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President
The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA)
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The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS)
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Testimony on the State Department and USAID Appropriations

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) is grateful that Congress voted to increase the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 International Affairs Budget and, once again, reject proposed cuts to diplomacy and development funding. In FY22, AFSA hopes to build on the momentum of FY21's funding increases by increasing the amount of Foreign Service positions and shifting more positions back to the field. We have recently seen that field work in action—when Foreign Service members spearheaded the successful effort to bring more than 100,000 Americans home during the global COVID-19 pandemic. **In the FY22 SFOPS Appropriations bill, AFSA is seeking: A \$30 million increase above the FY21 enacted level to the State Department's "Overseas Programs" account and the following report language that specifies the restoration of at least 100 mid-level FSO positions from Washington to posts overseas: "The Secretary of State shall increase the Department by at least 100 Foreign Service positions, specifically mid-level Foreign Service officer positions (grades FS-03, FS-02, and FS-01), at overseas posts." Also, additional funds to the State Department's "Human Resources" account for the creation and filling of 1,000 new Foreign Service positions and additional funds to USAID's "Operating Expenses" account for the creation and filling of 650 new Foreign Service positions.**

AFSA has made the case that maintaining a robust diplomatic capability is vital to preserving America's global leadership role. Our leadership was built on a foundation of military might, economic primacy, good governance, tremendous cultural appeal—and the diplomatic prowess to channel all that power, hard and soft, into global leadership that has kept us safe and prosperous at home. A 2019 Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey found that seven in ten Americans support an active U.S. role in the world, a record high of the past five decades.

We would like to partner with our congressional supporters to ensure that today, and years from now, full teams of U.S. diplomats are in the field, deployed around the world to promote and protect U.S. interests. For a tiny percentage of the overall budget, the Foreign Service builds the relationships that enable Americans to conduct business all around the world and keep threats at bay, reducing the need for military action. If the United States retreats diplomatically, we leave a vacuum that *will* be filled by others. In the face of more aggressive competition from China and Russia, the opportunity costs of leaving American embassies short staffed is rapidly increasing. Doing so erodes our nation's diplomatic power at our own peril.

Creating and filling 1000 new State Department positions and 650 new USAID positions will accomplish three major things: create a training float so members of the Foreign Service are better prepared for their jobs, allow expanded intake from an increasingly diverse U.S. population, and enable the foreign affairs agencies to meet expanding mission requirements.

1. Members of the Foreign Service receive quality training on the front end and on the basics; before they go to their first assignment—for language training, for certain leadership positions, etc. For example, a mid-level ranked Public Affairs officer may never take training on core public diplomacy functions because there is never time. The officers are usually shuttled between language training and their next post, without the opportunity to simply study and learn how to do their jobs better. This training float will enable members of the Foreign Service to perform higher quality work and provide temporary duty officers to perform jobs while others attend training.
2. A significant increase in positions also provides the opportunity to expand representation to traditionally underrepresented groups. Diversity in foreign affairs agencies is not reflective of the U.S. population; and general expansion of the Foreign Service while targeting underrepresented groups will aid in both the recruitment and retention of a more diverse Foreign Service.
3. Today, the U.S. is facing new threats and issues diplomats did not have to reckon with 10 years ago. Russia has resurged as a major national security threat, and U.S. diplomats have reported Russian foreign policy revolves around simply disrupting liberal democracy. China now has a larger diplomatic presence than the U.S., having more posts overseas and outnumbering American diplomats five to one in African countries. More positions will enable the Foreign Service to meet its expanded mission requirements to counter any threats to our global leadership and influence.

Complementing the need for new positions is the need for more members of the Foreign Service at posts abroad. Members of the Foreign Service recall being asked during the height of the “civilian surge” in Iraq to identify positions U.S. embassies could sacrifice for the cause of ensuring that every position in Iraq was filled with Foreign Service volunteers. Well over a decade later, those positions have not been returned to the overseas posts from which they originally came. The Foreign Service finds itself struggling in short-staffed sections at embassies around the world that gave up those same positions 10 years ago.

State’s Overseas Staffing Board concluded in its most recent report that America has too few diplomats in the field. The Overseas Staffing Model showed a deficit of almost 200 overseas positions in “core diplomacy,” (the term used for political and economic officers, as well as chief of mission positions). Without those core diplomacy positions, the State Department routinely misses opportunities to bring business to the U.S., assert the values of democracy, and protect core foreign policy interests.

Our nation needs a full team of diplomats and development professionals in the field keeping threats at bay and protecting our prosperity—combating the conditions that enable terrorism to take root, protecting against pandemics, and promoting the rule of law and open systems that allow U.S. companies to compete and thrive. The documented deficit in overseas core diplomacy positions needs to be addressed as soon as possible if we are to avoid losing further commercial, economic, and even political ground to rising great power competitors.

These three requests—a \$30 million increase to the “Overseas Programs” account and report language specifying the restoration and filling of 100 positions in the field, along with 1000 new State Department positions to fill for general expansion of the Foreign Service, will enable America to have a full team in the field and at home.

AFSA also greatly appreciates congressional bipartisan support for foreign assistance as a critical component of America’s national security. However, long-standing staffing and operational challenges, including the hiring of career members of the Foreign Service at USAID, remain. USAID is expected to continue making requests for contractors, Foreign Service Limited (FSL) appointments, and other non-career staff. Many of these non-career hires are not competed through USAJobs.gov—which raises questions of transparency and propriety. The numbers suggest that USAID headquarters will be comprised primarily of short-term contractors and limited appointees, while employees abroad will primarily be career officers.

Therefore, the field-informed perspectives and Civil Service long-term trained personnel will dwindle in percentage to the non-career high turnover hires. Over time, this lack of career officers will seriously reduce the effectiveness and threaten the institutional knowledge of USAID. Thus, AFSA would like to partner with our congressional supporters to provide additional “Operating Expenses” funding for 650 additional USAID career Foreign Service positions – our fourth request.

AFSA would also like to point out that career USAID Officers are both less expensive than short term contractors or FSL appointments, and long term provide field-driven perspectives and expertise which enable more effective foreign aid. A clear prioritization and increase of career Foreign Service positions at USAID, accompanied by a pause of further FSL appointments, would send the signal to our diplomats that they will continue to be supported by Congress.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Eric Rubin, AFSA President