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House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
regarding Merit, Accountability, and Performance at State: Evaluating
Promotion, and Placement
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Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding our efforts to improve merit, accountability, and performance standards in the Foreign Service. We are committed to shaping and managing a State Department workforce that is best prepared to deliver on the President's foreign policy agenda.

Under President Trump's leadership and Secretary Rubio's direction, we are creating a Department of State workforce that is agile, merit-based, and laser-focused on delivering results. Every hiring decision, every promotion, every assignment must serve our national security objectives and make us safer, stronger and more prosperous.

Ensuring that the Department of State fully aligns with the President's "America First" agenda is my highest priority. The success of this mission rests on the combined efforts of Foreign Service employees, civil service employees, and Locally Employed Staff, both domestically and around the world, leveraging their wide-ranging knowledge and expertise to advance the interests of the United States. This requires a personnel system that rewards merit and professionalism, the core mandate of the Foreign Service Act. We are undertaking comprehensive reforms across the entire Foreign Service personnel lifecycle, including recruitment, assignments, and performance management. These changes will promote better accountability, ensure high performers are appropriately recognized and rewarded, and put the right people in the right places to create a workforce capable of meeting today's complex geopolitical challenges.

We are fully committed to aligning Department hiring practices with E.O. 14170, "Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service" and E.O. 14356, "Ensuring Continued Accountability in Federal Hiring."

Our plan to recruit the best Foreign Service candidates includes reforms to the Foreign Service Officer Test and Assessment that will better identify individuals who possess not only the necessary skills and knowledge but also the judgment and commitment to advance American interests. Consistent with OPM guidance and E.O. 14170 on “Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service,” Secretary Rubio approved changes to the Foreign Service Officer Test in June 2025 that modernized and aligned it with the President’s America First Agenda. This updated test was administered for the first time in October 2025, and more than 5,000 candidates participated, roughly double the number of candidates in October 2024.

Once we bring talented individuals into the Department, we must ensure they perform at the highest level and that performance evaluations promote responsibility and accountability. For Foreign Service employees, we are establishing clearer standards that link individual contributions to mission outcomes and national security priorities. The updated Foreign Service Core Precepts reflect the competencies determined to be the most critical to successful service throughout a Foreign Service career and in which Foreign Service members must demonstrate potential in order to advance. In addition, a supervisory goal has been added to make sure managers hold their subordinates accountable, and each precept now has a supervisory component. This will allow employees to benefit from meaningful feedback on their performance throughout the process, alongside required professional development and counseling sessions, allowing them to identify any areas for improvement and provide employees with actionable steps to improve when needed.

We are also reviewing training and professional development programs to ensure all employees receive the preparation they need to excel in their roles, no matter the environment. The Department is focused on implementing the highest standards in all training offerings, including during the initial Foreign Service orientation. Testing students on the material throughout the course reinforces their training, reveals gaps in understanding, ensures they can apply the material to their future positions, and ensures accountability. Similar testing to measure progress is included in most Department long-term training courses.

Merit and professionalism demand accountability, and we are committed to delivering it. We have strengthened our performance and disciplinary processes to ensure that employees who fail to meet performance standards or engage in misconduct face timely and appropriate consequences. This includes decisively

addressing cases involving allegations of hostile work environments and unaddressed misconduct – behaviors that undermine both mission effectiveness and employee morale. When misconduct is substantiated by our investigations, we act decisively, taking appropriate timely disciplinary action consistent with applicable laws and regulations.

The Foreign Service Act of 1980 has served as the foundation of our structure, administration, personnel systems, compensation, retirement, training and labor-management relations for over four decades and continues to guide our work. As we align the Department with President Trump's and Secretary's priorities of building a robust, dynamic workforce for the 21st century, additional reforms may be required.

For example, we have identified several places within the Foreign Service Act where discriminatory DEI language related to recruitment and selection boards should be eliminated.

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the committee on this and other efforts.

I look forward to your questions and continued collaboration with the Committee moving forward on workforce matters.