

V.P. VOICE: FCS ■ BY DON BUSINGER

Unfinished Business

Even casual readers of this column will already know that the AFSA-Commerce relationship during the last three years of my tenure as VP has been “less than fully successful.” If it takes two to tango, FCS management has pretty consistently stayed in its corner and been unavailable for most dances, slow or fast.

As I move on to a foreign posting next month and AFSA Representative Steve Anderson does likewise in August, this is our last message from these pages. There is a lot of unfinished business, though not for lack of trying. Here are the details, at least from a midterm proposal perspective.

Since the fall of 2005, AFSA has submitted 12 midterm proposals to management and signed two memorandums of understanding. (The latter took 21 months from time of submission to time of signing — a very slow dance!) See www.afsa.org/FCS/FCSUpdate062207.cfm for details. For the other 10 proposals, AFSA received very limited fixes and/or responses from FCS management. While a letter was drafted in July 2007 and suggestions were made by AFSA for progress or at least dialogue, to date no response has been received. Meanwhile, management grew less responsive, even dysfunctional, requiring us to file grievances.



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Our spring 2006 proposals concerning Senior Foreign Service pay policies, improvements in employee performance and work plans, and a joint Standing Committee for Annual Review of the Precepts led to limited tinkering with some improvements on the first two items but no MOUs. We encountered a lot of resistance to working with AFSA on behalf of our membership.

Our fall 2006 proposals revisited the SFS issues, the Residential Transaction Allowance and compliance with the Foreign Affairs Manual, and the Personnel Audit Report. Management did address two of the three SFS issues at least informally; but on the RTA provisions of the FAM, it simply withdrew its adherence without even consulting with AFSA. It ignored the third issue entirely.

Our single spring 2007 proposal concerned domestic assignments to U.S. Export Assistance Centers and the seven-year rule mandating them. This seems to have paralyzed our dance partner. No formal response, required by the collective bargaining agreement, was ever received and AFSA was eventually forced to file an institutional grievance, which is currently before the Foreign Service Grievance Board.

Our fall 2007 proposals concerned better forms of management for appraisals and consultations to ensure regional, gender and racial diversity in the four selection and promotion boards. Again, there has been no response from management.

As we move toward a transition in AFSA, in management and in administrations, one can only hope for a better future relationship, in which management organizes itself to identify the right partner for AFSA (to ensure it receives responses in a timely fashion, with true dialogue and progress) and to “get the job done” for our senior, mid-level and junior commercial officers who pay their dues and expect better from management. □

AFSA NEWS BRIEFS

AFSA FCS VP Position Open

The AFSA Foreign Commercial Service vice president position was not placed on the FCS bid list, and thus all likely candidates have been assigned to other positions. VP Donald Businger will resign this summer in order to begin his next overseas assignment, so the AFSA Governing Board can appoint a successor.

Basic qualifications are that the officer: be located within 50 miles of Washington, D.C., to be available for board meetings; not hold an FCS management position; and be able to spend at least 50 percent of his or her time on AFSA duties. Please contact AFSA as soon as possible if you are interested in the position.

On May 7, the Governing Board appointed Rebecca Balogh as the new FCS representative beginning July 15.

ISO DG Reporting Award Cables

Retired FSO Raymond F. Smith is writing a book, *The Craft of Political Analysis in Modern Diplomacy*. He would like to include, as case studies, examples of outstanding Foreign Service reporting (declassified). He tells the *Journal* that when he asked the Bureau of Human Resources for cable numbers of reports from winners and runners-up of the director general's annual reporting awards, so he could request that they be reviewed for declassification, HR said it had the information, but that he would have to file a Freedom of Information request to get it. He did, and then was told that HR had destroyed the records shortly after telling him to file the FOIA request.

Mr. Smith requests that anyone interested in helping with this effort provide him with cable numbers of winning messages so that he can file declassification requests. His e-mail address is ray.smith531@gmail.com.