

# WHAT IS THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION?

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), established in 1924, is the professional association and labor union of the United States Foreign Service. With 16,000 dues-paying members, AFSA represents more than 30,000 active and retired Foreign Service employees of the Department of State, Agency for International Development (AID), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

AFSA's principal missions are to promote a strong, effective professional career Foreign Service as the institutional backbone of American diplomacy, enhance the effectiveness of the Foreign Service, to protect the professional interests and rights of its members, ensure the maintenance of high professional standards for all American diplomats, career or political appointees, and to promote understanding of the critical role of diplomacy and development in promoting America's national security and economic prosperity. AFSA seeks to be an effective voice and strong advocate for the Foreign Service with management, the Congress and the American public.

Among its professional activities, AFSA publishes the monthly *Foreign Service Journal*, presents an annual set of awards for intellectual courage and creative dissent, participates in initiatives to strengthen professional education and training for American diplomats, organizes programs of speakers on issues of interest to the profession, maintains meeting facilities for its members, provides a college scholarship program for Foreign Service children and offers discounts on a variety of services to its members. AFSA's legislative affairs department coordinates efforts to keep Congress aware of the concerns of the Foreign Service and of active and retired Foreign Service personnel. Additionally, AFSA builds understanding of and support for our diplomatic and development services.

AFSA is the exclusive bargaining agent for the Foreign Service employees of all six agencies. In this labor/management relations capacity, AFSA negotiates with the agency management on personnel policies and practices affecting members' working conditions. AFSA also represents members in formal grievance proceedings, office of security and inspector general investigations, and EEO cases, while providing them informal assistance in dealing with administrative problems.

Foreign Service retiree concerns are an integral part of the AFSA agenda. AFSA works closely with retired Foreign Service personnel on legislative issues related to retiree pensions and benefits. Retirees, individually and through independent retiree groups around the country, actively promote the Foreign Service and international engagement in their communities.

In its efforts to explain the Foreign Service's role and to build domestic constituencies to support American diplomacy, AFSA operates a speakers' bureau, which makes experienced diplomats available to speak to a wide range of groups all across the country. Through Road Scholar programs, AFSA members conduct continuing education classes on the Foreign Service.