

On the Job

As we approach the summer 2008 assignment period and my own reassignment from AFSA VP to a foreign post, thoughts of a succession loom just as the FCS management team (at least the officers) is also turning over en masse. What can I tell my eventual successor about the ups and downs of being the AFSA VP for Commerce/FCS?

Within Commerce/FCS, it is well known that the AFSA VP position is a half-time job. For several years, the other half of the job has been as senior adviser to the deputy assistant secretary for international operations. Commerce/FCS is the only Foreign Service agency that has a non-full-time AFSA VP.

Having just gone through the 2007 Selection and Promotion Boards cycle, along with the “pay for performance” (or, if you prefer, “performance pay” cash awards) exercise, the first thing I can tell a successor is that this job provides virtually no chance for

promotion and little to no chance of cash awards, regardless of how well the AFSA VP performs under either of the two hats. (On the plus side, there is time-in-class relief.)

The second piece of wisdom to pass on is that the AFSA VP has excellent opportunities to provide significant and responsive support to FCS AFSA members facing problems big and small. In that task, despite the half-time status of the position, the AFSA VP receives a great deal of sup-

port from the AFSA Governing Board and the AFSA staff.

On the other hand, our own agency appears to be only half-serious about its relations with AFSA. Our 2005 proposals were finally accepted (in part) in mid-2007, but our 2006 and 2007 proposals have remained largely in limbo, with only promises of responsiveness. The AFSA VP’s relations with management may be contentious (as they were under Peter Frederick) or amicable (as they were under Chuck Ford). My experience has been that relations tend to be mostly cordial but also largely ineffectual, with a few exceptions. Our agency has maintained a dysfunctional approach to dealing with AFSA.

What about day-to-day operations and impact? The AFSA VP can bring customer service to both members and management in the same way that FCS is highly responsive to companies seeking export promotion assistance. The VP handles grievances, problems related to tenure and discipline, assignments, benefits and a host of other issues that affect our officer corps of over 200 (admittedly small compared to the thousands at State). The best way to gain a sense of the issues we deal with year-round is to visit our page of the AFSA Web site at www.afsa.org/fcs/.

The future of Foreign Commercial Service officers at the Department of Commerce is ambiguous. As I noted in one of my first VP columns (“Whither the Commercial Service?” *AFSA News*, December 2005), our budget and roles encompass numerous strains that influence decisionmakers in Washington.

The influence of AFSA on the Foreign Commercial Service is a small part of larger relationships — the administration vs. Congress, State Department vs. Commerce, and FCS within the International Trade Administration — that seem to leave commercial officers with little clout. That said, AFSA is all we have. Please keep your membership current and support my successor — AFSA is still your key advocate and your voice back home. □



AFSA NEWS BRIEFS

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the West Bank and Gaza. Before entering the Foreign Service, Steinger worked as a science policy analyst at both the National Institutes of Health and NASA, where she began her federal career as a Presidential Management Fellow in 1991.

During a three-decade Foreign Service career, Barbara Bodine served as ambassador to the Republic of Yemen from 1997 to 2001, as deputy principal officer in Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War and as deputy chief of mission in Kuwait during the 1990 Iraqi invasion and occupation. In 2003, she was seconded to the Department of Defense to return to Iraq. Since retiring from the Foreign Service in 2004, Amb. Bodine has held positions at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and MIT’s Center for International Studies, and lectures at a number of other universities.

Josh Glazeroff left the *FSJ* Editorial Board last fall and David McFarland joined. AFSA appreciates Glazeroff’s valuable contributions to the *Journal*. AFSA also appreciates the service to the Governing Board and the membership of all the departing board members. Welcome to the new members of both boards.

Last Call: AFSA Scholarship Applications Due Feb. 6

Children of Foreign Service employees who would like to be considered for the AFSA financial aid college scholarship program for the 2008/09 school year need to submit their applications by Feb. 6. Only tax-dependent children of active-duty, retired, separated and deceased Foreign Service members are eligible to apply. AFSA funds students who attend both domestic and overseas colleges and universities.

Academic and Art Merit Award applications also need to be submitted by Feb. 6 by Foreign Service high school students in their senior year. Please visit www.afsa.org/scholar/ for AFSA Scholarship Program details or call Scholarship Director Lori Dec at 1 (800) 704 2372, ext. 504, or (202) 944-5504.