



PRESIDENT'S VIEWS

Team AFSA

BY JOHN K. NALAND

Greetings from your new AFSA president. I join with the 24 other members of the new AFSA Governing Board in pledging to tenaciously defend and advance the interests of the Foreign Service over the next two years. I thank my predecessor, Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes, and the members of his Governing Board for their strong, principled advocacy of AFSA members' interests over the past two years.



This is a critical time for our profession. Conditions of service have deteriorated. More posts are dangerous and unhealthy. The number of unaccompanied positions has soared. Longstanding physical security policies have been abandoned in order to staff war zones. Many posts and offices are understaffed and overworked. The Service has become less family-friendly. The lack of Overseas Comparability Pay is an ever-growing financial disincentive to overseas service.

Gains made earlier this decade in strengthening diplomatic readiness have been overwhelmed as staffing demands in Iraq have far outpaced appropriations for personnel. There is a growing deficit between the missions assigned to the Foreign Service and the resources available to carry out those missions.

AFSA has many tools with which to confront these challenges. As a union, AFSA has the legal right to negotiate

with agency management over many conditions of service. Speaking as a professional association with an 83-year track record as the voice of the Foreign Service, AFSA can often influence even non-negotiable agency policies. AFSA frequently testifies on Capitol Hill, has a full-time director of legislative affairs, and operates a political action committee, AFSA-PAC. We have an active communications outreach program that gets AFSA's views cited by major media outlets and arranges speaking events around the country to explain the importance of diplomacy to tens of thousands of citizens each year.

Our greatest strength, however, is you. AFSA's active-duty members are our eyes and ears around the world, alerting us to the good, the bad and the ugly in agency practices. Our retiree members play a key role in lobbying Congress for resources for diplomacy and educating our fellow Americans about the role of the Foreign Service. And all members, through their dues, support AFSA's talented professional staff, who work hard each day to advance your interests.

This, then, is our Team AFSA: Governing Board, professional staff, and rank-and-file members. Working together over the next two years, we can help realize AFSA's mission of making the Foreign Service a more effective agent of United States international leadership — while simultaneously making it a better-

supported, more respected and more satisfying place in which to spend a career.

As we move forward, I promise to maintain an active pace of outbound communications, not only through this monthly column, but also via frequent e-mail updates sent via our free listserv, AFSA.net. If you are not among the nearly 10,000 subscribers to that service, you may sign up at www.afsa.org/forms/maillist.cfm.

If you are a subscriber, you will have seen my initial updates laying out the new AFSA Governing Board's starting agenda, which includes the following objectives: secure Overseas Comparability Pay; obtain more resources for diplomacy; improve overseas security; influence Foreign Service reform initiatives; preserve and strengthen USAID; defend the Foreign Service against outside critics; expand professional training; improve overseas living conditions; increase WAE opportunities; defend and expand retiree benefits; expand diplomatic privileges for specialists; improve administrative accommodations for members of household; update contact reporting and security clearance suspension procedures; and assure fair and equitable standards for assignments.

I also welcome your comments, suggestions and — as may be appropriate — complaints. You may contact me by e-mail at naland@afsa.org; by mail at 2101 E Street, NW, Washington DC 20037; by phone at (202) 338-4045; or by fax at (202) 338-6820. ■

John K. Naland is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.

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