your continuing support for Year Two of the Diplomatic Readiness Initiative. This is Secretary Powell's top human resources priority. It is essential that we get the new people we require if America is going to retain its first-class diplomatic capabilities. Our leadership role in the world faces us with many challenges, some of which did not exist when I joined the Department in 1978. I can assure you that we in the Department of State are eager to meet these challenges, but to do so requires new people and adequate resources. Thank you very much.

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