

AFSA NEWS BRIEFS



AFSA Meets with Entry-Level Employees in Africa Posts

AFSA State VP Steve Kashkett participated in the Africa-region entry-level conference that took place in Addis Ababa from Oct. 12-14. This event, which brought together more than 70 entry-level Foreign Service employees from virtually every post in AF — and was organized by the employees themselves — provided an opportunity for a candid exchange of views on the key concerns and problems facing entry-level employees in that region.

Kashkett participated in several panel discussions covering personnel issues and career development in today's Foreign Service. He particularly enjoyed and found useful his private conversations with nearly 50 of the participants on the margins of the conference.

Life in the Foreign Service

■ BY BRIAN AGGELER, FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER



“Wallace, I understand your youthful appetite for reckless speculation, but maintain it's safer if this memo concludes that whatever will be *may be*.”

AFSA Meets with USAID Administrator

On Oct. 31, AFSA President Tony Holmes met with USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios. The meeting was cordial and frank and covered a wide range of topics. Amb. Holmes highlighted AFSA's highest-priority issue: overseas comparability pay. He also expressed AFSA's bafflement at USAID's refusal to abide by the decisions of the Foreign Service Grievance Board and resolve the cases involving the unfair selection out of two employees.

Other topics discussed at the meeting included USAID's extensive use of Foreign Service Limited appointments and using program resources as opposed to the operating expenses budget. AFSA pointed out that these two separate FS systems would inevitably start bumping up against each other and cause the agency problems. Administrator Natsios said that he was preoccupied at the moment with the \$60 million shortfall in the large operating expense budget, but would do all he could to avoid a RIF and mitigate, to the extent possible, rollbacks in employee benefits such as training, student loan repayment and spousal language training.

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Gilbert Sheinbaum

On Dissent and Disloyalty

“We must never confuse dissent with disloyalty. When the loyal opposition dies, I think the soul of America dies with it.”

— Edward R. Murrow



A FSA’s annual dissent awards are in danger of becoming a thing of the past. These awards, created to encourage those willing to speak out forthrightly, in appropriate channels, to express alternative points of view on policy matters, have attracted a dwindling number of nominees over the past few years. As we again launch the call for nominations in this issue of the *Foreign Service Journal*, we fear that constructive dissent may be disappearing from the landscape of the Foreign Service.

Use of the Department of State’s official Dissent Channel, which was designed to serve the same lofty purpose as AFSA’s dissent awards, has dwindled to a trickle since its heyday in the 1970s. In 1977, the Executive Secretariat logged in some 32 Dissent Channel messages. By contrast, in 2005, you can count on the fingers of one hand the number of Foreign Service professionals who have sent in a Dissent Channel message.

This is a disturbing trend. It tells us that people are reluctant to express any point of view that might be perceived as contrary to the policy line of the administration that happens to be in power. It tells us that internal debate among foreign policy professionals within the department is being stifled. It tells us that our colleagues are afraid of retaliation.

The Foreign Service is full of genuine experts on all regions of the world and on virtually every substantive policy issue, ranging from conflict resolution and counterterrorism to sustainable economic development and the promotion of democracy and human rights. A diplomat who spends years living and working in a foreign country, speaking the language, learning to understand the culture and dealing directly with the foreign government, will

acquire a certain instinctive sense of what will work and what will not in that country and in that part of the world.

Many of our colleagues take great pride in this “hands-on” expertise in foreign affairs and seek to reinforce it constantly during their careers through reading, academic training and involvement in think-tanks. These are people who deserve a special place at the table when U.S. foreign policy decisions are made. These are people worth listening to.

On occasion, Foreign Service careerists might disagree on a particular course of action that the administration of the day has embarked upon and might have an alternative approach to recommend. There must be a place for such constructive dissent in our democratic system of government. There *must* be a place for an open airing of different points of view without fear of reprisal or career damage.

Any administration that equates such constructive dissent with disloyalty is making a serious mistake, and is depriving itself of a valuable resource. Foreign Service careerists are patriots who spend a substantial part of their lives faithfully serving their country in difficult and often dangerous places around the globe. We all care deeply about the United States and its relationship with the rest of the world; after all, most of us in the Foreign Service got into this profession to help shape foreign policies that can effectively advance U.S. interests.

It is a tragedy that so few people in the Foreign Service today feel safe using the Dissent Channel, and it is a sad state of affairs that so few are willing to nominate others — or be nominated themselves — for AFSA dissent awards. U.S. foreign policy only stands to benefit from an open and candid debate that includes our country’s true experts. □

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Don't "Overlook" Your Membership

Some 30 years ago I ran for the AFSA Governing Board on the "Radical Slate" and did not make it. I am delighted that this time around, in the 2005 board election, I was selected to be one of the retiree representatives. The slot I now occupy had been previously held for the USIA retiree representative. Although the agency no longer exists, I still consider myself a voice of those ex-USIAers who are now aging annuitants.

Not long after the election results were distributed, I got an e-mail from the widow of a former USIA officer asking me if she should join AFSA and what the benefits would be for her. I told her that the benefits of AFSA membership were considerable for the affordable annual dues she would have to pay as a retiree spouse. I pointed out to her that AFSA is the only organization that is solely dedicated to protecting and catering to her needs as a Foreign Service retiree. I told her that AFSA lobbies Congress to preserve, and hopefully to expand, the retiree benefits she is receiving.

AFSA's ability to lobby Congress is dependent on how strong a voice it has in terms of total membership.

While she did not seem responsive to the mention of AFSA's lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill regarding the Windfall Elimination Provisions and the Government Pension Offset issues, she became very interested when I started talking about AFSA and her health benefits, about Medicare prescriptions and premium conversion and about information regarding various insurance programs available through AFSA. I told her she could also keep up on these personal matters of concern via *AFSA News* and the bimonthly *Retiree Newsletter*. Finally, I pointed out that if she needed counseling or wanted further information, all she had to do was contact Bonnie Brown by phone or e-mail. She then said she would send in her membership dues.

All of you should be aware by now that the Retiree VP and all four retiree representatives will be making a determined effort to recruit new members from the retiree community and to convince "lapsed members" to renew their membership. AFSA's ability to lobby Congress and the foreign affairs agencies is dependent on how strong a voice it has in terms of total membership. I was surprised to learn that of the 3,200-plus retirees in Virginia, where I live, only 878 are AFSA members.

In recent conversations with some of the "lapsed members," I discovered that while they were paying \$100 or more a year to join other social and professional organizations, they had "overlooked" AFSA membership. I challenged them to compare the benefits of being a member of a monthly luncheon group to the benefits that AFSA provides its members, both professionally, as a voice of the Foreign Service, and personally, as an advocate before Congress on issues that affect their own lives and the lives of their spouses. I argued that the choice is a "no-brainer," and said I would expect them to be rejoining AFSA as soon as possible.

As AFSA Retiree VP David Reuther pointed out in his October column, you can expect to hear from us often. At the same time, we want to hear from you and welcome your comments, recommendations or concerns. I can be reached most easily by e-mail at ljbjbb@aol.com.

Your Voice, Your Advocate. □



AFSA NEWS BRIEFS

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Austin Tracy

AFSA Send-off for Susan Moorse

During a farewell luncheon on Oct. 25, AFSA President Tony Holmes and AFSA State VP Steve Kashkett presented a plaque to Susan Moorse, the State Department's outgoing labor-management negotiator, to acknowledge the productive and businesslike relationship that AFSA had with her during her tenure.

Call for Writers

Let your voice be heard throughout the Foreign Service community by writing a feature for *AFSA News*. We are now — as always — accepting submissions for a number of features, including:

- "Family Member Matters," a forum for views from Foreign Service family members about issues of concern to the Foreign Service community. (\$100 honorarium upon publication)
- "Of Special(ist) Concern," where specialists can write about issues of particular concern to them.
- "Where to Retire," advice from retirees on the best places to retire.
- "Memo of the Month," where we feature unusual and entertaining memos.
- "The Lighter Side," an opportunity to share Foreign Service humor.

Please submit your 400- to 600-word essay/column to *FSJ* Associate Editor Shawn Dorman at dorman@afsa.org. We cannot guarantee publication of all submissions, but do guarantee that all submissions will be seriously considered.

Money from AFSA for College

Children of Foreign Service employees who are high-school seniors and college undergraduates are eligible to apply for one-time-only AFSA Academic and Art Merit Awards and renewable need-based AFSA Financial Aid Scholarships. Awards range from \$1,000 to \$3,000.



The submission deadline is Feb. 6. Visit AFSA's scholarship programs Web page at www.afsa.org/scholar/index.cfm for complete details, e-mail Lori Dec at dec@afsa.org or phone her at (202) 944-5504 or 1 (800) 704-2372, ext. 504 (toll-free).

In the Journal

Have you ever wondered whether taking your kids along for overseas postings will enhance their long-term educational/career/social prospects? Well, Francesca Kelly addresses this question in her article, "Going to College in America," in this month's *Schools Supplement*. See if her conclusions match your expectations.

In Search of a Symbol and a Slogan for OCP

Active-duty AFSA members have confirmed that overseas comparability pay is the number-one personnel-related issue for them. As part of AFSA's ongoing campaign to gain OCP for all Foreign Service personnel serving overseas, we are seeking a catchy symbol and slogan for the campaign and encourage your input. Send ideas to AFSA Secretary Tex Harris at afsatex@aol.com.

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Whither the Commercial Service?



On Sept. 13, Will Center and I tabled three midterm proposals for negotiation with management and have been seeking its concurrence for a posting on the AFSA FCS Web site (by the time this is published I expect you should see it there). As I write during this balmy mid-October week in Washington, we are still awaiting an official response from management, but I have indications that we may progress more quickly than in the past on at least one of the issues.

Management, however, has been rightly focused on two much larger priorities. The top concern for Commerce management has been getting confirmed as management so that strategic decisions can be made. The Commerce Department's Under Secretary-designate for International Trade — the head of our agency — had not been confirmed as of this writing. Israel Hernandez, however, was sworn in as Assistant Secretary for Trade Promotion and Director General of the US&FCS in mid-October. Hernandez very promptly requested a meeting with AFSA President Tony Holmes. The meeting took place just two days after his swearing-in.

Indeed, as alluded to in my October column, "strategic disbursement," "right-sizing," cutbacks and realignments and perhaps even the dreaded "R" word (RIF), are issues that have been awaiting those confirmations and should be addressed shortly. As was apparent from the presence of Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, First Lady Laura Bush, White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez and OMB Director Josh Bolten at the swearing-in ceremony at USDOD, DG Hernandez has top-notch political connections. He assured AFSA that he would work all angles, both at Commerce and on the Hill, and keep us advised of pending decisions. His swearing-in remarks and other statements indicate that cuts do loom.

In the field, Commercial Service officers are generally quite capable and effective at managing budgets — appropriated and trust funds — to match expenses and income at a post level. CS clients — American exporters — are also generally quite satisfied with our services for the fees paid. As we often say, for every dollar spent on trade promotion generally or assisting an export client specifically, many more dollars accrue to our exports and our economy, as well as to the client company.

Given budget pressures to extend the Commercial Service cost recovery toward 100 percent of indirect as well as direct costs, CS collections and targets remain in doubt. For Fiscal Year 2006, we got a partial reprieve on Oct. 1. CS did not increase pricing to full cost-recovery levels, pending the outcome of House and Senate negotiations in conference for the FY-06 Commerce, Justice, State appropriations bill. On a broader scale, even though our total budget is set to increase from \$220 million in FY-05 to \$232 million in FY-06, earmarked amounts for reimbursements to State and other programs set by Congress leave the Commercial Service with a shrinking budget, even without a possible across-the-board 2-percent cut because of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Salaries account for about 57 percent of budget and are considered a "sunk" cost (people are our best resource anyway, right?), so the pay increases from 2005 to 2006, combined with inflation, unfavorable exchange rates and uncertain OMB cost-recovery levels, squeeze the overall budget so much that we cannot escape some action to realign expenses with "income." Whether the actions involve personnel or program cutbacks — or both — remains to be seen. Whither the Commercial Service? □

The Overpayment Cases: A Warning to All

BY JOE SLOTNICK, AFSA GRIEVANCE ATTORNEY

Over the past three years AFSA's State labor management staff have represented a number of retired members in annuity disputes with the State Department. While the specifics of each case are different, a broad pattern has emerged. Early in the spring of 2003 the department began to discover accounting errors by its retirement and payroll offices that resulted in a large number of annuitants being overpaid over a significant period of time (15 years or more).

The department then contacted the affected annuitants with a demand for immediate payment of thousands or tens of thousands of dollars. If they did not pay, their monthly payments would be reduced by hundreds or thousands of dollars. AFSA learned that annuitants could request a waiver of this debt and the labor management staff assisted some annuitants with this process.

After the department denied these requests, AFSA helped members file appeals to the Foreign Service Grievance Board. Some of these cases are ongoing, more have been settled, and one was recently decided by the Foreign Service Grievance Board. The board's decision offers a cautionary tale for annuitants, as well as a broader message to members of AFSA.

In FSGB Case No. 2004-018, the annuitant was seeking a waiver of the more than \$50,000 owed. (*Note:* Due to confidentiality rules, Grievance Board decisions are not available for public review until all confidential information has been excised by the FSGB. Information on the availability of FSGB decisions can be obtained at www.fsgb.gov.) According to the Foreign Service Act and department regulations, overpayments shall be waived when the annuitant proves that he/she was "without fault" and recovery would be "against

equity and good conscience." See Section 807(d) of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 (22 USC 4047(d), as amended), 22 CFR Part 17.

Based on these regulations, AFSA argued that the overpayment resulted from a department error, and in light of the scant and often contradictory information provided by the department, it



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would have been impossible for the annuitant to detect the department's error (and thereby avoid the overpayment). With regard to "equity and good conscience," AFSA argued that it would be inequitable to punish the individual for the department's 15-year-old mistake. In addition, we stated that the annuitant had relied to his detriment on the department's erroneous payments in irrevocable legal and financial arrangements and therefore, as provided by regulation, recovery would be against equity and good conscience.

The department dismissed AFSA's

arguments as baseless. The department stated that the annuitant received sufficient information to determine that the overpayment was occurring, and called into question the individual's credibility. The department rejected the argument that the annuitant relied to his detriment and, primarily due to the annuitant's relatively stable financial position, argued that recovery would not be against equity and good conscience.

The Grievance Board unanimously held that the individual was not entitled to a waiver. Despite the undisputed fact that the individual did not know of the department's error, the Grievance Board concluded that the individual was not without fault because he/she could have determined that overpayments were occurring. The board stated, "Casual reading of Annuity Adjustment Notices and an unquestioning confidence in the accuracy of the department's accounting system are not acceptable excuses." (FSGB Case 2004-018).

This decision reinforces two unofficial axioms of Foreign Service life: 1) the individual is presumed to know the governing rules, regulations and standards, no matter how arcane; and 2) the individual Foreign Service officer, specialist, career candidate or retiree can always be held responsible, even in the event of a department mistake.

So what's the lesson? From competent retirement planning and management to storing your HHE, the Grievance Board thinks that you can take care of yourself. So, whether it is your first time overseas or you have retired after 30 consecutive years abroad — never assume you "know the rules" or that the department will "take care of you." If you don't know the rules, ask. And if you do know the rules, ask anyway. Remember, ignorance is no excuse. □

them now more than ever. AFSA believes that the courage to ask 'why' or 'why not' or suggest ideas that may be considered controversial or against popular wisdom is a true indication of loyalty — to our Service, to our oath of office, to our profession and to the American values upon which our country was founded.

"Just as AFSA believes it has a solemn responsibility to advocate for our Foreign Service colleagues," Limbert added, "we also believe that each of us has the responsibility to stand up for our convictions, to give the best possible counsel we are qualified to give, and to recognize those colleagues who stick their necks out, who challenge the status quo, who dare to ask the tough questions."

CONSTRUCTIVE DISSENT AWARDS

- **The Tex Harris Award** for a Foreign Service Specialist
- **The W. Averell Harriman Award** for a Junior Officer (FS-4, 5 or 6)
- **The William R. Rivkin Award** for a Mid-level Officer (FS-1, 2 or 3)
- **The Christian A. Herter Award** for a Senior Officer (FE-CA or OC)

These prestigious awards recognize individuals "who have exhibited extraordinary accomplishment involving initiative, integrity, intellectual courage and constructive dissent." They reward Foreign Service members who have promoted critical and constructive solutions to foreign policy problems, management issues, consular policies or any other area which affects the work of the Foreign Service. The constructive dissent awards are *not* for performance of assigned duties, however exceptional.

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE AWARDS

AFSA offers three awards recognizing exemplary performance of assigned duties or voluntary activities at an overseas post, performance that demonstrates extraordinary contributions to effectiveness, professionalism and morale.

The outstanding performance awards are:

- **The Nelson B. Delavan Award** for an



office management specialist. This award recognizes the work of an OMS who has made a significant contribution to post or office effectiveness and morale, beyond the framework of her/his job responsibilities.

- **The M. Juanita Guess Award** for a community liaison officer. This award recognizes a CLO who has demonstrated outstanding leadership, dedication, initiative and imagination in assisting the families of Americans serving at an overseas post.

- **The Avis Bohlen Award** for a Foreign Service family member. This award recognizes the accomplishments of a family member whose relations with the American and foreign communities have done the most to advance the interests of the United States.

NOMINATION PROCEDURES

Please submit the following information to AFSA by Feb. 24, 2006:

Part I — The name of the award for which the person is being nominated; the nominee's name, grade, agency and position. (For the Bohlen Award, also include the family relationship.)

Part II — The nominator's name, grade, agency and position, and a description of the association with the nominee.

Part III — The justification for the nomination. This narrative should discuss the actions and qualities which the nominator believes qualify the nominee for the award, giving specific examples of accomplishments that fulfill the criteria stated above.

Part III should not exceed 700 words.

All winners receive a monetary award of \$2,500 and a framed certificate and are honored at a reception in late June at the State Department's Benjamin Franklin Diplomatic Reception Room. The Secretary of State is invited to participate in the ceremony.

Further details on nomination procedures, additional guidelines and a nomination form can be found on the AFSA Web site at www.afsa.org/awards.cfm. From there, you can also link to articles about the AFSA awards and find a comprehensive listing of past award winners.

Questions should be directed to Barbara Berger, Coordinator for Professional Issues, by e-mail: berger@afsa.org, or phone: (202) 338-4045, ext. 521. For reference on dissent in the Foreign Service, go to the June 2002 *Foreign Service Journal* (www.afsa.org/fsj/2002.cfm), which features several articles on the topic. The deadline for submitting nominations is Feb. 24, 2006.

Perhaps Thomas Jefferson said it best: "Dissent is the highest form of patriotism." Help AFSA honor our fellow patriots, who have stood up for what they think is right, by nominating a worthy candidate for a dissent award. □

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AFSA Group Accident Plan

AFSA Group Accidental Death Coverage has been expanded to include Medical Evacuation and Repatriation Costs (up to \$75,000). Terrorism is covered everywhere in the world and at full policy limits. The policy is not expensive, at \$1 per \$1,000 of coverage. Choose limits from \$50,000 to \$500,000. For more information, call toll-free: 1 (800) 242-8221, e-mail afsainfo@hirshorn.com or visit www.hirshorn.com/AFSA-group-accident.html. □

Medicare D: What You Should Know

BY BONNIE BROWN, AFSA RETIREE COORDINATOR

Medicare prescription drug coverage is a voluntary insurance program that will be available to everyone with Medicare coverage in January 2006. Open season began Nov. 15.

The monthly premiums will be \$32.20. After a \$250 deductible, Medicare will pay 75 percent of the cost of each prescription and the beneficiary will pay 25 percent, up to \$2,250 in total costs. (At this point the beneficiary will have paid an out-of-pocket total of \$750.)

Once a beneficiary has \$2,250 in drug costs (a combination of costs paid by the beneficiary and Medicare), he/she hits a coverage gap or “doughnut hole.” At this point Medicare will stop covering drug costs until the beneficiary spends an additional \$2,850. This amount may not be paid by another insurance plan. Once the beneficiary has paid this \$2,850, he/she is eligible for catastrophic coverage.

Because FEHBP plans pay well for prescription drugs, adding Medicare D prescription drug coverage would not make sense for most retirees with these plans. There are exceptions, particularly people with low incomes or those in a health plan with a weak drug benefit. Since any participant in any FEHBP plan has “creditable” drug coverage (coverage deemed as good as or better than Medicare D), he/she can enroll in Part D in later years without pay-

ing a penalty. For more information, call Medicare toll-free at 1 (800) 633-4227 or visit www.medicare.gov.

When considering or comparing Medicare D plan(s):

- Take an inventory of your prescription needs.
- Determine if your present plan meets those needs.
- Find out if a plan lists your prescriptions on its “formulary,” the list of drugs covered by its policy.
- Calculate to see if the plan will save you money, taking into consideration your income level, prescription needs and your present drug coverage.
- Find out if you can use your regular pharmacy under the plan.

Consumer and Medicare groups have expressed concern that consumers will be overwhelmed by the plan choices, and that the open season will be a high-pressured marketing blitz, rather than an effort to genuinely educate seniors about Medicare D options. In addition, these groups caution that unscrupulous people might acquire bank account and Social Security information, or fees, under the guise of registering people for the new drug program.

Here are some tips to help you protect yourself from fraud:

- Register for the national Do-Not-Call registry by calling toll-free, 1 (888) 382-1222.

Companies offering Medicare D plans cannot call you if your home telephone and cell phones are on this registry.

- Do not give out any personal information, particularly your bank account or Social Security number, over the telephone.
- Demand written materials from telephone solicitors before making any decisions.
- Remember, you can hang up on telemarketers.
- Do not allow anyone you do not know and have not invited into your home.
- Do not allow yourself to be pressured into a quick decision.
- Check out Medicare D companies with Medicare by calling (toll-free) 1 (800) 633-4227 or visiting www.medicare.gov.
- Do not pay any money to apply for a plan. Medicare D plans never require an application fee.
- If you become apprehensive about a caller or telephone solicitor, call your local police. □

New Retiree Benefit: Consumer Checkbook Guide

A FSA is pleased to offer a new retiree benefit — online access to the *2006 Consumer Checkbook Guide to Health Plans*. The *Guide* provides 2006 premiums and benefits, as well as information on comparative plan quality and service to help retirees choose the best plan for their needs and pocketbooks.

Retirees can gain access to the *Guide* at AFSA’s Retiree Web page at www.afsa.org/rtvppage.cfm, or go to www.afsa.org and click on the retiree tab at the top of the page. Retirees who do not use the Internet but need assistance with the FEHB open season may write or call our retiree coordinators toll-free at 1 (800) 704-2372: Bonnie Brown (ext. 509) and Norma Reyes (ext. 514).

More on PIT Buyback

The PIT buyback is available to employees who will be eligible for an annuity under the Federal Employees Retirement System and the Foreign Service Pension System, but who were unable to participate in the retirement system from Jan. 1, 1989, to May 23, 1998. They are now able to purchase credit toward retirement by making a deposit equal to the deductions that would have been made from their earnings if they had been eligible, plus interest. Employees under the Foreign Service Retirement and Disability System and the Civil Service Retirement System have always been able to purchase credit for their PIT service if it was followed by FSRDS or CSRS service.

they go overseas is unfair, illogical and unacceptable at a time when we need to encourage people to serve in increasingly difficult — and difficult to staff — foreign posts. We informed her that our survey, as well as direct contacts with our members, left no doubt that this is the number-one issue for the Foreign Service. I described the tremendous progress that AFSA has made in lobbying a range of members of Congress to get overseas comparability pay passed in Fiscal Year 2006, including finding a champion in the Senate who was willing to put his support in writing in an important letter to the key appropriations subcommittee chairman.

I told the Secretary that our members have heard her assert her support for the Foreign Service and that her key deputies have told us that obtaining overseas comparability pay for employees at the FS-1 level and below is the department's highest personnel-related priority. I asked her to use her personal influence to make it happen, and to get the White House on board. I asked her to make a phone call to a key member of Congress to show her support of OCP in principle, something that would have greatly improved the chances for its passage this year. Secretary Rice reaffirmed that OCP is in fact a top priority, and said that she had personally spoken to the director of the Office of Management and Budget on several occasions to seek his concurrence.

(We learned later from her chief of staff that she was unable to make the call because OMB would not clear it. However, he affirmed that she supports OCP and will work to get it for Fiscal Year 2007. I told him that her willingness to use her personal political capital and relationship with the president to get OCP is seen as the litmus test of her support for the department's employees.)

Pay for Performance Linked to OCP

As it turns out, department management had long ago given up on OCP in FY-06. The OMB veto in last December's budget request "passback" was definitive. The only way the White House will ever seriously consider it, we've been told, is if it is part of an initiative to convert the entire FS personnel system to "pay for performance." However, it is important to realize that if management goes forward with a conver-

sion to pay for performance, there would be some big tradeoffs in the equation. All FS employees would lose their annual 3-percent step increase in return for a pool of performance-pay money. Whether this tradeoff would be good for FS employees depends on some key assumptions, the most important of which is that Congress would fund the performance-pay line item in the department's future budgets at levels that equaled the lost three percent step increases.

You will probably be hearing much more about all this in coming months. In any case, you can be assured that AFSA will play the legislative game again next year. The fact remains that OCP is in the authorization bill the House passed earlier this year and that is a "two-year bill," which means that it remains valid through the present Congress. To become law, though, we'd need a Senate companion bill. □

OCP Dead for FY-06

Despite a six-week-long full court press by AFSA that generated enough momentum to keep our hopes up until literally the last minute, the House/Senate conferees on the State Department portion of the Fiscal Year 2006 appropriations bill finished their work on Nov. 4, and did not include the provision we'd been seeking granting overseas comparability pay to all FS members (not just the senior FS) overseas this year. At the end of the day, according to people in the meeting, it was the administration's and department's complete lack of support that doomed our efforts. The only way you're realistically going to get this, we were told, is if you bring the administration along with you. The lesson we learned is that when Congress and the White House are controlled by the same party, it is exceedingly difficult to get something passed in the face of that party's opposition.

STATE RECYCLING PAYS FOR CHILD CARE

Recycle for Diplotots

BY PAIGE CHABORA, DIPLLOTOTS BOARD MEMBER

Did you know that you help children and families every time you recycle paper, cans or glass? It's true. State Department recycling helps families cover the cost of quality child care at Diplotots, the department's child-care center.

Child care with Diplotots costs \$700-\$1,000 per month, depending on the age of the child. The Diplotots Board of Directors manages a tuition-assistance program that provides funding each year in tuition assistance for 15 to 20 children. The program is funded primarily by contributions through the Combined Federal Campaign (#7861) and the State Department's recycling program.

Last year, department recycling efforts generated \$63,000. This revenue makes it possible for parents from a wide variety of income levels to send their children to the same high-quality program. In 2005, nearly one-quarter of the families receiving tuition assistance earn less than \$20,000 per year. The Diplotots Board covers about 65 percent of the tuition bills for those families. The average annual income for a family with one child receiving assistance is \$33,000. The average award given to a family is just over \$300 per month.

Funds are also used to permit children who receive tuition assistance to participate in the center's extracurricular activities — such as gymnastics, swimming and field trips — and to provide special learning opportunities for all the children in the center.

So, the next time you need to toss any paper, cans or glass, look for a recycling bin. It's good for the earth, and good for children. □

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