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# PRESIDENT'S VIEWS

## *Ideology, Greed and the Future of the Foreign Service*

By J. ANTHONY HOLMES

As I write this column in mid-September, the House International Relations Committee has just approved a mini-authorization bill. This is an important step in achieving AFSA's highest priority, but several hurdles remain. By the time you read this in early October, we likely will know if our Herculean efforts the past eight months and the quid pro quo deal we accepted earlier this year, agreeing to a conversion of the entire FS to a pay-for-performance personnel system in return for Bush administration support for Overseas Locality Pay, have succeeded. Given the pitfalls that remain, I estimate our chances are not much higher than 50/50.

When the State Department publicly revealed in February the package deal dictated by the White House, it assured us that it would avoid the morass that had befallen the new pay-for-performance systems created for civilian employees of DOD and DHS. These are mired in controversy, judged illegal in significant part by a federal court, and detested as "anti-employee" by the other federal employees unions. We were assured repeatedly that the new State PFP system for FS-1s and below would be identical to what has worked well the past two years for the Senior Foreign Service. Win/win all around, we were told.

Unfortunately, 11 weeks later, when we finally received the administration's draft bill to amend the Foreign Service



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Act to provide OCP and create a PFP system, it contained two egregious flaws. Incomprehensibly, the bill sought to delink the award of future PFP salary increases from the selection boards. How can a PFP system work, we asked, if it isn't based on performance evaluations? We got no response, but the answer was clearly through a combination of political factors and personal favoritism. The other flaw was, in direct contradiction to the department's public assurances, the bill sought to emasculate the employees' exclusive representative (i.e., AFSA). In fact, it duplicated precisely the most controversial, ideological element of the DOD/DHS systems that the courts have since ruled illegal. These poison pills not only made the proposed system unacceptable to us; they also made it dead on arrival on Capital Hill in the views of key members of both political parties. "If it isn't acceptable to AFSA," we were told, "it isn't acceptable to us." I understand that key administration officials responsible for these broken promises were astonished that we stood on principle and didn't simply take the money and run.

Sorting this mess out took several months and, in the process, revealed two weaknesses in the way some other FS agencies are operating their PFP systems for seniors that also had to be fixed. USAID and IBB did not provide any performance-based increases this year to their seniors, claiming that Congress hadn't provided sufficient funds. In addition, we understand that

USAID has manipulated selection board recommendations, shifting certain individuals to lower salary increase categories and boosting other favored employees. The draft bill the House International Relations Committee just passed contains guarantees that this abuse will not occur again. But the months lost having to negotiate remedies to all these problems meant that precious little time remained in the tightly packed post-Labor Day legislative calendar. Moreover, because there are 15 other State-supported provisions in this bill, at least one of which is a show-stopper for the Senate, the risks have multiplied.

Whatever its outcome, this saga has starkly revealed a few things. The Foreign Service is held in extremely high regard on Capital Hill by the people who know us best and who oversee us. AFSA's views and input are actively solicited and we have a real ability to influence provisions that affect the Service. However, there are some in this administration who are decidedly unhappy with the statutory independence and autonomy of the FS and who want to make it more politically subservient. They are clearly willing to sacrifice for short-term political expediency what a bipartisan Congress has constructed for the long-term good of our national security.

AFSA will continue to defend the oath that all Foreign Service officers take on receiving their commission, to uphold the constitution of the United States, by preserving our ability to put our country's long-term interests above political considerations. ■