



PRESIDENT'S VIEWS

The Journey

BY JOHN K. NALAND

Have you noticed that, even if you have just begun a new assignment, some colleagues ask what you plan to do next? Such questioning reflects a tendency by some people to focus on becoming something else as rapidly as possible, rather than making the most of what they are now. Colleagues who are "always becoming but never being" focus on a desired destination (such as attaining some high position years from now) rather than the journey (the day-by-day experiences over the course of their careers).

But there is an alternative philosophy that views the Foreign Service career as a journey rather than a destination. This philosophy encourages taking some emotionally rewarding assignments and beneficial long-term training or developmental details, even if they do not promote the rush up the promotion ladder. It advocates the maintenance of a reasonable balance between work and family since, as the cliché says, no one on their deathbed ever wished they had spent more time in the office.

Obviously, even those of us who try to enjoy the journey must take a fair share of difficult and even dangerous assignments along the way. Thus, there will inevitably be times when the needs of the Service overshadow the needs of family, friends or off-duty interests. But, over the course of a



career, there should be a balance between work and family. There should also be a balance between sacrifices and rewards (both material and emotional).

This "enjoy the journey" philosophy also encourages us to volunteer for additional duties that allow us to "give back" by way of community service and institution building activities. For active-duty members, that could mean serving on an Employee Evaluation Review panel, an interagency housing board or a commissary association. For retirees, that could mean contacting lawmakers to highlight the need for more resources for diplomatic engagement.

AFSA offers several community service opportunities. Our overseas chapters each need a post representative to bring local members' concerns to the attention of management and AFSA headquarters. The *Foreign Service Journal* is always looking for members to write analytical articles on professional issues and international affairs to further the continuing education of our colleagues. AFSA's leadership highly values the input of members who take the time to send in their suggestions and criticism. And we depend on members to take the time each year to nominate colleagues for our prestigious awards for constructive dissent (see p. 69).

Last but not least, AFSA needs volunteers from all five foreign affairs agencies to step forward every two

years to fill the 26 vacancies on the AFSA Governing Board. The current board's term expires next summer and elections will be held this winter for the 2009-2011 term. I will be leaving office, and we will also seek nominations for AFSA's constituency vice president jobs at State, USAID, FCS and FAS, and for retirees, as well as secretary and treasurer. Finally, we will be filling the constituency representative positions: nine from the State Department, five retirees, and one each for USAID, FCS, FAS and IBB.

Service on the AFSA Governing Board offers the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of your colleagues and their families. The next few years will be critical ones for our profession. Without a strong AFSA Governing Board that is representative of our diverse Foreign Service, diplomacy and development assistance may continue to suffer from inadequate support and respect.

I particularly highlight the need for volunteers to stand for election to the full-time AFSA president and active-duty vice president positions. These jobs — some of the most personally and professionally rewarding in the Foreign Service — are not listed on any agency's vacancy list. But they require strong candidates to step forward to maintain AFSA's effectiveness after the summer of 2009.

Information on past election procedures can be found on AFSA's Web site. An updated call for the coming elections will be issued later this year. ■

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