

Rep. Spanberger Remarks for SFOPs Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day

“Our Long-Term National Security is Contingent on the Training We Provide Today”

February 27, 2020

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairwoman Lowey, for your leadership on this Subcommittee and on the Appropriations Committee more broadly. Thank you, Ranking Member Rodgers, as well. And thank you all for providing me the opportunity to address the **State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee today**. The mission of this appropriations subcommittee is very near and dear to my heart, and I thank you for your commitment to thoughtful U.S. leadership around the world.

As someone who has devoted my entire career to strengthening our national security, I am acutely aware of the proven benefits of strategic diplomacy and targeted foreign assistance. But as you know, the success of these efforts is wholly dependent on the capacity, equipment, and training we choose to provide to our diplomats and public servants. These Americans have demonstrated—time and time again—that they deserve our full support.

As a CIA case officer serving abroad, I witnessed the immense dedication of my State Department counterparts who worked tirelessly in pursuit of U.S. foreign policy objectives. The work of our diplomats is vital to advancing U.S. national security and economic priorities, and the dedication of our nation’s Diplomatic Security Agents has protected not just our nation’s diplomats and embassies, but the very members of Congress in this room who have traveled abroad on Congressional delegation trips. State Department officers around the world serve in challenging locations, under immense pressure, and with one unifying commitment to service.

As a Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I’m committed to advancing a smart national security strategy. As part of this strategy, we need to properly value and train our diplomatic professionals. And given the range of risks these public servants face while serving their country abroad, this must include training to counter threats to their personal security and U.S. national interests.

In my district—Virginia’s Seventh Congressional District, we’re proud to be the home of the State Department’s new Foreign Affairs Security Training Center, or FASTC. Located at Fort Pickett near the town of Blackstone in Nottoway County, Virginia, FASTC’s mission is to be the premier training center for members of the U.S. foreign affairs community who risk so much in service to our nation. I encourage you all to visit the facility—it is truly remarkable to witness the counter-threat training they are providing. And I can vouch for its impressive capacity and for its committed employees.

Today, I'd like to thank the appropriators, as well as the many other Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, for their work to facilitate the creation of FASTC.

Following a 2008 report to Congress, lawmakers saw the pressing need for a consolidated, high-tech security training facility—and they acted to fill this void. Throughout the process, Virginia lawmakers and others put the work in to make FASTC a reality.

After opening on Fort Pickett in November of 2019, FASTC is now meeting the need for security and personnel training that was identified more than a decade ago. FASTC already provides lifesaving security training to thousands of Diplomatic Security personnel and other members of the U.S. foreign affairs community.

With this training, they will be more prepared to identify, prevent, and respond to a wide range of security risks to U.S. personnel and U.S. citizens. We are honored to be the home district of this critical mission and to welcome thousands of dedicated public servants to Central Virginia for years to come.

However—while this state-of-the-art facility is training hundreds of government employees each week, FASTC still faces several barriers to reaching its full potential. The facility was originally designed not only to serve a critical national security function—one that has become even more necessary as U.S. embassies and American citizens face heightened risks and attacks—but also as a consolidated training facility that would generate cost savings for the federal government.

So far, those cost savings have not been realized. And FASTC has not yet achieved its maximum potential in terms of a comprehensive training experience. For example, right now, trainees are being bussed-in each day from hotels more than an hour away. Currently, there are no hotels or eating establishments nearby that can meet the needs of the hundreds of trainees at FASTC. That means Diplomatic Security Agents and other trainees often bring their own lunch and spend up to three hours of their packed training days in transit to the training itself. These are wasted hours and wasted dollars.

We should all be concerned about these remaining deficiencies and how they could impair the security of American personnel around the world. But we don't have to accept these gaps; we can fix them all the while improving cost-effectiveness.

It is imperative that we take affirmative next steps toward fulfilling this Subcommittee's original vision for FASTC as both a top-notch national security training facility and an engine of local economic development.

In the coming months, I look forward to working with this Subcommittee and my colleagues in Congress on this issue. I see a clear opportunity to do better by both

the American taxpayers and our diplomatic professionals—and it starts with lawmakers delivering on the initial promise of FASTC. As the appropriations process proceeds, I'll be working to address this challenge.

I am proud to have this critical diplomatic security facility in Central Virginia—and I am committed to making it even more effective on behalf of our public servants and the American communities they serve.

If we're not focused on preparing the next generation of diplomats and Diplomatic Security Agents, it's not an understatement to say that we'll be putting Americans in jeopardy. These investments have real, short-term implications for our ability to deal with the threats of tomorrow. And they have real impacts on our ability to reassert U.S. leadership around the world for years to come.

State Department training is a critical aspect of our national security, and I hope all Members of the SFOPs Subcommittee recognize this. I've taken an oath—three times—to protect my country and its values, and I know our career foreign affairs professionals take this oath just as seriously. We too must take our commitment to them seriously. Thank you for your time today.