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Thank you for the opportunity to join you here today to address some of the misconceptions around the words diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility as characterized in the title of this hearing. I come from a family of proud public servants. I have three siblings; an older brother who served in the army, a younger one who is a submariner veteran and a sister who is a retired Navy captain. I am the only one in my family to face a terrorist attack while serving my country in the Middle East.

During 30+ years of assignments with the U.S. State Department, I stepped up to challenges in Cairo, Jakarta, Baghdad and the Gaza strip. Because of this stellar record, and more, I was selected as the first woman to lead a diplomatic mission in Saudi Arabia. America got to show that our best leaders come from all backgrounds. So when called on to go to one of the most conservative nations in the world as a working mom with a young family, I went. And when terrorist threats required my family's evacuation and separated us for 18 months, I stayed. My presence conveyed a powerful testimony about the rights and capabilities of women without uttering a word. Many of my colleagues had similar stories of hardship, sacrifice and commitment. Even so, the most challenging and important assignment that I took on during my 30 year career, was the assignment of chief diversity and inclusion officer for the Department.

Why do the hard—and too often misunderstood—work of ensuring America's representatives represent the breadth and complexity of America?

Three reasons:

1. There is essentially no difference in this administration's goal of a merit based society and the goals of the diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility program I oversaw at the State Department. We aimed to create a system that ensures the very best rise to the top.
2. The world's challenges have grown broad and complex and if we don't use the full array of cultural knowledge and connections we have to meet these challenges, we court failure. We know we're missing out on some of our best and brightest.

3. We have to walk the talk. In order to remain a great power, America's word must be trusted. We say we believe in a level playing field, but too many of the Department's employees no longer believed us. Multiple studies confirmed that doubt.

Common sense tells us It's not enough to tap a few viewpoints, cultivated amongst a narrow list of schools, a few experiences. We can't rely on diplomats who are only familiar with, and can only blend in, in a few places. We need professionals who can speak more than a few languages, connect with and engage the full range of humanity. Diplomacy isn't confined to government buildings, receptions. We advocate for America's priorities in government and corporate offices, yes, but also at community centers, factories, remote border crossings and town squares.

And let me be clear: Every change we made, every effort we undertook, every data point we gathered, was first cleared by our lawyers, and designed to benefit all State Department employees. The Department of State has some of the finest —and most conservative lawyers in the federal government. I can confidently say that we followed the law with every effort, every program, every undertaking that we carried out in the office of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. There were no so-called DEIA hires. Yet, far from being a meritocracy, the Department of State has long been characterized by employees as a system of patronage, wherein those who make it to the top do so based on their networks -- principally by being loyal to those more senior who, in turn, reward that loyalty by pulling those they know and trust into positions of power and influence. This created a culture of "kissing up and kicking down" whereby even the most toxic of managers ascended the ranks by bullying others. My office's work focused on dismantling this cronyism and redirecting the Department to use processes that were **truly** merit-based, more transparent, and rooting out toxic leadership by holding people accountable.

The goal was never to simply put a new group at the top of the pyramid. Discrimination is investigated by our sister office, the Office of Civil Rights. The work of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion was to ensure fewer people ended up in our sister office to begin with by dismantling the patterns of behavior that led them there. So let me discuss a few of the processes we tried to change.

Again, these efforts were essential for some, but beneficial to all. We are all familiar with the government accountability office (GAO) reports that have come out repeatedly over the years that showed the Department of State – particularly its senior ranks – is disproportionately made up of white Americans. There was a time that that was representative of the United States, but that has not been the case for a very long while. As we looked at why our recruiting skewed so strongly, and once we recruited more broadly from America's population, why our efforts to recruit did not translate into retention. The office of diversity, equity and inclusion carried out qualitative and quantitative studies and determined that a number of women and minority Foreign Policy professionals, well qualified and well suited to the work of supporting America's

diplomatic efforts, found it difficult to remain in the Department of State over time. We determined that efforts needed to be made to increase a sense of belonging and ensure everyone enjoyed opportunities to rise through the ranks commensurate with the level of work they put in. The quantitative information showed us that the State Department increasingly did a good job at recruiting the best from a wide cross-section of our population, but did less well with retention.

We worked to address this through a few programs that increased confidence in every state department employee that the organization was working to ensure that everyone's potential was maximized—a win-win situation for employees and the organizations they work for. At the top, we started with bringing greater transparency and fairness to the selection process for deputy assistant secretary positions. And let me say now, white men benefited from the change. This position is influential, impactful, and often the penultimate assignment through which one proves their metal before going out as a US ambassador; it is that senior.

Our method for assigning most diplomats is to have a bid list where everyone can see what assignments are coming open, put their names forward and interview for the opportunity to advocate for themselves. The deputy assistant secretary positions, however, were more secretive. They were not advertised nor openly competed. You had to be known to the assistant secretary, or someone in the Asst. secretary's circle. You had to be liked, have the right connections; be in the "in" crowd. You might also benefit by a trade. Because of this opacity, only certain people even knew that the position was open and available. This cronyism was far from meritocracy. The office of diversity inclusion led the effort to ensure that these positions like all others were advertised and openly competed. We leveled the playing field and I take great pleasure to point out that the first person to thank me for this change was a white male. He told me he was surprised to see an open DAS position on the list, but felt he was well suited and eminently qualified, so he pursued it. Even though he wasn't connected to anyone in senior leadership, he was selected as the best candidate. That's how it should work! For women and minorities these open processes are essential, but because every white male is not in the "in" group, these types of changes often benefit them as well. That is what competing on the basis of merit looks like. Inclusion means everyone so the fact that the first beneficiary of the change was not a minority was immaterial because the goal of DEI is to give EVERYONE a fair chance. I was thrilled that he got the job, as he proved our point about the benefits of leveraging DEI to create true meritocracy.

Another priority was to bring transparency and fairness to the assignments process at lower levels. We worked to bring strong business practices to ensure the selection processes were as efficient and effective as possible. We brought in standardized questions for every candidate and panel interviews instead of one person deciding. Traditionally in the Foreign Service, only the most connected could even land an interview, but we successfully pushed managers to ensure that everyone with the same level of qualifications had a chance to interview. Businesses have long used these techniques and they ensure merit wins over bias. They also increase employee confidence in the process—and the organization as a whole. Another win-win.

One of my favorite changes was modeled after the U.S. military and a phrase I heard repeatedly as a mantra from my military siblings: “We’ve Got Your Back”. My office worked with key stakeholders in the building, our embassies abroad, and host governments to put a stop to the widespread harassment and discriminatory treatment experienced by our diplomats and their families overseas. Many reported being stopped, questioned, detained, and even sometimes harassed by government officials in a way that would be illegal in the United States. In some instances, their status as a US diplomat was not recognized. It was so bad in one country that after an officer’s family was mistreated and his leadership failed to respond, he left the foreign service. I myself was harassed by local security forces in a middle eastern country, and it took Embassy leadership engagement to get the behavior to stop. I was lucky my front office had my back. But it shouldn’t depend on luck. We wanted to ensure that every American at Post felt the same support from their Embassy. Our new procedures required three things: making it clear to employees where to report such behavior, that embassies engage formally with host governments to rectify the situation, and that actions taken be reported to Washington.

The positive response was overwhelming. The morale boost among affected staff was huge. This sort of harassment happened to staff from any agency, let me stress. We got reports from Algeria and Peru, Israel and Costa Rica. Bias can be directed at anyone of any background, White, Brown or Black or any gender expression. Many missions did not know their staff coped with sexual or racial harassment as well as having to do their jobs. But once informed, leaders and colleagues stepped up to ensure it stopped. Host governments did everything from issuing formal letters of apology to implanting trainings to ensure the behavior stopped. In partnership with our employee organizations, which sadly are now banned in the Department, we worked to ensure that everyone felt more seen and more included. This included working with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim employee organizations to help managers learn how to support them in their expressions of faith. It also included work to ensure employees with hearing impairment and new mothers could bring needed equipment into classified workspaces to continue their work. These relatively simple accommodations were previously hard to accomplish and left employees feeling isolated and unsupported.

All of these efforts focused on removing barriers to employees doing their best work and reaching their full potential – a goal is shared by every great leader and good manager. That’s why there is such resistance – overt and covert – to turning back the clock.

We are a nation united in the belief that everyone deserves that which they are willing to work hard for. This is the core of the American Dream. And the ability of every American to make their dream a reality is what makes us the envy of the world. Not everyone among us has had an equal shot at achieving their version of the American Dream, but our work to increase everyone’s chances of getting there serves to solidify the stability of our democracy. Those who seek to dismantle this work chip away at the very foundation of our democracy and render the American Dream itself as nothing more than a fanciful illusion.