

Leading by Action: The Fierce Urgency for Diversity and Inclusion in the Foreign Policy
Workforce Hearing
Thursday, March 25, 2021
The House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs

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Chairwoman Lee, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before the House Appropriations Subcommittee in my personal capacity and as a member of the Association of Black American Ambassadors (ABAA).

The ABAA has worked closely with the State Department's Affinity Organizations, including the Thursday Luncheon Group, Disabilities at State, Hispanic Employee Council of Foreign Affairs Agencies, American Foreign Service Association, Black Professionals in International Affairs, and the Asian American Foreign Affairs Association, to design recommendations regarding diversity and inclusion in the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

My testimony centers on the importance of the Secretary of State's and the AID Administrator's leadership and sustained commitment in achieving the State Department's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion goals and objectives, establish metrics for measuring each bureau's achievement of these goals and objectives, the importance of rewarding and recognizing those leaders who achieve diversity goals, continued support for the Pickering, Rangel and Payne Fellowship programs, advocates for an increase in the number of Diplomats in Residence and the end of the decades old practice of de facto assignment of officers to bureaus based on their race with a particular call for the end of the majority of African American Chiefs of Mission being assigned to Africa and the Caribbean.

The foreign affairs agencies have a collective responsibility to stand up and take serious action to address structural barriers to diversity and inclusion in their respective agencies. All employees should be provided with the skills, resources and mentoring that contribute to professional advancement. These proposed changes should be codified in the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and implementing regulations.

Leadership. Unless there is clear and visible support from the highest levels, little action will be taken to advance diversity, equity and inclusion in the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development. We believe that the only way to reverse the institutional failings in these areas is to put the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the Secretary of State and those in the senior ranks of the Foreign and Civil services.

We applaud Secretary Anthony Blinkin's decision to appoint a Chief Diversity Officer and recommend that person report directly to the Deputy Secretary. We urge the incoming USAID

Administrator to appoint a Chief Diversity Officer who will report to the Deputy Administrator and expect both individuals to be a resource for dealing with diversity issues and coordinating with the agencies' affinity groups.

We recommend that:

- (1) The Secretary commit to all employees and to the public that he will not permit discrimination of any type anywhere at any time and is committed to ending it at the State Department.
- (2) The Secretary include in his regularly scheduled staff meetings discussions with the assistant secretaries regarding their progress in addressing diversity and inclusion issues such as the racial and gender composition of their bureaus. Particular attention should be placed on the number of deputy assistant secretaries, desk officers and ambassadors.
- (3) The State Department and USAID establish clearly defined and measurable ways to financially reward senior personnel for their achievement in reaching the department's diversity goals.
- (4) The State Department and USAID should continue support of the Pickering, Payne and Rangel Programs, and make known the rigid selection process that these Fellows undergo, in order to dispel negative perceptions about their qualifications to be in the Service. They should support and expand Pathways Student Internships, including Presidential Management Fellowships, and assist in their noncompetitive conversion into an FTE (full-time equivalent) at the end of their program. Recruitment outreach should be strengthened.

We recommend that:

- (1) The State Department increase the number of Diplomats in Residence (at least 10) at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI), and other institutions serving significant numbers of minority students, as well as at public land grant and private colleges. They should focus on recruiting African Americans, LatinX, Asian- and Pacific Islander Americans, Native Americans, Arab Americans, disabled Americans, LGBTQIA and any other historically underrepresented Americans.
- (2) The State Department examine the process of security clearances for Fellows, considering that people with economic disadvantages might have encountered problems related to debt repayment.
- (3) The State Department double its recruiting programs and set a goal to increase the annual intake to an established goal within three to five years.
- (4) The State Department increase the number of paid internships for members of underrepresented communities, especially for those demonstrating financial need.

Assignments. Underrepresented Foreign Service officers and specialists can advance America's foreign interests at all posts, and their assignments should reflect this from their entry into the Foreign Service throughout their careers.

We recommend that:

- (1) The State Department and USAID cease the practice of assigning African Americans predominantly to the Africa Bureau, especially in ambassadorial and other high-level positions.
- (2) The State Department and USAID end similar de facto practices with LatinX and Asian Americans in the Western Hemisphere, East Asian and South and Central Asian Affairs Bureaus.
- (3) The Director General of the Foreign Service recruit officers from underrepresented groups to bid on chief of mission (COM), deputy chief of mission (DCM), principal officer (PO), office director, deputy assistant secretary (DAS), and principal deputy assistant secretary (PDAS) positions.
- (4) The Director General of the Foreign Service ensure DCM/PO committees and COM committees are diverse and provide feedback to those not selected.

Training. We recommend that all senior personnel, Foreign Service and Civil Service, including noncareer officials, especially those serving as ambassadors, be required to take training on hiring and leadership principles, subject to executive order and State Department policy. Such training might be organized into one or more short mandatory courses to enable the maximum number of participants.

Missions should also develop training for all employees to ensure that locally employed staff hiring practices do not reinforce host country's values that contravene U.S. principles and values.

Mentoring. We recommend that the State Department and USAID institutionalize a robust mentoring program for individuals at all grade levels.

Promotions.

We recommend that the State Department:

- (1) With the American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees rework the 13 Dimensions' skill set (that reflect the skills, abilities, and personal qualities deemed essential to success) to give more weight to equal employment opportunity (EEO) principles in the performance evaluation process.
- (2) Require language in employee evaluation reports (EERs) to emphasize commitment to diversity, with concrete examples required.
- (3) Direct raters and reviewers to use gender-neutral language in EERs.

- (4) Hold ambassadors, deputy chiefs of mission and principal officers accountable in their EERs for supporting and implementing diversity and inclusion at post. Rating and reviewing officials of Civil Service employees should be held equally accountable.
- (5) In the case of noncareer ambassadors who elect not to have an EER, letters to the White House Personnel Office be sent on those who fail in this regard.
- (6) Ensure that members of underrepresented groups serve on every selection panel.

Retention. Consistent, high-level support for targeted mentorship of officers from underrepresented communities coupled with promotion-related incentives can help officers of color advance and feel their contributions are valued.

We recommend that the State Department:

- (1) Pay more attention to retention. Increased payments that reduce or eliminate student loans might help retain more diverse candidates. To be eligible, the employee should commit to serve for at least five years.
- (2) Support external training programs, such as the International Careers Advancement Program (ICAP) that helps prepare mid-level foreign affairs practitioners to advance to more senior levels.
- (3) Make exit interviews mandatory—and retroactive to include those who did not have an exit survey on separation—and collect data to make changes in the system that would keep people in the Service. Data should include patterns of assignments; challenges for underrepresented members of the Foreign and Civil Service in finding mentors, employment opportunities and treatment of spouses; and the impact of and procedures for (cone) track designation.

In conclusion, the ABAA requests that the Committee maintain oversight of the State Department's and USAID's principals to ensure that our nation's diversity, equity and inclusion goals are met and sustained through quantifiable metrics

Thank you and I look forward to answering your questions.