

**THE STATE OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT
AND STATE DEPARTMENT AUTHORIZATION**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2021

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert Menendez presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Van Hollen, Risch, Johnson, Romney, Portman, Young, Barrasso, and Hagerty.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for joining us today. As this committee continues to seek to restore its position of conducting robust oversight, we greatly appreciate your willingness, like that of Secretary Blinken, to come before us for hearings, and that is refreshing.

Let me also acknowledge that you and Secretary Blinken inherited a damaged and depleted State Department. As I documented in a committee report last year, "Diplomacy in Crisis," the last Administration's repeated assault on State Department personnel, management, and resources were, in my view, unconscionable and dangerous for long-term U.S. foreign policy interests.

When you assumed your position, morale was at its lowest point in decades, confidence in leadership had decayed, and key bureaus had been gutted.

In fairness, however, the institutional, budgetary, and morale problems of the department are the result of many years, multiple administrations, and, yes, congressional action and inaction as well.

I think there is now broad and bipartisan consensus that we have reached a crisis point, and there is a bipartisan desire to address the core structural and resource issues that have too long plagued the Department.

With the Department being led by people such as yourself, who have dedicated so much of their careers to government service, I had been hoping to see a necessary effort to undertake a systematic reform and modernization effort.

Today, I look forward to hearing specifics. What is your thinking about reforming and modernizing the department? Where do you

see opportunities to ensure that resources are aligned with the department's missions? What are you doing to address the morale crisis and stem the loss of talented Foreign Service and Civil Service officers?

As the Administration continues to deemphasize our military presence around the world, where is the necessary diplomatic counterweight?

There are a number of other specific issues I hope you will address today. First, I hope you will address State's role in the Afghanistan evacuation. There is no doubt that the Department personnel performed heroically but, arguably, had the department been better positioned and structured to get ahead of some of the issues, particularly processing Afghan SIVs, P-1s and P-2s, the heroism would not have been necessary.

Much like in the early days of the COVID pandemic when tens of thousands of American citizens were stranded around the world, while State Department personnel ultimately performed Herculean tasks to launch a successful repatriation effort, it took weeks of heavy lifting and congressional pressure and suggests the department needs to fundamentally alter institutional structures to deal with emergency contingencies, planning, and operations.

I would also like to hear your plans to address a long-standing priority of mine, significantly expanding diversity at the department, including long overdue improvements in recruitment and retention.

Study after study has shown that a more diverse workforce leads to better decisions and outcomes for institutions, and it is essential for the State Department as an institution that represents our country to the world that we represent our values as a nation in celebrating all Americans.

I would also like to hear your thinking about how the United States can best position ourselves to counter China in the conduct of diplomacy around the globe. China now has more diplomats, more missions, more concerted public diplomacy, and more money for its diplomacy than we do.

In parts of Africa and Latin America, we are being badly outlapped, and the holdup of confirming ambassadors by this body is, certainly, also hampering U.S. foreign policy objectives to be competitive with China.

Relatedly, I also hope that you will address staffing and resource shortages that hamper our diplomacy. For example, a recent State Department Inspector General report found that the Africa Bureau has faced persistent staffing shortages and that the department has not appropriately prioritized the Bureau's needs.

Critical posts such as our embassy in Niger lacked a political and economic officer for months. I look forward to hearing about the Department's plans to create a new Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy and a Special Envoy for critical and emerging technology.

As you well know, we are facing a new era of international cooperation and competition on cyber and technology issues. Real systematic change in how the United States responds to digital innovation will require swift institutional adaptation, and I believe these new structures are the right first steps.

Finally, I would like to hear from you on the Department's response to the so-called anomalous health incidents or what some of us call Havana syndrome. For years the department did not take this seriously, stigmatizing those who reported incidents and failed to get those affected prompt treatment.

I appreciate that you and the Secretary have prioritized this issue and I know you are committed to protecting our personnel, but the Department's response continues to fall short of what we owe our personnel and their families, and we look forward to hearing specifics.

It is a broad agenda but that is the nature of the undertaking that you have.

With that, Mr. Secretary, let me turn things over to the ranking member for his statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Secretary McKeon, for being here today.

It has been nearly 20 years since Congress passed an authorization for the State Department. Over that time, the Department's need for reform of its operations and management has grown enormously.

As such, I have spent the past 2 and a half years working with the chairman on a much-needed State Department authorization bill, partly on my watch and partly on his watch. We have not been successful to date, obviously.

If we want to exercise full oversight of the State Department, which is the charge of this committee, we must regularly and consistently authorize the State Department. If we do not, we will get more of the same with the State Department choosing when and how it will listen to this committee.

As the chairman knows and I experienced during last Congress, getting the State Department to do the basics—provide witnesses for hearings, feedback on legislation, and updates before issues hit the news—is extremely difficult without authorizing bills.

I look forward to working with the chairman and you, Mr. McKeon, on getting a State Department authorization across the finish line this Congress. Since today's hearing is also about the state of the State Department, we must address the Department's role in the hazardous withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Despite the Administration's efforts to put Afghanistan in the rearview mirror, it remains a pressing national security concern for the Senate and for the American people.

It has been over a month since Secretary Blinken appeared before this committee and we have yet to receive the Secretary's responses to our questions for the record that were propounded at that time.

This is an unacceptable delay and we expect better responsiveness from the department, which they have always promised but have never executed on.

On the issue of continued evacuations, in September, Secretary Blinken assured us that there were just 100 Americans remaining in Afghanistan that wished to depart. One hundred.

Just last week, however, the team responsible for continued evacuations of Americans told us that they were working on over 170 Americans who wished to depart from more than 360 Americans who remained there, and the list is growing.

I want to make note and ask us to enter into the record aggregate data my staff has collected from 25 Senate offices about the botched evacuations. It should be noted that this is a snapshot of just one-quarter of the Senate's work to get people out.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this hearing.]

We know that 16,688 cases were referred to the State Department during and immediately after the NEO. We only know of 110 individuals of the 16,000 who were successfully evacuated out of Afghanistan to the U.S. or to a third country. I have been working on one flight with several U.S. citizens with over 100 minors on that flight.

I am also curious about the state of Embassy Kabul's workforce, particularly the fate of our locally employed staff. We owe a great debt to the Afghans who assisted our diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan for 20 years and it is shameful that they were not all evacuated before the Administration's arbitrary withdrawal.

I look forward to hearing more details on establishing predictable mechanisms for the continued departure of Americans and the Afghans who assisted us in our mission there.

Last Thursday, I, along with Armed Services Committee Ranking Member Inhofe and Homeland Security Ranking Member Portman, sent a letter to the Inspectors General of State, DoD, DHS, and USAID requesting a joint audit on the botched evacuation and the failure to deliver on the Special Immigrant Visa Program.

As I mentioned at Secretary Blinken's hearing, the Department of Defense has a lot to answer for on SIVs as well. The bungled Afghanistan evacuation was a failure not only of the interagency but also of leadership at the top.

We will not accept separate audits from each agency just pointing fingers at the others. We have seen a dramatic uptick in terrorist activity in Afghanistan, demonstrating the Taliban lacks the will and capability to prevent terrorists from using Afghanistan as a safe haven or, for that matter, even governing in the most basic sense.

Coordination with Afghanistan's neighbors to address terror threats is critical, and I look forward to hearing an update from you today.

I am not surprised but I am disappointed to hear that the Taliban is blocking women and girls from the workplace and higher education. Yet, the Department has signaled the intent to restart nonhumanitarian assistance to Afghanistan without securing concessions from the Taliban on these important issues.

I have no doubt you are going to face some strenuous questions on that particular issue from this committee and others. Any further expansion of long-term assistance to Afghanistan requires a discussion with Congress.

Finally, I and 29 of my colleagues introduced the Afghanistan Terrorism Oversight and Accountability Act. I have asked the chairman that we mark up this important bill soon.

Mr. McKeon, I look forward to working with you on this matter.

With that, I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch.

With that, Mr. Secretary, the floor is yours. We would ask you to summarize your statement in 5 minutes or so, and your full statement will be included in the record, without objection.

Mr. Secretary.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE BRIAN MCKEON, DEPUTY
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCES,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. McKEON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Risch, members of the committee. I appreciate you having me here today. This is the first time I have appeared before you since I was confirmed in March. I am happy to be back here to report on many of the issues that you have raised in your opening statements.

I know there is significant support on this committee for the Department's mission and its personnel, and I welcome the discussion of our authorization priorities and your priorities, and hope to build on the work that you have started.

I, first, want to take a moment to recognize the State Department's remarkable public servants. It would be hard to overstate the unique challenges faced by our global workforce, especially during a lengthy global pandemic. Their resilience embodies the truest spirit of public service.

I also want to speak to the Department's work since I came before you in March, including the steps taken to address some of the issues that you raised then.

In May, the President submitted his budget request for fiscal year 2022. He requested a 10 percent increase for the State Department and USAID, which included the largest personnel increase for the State Department in a decade. It is a budget that reflects the importance of investing in our people and our technology, and we appreciate the support for these priorities in the Congress to date.

President Biden has been clear from his first day in office about his commitment to put diplomacy at the center of our foreign policy. The President's first visit to a major Cabinet department was to the State Department, an intentional signal of the importance he places on diplomacy. Secretary Blinken is equally committed to this objective.

Today, at the Foreign Service Institute later this morning the Secretary will publicly outline the Department's modernization agenda, which has five pillars, and I believe he came to speak to you, Mr. Chairman and Senator Risch, yesterday about some of these issues.

First, building the department's capacity and expertise in areas critical to our national security, including cyber and emerging tech, climate, and global health.

Second, elevating new voices and fostering a climate of initiative and innovation within the department.

Third, we are determined to compete for talent and to build and retain a diverse, dynamic, and entrepreneurial workforce. The Secretary has appointed the Department's first ever Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. We are addressing a number of issues that make it challenging for officers to serve, from family member employment to assignment restrictions to the challenges that LGBTQ+ and employees of color face serving overseas.

Fourth, we are working to modernize our technology, our communications, and our analytical capabilities.

The final pillar focuses on our overseas engagement to ensure that our diplomats can conduct in-person diplomacy that is essential to advancing foreign policy goals. This gets at the issue of risk management.

Pursuant to the President's National Security Memorandum 3, which he issued in February, an initiative that he undertook to revitalize our nation's foreign policy and the national security workforce, we have already taken steps to make systemic improvements in the way we recruit and retain employees.

On recruitment, we have established a volunteer recruiter corps with 500 Foreign and Civil Service employees who will assist our efforts to recruit a diverse workforce. We have also requested funds and authorization for a paid student internship program.

On retention, we have broadened access to childcare, we are enhancing telework opportunities, we are expanding eligibility for the student loan repayment program, and we are reviewing our performance management systems.

On advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, we launched the Department's first DEIA Leadership Council and, as noted, the first Chief Diversity Officer.

We have also sought to advance diversity in our senior appointments. There is a lot of other work going on that I can speak to during the Q&A.

We have made considerable progress, but there is a lot of work ahead. We have reduced the lengthy hiring timeline and made security clearance processing more efficient, but we need to do better.

Our passport processing during the peak summer travel season was inadequate. I am not going to try to gloss over it. We have surged resources in recent months that have measurably reduced waiting times.

Finally, I just want to thank the committee for the large number of nominees—over 40—who have had their hearings in the last 2 months, but we still have 80 nominees pending before the Senate, many of them on the executive calendar. As I understand it, most of the confirmations are delayed due to unrelated policy disagreements.

The development and execution of our national security policy depends on having senior leaders in place in our embassies and in Washington. In the first 9 months of the Biden-Harris administration, only five ambassadors to countries have been confirmed, just four of them yesterday. Our security and interests are substantially undermined because so many of our senior leadership roles are not occupied by Senate-confirmed officials.

While we can do more as an Administration to improve our part of the process, the level of delay and obstruction we have faced is unprecedented, and I speak with knowledge of working here for 20 years. I urge the Senate to act on these nominations with all haste.

With that, I look forward to your questions, sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McKeon follows:]

Prepared Statement of Deputy Secretary of State Brian McKeon

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, members of the Committee—thank you for having me here today.

I know there is significant support on this Committee for the Department's mission and its personnel, so I welcome this discussion of our authorization priorities and hope we can build on the work you have already started.

I first want to take a moment to recognize the Department's remarkable public servants. It would be hard to overstate the unique challenges faced by a global workforce, including for those serving domestically, especially during the long pandemic.

They have also been serving through a transition that ushered in a significant shift in the Department's priorities and its role in interagency policy making, substantially increasing their workload as we seek to revitalize the Department to better serve the American people.

Their resilience through it all, the way they rise to the challenge every day, continues in the truest spirit of public service.

I also want to reflect on the months that have passed since I came before the Committee in March, including steps the Department has taken to address some of the issues you raised at that time.

In May, the President submitted his budget for Fiscal Year 2022. He requested a 10 percent increase for the Department of State and USAID, which included the largest personnel increase for the State Department in a decade. This budget request reflects the importance of investing in our people, processes, and technology. We appreciate the support demonstrated for these priorities in the House-passed and draft Senate bills. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues on enacting the necessary funding and authorizations.

On our modernization process: President Biden has been clear from his first day in office about his commitment to put diplomacy at the center of our foreign policy. The President's first visit to a major cabinet department was to the Department of State, an intentional signal of the importance he places on diplomacy. Secretary Blinken and I are equally committed to taking the necessary steps to ensure that we can deliver today—and for many years to come.

We have listened to the workforce and heard from the Department's partners and advocates in and out of government, including the Congress. There is also considerable information and advice provided by recent studies, reports and commissions that make clear the work we need to do to modernize diplomacy. We are drawing from all of this work to inform our decisions.

This morning at an event at the Foreign Service Institute, Secretary Blinken will outline the Department's modernization agenda, which has five pillars:

- *First, building the Department's capacity and expertise in areas that will be critical to our national security in the years ahead*, particularly democratic governance, climate, global health, cybersecurity and emerging technologies, economics, and multilateral diplomacy. For example:
 - We have conducted a review of our priorities and structure on cybersecurity, digital policy, and emerging technologies, and we are consulting with the Congress about the proposed new organizational structure based on the review process.
 - We are launching a similar review on global health, to make sure we are able to defeat COVID-19 and build the global health security architecture to prevent and mitigate future pandemics.
 - We are taking steps to institutionalize and integrate our work on climate across our diplomacy, including by adding new climate-focused positions in every regional bureau and in critical posts overseas.
- *Second, we will elevate new voices and foster a climate of initiative and innovation.*

- The Secretary is launching a new Policy Ideas Channel to allow employees, at any level in Washington and in the field, to share creative policy ideas and initiatives directly with Department leadership.
- We are also revitalizing the Dissent Channel as a protected means of constructive, professional dissent and alternative perspectives.
- And we will seek to enhance and elevate our approach to partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and state and local governments.
- *Third, we are determined to win the war for talent* by continuing to build and retain a diverse, dynamic, and entrepreneurial workforce and empowering and equipping all employees to succeed. For example:
 - The Secretary appointed the Department's first Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, charged with developing and implementing a strategic plan to ensure the Department reflects the country's rich diversity from the entry-level to the senior ranks. We can and must do better.
 - We are investing in more professional training and development for both the Foreign and Civil Service, including opportunities for exchanges and rotations with the interagency, private sector, and the Congress that will enhance the Department's policy expertise. We want to finally realize Secretary Powell's vision, for a training float, which would provide a capacity to temporarily backfill positions—so that we don't shortcut training or sacrifice readiness.
 - We are working to address the issues that make it challenging to serve, from family member employment and workplace flexibilities to assignment restrictions and the unique challenges that LGBTQ+ employees and officers of color may face serving overseas.
- *Fourth, we are modernizing our technology, communications, and analytical capabilities* to work more flexibly, efficiently, and securely and better connect with global audiences. For example:
 - We are seeking investments across the Department's IT enterprise to expand mobile and secure communication capabilities, improve access to data, and enable us to succeed in the modern information environment while strengthening protections against malicious cyber threats.
 - And we are enhancing the Department's ability to utilize data and leverage technology to solve foreign policy challenges, including through the first-ever Enterprise Data Strategy released in September.
- *The final pillar focuses on broadening and deepening our overseas engagement* by working to ensure our diplomats can conduct the kind of on-the-ground, in-person diplomacy that is essential to advance U.S. foreign policy goals. We want to strengthen our processes for evaluating the risks and benefits of our overseas presence—including the risks entailed when we are absent or less able to engage—and to encourage a culture of being risk aware as opposed to risk averse.

I want to say a bit more on our efforts to win the war for talent. Early in his tenure, President Biden issued National Security Memorandum-3—an initiative to revitalize our nation's foreign policy and national security workforce. We have already taken many steps to make systemic improvements to the way we recruit and retain employees. Let me highlight a few measures.

On recruitment, we have established a Volunteer Recruiter Corps with 500 Foreign Service and Civil Service employees who will assist our efforts to recruit a diverse workforce, and we have separately worked with the Partnership for Public Service to develop improved Civil Service hiring and recruitment training for our managers. We have also requested the necessary funds and authorization for a semester-length paid student internship program. And we are planning to advance an integrated Foreign and Civil Service recruitment strategy.

On retention, we increased the childcare subsidy total family income threshold, are enhancing telework and remote work opportunities, expanded the number of positions eligible for the Student Loan Repayment Program, and are conducting a comprehensive review of the Foreign and Civil Service performance management systems. Also, as part of a long-term effort to develop a career-long professional development curriculum, the Department of State will design and seek to pilot in FY22 core professional skills training for mid-level Foreign and Civil Service employees.

On advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley is fully engaged as a voting member on key personnel selection committees; we launched the Department's first DEIA Leadership Council,

chaired by the Secretary and made up of Deputy Assistant Secretaries and DEIA advisors from each bureau; and we have built a one-stop shop for the Department for DEIA information to share best practices, link to contacts, and find DEIA-related resources such as executive orders, cables from the Department and posts, and trainings from the Foreign Service Institute. We have also sought to advance diversity in our senior appointments, both at the Senate-confirmed level and in senior positions in the bureaus.

But this work is not just focused on the Department's workforce. I oversee the work of the Department's Agency Equity Team (AET) in response to President Biden's Executive Order 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government." The AET focuses on how the Department can advance racial equity and support for underserved communities not only in our staffing but through our foreign policy and grants, contracts, public engagements and exchanges, and consular services.

These are just a few of many examples of initiatives that are vital for modernizing the Department to address the generational challenges we are confronting today.

While we have made considerable progress in some areas, there are also issues on which we're not yet where we hoped to be, despite our best efforts. For example, while we have cut down the lengthy hiring timeline and made security clearance processing more efficient, we need to do better. We also know that our processing of passports during the peak summer travel season was inadequate, but we have surged resources in recent months to reduce processing timelines.

I also know that several members of the Committee are interested in the posture of our workforce. In September, the Department announced an updated framework for maintaining model safety principles and evaluating local risk indicators to determine our appropriate on-site workforce posture during the pandemic. OMB approved November 1, 2021 as our re-entry date when we can expand our on-site workforce presence, contingent upon local public health conditions. That date has already shifted to November 15 given current COVID-19 data. Based on our current assessment of the risk indicators, we will continue to limit workplace presence in the National Capital Region and the on-site workforce posture will remain "mission critical functions only." We evaluate our posture every 2 weeks and anticipate a shift toward an increased presence soon, based on encouraging data trends. But it bears emphasis that we will continue to offer expanded telework opportunities and workplace flexibilities, incorporating the lessons learned since the start of the pandemic. For those overseas, our goal is to begin an increased return to the workplace, in accordance with each post's risk indicators, starting in January 2022.

Finally, I want to thank the Committee for the large number of nominees—over 40—who had hearings in September and October, and the 34 who were reported out of the Committee last week. There is still a lot of work ahead. As of today, there are more than 80 nominees before the Senate, including 41 pending on the Senate Executive Calendar. Seven career Senior Foreign Service Officers, passed out of Committee with full bipartisan support, have been pending on the Executive Calendar since June. Their confirmation is delayed not due to objections over their credentials, but unrelated policy disagreements.

The development and execution of our national security policy depends on having senior leaders in place in our embassies overseas and in Washington. There is not another major power in the world that would leave the vast majority of its embassies without an ambassador in place for many months. In the first 9 months of the Biden-Harris administration, only five country ambassadors have been confirmed. Dozens of U.S. embassies in every region are led not by a Senate-confirmed Ambassador but by a *chargé d'affaires*. Our embassies are being led by dedicated personnel who are doing a fantastic job, and I am proud of all they have achieved. But there is no substitute for an empowered ambassador, and many governments do not provide access at the highest levels to officials who are not accredited ambassadors. The bottom line is this: our security and interests are substantially undermined because so many of our senior leadership roles are not occupied by confirmed officials. This compounds the challenges we face in pursuing our shared objectives, especially for functions that are critical for taking care of our workforce and leading our overseas missions. While we acknowledge there is more we can do as an administration to improve our part of the process, the level of delay and obstruction we face is unprecedented. I urge the Senate to act on these nominations with all haste.

With that, I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. We will start a round of 5-minute questions.

I heard what you say in broad outlines, but what would be your top three priorities for assuring that the Department has the organization, the tools, and the resources it needs to meet its mission?

Mr. McKEON. Well, the first priority, sir, is getting adequate funding and, as I said, we are very appreciative of where we stand in the appropriations process to date with Senator Coons being the new chairman of the Subcommittee on Appropriations.

Second, investing in our workforce to try to build a workforce to face the challenges of the next several decades at a strategic level but also, as I mentioned, retention is a real concern. I mean, our attrition numbers are not as high as you might think, but, anecdotally, in some surveys there is a suggestion that a significant number of employees are thinking about leaving.

That is the canary in the coal mine that we have to worry about and so we have to address a lot of the pain points that make it hard to serve and that undermine morale. So we will not hit a lot of home runs but we are trying to hit a lot of singles that add up to something to make their lives better.

Then within the organization we need to empower people because it is a big organization with a global workforce, and there has been a tendency over the years, and I have been part of it in prior administrations, to try to manage everything with an 8000-mile screwdriver overseas. We have to empower our workforce at our missions but also in Washington to generate creative ideas and fully utilize our workforce.

That is a cultural shift. That is nothing that we can do with resources, and it is going to take all of the leadership believing in it and having the back of our employees.

The CHAIRMAN. Speaking about the staffing questions, something I have been at for 25 years between the House and the Senate is the diversity in the Foreign and Civil Service, particularly in the State Department, which has one of the worst records of any of the federal departments.

It is not only one of the best ways of representing the United States and our values abroad, it is also, I believe, a national security imperative. How are you working to currently and how do you intend in the future to hire, retain, and promote a diverse Foreign and Civil Service?

I hope you are looking at—when I have looked into this issue in the past, the oral exam has always been a somewhat amorphous process to me in terms of who can communicate well orally and who cannot. Then, of course, the review panel seems to be certain types of people.

That is one of the elements, and we always hear about recruitment. Well, you have to recruit at diverse places to get a diverse workforce. There are some great institutions that are known for their Foreign Service and policy education but they do not necessarily provide the most diverse student body as a way to recruit.

Can you talk to me a little bit about this?

Mr. McKEON. I am happy to, Senator. It is probably worth a longer conversation separately, which we are happy to do.

As I mentioned, we have the Chief Diversity Officer, Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, and it is not just an officer, it is an office that we were staffing with, ultimately, about a dozen people, including

people who understand data analysis, and one of her primary tasks that she wants to undertake is, really, getting at the data so we understand at a disaggregated level what the workforce looks like and what the promotion statistics look like, and then understanding what are the barriers to advancement within these services.

She sits on some of the key personnel committees. We have what is called the Deputies Committee that recommends career officers for ambassador positions. She also sits on the committee that selects deputy chiefs of mission and principal officers.

She has put out guidance to bureaus on more transparent and objective approaches to hiring. She is putting together a broad diversity and inclusion strategic plan. Across the department every bureau now typically has somebody who is assigned to this task and we have got a Department-wide diversity council that the Secretary chairs.

On the recruitment issue, I have to tell you, I just looked at the statistics of people who are taking the exam and it is not a very good picture. Both the gender parity is not there—the ratio between men and women taking the exam is two to one—and under-represented communities are not signing up to take the exam.

Our Human Resources Bureau has done some analysis on both why women are not signing up to take the test and why African Americans in particular are not doing very well on the test, and so that will guide our thinking on how we try to strengthen our recruitment.

One of our programs for diversifying the pipeline, the Rangel-Pickering Fellowships, are really critical and we have increased those by 50 percent and will sustain that, but there is a lot of different things we need to work on and we cannot flip a switch and improve it. We know that if we leave in a few years, the Secretary and I, and we have not made material progress, we will have failed.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate all the statistical information, and for 25 years I have been accruing statistical information and making the case that we are not having a diverse workforce, and that information, I think, is very well situated already to know what the reality is.

The question becomes, as I said to the Secretary yesterday, change starts at the top and if the top and you, as the Secretary in charge of management, if you make it clear to all of those underneath you that part of their performance review is how well they have worked to bring people, a diverse group of individuals, into their respective departments then that message will get out there.

I hope that the leadership is pursuing a very clear message of how we are going to make judgments about—in part about how promotions and other opportunities exist because but for that we will talk, as we have for 25 years, about the statistics and we will be at the same place.

This is not an issue of this Administration but it is an ongoing issue and I would hope that this is the Administration that begins to create change, at the end of the day.

Mr. McKEON. I know you are over time, sir. If I could say a couple things on this.

One, the Foreign Service promotion system has the—guides promotion with something they call the Promotion Precepts and those get revised every few years and we are working on the revision right now. It is a significant change in the way that we do it, and we are looking at a specific precept on diversity and inclusion, which would be, I think, a game changer.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, we look forward to working with you on this. Let me turn to Senator Risch. We will have a further discussion. Thank you.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. McKeon, one of the things that is really troubling to us is we understand that the State Department has indicated, perhaps decided already, that they are going to restart nonhumanitarian assistance to the Afghans.

Now, set aside humanitarian assistance. We are already seeing a lot of pictures of starvation and what have you and they say the winter is going to be particularly bad.

I want to talk about nonhumanitarian assistance. What are we talking about here? What is the State Department doing? What do you plan to do?

Mr. McKEON. Senator Risch, we have done a review within the Department and with USAID on all of our assistance programs that were in the pipeline with Afghanistan and created what we call a spotlight chart—category of green, category of yellow, and category of red, the red being bilateral programs directly with the Afghan Government that we are not able to continue.

The yellow ones we are taking a look at for further review but none have been approved to move forward, and then the green are programs that are, in several respects, similar to humanitarian assistance, some of the things, and we can get you a longer list, but the notes I have—

Senator RISCH. Give us some examples of that, if you would.

Mr. McKEON. Yes. Sheltering vulnerable women, basic education, water and sanitation, health. They are humanitarian-like but they have been considered in the economic assistance basket, if you will, in our categorization.

Senator RISCH. One of the things, of course, we are always concerned about when dealing with countries like Afghanistan how is this money going to be handled. If this gets in the hands of the Taliban, I have got serious reservations whether it is going to go to taking care of women and girls to go to school and that sort of thing, since we are hearing lots of stories about them shutting down schools and stopping women from the workforce, removing women judges from their positions.

What are you doing about this? How are you handling this?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, the aid is flowing through either non-governmental organizations or U.N. agencies that have long records of working in difficult contexts and in the midst of civil wars like in Syria or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

They have systems and an ability to ensure that the assistance does not fall into the wrong hands. You gave us a statute in the Continuing Resolution no funds shall go to the Taliban. We have a legal prohibition on that occurring and we have to be very mind-

ful of it. If we get reports that money is being siphoned off, then we will just stop the flow of that program.

Senator RISCH. Can you give us any more specific examples of where this money is going and specifically how it is being kept out of the hands of the Taliban? It is hard to conceive that money flows into the country and the Taliban—obviously, they have a design to get their hands on it. How do you keep it out of their hands?

Mr. McKEON. On the humanitarian assistance side and the types of sectors we are working in—our food and nutrition assistance, the health sector, including COVID-19 assistance, emergency shelter, and relief supplies—we are working at the provincial and local district level and the level of governance in the provinces is pretty mixed.

I am not sure the Taliban is omnipresent everywhere in controlling what is happening, but I am happy to try to get you a more detailed briefing with folks working on these issues directly.

Senator RISCH. I would appreciate that.

Let us talk about the evacuations. How many Americans are left in Afghanistan as we sit here today?

Mr. McKEON. The number we are currently tracking, Senator, and I know, as you mentioned in your statement, it seems to be going up as we learn people who are there, the number we were tracking as of a couple of days ago, the total is a little over 400, and we break that down into two categories because we are constantly communicating with them to see if they are ready to depart Afghanistan. The number of people who are ready to depart is around 225 and those they say that are not ready is about a hundred—a little south of 190.

These numbers change all the time. Even somebody who told us last week they were ready to depart, if we call them today and say there is a flight in 2 days, can you get on it, say, oh well, we are not ready this week. Can we go next week?

Senator RISCH. I appreciate that. I suspect that is the exception as opposed to the rule, that when the people say they are ready to go I would suspect most of them are really, really ready to go.

Mr. McKEON. Yes, you would think, but people have big extended families.

Senator RISCH. Sure.

Mr. McKEON. They have roots in the country and they are human beings. They change their minds.

Senator RISCH. Right, I get that.

The number—like I said, as we surveyed the offices we find about 16,000 cases that have been referred to your department and I got to tell you, I have people that are personal friends that have been working on flights out of there and they just are not getting the help.

I mean, they are being told they have got—the department has got every excuse there is as to why they cannot get the people out of there and these are people that that helped. Every office, I think, in the Senate got calls from veterans from over there and other people who have worked over there and said, look, here is a list.

These people went the extra mile for us. They are going to die, their families are going to die, if we do not get them out of there, and there just is not anything happening.

I understand the leadership of that office has changed two or three times, but I will tell you, as the person in charge of management, I would strenuously urge that you personally take a look at that and see if you cannot move that on because I am telling you, this is not a partisan issue by any stretch of the imagination. This is a bipartisan issue, and I know that my friends on the other side of the aisle are as frustrated as we are that we have left behind some pretty bad messes that we should have cleaned up and have not yet.

I would urge you to take a personal look at that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator.

Mr. McKEON. Thank you, Senator. I am happy to speak to it if you would give me a minute, Mr. Chairman, but if you do not, I can catch up with Senator Risch later on this issue.

Senator RISCH. Okay. Could we hear from him?

The CHAIRMAN. If you want to respond for a moment.

Mr. McKEON. I will speak briefly. I have followed this pretty closely, Senator Risch, and meet with Beth Jones, who is the head of our team working on these issues now.

The biggest obstacle right now to getting people out of Afghanistan is the Taliban, which keeps changing its mind about what the rules are in permitting people to depart, but we are working, first instance, trying to get Americans out and green card holders, but also people who worked with us, including people who worked with U.S. Embassy, and trying to get some regular flow of people out of Kabul and holding the Taliban to their commitment to permit freedom to travel.

Some of the charter groups that I think you alluded to, many of them have been working out of flights out of Mazar-i-Sharif where we had a much harder time getting fidelity on the manifests.

We have had issues of stowaways on the planes or the flight crews coming into Al Udeid in Qatar wanting to stay there and not go back. Most of the flights out of Mazar want to come to the base in Qatar so we have an agreement with Qatar if these planes come these people are likely coming to the United States. We are not going to leave them there in Qatar. We need to get a better fidelity on the manifests and that has been a huge challenge.

I will give you one example. Early on in this process there was a flight that was being organized and we were told there were about 10 or 12 Americans and 200 or so Afghans. We checked the passport records and validated that, yes, there were seven or eight American citizens on the list, and then we called them and most of them were in the United States. They were not in Afghanistan.

Just drilling down and really understanding who is getting on that flight because we have nobody there on the ground in Mazar, because once they get to Qatar we own them.

So I understand the frustration. We have been working very closely with a consortium of veterans groups about this, but we are working it hard every day, I can tell you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Deputy Secretary McKeon, for being here this morning and for your willingness to respond to our questions.

I know you have offered to sit down with me on the Havana syndrome attacks, also known as anomalous health incidents, but I would be remiss if I did not raise some of my concerns today at this hearing because I continue to be disappointed by the State Department's response, even though I have heard from both you and Secretary Blinken that you are committed to ensuring that people who have been affected are—get the medical care they need.

What I am still hearing from victims is that that is not happening always, and so there is, clearly, a disconnect between what is happening at the top levels of the State Department and how people are being treated, in some cases.

Let me ask you a couple of questions. First of all, Ambassador Spratlen, who was designated at the Department to be the point person on this, left in September. I think it has been about 40 days since she has been gone, and the Secretary said that he was committed to ensuring that someone would replace her.

Do you have any sense of when that is going to happen? Is there a protocol that is provided to all of our embassy personnel, all of our ambassadors, for how to treat reports of these kinds of attacks and get people medical care?

Mr. McKEON. Yes, thank you, Senator. On Ambassador Spratlen, she performed great service and we were sorry to see her go. I expect the Secretary to make an announcement about a replacement in the next day or two.

In terms of protocols, so when an officer at post reports an incident, they are instructed to either report it to the medical unit or the diplomatic security, the Regional Security Office, and both of those offices have a standard protocol.

The RSO has a questionnaire that the officer fills out and then that is reported back to Washington, and then the medical officer, whether it is a doctor or a nurse, has what is called a triage tool and, similarly, it is a medical assessment of various things, but they are all being asked the same questions so we can try to have consistency in the data.

Then if their symptoms are serious enough, some officers are medevaced and back here in Washington, we have recently organized a contract with Johns Hopkins University Medical System to get people into care quickly if they need it there. I know there has been interest in getting folks in Walter Reed, but that is not typically a fast process and the Hopkins contract allows us to get people more immediate care.

Senator SHAHEEN. I have had the opportunity to question a number of the ambassadorial nominees about this issue and whether they had been briefed by the State Department, and I do not think there was anybody who said they had actually been briefed.

Mr. McKEON. That surprises me, Senator. I have spoken—we have this course called the Ambassadorial Seminar for nominees for positions, whether they have been confirmed or not, out at the Foreign Service Institute.

I spoke to the class in August, as did Ambassador Spratlen. I spoke about a lot of issues but I touched on this issue, and there

is a class going on right now. I am speaking to them next week about this issue. Whoever told you that skipped the class that day, which would not be surprising because they do not go to the class every day.

Senator SHAHEEN. Okay. Well, this was 2 weeks ago, and so I am glad to hear that, that there is an ongoing. Is there a written protocol that people are provided? You mentioned the questions that——

Mr. McKEON. There have been several guidance cables to posts around the world, both classified and unclassified, about what to do, how to report, emphasizing that there is no stigma for those who wish to report.

Both the Diplomat Security Service and the Medical Bureau have done their own messages to their individual workforces. I think Dr. Padget, the head of the Medical Bureau, did a town hall on this issue within the last couple of weeks. There is a lot of communication, both to the workforce at large but also to the units who have to deal with these issues directly.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

As we are talking about Afghanistan and, going forward, obviously, what is happening to women and girls there is a critical concern for, I think, probably all Americans.

The Secretary has said that he expected to appoint someone to coordinate a strategy around how to respond on Afghan women and girls. That person has not yet been appointed.

Do you expect that to happen soon and can you tell us who that is so that we can work with whoever is appointed to address concerns that we are hearing both from Afghans but also thinking about how we can be helpful in the United States?

Mr. McKEON. I know that is still the Secretary's intention. I confess, I have lost the thread on where we are on selecting a person. When I come see you next week to talk about AHI I will have a better answer.

Senator SHAHEEN. Good. Thank you. Hopefully, you will have the name of a person——

Mr. McKEON. Even better.

Senator SHAHEEN. —to share with us.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Romney.

Senator ROMNEY. Deputy Secretary McKeon, thank you for appearing today and appreciate the chance to ask you a few questions. I begin by saying something that I think we can all agree with or almost all of us can, which was the Afghanistan withdrawal was a very sad day in American history and in human history for many, many reasons.

At this stage, one of the things we are all concerned about is the number of people who are working with us and working with our military, who are fighting for our values, who are nonetheless still in Afghanistan.

I understand that an Afghanistan task force was created to help get these individuals out, but I am interested in understanding how many people are associated with that task force. Is it effectively getting people out? What is the state of that work now?

Mr. McKEON. Yes. Thank you, Senator Romney, and I concur in what you said at the beginning, and I know that there was a Marine from Utah who lost his life on August 26. As the Secretary said, we have a special relationship with the Marines and a lot of State Department officers knew some of those Marines from service in other posts.

We have a task force—it is led by former Ambassador Beth Jones—that is looking across the continuum of how we are trying to get people out, which is how we are helping to facilitate travel out of Afghanistan at what we call the transit points, or lily pads, at military bases now in the Middle East, primarily, and then bringing them to the United States for resettlement activities.

The current—there has been some turnover in the task force as people have gone back to their jobs and then we issued a new call for recruits. Recently, we put out a department wide call for people to come work on the task force and 140 or so people raised their hands.

I will have to get you the precise number of people working on it in the Department. There are also people working out at the military bases on the resettlement work and at the bases in the Middle East who are either State or USAID people.

The first priority right now, as I said, is American citizens and green card holders, but we are also working to evacuate Afghans at-risk and other people closely associated with the United States Government.

There is a number of applicants for the Special Immigrant Visa Program who already have a visa. They were issued a visa back in August, or we have given them what we call an electronic visa. We are also working to try to arrange flights for them.

Senator ROMNEY. Deputy Secretary, I would just note that, at least speaking for myself, if there is need for additional resources, financial resources to provide additional personnel to speed this process, I would, for one, be very anxious to provide that support.

I think we have a moral responsibility and an American commitment to help those who helped us and leave no one behind, not just our own citizens but others who fought alongside us.

Mr. McKEON. Yes. Thank you.

Senator ROMNEY. On a very different area, many of us have a great deal of concern about what China's ambitions might be with regards to Taiwan, one, because of the people there who have enjoyed a freedom from the heavy hand of the Communist Chinese Party, but also for our own interests, particularly given the fact, for instance, that the great majority of the world's semiconductors are manufactured in Taiwan and this would be an attractive get for the Chinese Communist Party.

What is or what can the State Department be doing to make sure that China understands what the consequence would be—I am not talking about military consequence—but the consequence would be of them taking an effort, a military effort, to grab Taiwan?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, this is not something I work on very often, but I am familiar with the general contours of our Taiwan policy.

As you know, it is grounded in the Taiwan Relations Act and our commitment to Taiwan's self-defense and providing their legitimate

self-defense needs, which those arms sales go through the State Department approval process.

I think, politically, it is a broader campaign that we do directly with the Chinese but with other governments to make it clear that coercion by China vis-à-vis Taiwan or, God forbid, the efforts to seek to change the status quo by nonmilitary means will not be accepted by the United States and the international community.

Senator ROMNEY. I guess the term “will not be accepted by”—I would love to have that expanded upon, not necessarily right here in this hearing but to make it very clear to China what the consequence would be.

I mean, oftentimes, we put in place sanctions on people who do things we do not like. The problem is the things we do not like have already occurred when those sanctions are put in place.

I would love to be very clear to the Chinese Communist Party about what would occur not just on the part of the United States but of our allies and friends around the world were they to take kinetic action against the people of Taiwan, and think that that specificity might be helpful in helping them calculate just exactly what the cost, and I am talking about the diplomatic and economic cost might be were they to take such effort.

Thank you, Deputy Secretary. I appreciate your participation today.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Secretary McKeon, welcome. Thank you, again, for your leadership at the State Department.

Let me first follow up on a point that Senator Risch brought up in regards to Afghanistan and the procedures being used to help those that are vulnerable in Afghanistan, whether they are U.S. citizens, whether they are eligible for our special visas, or whether they are those at risk because of the Taliban government.

I sent a letter to the State Department about a week ago and asked for a response before this hearing, and I have not gotten one, in regards to the apparent lack of transparency and openness in individual cases that we have.

During the withdrawal, the evacuation, we had a pretty open process with the State Department on individual cases. That seemed to have changed once our presence was no longer in Afghanistan.

I just really wanted to point out I was disappointed I did not get a response, but I do look forward to getting that response and following up with you as to how you are going to be working with our individual offices on the still significant amount of inquiries we get in regards to vulnerable people that are still remaining in Afghanistan.

Mr. McKEON. Senator, I am told by our head of Legislative Affairs sitting behind me that the letter should have been delivered this morning. I looked at a draft last night. If you do not have it, we will make sure that you get it after this hearing.

Senator CARDIN. I thank you for that.

First, I am very supportive of the announcements being made today, the five areas that you mentioned for significant reform within the State Department. I agree with Chairman Menendez's

initial statements of how, over a long period of time, we have seen a decline in support for our Foreign Service officers in our diplomacy mission.

So I do think it needs to be reinvigorated and I think the outline that you announced today is the right way forward for us to have those discussions. I do encourage us to have a robust interaction as these plans are being implemented because we are, certainly, going to have some comments. We may not be in total agreement with every move, but we, certainly, want to work together to achieve the objectives that you have set out.

Let me mention an area that gives me great concern, and that is we have seen in regards to the training of our diplomatic service—Foreign Service people—that we have cut back pretty dramatically in their ability to get the type of training necessary to carry out those missions.

We have also seen a decline within the mission's capacity to deal with the core values that make America the strong nation that it is in promoting democratic institutions and advancing human rights and dealing with anti-corruption measures in countries.

We just do not have the capacity within our missions to carry this out and we do not have the trained Foreign Service officers in order to advance these core mission objectives.

We, in Congress, are looking at following President Biden's leadership to advance these values but we need to have in country the capacity to deliver on that. Will you just share with us the priorities of making sure that we have the training resources available for our Foreign Service officers as well as the capacity in mission to deal with advancing these values?

Mr. McKEON. Thank you, Senator Cardin. On the first issue, and it is mentioned in my longer statement for the record—I do not think I hit it in the oral statement—we are trying to build in what Secretary Powell first set a vision for, which is a training float. That is, a sufficient number of people in the workforce so that people can go off and get training and we do not lose our capability at missions and in Washington.

We have a training float now, to some degree, because people go take language training for 6–12 months, but we need to build in a bigger cadre of people so that we can have that training and professional development floats so people can go on interagency rotations or even go outside the Government for a rotation.

In the '22 budget we have asked for 500 new positions. We have been ambitious in our submission to OMB for the '23 budget to try to continue to build on that, but, obviously, that is a decision that would still need to be made.

Then with regard to democracy and human rights and the core values the President has embraced as central to his foreign policy, there is broad guidance to our missions and our workforce about how to speak to these issues and amplify them.

The President is hosting a Summit for Democracy later this year, which will be the first of a couple.

In terms of the training for these officers to carry these messages, I will have to get back to you on exactly what we do at the Foreign Service Institute. I know there are some courses on human rights but I am not familiar with all the details.

Senator CARDIN. I would just underscore the summit. We all support the summit being held and the President's leadership on that. There will be countries participating in this summit that have challenges in regards to current trends on democracy. I hope that we are very direct in our messaging about the importance of not backsliding on democratic principles.

Then lastly, Mr. Chairman, I just want to support your comments in regards to diversity and I would hope that the State Department would work with us, keep us informed as to the strategies they are using in order to make sure that our State Department workforce represents our country and the diversity of our country.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

I understand Senator Young is with us virtually.

Senator Young, are you with us virtually?

Senator YOUNG. I am. Yes, sir. Can you hear me?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, we can. Go ahead.

Senator YOUNG. All right. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. McKeon, I wish we could spend this hearing looking at long-term strategic resourcing issues for the State Department. I wish we had the luxury of rethinking the State Department, of evaluating new horizons of diplomatic efforts throughout the world. I especially wish we could discuss how we are shifting our focus to Asia to deal with the growing threats to national security from a rising China.

Instead, we must first attend to this Administration's suboptimal withdrawal from Afghanistan, its careless failure to treat allies with respect to its self-inflicted wounds that have sapped our nation of vital resources at a critical time in our nation's history.

I want to start with a very simple yes or no question, sir. Has our withdrawal from Afghanistan freed up resources at the State Department to focus on other strategic priorities in Asia such as the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party? Yes or no, sir.

Mr. McKEON. We are spending fewer resources in Afghanistan, that is correct, though some of these resources may get rescinded in the appropriations process, but it is not a yes or—

Senator YOUNG. It has freed up resources to focus on other strategic priorities? We are not more focused on Afghanistan now than we were a couple of years ago?

Mr. McKEON. In terms of our overall resources, that is correct. We still have a focus on the enduring commitment to Americans and green card holders and Afghans who have helped us to try to bring them out of the country.

Yes, we have fewer department resources devoted to Afghanistan, but as I mentioned, we had a pretty big assistance pipeline, some of which probably will get rescinded in the appropriations process.

Senator YOUNG. All right.

Mr. McKeon, let me follow up. I am a little skeptical only because I know the nature of the withdrawal has forced the department to pull officers and staff from Asia and throughout the world to stand up multiple crisis teams, and those teams are desperately trying to catch up to the crisis on the ground.

We know diplomats have spent hundreds of hours reassuring allies and trying to repair our damaged reputation. That does not sound like a strategic refocusing.

Can you provide specific numbers of personnel and funding that have been freed up as a result of the withdrawal, sir?

Mr. McKEON. I will have to get you those numbers for the record, Senator Young. What I would say is we, certainly, have not lost focus on the importance of the generational challenge with regard to China and our Indo-Pacific strategy.

I am unaware that we pulled officers from posts in Asia to work on the task force. We did have some consular officers at some of our bigger posts in the world, like in Manila and New Delhi, helping to call American citizens in August, but we have not pulled officers from missions in Asia and the Pacific.

Senator YOUNG. Okay. I will look forward to getting the specific numbers of personnel and funding that have been freed up as a result of the withdrawal.

Mr. McKEON. I could also say, Senator, in both our '22 budget and our pending '23 requests with OMB, as we look at increased personnel resources the number-one bureau, the bureau that is getting the most new positions, is the East Asia Pacific Bureau in both years.

Senator YOUNG. All right.

Sir, how would you say that morale and confidence in State has been affected by our botched withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Mr. McKEON. Well, Senator, with some humility, I am not sure I can speak to the morale of 75,000 people who work for the department. I would say that many people who stepped up to volunteer either to go to Afghanistan—

Senator YOUNG. I am going to just briefly respectfully interject. You are one of the leaders of the State Department. You are supposed to have your finger on the pulse of the morale of folks at the State Department.

I think you can at least make a generalization about institutionally organizationally how folks on the line are doing right now so that we in Congress might fulfill our oversight responsibilities.

Mr. McKEON. Senator, the people who volunteered to go to Kabul or who worked on the task force felt a strong sense of mission to help during the crisis and, I think, felt that they did the best they could and managed to save a lot of lives.

I know people who came back from Kabul airport who are undergoing an emotional toll about the experience they went through. I think people—many people in the department served in Afghanistan over 20 years, so there is an array of emotions about what was invested and what was lost. I think—go ahead.

Senator YOUNG. I just—how can we possibly say in the end that the withdrawal has left us better equipped diplomatically to face other challenges? I will just end with that question.

Mr. McKEON. I think in a broad sense, Senator, Afghanistan, over the last—at least the last decade was—we were investing substantial sums in human resources, both at the Defense Department and the State Department and USAID, which was, in some respects, an opportunity cost.

I remember in the Obama administration in which I served President Obama constantly asking the question, what am I getting for \$20 billion to \$40 billion a year and what is the opportunity cost of that?

Ultimately, the strategic shift away from Afghanistan, allowing us to focus on the priority you started with, which is the challenge of China, will be to our national benefit.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Secretary McKeon.

Mr. Chair, I have a thought that I kind of maybe wanted to direct to the committee, to the leadership of the committee, a concern of mine.

In discussions about Afghanistan in this committee and the Armed Services Committee there is analysis, as there should be, about the withdrawal and was it planned correctly.

I have not yet in any of my committees, and I am not aware of it really happening in the Senate, of significant discussions in committee hearings about maybe the most pressing issue with respect to the Afghanistan withdrawal.

We have brought tens of thousands of Afghans safely into the United States. They are in New Jersey. They are in Virginia. They are in New Mexico. They are in Indiana. They are in Wisconsin.

I have visited two of the sites in Virginia. Quantico has about 5,000 Afghans on its base right now. Fort Lee has about 2,000. Fort Pickett has about 10,000. I actually think the biggest marker of the success or failure of the Afghan evacuation is going to be the work that we do as a nation to help these families transition into being successful parts of American society.

My worry is I am not hearing that as a focus of committee discussion. Some of the resettlement effort is owned by the State Department. The DHS is now the lead agency on the effort.

Most of the Afghans who are not SIVs, they are in a humanitarian parole situation that will need some adjustment at the end of a 2-year period and that would likely go through the Judiciary Committee.

There is tremendous needs of the resettlement agencies. Those would likely be handled via Appropriations, but I am kind of wondering, from a Senate oversight of this critical mission, going forward, I would love it if this committee might have a hearing about the resettlement effort, looking forward, and what we are going to do for these families, or a number of the committees doing it together because I think this is absolutely critical.

When I went to Fort Lee at the end of August right at the beginning of the evacuation, the plan at that time—and families were being told this—is that they might be on a military base for 10 days to 2 weeks.

When I went to Quantico last Monday, a week ago this past Monday, the families were being told they might be there for 3 to 4 weeks. There were 5,000 Afghans on that base. They were letting 50 depart that day, and I just did my math. Okay. Fifty depart every day that is 100 days. That is 3 or 4 months, not 3 or 4 weeks.

It is all depending upon the resettlement agencies' ability to find jobs and housing, finding jobs in a tight labor market. I had a barbecue restaurant in Richmond call me the other day and say, I want to hire some Afghans because if I cannot hire Afghans I am not able to hire anybody.

There are some market conditions right now that could make a resettlement effort may be easier than it would be at a time when the unemployment rate is high, but I am just worried in the discussions about Afghanistan that we have had beginning in late August to now I do not see a kind of organized discussion with a big spotlight on what do we need to do to successfully enable tens of thousands of Afghans to resettle and lead productive lives.

Again, I do not know whether the Foreign Relations Committee is the right venue for that. Would it be HSGAC or would it be Judiciary or would it be Appropriations?

I am feeling a compelling need that we should be about it because that work is going to be so tough, but the prospects of it being successful, ultimately, might be the most memorable thing about the end of the Afghan war.

I do not know if you have thoughts about that. I am just kind of throwing it out there. I hope this committee might be able to take up this matter maybe in tandem with other committees.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I thank the Senator for his observations. I agree with you. We have 9,000 in New Jersey. I visited them at McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, and the process, as I understand it, one of the—it does not seem to be the labor opportunities. That seems to be a real opportunity, as you point out. It is the housing element that seems to be a challenge across the country.

To the extent that the committee has jurisdiction, I am happy to consider it, and to the extent that it exceeds our jurisdiction we are happy to engage with other committees to see if we can have either a joint hearing or at least create attention to what we do, moving forward.

Senator KAINE. I very much appreciate that. I have one question for you.

Mr. McKEON. I am happy to speak to this briefly, if you wish, Senator Kaine, but I do not want to chew up your time.

Senator KAINE. Yes. Let me just ask you one question. The State Department has a Health Incidence Response Task Force looking at the Havana syndrome issues. The previous leader of that task force left on September 23 and, as far as I know, State has not appointed a new person to lead that task force.

If I am correct about that, can you tell me that you will get a good director running that task force ASAP?

Mr. McKEON. As I told Senator Shaheen, the Secretary is expected to make an announcement about a new coordinator in the next day or two.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator BARRASSO.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

On August 19, President Biden vowed that he would get every American out of Afghanistan before withdrawing U.S. forces. He stated, "Americans understand we are going to try and get it done

before August 31.” The President went on to say, “And if there are American citizens left behind, we are going to stay until we get them out.”

This Saturday, I attended the funeral services and memorial service for the life of Rylee McCollum, one of 13 of those soldiers. He was a U.S. Marine. A thousand people turned out in Wyoming to honor his life, a life he gave at the airport in Kabul.

I am talking to you. Would you please pay attention?

Mr. McKEON. I am listening, Senator. I am looking at my notes on this very issue.

Senator BARRASSO. The next day, the President reiterated a point, stating, “Let me be clear. Any American who wants to come home, we will get you home.” He is President of the United States.

Well, he did not keep his word. On August 30, the U.S. military evacuation ended with the last five planes leaving Kabul without a single American onboard. The Biden administration left hundreds of Americans and thousands of Afghan partners behind enemy lines.

The Administration seems in deep denial, greatly miscalculating how many U.S. citizens they left behind. One or the other, deep denial or great miscalculation.

On September 13, Secretary Blinken said there were fewer than 200 American citizens in Afghanistan who wanted to leave.

Yesterday, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that there were 450 American citizens still in Afghanistan. He said 196 Americans were ready to leave Afghanistan. He also stated that since September 1, the U.S. Government has helped facilitate the departure of 234 U.S. citizens and 144 permanent residents.

Today you testified to a different number. It has been almost 2 months since the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan. There are still American citizens trying to get home to get to safety still behind enemy lines.

With no U.S. presence on the ground, what mechanism are you using to ensure the safe evacuation of Americans that the Biden administration left behind in Afghanistan?

Mr. McKEON. Senator Barrasso, we are working every day to try to bring out the Americans who wish to depart. We are working with a couple of airline companies that are willing to go into the Kabul airport to bring people out on chartered aircraft. There is not normal commercial aircraft service right now at the Kabul airport. We have some flights that we expect to go this week to bring out several dozen Americans.

Senator BARRASSO. Several dozen. When do you believe all Americans who want to leave Afghanistan will be evacuated?

Mr. McKEON. The number, as I said earlier, of people ready to depart is over 200. On the current pace, depending if we continue to have success with these charter flights, I think all of these people who say they are ready to depart will be offered an opportunity to depart in the next couple of weeks.

Senator BARRASSO. We have Americans still trapped in Afghanistan. What actions is this Administration taking to help secure the safety and the wellbeing of these American citizens?

Mr. McKEON. We are talking to the Taliban in Doha about their commitment to permit freedom to travel, particularly American citizens, and we are working with, as I said, a couple of airlines who are willing to go into the Kabul airport.

They have agents on the ground who are checking the manifests, ensuring that people who are coming onto the planes have the right documents, and it is something our task force, led by Ambassador Beth Jones, is working on hourly.

Senator BARRASSO. The Taliban has taken over Afghanistan. They are a foreign terrorist organization. There is increased insecurity, movement restrictions, threats posed to civilians. Afghanistan is in crisis.

No U.S. civilian diplomat or military presence in the country other than those being held. The Administration wants to continue to provide foreign assistance, including economic support funds, to Afghanistan.

During his testimony before the House Subcommittee on National Security, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction stated, "A reduced U.S. civilian and military presence in Afghanistan among a deteriorating security environment could create new challenges for conducting effective oversight of U.S.-funded grants, programs, and contracts for reconstruction work."

The question is, given the fact that there is now no U.S. diplomatic or military presence in Afghanistan, is there any way to ensure U.S. taxpayer resources will be used appropriately and actually go to the intended recipients?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, the primary assistance we are providing in Afghanistan is humanitarian assistance through nongovernmental organizations, U.N. agencies like the World Food Programme.

All of these organizations have long experience working in challenging environments where there has been civil war. We have confidence in that system, but if we see anomalies or money seeping off to the Taliban we will stop the programs. We have a statutory provision you have given us that says no funding to the Taliban.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Before I recognize Senator Murphy, I just have to say I wish we had had the alarm bells sound when President Trump made a deal with the Taliban that told them with a date certain—we will leave by this date—that released thousands of Taliban prisoners to the Taliban that only augmented their fighting force, that ultimately, dramatically reduced our troop presence before this Administration took over, and that got none of the commitments from the Taliban cemented before all those actions were taken. That set the stage.

I do not excuse anybody for execution of what they decided, but it set the stage.

Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Barrasso has left, but it takes a lot of guts to come down to this committee and lecture the Administration about the conduct of foreign policy when right now Senate Republicans are using extraordinary powers on the Senate floor to deny this Administration the personnel they need to conduct this policy.

Senator Barrasso is talking about whether or not U.S. taxpayer dollars are going to be effectively administered in Afghanistan. I just came from the floor trying to get approval for two totally non-controversial USAID administrators whose job it is to oversee the expenditure of U.S. dollars in places in and around Afghanistan, and we were denied the ability to move two nominees that under any other administration would have gone by voice vote.

The Assistant Secretary that oversees Afghanistan blocked. The Assistant Secretary that oversees refugee policy directly relevant to Afghanistan blocked by Republicans.

So spare me the righteous indignation about whether or not this Administration is conducting foreign policy according to your priorities when you are at the same time denying the personnel necessary to protect this nation.

Never before, never before, has a minority party gone to this length to stop a President's diplomatic team from being put in place. President Trump by this time had nearly 20 ambassadors that were confirmed, 17 of them by voice vote. This President has four ambassadors in place.

It is like criticizing your buddy for not fighting back after you just tied his hands behind his back.

Mr. Secretary, I wanted to talk to you about the impact of not having ambassadors. We have great chargés out there. They are fantastic. They are capable, but they are not ambassadors.

In my travels around the world representing this committee and this Congress, there is a difference when you have an ambassador. There is a level of public diplomacy that an ambassador can engage in on behalf of the United States.

There is, frankly, a level of meetings that can be secured in some countries only by an ambassador very different than what a charge can get.

Can you just share with the committee what the impact is, the practical impact, of not having ambassadors and maybe, further, the practical impact of not having assistant secretaries in place to oversee our diplomacy?

Mr. McKEON. Thank you, Senator Murphy. You have put your finger on a very important issue that concerns us. As you say, we have very talented officers serving as chargés d'affaires in dozens of countries around the world, but they were selected to be deputy chief of mission—they were not selected to be chiefs of mission—and usually in the progression in the Foreign Service that is a job you hold before you get to be an ambassador.

People are doing what we would call a stretch assignment. Many of them are performing very well in leading their missions but there are substantial costs. One you put your finger on, which is in some countries the government at the highest level will not receive an American representative unless they are the ambassador.

We are not getting the meetings we need to have and having the influence that we want to have in that country.

Secondly, it is an interagency mission. There are people from across the Government serving in our embassies. Having an accredited and confirmed ambassador leading that mission really makes a difference, having somebody who is empowered by the President and the Secretary.

Then in Washington with assistant secretaries they drive the policy innovation. We cannot all do it from the seventh floor, and having Senate-confirmed people recommended by the Secretary, chosen by the President, it makes a big difference. The acting people we had in place were terrific but they—I think some of them after the last 4 years were not used to being empowered and not all of them always took the initiative.

Having the folks that we have chosen in places made a difference. I can see it already with some of the assistant secretaries who have come in in the last few weeks.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you for that answer.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for being so vigilant about trying to move forward the President's national security team. I also know this is, largely, a crisis being created by one member of this committee but it does seem to be spreading.

I was just on the floor asking for these two USAID administrators, and it was not Senator Cruz objecting. It was, in this case, Senator Marshall. So this remains a crisis that I hope this committee can get its head wrapped around.

Lastly, just for the record, if I could send you some information on a bill that I am introducing today with Senator Cornyn on promoting more subnational diplomacy, trying to help the department organize mayors and first selectmen and governors to be able to represent the United States abroad. I know this is something you care deeply about and believe in.

My time has expired, but I would love to continue to work with this committee and the Administration on trying to buttress our official diplomatic corps with more Americans who want to represent the good things about America abroad.

Mr. McKEON. I will be happy to look at that and talk to you about it, Senator. This is of great interest to the Secretary.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator HAGERTY.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak to Senator Murphy's point and come to Senator Barrasso's defense.

With all due respect, Senator Murphy, this is about priorities. This is about how the Administration sets priorities. It is about how Senator Schumer sets priorities in terms of how he utilizes the time on the Senate floor.

Since I have been here, I have seen the Board of Governors of the Postal Service seated, that time has been utilized to do that. Since I have been here, I have seen term appointees of the previous Administration pushed out of their positions, again, leaving these departments unsupervised.

I myself was put through 30 hours of cloture before I could be named U.S. Ambassador to Japan. This has to do with a set of priorities and how floor time is utilized.

I would like to turn to you now, Deputy Secretary McKeon. As you know, the Government of Israel strongly opposes President Biden's plan to reopen a U.S. Consulate for the Palestinians in Jerusalem, a controversial plan that would establish a second competing U.S. mission in Israel's capital city.

The Trump administration followed the law, namely, the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's eternal and undivided capital—that happened in 2017—and then by moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018.

The Trump administration also closed the U.S. Consulate to the Palestinians and merged its functions into the U.S. Embassy's Palestinian Affairs Unit under the chief of mission's authority of the U.S. Ambassador to Israel.

President Biden's proposal to open a second U.S. mission in Jerusalem would begin to reverse the recognition of Jerusalem and it would divide Israel's eternal and undivided capital city.

Yesterday, I led a group of 36 senators to introduce a bill that would protect America's full and faithful implementation of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 and it would ensure that there is only one U.S. mission, a U.S. Embassy to Israel that exists in Israel's capital city of Jerusalem.

Deputy Secretary McKeon, I just want to confirm something on the record. Is it your understanding that under U.S. and international law the Government of Israel would have to provide its affirmative consent before the United States could reopen the U.S. Consulate to the Palestinians in Jerusalem? Or does the Biden administration believe it can move forward to establish a second U.S. mission in the Israel capital city of Jerusalem without the consent of the Government of Israel?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, that is my understanding, that we need the consent of the host government to open any diplomatic facility.

Senator HAGERTY. That is my understanding as well, yet I do not understand that is the intention of this Administration. I appreciate you being on the record clarifying that that is a requirement.

I know this is not necessarily your decision. You would be an implementer here, but the State Department should know that Congress has enacted laws that mandate that the United States should recognize Jerusalem as the eternal and undivided capital of Israel and that it shall take all diplomatic steps to effectuate this recognition.

Opening a second U.S. mission in Israel's capital city of Jerusalem will start to reverse this process.

My next question, Deputy Secretary McKeon——

Mr. McKEON. I would say, briefly, Senator, there is no intention to move the U.S. Embassy from Jerusalem.

Senator HAGERTY. I want to make certain that is the case. We voted 97 to 3 to make certain that that was the case.

Deputy Secretary McKeon, I want to focus on the bipartisan issue of modernizing the State Department for the 21st century. As a former diplomat, I am personally committed to this issue.

In July, Senator Cardin and I held a subcommittee hearing on this topic, and during that hearing former Deputy Secretary Stephen Biegun said, and I quote, "Change is desperately urgently needed if the Department is to continue to serve the interest of the United States of America and the interest of the people in the employ of the Department of State."

It has been 41 years since the Congress last passed legislation on this issue and I believe it is now time for Congress to modernize

the Foreign Service Act of 1980. I hope to work with Senator Cardin and the other members of the committee on this issue.

Deputy Secretary McKeon, do you agree with former Deputy Secretary Biegun that change is, “desperately and urgently needed” at the State Department?

Mr. McKEON. The modernization agenda that the Secretary is announcing this morning is precisely because we know that we have a historic moment where we need to enable the Department for the challenges of the next several decades.

Senator HAGERTY. I am glad we agree on that.

Do you commit to working with this committee as well as the subcommittee on State Department management to reform the State Department, including testifying on this subject when necessary?

Mr. McKEON. Yes, of course.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you. I understand from your testimony that State is conducting a review on cybersecurity, digital policy, and emerging technologies. I also understand that you are contemplating a new cyber office that is going to report to Deputy Secretary Sherman. I hope to work with you and the Department to ensure that a highly capable and technically proficient nominee is appointed to that position.

Thank you.

Mr. McKEON. We welcome your suggestions. Yes, we are announcing a new bureau on cyberspace and digital policy.

Senator HAGERTY. I think it is critically important.

Mr. McKEON. We will need to work with this committee and other committees to work through the notification process and get your consent.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cardin, I think you—

Senator CARDIN. I just wanted to acknowledge, Secretary McKeon, I did get your letter this morning and I just had a chance to read it. I just want to acknowledge for the record that the letter was—

Mr. McKEON. Thank you, Senator. I am sorry it took until this morning.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, I have one final question for you and then we will adjourn.

I applaud the recent announcement of the new Cyber Bureau and the technology Special Envoy as well as the work that the State Department has already done to center recent diplomatic efforts on technological cooperation.

The question for me, including the concerns I have about IT security, repeated cyber intrusions of the Department’s networks and systems, what steps are you planning to take to ensure that the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy and the Special Envoy for critical and emerging technologies will be successful in achieving their missions?

Particularly, how do you plan to clarify the distinct missions between the Bureau and the technology Special Envoy? How do you intend to de-conflict their objectives and strategies?

Mr. McKEON. Thank you, Senator. We think there is enough space for both because of the different work priorities that we expect them to undertake. The Cyber and Digital Policy Bureau will focus on international cybersecurity policy, digital freedom, and international digital policy, working with the International Telecommunications Union and trusted telecom issues and the like.

The Special Envoy on critical and emerging technologies will focus in the first instance on issues like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, making sure that our engagement with both these sectors, the rest of the Government, and technology partners is advanced and in the right place.

Part of the reason to have both of these entities reporting to Deputy Secretary Sherman directly, at least for the first year, is to ensuring harmony in their missions and that they are not stepping all over each other.

The CHAIRMAN. We look forward to your continued engagement with the committee as you create this reorganization and structure and but we applaud—this is an area we think is incredibly important.

Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to echo the points that you are making and say that it is critically important that in these positions we get people with the right technical proficiency.

The evolution of these technologies is moving rapidly and I think it is going to be critically important that we get people that are deeply trained and immersed in this technology and the evolution that is underway and, again, we look forward to working with you closely on selecting those nominees.

Mr. McKEON. Thank you, Senator. One of the reasons we created two separate entities rather than one large entity dealing with both is they are in some ways quite distinct and it is hard to find one person who is versed in both of these skill sets. That was part of the thinking.

The CHAIRMAN. The record of this hearing will remain to the close of business tomorrow.

With the thanks of the committee, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:27 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

TESTIMONIES ON THE NON-COMBATANT EVACUATION OPERATION, ENTERED INTO THE RECORD ON BEHALF OF SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH, DATED OCTOBER 28, 2021

Since today's hearing is also about the state of the State Department, we must address the Department's role in the hazardous withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Despite the Administration's efforts to put Afghanistan in the rearview mirror, it remains a pressing national security concern for the Senate and the American people.

On the issue of continued evacuations—in September, Secretary Blinken assured us that there were just 100 Americans remaining in Afghanistan that wished to depart. One hundred.

Just last week, however, the team responsible for continued evacuations of Americans told us that they're working with over 170 Americans who wish to depart from more than 360 who remain there. And the list is growing.

I want to make note, and ask us to enter into the record, narratives my staff has collected from 25 Senate offices about the botched evacuations. It should be noted that this is a snapshot of just one quarter of the Senate's work to get people out.

Data on Afghanistan evacuation requests from August 2021–October 27, 2021 sent to the U.S. State Department from 25 Senate offices: Blackburn, Capito, Collins, Cotton, Crapo, Cruz, Daines, Fischer, Graham, Grassley, Hyde-Smith, Inhofe, Johnson, Lummis, Marshall, Risch, Romney, Rounds, Rubio, Sullivan, Thune, Tillis, Toomey, Wicker, and Young.

- The combined total of evacuation requests between the 25 offices is 16,688.
- Out of the 16,688 evacuees, we know of 110 who were successfully evacuated out of Afghanistan to the United States or to a regional third country.
- U.S. State Department was 99.3 percent non-responsive to these members' requests.

This is only a snapshot of the work Senate personal and committee offices have done to try to evacuate American citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRs), Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders and applicants, and refugees from other at-risk groups such as local employees and contractors for the U.S. Government, journalists, and human rights advocates.

We know that some offices bore an immense, lone responsibility to get Americans, SIV holders, LPRs, and Afghans at-risk out of the country as it fell to the Taliban. One Senate office described the lack of responsiveness from State:

Testimony No. 1

- From 25–30 August, I emailed *HAfghanInquiries@state.gov* and *ATF-TF3@state.gov* multiple times for assistance with a family outside of the gates of Hamid-Karzai International Airport. I never received a specific response from *ATF-TF3@state.gov* or *HAfghanInquiries@state.gov* about how to help those individuals, even after I reported that the family had been severely beaten by the Taliban, and even after I reported that one of the women in our bus convoy had gone into labor. Two weeks later, I was given the number to a State Department Afghan evacuation help desk and asked how our people (who were receiving death threats on their phones and being actively hunted by the Taliban) could seek evacuation. I was told they should “remain in place and await further instructions.” I have received no formal guidance on how Special Immigrant Visa applicants and Priority-1/Priority-2 applicants might seek evacuation and despite the State Department's assurances that they are working to “identify” those who need evacuation, I have seen no guidance from them on evacuation opportunities, other than commercial flights for American citizens.

Testimony No. 2

- I submitted several American citizens, LPRs, and their immediate family members for manifest consideration this week with one group, and they were denied a place on the manifest. If it is this difficult for American citizens and LPRs to secure airlift, it will be impossible for SIV and P2 applicants. This means that they will remain in the country and either: 1) their American friends will support them as long as possible while they remain in hiding, or 2) they will attempt to return to work at the risk of their own lives.

The same Senate office describes the continued and arduous bureaucratic delays, resulting in life or death situations for American citizens and Afghans:

Testimony No. 3

- Meanwhile, flights have stalled due to diplomatic issues at our lily pad countries. Last I heard, the United Arab Emirates' Humanitarian City, which is where most flights are going, contained approximately 9,000 refugees, and its capacity is 10,000. Some flights that have already been planned are not being allowed into the United Arab Emirates because they need to move people onward to the U.S. first, and this is not happening quickly enough due to lack of consular support. Another of our task forces, which sends its flights to Qatar, has had to halt its operation due to a diplomatic holdup there. We are always told that the State Department is working negotiations and there may be a breakthrough any day, but I have had a family in Mazar-i-Sharif waiting on a flight they are manifested for almost a month.

Another Senate office describes the grueling journey for American citizens through the streets of Kabul to the Airport, only to be turned away with no help from the United States Government:

Testimony No. 4

- During the NEO, a Pennsylvanian constituent, American Citizen, and mother of two tried and failed to make it through the streets of Kabul to the Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA). She is an American Citizen who should have been given priority to enter the gates of HKIA and onto a C-17 for evacuation. While she was waiting outside the gates, she was teargassed, another time she nearly had her passport seized from her and destroyed by a member of the Taliban who did not want her to leave Afghanistan. On the day a suicide bomber made it within range of HKIA, she was blocks away from the blast. Ultimately, the only way she escaped Afghanistan was because a veterans' group operating on the ground found her, protected her, and put her on a private charter flight to Qatar on September 10.

Testimony No. 5

- During the non-combatant evacuation operation, a Pennsylvanian constituent, Legal Permanent Resident, tried to make it to the Pakistani Embassy in Afghanistan to get a visa prior to making the overland trip to Pakistan to escape. On his travels to the Embassy, he was questioned by the Taliban about his activity in the Embassy, to which he replied honestly. In retaliation, the Taliban locked him in a dark room for several hours. After begging for his life and to be let out, the Taliban finally allowed him to leave to pray. Upon exiting the room, he was beaten with their guns and suffered injuries. Eventually, he was released to leave and received his visa from the Embassy. Despite having a current U.S. K-1 visa foil in his passport and an onward Pakistani visa, he had significant difficulties in getting on a U.S. evacuation plane. He finally paid \$1400 USD to get on a charter flight from Hamid Karzai International Airport to Islamabad, Pakistan on September 20, 2021.

Caseworkers in my Twin Falls office described continued bureaucratic obstacles to obtaining basic guidance on movements and documentation, fundamental to the safety and security of American citizens, LPRs, and Afghans in Kabul during the NEO:

Testimony No. 6: Senator Risch

- After the fall of Kabul, the U.S. Embassy informed stakeholders that all pending visas, passports, and documentation for consular services had been destroyed. For a pending LPR married to an Idaho constituent, this would have a remarkable impact. On August 14, this refugee's visa to the U.S. was issued by Embassy Kabul. On August 27, an evacuation request was emailed after the notice of document disposal was issued. The casework team emailed again on August 31 and September 15 for further guidance but the State Department provided none. On September 30, the Department informed the casework team that the individuals would need to find a way out of Afghanistan and transfer their case to another consular section currently open. Again, the case was flagged for the Department on October 6. On October 13, the Department confirmed that the guidance had not changed and the individual would need to find a way out of Afghanistan on their own, work with another U.S. Embassy to have boarding foils and further documentation issued, as well as the need to apply for a new passport which the United States government cannot issue.

An Idahoan details her harrowing journey to Afghanistan and her return home:

Testimony No. 7: Senator Risch

- From Katija Stjepovic, "With Sen. Risch's help, woman returns to Boise from Afghanistan," KTVB 7 News, Sept. 2, 2021:
 - Wahida Ivey is a U.S. Citizen who was born in Afghanistan and left in 1981 when Russia invaded the country. With help from Senator Risch's office, she returned to Idaho after visiting her family in Afghanistan for a week. She knew that Americans would soon evacuate the country, so she wanted to see her cousins and sister before.
 - "I kind of knew what was about to happen, but I also knew that if I didn't go see my sister, I probably would've never got to see her again," she said.
 - Ivey said what she saw were chaos and dysfunction. She added that there was no priority to get the U.S. citizens evacuated first. She made five attempts to get on a plane back to America. What she saw throughout the process was disturbing.
 - "Pushing shoving, Taliban are there at the gate, they are hitting people with the wires, and I have bruises [where] I took a couple of hits, they don't

see people they see them as this rush of animals standing at the doors, and these people are just desperate to make it through that gate,” she said.

- Before her last attempt to get home, she called her husband to say her final goodbye if she did not make it home. Ivey said soldiers were not checking documents, just opening the gates for a few people at a time but that her cousin who is an active U.S. Embassy employee, was turned away.
- “When the suicide bombing happened, you just see this river of blood, and I mean, you just can’t, not everybody has the stomach for it even after 45 years of war, you can’t stomach seeing people shoes, seeing peoples clothes, seeing their blood just running down that river, and pretend like it’s not there? You just can’t.”
- Ivey said her older sister attempted to get on a plane with her but had to turn back because of a lack of food and water.
- “Under Taliban in control of the country, women have no place you can’t be a lady at any age to go out and just get a grocery something as simple as that, unless you have a man accompany you or have a male escort with you to go out and do the basic everyday life,” said Ivey.
- While Ivey is forever grateful that she was able to safely return home, she fears for those who were left behind.
- “We must hold on to the promise we made, to the people that worked for us, to the people that held our hands when we needed our hands to be held, they deserve much better than that and we should not turn our back to them, it’s not okay,” she said. “These are also human beings, they have family, they have children, it is their home but it’s not a home safe for them to live in.”

Another office elaborates on the lack of communication between the State Department and casework liaisons in various Senate offices:

Testimony No. 8

- During the non-combatant evacuation operation, caseworkers shared the following anecdotes about the continuing lack of guidance and information from the State Department:
 - The State Department took days [after the fall of Kabul and start of the NEO] to establish an email account for Congressional and Senate Staff to file inquiries.
 - The State Department failed to update their website in a timely manner yet were asking Congressional Staff to check it daily and provide the site to those seeking evacuation assistance information and updates.
 - State Department Liaisons appeared to be confused on their own agency process, uneducated on how to assist Congressional and Senate staff. This is a tough one because the blame is not on our Liaisons, but on the Administration.
 - Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Applicants waiting on guidance to Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA) mimicking the same message said that Afghan Nationals were allowed entry into the airport holding invalidated or unsupportive documentation like energy bills, yet SIV applicants and even our Legal Permanent Resident was denied entry with paperwork in hand.

This Senate office describes the consequences they faced due to the lack of communication between the Department, other agencies, and congressional staff, including a child with severe injuries:

Testimony No. 9

- M.H. of Portland, Maine drove to the Augusta, Maine [immigration] office with her three children who have been in Portland for about 5 years going through the citizenship process. M, who speaks no English, and her 16-year old daughter who translated, advocated for assistance for her husband S.A.S.J., who has started the immigration process. He is in Kabul. M also is seeking assistance for S’s sister Z.K. She is also in Kabul. She has two children, both boys. One is currently in the hospital in Kabul after being shot in the face outside of Hamid Karzai International Airport. They showed me a video of him in his hospital bed. She has not started the immigration process for herself or her boys. M is also seeking help for her parents in Kabul M.S.H. and his wife B.M., who also is seeking help for her brother G.H. and his family who live in Logar. We began an inquiry with the Department of State on Aug. 23, 2021. While going

through the intake process with Chuck and showing the video, M fainted after becoming distraught. Augusta Emergency Services was called and brought her to Maine General. The State Department acknowledged receipt on Aug. 23. The child was shot in the face at Hamid-Karzai International Airport. He was initially refused entry to hospital and suffered extreme pain and trauma. Through Senator Todd Young's office we were able to get the child to the Indira Ghandi Children's Hospital to see a doctor there, whom I was able to reach. The doctors there concluded that the child's injuries were too severe for them to operate. He requires first-world surgery. He is on pain meds and antibiotics. He is not intubated. He is now home with his family. The child is the maternal nephew of an Afghan Legal Permanent Resident (and pending N400 applicant) in Portland Maine. Her spouse, who is in Afghanistan with the family, has an active I-130: Immediate Relative petition.

Testimony No. 10

- The American Citizen who reached out for help works at a Veteran's Affairs office in Virginia. The citizen's spouse had an approved immigration petition and an interview date in 2020 for KBL, but the U.S. Embassy in Kabul closed due to COVID-19 and was never reopened for interviews for her type. She had an electronic visa on 8/24/21 and could not get through the gates at Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA).
 - From the American Citizen: *"Five days ago my wife entered the Kabul airport and slept on the gravel awaiting her flight to the U.S.A. She was told to get in a car by U.S. forces to conduct biometrics. Shortly after she was dropped off outside the airport with no explanation."*
- Senator Collins office has contacted multiple border consulates/embassies including Doha and even if she COULD get there, they have told us they are unable to process her case.

This Senate office explains that American citizens had to resort to evacuation on their own merits including through private charter planes:

Testimony No. 11

- This group of Afghans had been on the ground transportation and were at the airport in line and ready to be evacuated several times. They were told to go home. Several members of the group were injured in the airport blast. One member of the group was 9 months pregnant, due to give birth any day. Had she gone to the hospital to give birth the Taliban would have found them. After four members of the group were evacuated through the airport, two families, a total of 10 people, made it to the Pakistan border where they found the borders closed. The private party our office was coordinating with was a former military member who was in direct contact with this group helping to coordinate on the ground movements to help them evacuate. Our office was attempting to get in touch with folks at the airport to allow these people in the gate at Hamid-Karzai International Airport. We were stymied at every point and to this day still have no idea how any of them managed to evacuate which leads us to understand that the State Department had nothing to do with their successful evacuation. Our office has not heard further from the State Department on the status of this group since August 28.

The following testimony by an office highlights the peril the lack of guidance put Afghans and Americans in place, leaving some without communications:

Testimony No. 12

- Our initial inquiry regarding this SIV case was made to the State Department on 8/13/21. Follow up inquiries were made to the State Department on 8/15/21, 8/16/21, 8/21/21, 8/23/21, and 8/29/21. The 8/16/21 follow-up inquiry to the State Department was to provide notice of his departure from Mazar and arrival in Kabul (see below for details). The first non-auto response received from the State Department was 8/29/21, which provided notice that he needed to contact the National Visa Center about an issue with his application. He had contacted the National Visa Center for assistance and status updates on multiple occasions prior to my receiving notice of the error from the State Department but had not received a response. The individual in question was in Mazar-i-Sharif when we initially became aware of his case from a constituent who served with him. We advised the indi-

vidual to stay put until the State Department provided further instruction, and, at that time, Mazar also appeared to be the safest place for him since it had not yet fallen to the Taliban. Once it became clear that U.S. evacuation efforts would be confined to the Hamid-Karzai International Airport, we informed him, and he made the decision to travel to Kabul to better position himself in the event the State Department would clear him for evacuation. We are unsure if he is still alive, as our last communication with him was 8/29/21.

Finally, the last testimony highlights that even the upper echelons of the State Department were unable to even guarantee safe passage for American citizens, who put their lives at risk to board private charter flights when our government left them behind on August 31:

Testimony No. 13

- Our office began working on this case in 2019. We emailed U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services and the National Visa Center throughout the process leading up to Afghanistan falling.
- We inquired with the State Department Task Force on 8/17/21, the Task Force emailed that our inquiry was forwarded to the appropriate team for action on 8/18/21. The family we were trying to assist received their access passes and visas on 8/24/21 and began trying to get to Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA), but were turned away every day. On 8/23/21 and 8/24/21 we called the State Department four times and left voicemails.
- On 8/26/21, after HKIA was attacked, and it became clear only certain American citizens and SIV holders would be cleared to enter HKIA, we began coordinating with NGOs on ground transportation for a group of 13 (four separate families/cases) to Mazar-i-Sharif, where charter flights had been departing earlier in the week. On 8/30/21, we provided head of the Task Force with the information on our group of 13, as well as notice of other American citizens in Mazar. In addition, we provided the Task Force notice and additional information surrounding the situation with the grounded charter flights in Mazar.
- After becoming aware that the Department and Task Force had been denying requests from NGOs for assistance in resolving the issues with grounded flights, we escalated the matter to the Secretary of State's office on 8/31/21. We connected NGOs to Secretary of State's office on 9/1/21. On 9/4/21, we received confirmation from the Department that the charter flights had received approval from the Department to land at Al Udeid Air Base (AUAB). The Department also confirmed that the landing sites in Doha, Qatar were prepared to accept the flights, if and when the flights received approval from the Taliban.
- We remained in nearly daily contact with both the Department and NGOs from 9/4/21 to 9/16/21, assisting where/when needed, as well as pressuring the Department to resolve the situation with the flights as soon as possible. We received confirmation from the Department 9/16/21 that wheels up for would likely be occurring in the coming days, with the first flight set to take off being the one carrying our group of 13. We received confirmation from both the Department and NGOs that the first flight carrying our group of 13 had departed Mazar for AUAB on 9/17/21.

RESPONSES OF DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE BRIAN McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. Anomalous Health Incidents/Havana Syndrome: Nearly 5 years after U.S. personnel overseas began suffering from a set of mysterious, but in many cases debilitating symptoms, we still have more questions than answers about the cause, the ongoing threat to personnel, and how we can better protect diplomats and others serving overseas. Do you believe that these incidents pose a serious threat to the health and security of our personnel?

Answer. Yes. There is nothing I take more seriously than the health and security of U.S. Government personnel and their family members. The interagency community is actively examining a range of hypotheses but has made no determination about the cause of these incidents and/or whether they can be attributed to a foreign actor. AHIs have been a top priority for Secretary Blinken, who set clear goals for the Health Incident Response Task Force to strengthen the Department's communication with our workforce, provide care for affected employees and family members, and better deal more effectively with these events in the future as we continue to work closely with the interagency to find the cause of these AHIs. All Department

of State employees receive regular updates about AHIs through various means of communication.

Question. I understand that every post should now be following the same protocol in responding to reported incidents. Yet we continue to hear that personnel do not always receive the same response or treatment (i.e., from the medical or diplomatic security personnel) when they report an incident. How are you ensuring the response and access to care is the same for every affected individual?

Answer. The Department has standard protocols for responding to reported incidents. In addition to these protocols, both Diplomatic Security and the Bureau of Medical Services have repeatedly messaged their employees to underscore the use of standard protocols, emphasizing the importance of taking every report of anomalous health incidents seriously, and providing updated guidance on how to respond to these incidents.

Question. Has the Department instituted specific measures to better protect the Department's personnel going forward that you are able to discuss here?

Answer. The Department has engaged with a series of top U.S. scientists in the effort to identify the cause of these incidents and to develop potential identification tools and countermeasures. Due to security constraints, I am unable to discuss specific measures, but would welcome the opportunity to speak about this in a secure setting.

Question. What takeaways or lessons learned have we gleaned from the baseline testing pilot so far, and is the Department looking to expand those efforts?

Answer. The Department launched a pilot program on June 1, 2021, to collect pre-incident health baseline information from employees and eligible family members in the Washington, DC area who are transferring to an overseas post. This information may be informative in the event of a reported anomalous health incident (AHI). Baseline testing remains available in the National Capital Region; testing at the Tri-Mission community in Vienna has concluded. State MED is undergoing an interim review of the pilot baseline program data to see if changes need to be made to make it a better tool. Regardless, MED plans to continue the pilot up to the original 1,500 individuals. Further review will then need be completed before contemplated further expansion of the program.

Question. Can you assure me that the Department is doing everything in its power to assist the interagency and find out who is behind these attacks?

Answer. Yes, I can assure you that the Department is doing everything within its power and in partnership with the interagency to identify the cause of AHIs. The interagency community is actively examining a range of hypotheses but has made no determination about the cause of the AHIs or whether they can be attributed to a foreign actor.

Question. Morale/Political Appointees: At your confirmation hearing, I asked you what specific steps you would take to address the morale problems at the Department and to ensure that the Department's workforce is empowered and trusted to carry out its critical diplomatic work. Can you tell us today what concrete steps you have taken and what additional steps you plan to take to rebuild the morale of the people who serve at the Department?

Answer. I am promoting and expanding workplace flexibilities—including telework and remote work—and stressing the importance of caring for oneself and family. Our Employee Consultation Service (ECS) is integral to this effort. I fully support ECS's continued outreach to employees and family members to further reduce barriers to seeking care by increasing knowledge of the support ECS can offer and addressing any misperceptions that utilizing ECS will impose adverse consequences. I will ensure ECS has the resources it needs to permanently support its 24/7 expansion of services. In addition, I am promoting resources that the Department offers to assist employees, including FSI workshops and engagements; 24/7 online access to Worklife4U to address personal issues, including mental health; and TalentCare, the single touchpoint for resources for well-being, community, safety, and workplace flexibilities.

More broadly, the Secretary's modernization agenda is designed to enable our workforce to better address the national security challenges of the next several decades.

Question. What steps have you taken to reverse the culture of fear surrounding political reprisal and retribution?

Answer. I view our Foreign and Civil Service colleagues with the highest regard. Department employees are free to express their views as part of the Department's policy formulation process without fear of reprisal, including through the Dissent Channel. If any Department personnel feel that political reprisal and retribution are taking place, I strongly encourage them to report it to the appropriate authorities, for example the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). I will ensure that these matters are handled through the proper channels and assist the Secretary in providing this information promptly to Congress. We also have reminded employees that the Department will protect them from unlawful retaliation and reminded supervisors that they will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including separation, if they retaliate against employees. I have personally sent two Department-wide messages on this issue. The first one reminded employees of their responsibilities to cooperate with the OIG; the second message, co-signed by the Acting Inspector General, marked Whistleblower Appreciation Day and acknowledged the important role of whistleblowers in promoting accountability.

Question. And what measures have you taken to protect the Department from a future administration that might once again seek to act in such a fashion?

Answer. Career Civil Service and Foreign Service employees are protected by law from being removed from positions or deferred from promotions or appointments due to their political affiliation. It is incumbent on both the Congress and the Executive Branch to ensure that these laws are honored and enforced; you have my commitment that they will be during my tenure.

Question. Afghanistan Evacuation: Americans, including U.S. Government employees, have reported that the State Department has had no communication pathway to successfully report Afghans in need of evacuation or assistance outside of Afghanistan. I have heard from other government agency employees that it is difficult to get through to the State Department and to discuss evacuations or assistance for Afghans overseas because the State Department lacks a coherent and transparent process or single point of contact with whom to discuss difficult cases of Afghans seeking assistance. Have you created a referral process for other government agencies or U.S. citizens and residents to alert the State Department of Afghans in need of evacuation?

Answer. The Department of State posts information for the public pertaining to Afghans in need on its *Afghanistan Inquiries* page: <https://www.state.gov/afghanistan-inquiries/>. Constituents seeking to confirm that an individual was referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Afghan P-1 and P-2 program can contact the USG agency that employed the individual or funded the particular NGO/contract that employed the individual and therefore would have made the referral. Information on the Priority-2 designation for access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is available at <https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/>. Information for Afghan nationals regarding the P-2 designation and instructions for U.S.-based media and U.S. NGOs to submit P-2 referrals are available at <https://www.wrapsnet.org/>. For additional questions related to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, we ask that individuals please contact USRAPAfghanInquiries@state.gov.

Question. Members of my staff have flagged a number of cases over the last several months, many of which remain unresolved. The lack of response or resolution is disturbing. Will you commit that you will take action on these cases in a timely way?

Answer. On November 9, the CAREHillInquiries@state.gov congressional mailbox was established to complement existing congressional inquiry channels to specifically facilitate ongoing communication with Members of Congress and their staff regarding Afghan relocation inquiries. The Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) team responds to these congressional inquiries about U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents, and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders and their immediate family who are requesting USG assistance to repatriate or relocate. For privacy and operational security reasons, CARE is limited in what can be shared. While individual cases, which are complex and varied, may take time to resolve, I commit to you that the Department will work to resolve these cases in as timely a manner as possible.

Question. We understand that a number of active-duty U.S. service members have contacted the State Department for assistance with their immediate family members trapped in Afghanistan. Does the State Department have the ability to coordinate the evacuation of the family members of active-duty U.S. military?

Answer. The Department of State continues to work with U.S. service members who alerted us of their immediate relatives in need of relocation assistance. The Department is also working closely with DoD for those service members who still have immediate relatives in Afghanistan.

Question. Do immediate family members of our active-duty military qualify for SIV status?

Answer. Statutorily, immediate family members may qualify for SIV status only if they are a spouse or unmarried child under 21 of a qualified SIV principal applicant, or they independently qualify as SIV principal applicants themselves. Afghan nationals who worked for or on behalf of the U.S. Government or ISAF or a successor mission in Afghanistan for at least 1 year, providing faithful and valuable service and meeting the other program requirements, can apply for the SIV program. If an individual who is currently active-duty military was admitted to the United States on a SIV and has maintained his or her lawful permanent resident (LPR) status (i.e., has not yet become a naturalized U.S. citizen), then their immediate family members may qualify for derivative SIVs. If the individual has never applied for an SIV, then their immediate family members cannot qualify as derivatives. Alternatively, members of our active-duty military who are U.S. citizens may petition for family-based immigrant visas for their spouse, children, parents, and siblings. LPRs, including members of the United States military, may petition for family-based immigrant visas for their spouse and unmarried children.

Question. If not, will you prioritize family member evacuation via charter flights and resettlement to the United States or a third country under other programs?

Answer. Individuals with a clear legal pathway to residency in the United States include U.S. citizens and their immediate family members, lawful permanent residents (LPRs) and their immediate family members, and valid U.S. immigrant visa holders—including Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders—are our priority for the current relocation effort. We are committed to reuniting families, especially parents and minor children, who may have been separated during relocation operations in August 2021.

Question. The fees associated with applications of U.S. visas, including Special Immigrant Visas, and humanitarian parole are very steep. Is the State Department considering offering a blanket waiver for all Afghan applicants in these categories given the precarious financial situation in which many Afghans find themselves? If not, why not?

Answer. Applicants for the Special Immigrant Visa program for Afghan SIVs are exempt from all associated visa fees. Typically, SIV applicants are responsible for expenses related to the panel physical medical exam—these expenses are not controlled by the Department of State; however, the U.S. Government will be covering the cost of the panel physician medical exams for SIV applicants processed through Operation Allies Welcome at designated “lily pad” locations.

I defer to the Department of Homeland Security regarding any fees associated with humanitarian parole.

Question. Processing Afghans at Risk: I understand that consular officers are not involved in P-1 or P-2 processing for Afghans, but that they can make P-1 embassy referrals. What guidance have you given to consular officers working overseas on how to assist Afghans—whether P-1, P-2, SIV, or others—who may arrive at the U.S. Embassy seeking help?

Answer. The Department continues to provide U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide with guidance for Afghans seeking help with refugee or visa processing. Personnel representing every part of all of our missions overseas remain committed to assisting Afghans at risk.

Question. How are consular officers working with PRM refugee coordinators and Resettlement Support Centers to assist with refugee processing for Afghans?

Answer. With the exception of “following-to-join cases,” consular officers are not involved with refugee processing.

Question. Can they submit parole applications on behalf of SIV and P-2 eligible Afghans?

Answer. Under extraordinary circumstances, U.S. Government agencies, including the Department of State, may request that DHS approve an individual for Significant Public Benefit Parole (SPBP) to the United States. Parole does not, in and of itself, confer any immigration benefits. It is authorized for a specific and temporary

period of stay in the United States, during which time parolees may adjust their status by seeking asylum or other immigrant status.

Question. Why is the Administration not doing remote/virtual processing for P-2 refugee-referred Afghans?

Answer. The Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) anticipate conducting both in-person and virtual processing of Afghans referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Once individuals depart Afghanistan and reach a third country where processing is possible, PRM reviews the individual's referral, creates a case for the individual, and assigns the case to the relevant Resettlement Support Center (RSC). Once the case is assigned, USRAP processing—including RSC pre-screening, security checks, USCIS interview and adjudication, medical examination, and resettlement agency placement—takes between 12–18 months. Virtual/remote processing can occur in multiple processing steps including RSC pre-screening and USCIS interview/adjudication.

Question. Is there a way to break up the process to do some in-country screening and then to give a tentative "green light" on their eligibility before having them flee to a third country?

Answer. In-country processing of Afghans referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is not possible at this time since the U.S. Government does not have a physical presence in Afghanistan. As the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) works through the referrals, the Department is emailing Afghans whose referral is complete. Please note that the Department is able to accept referrals for Afghans who are located in Afghanistan, but at this time is unable to begin processing those referrals until the individual departs Afghanistan.

Once referred individuals depart Afghanistan and reach a third country where processing is possible, PRM will create a case for the individual and assign the case to the relevant Resettlement Support Center (RSC). At that time, processing through the USRAP may begin.

Question. What are the P-2 numbers?

Answer. PRM has received 11,469 P-2 referrals for a total of 48,134 individuals, as of November 30, 2021.

Question. Number of total referrals (primary applicants and primary applicants and dependents)?

Answer. PRM has received 29,224 Afghan P-1 and P-2 referrals for principal applicants and 58,042 dependents, as of November 30, 2021.

Question. Number that have begun processing?

Answer. PRM has accepted 2,301 Afghan P-1 and P-2 referrals (10,112 individuals) as complete. PRM has created 119 refugee cases (474 individuals) for Afghans who are in a third country and can begin processing as of November 30, 2021.

Question. Number approved?

Answer. No Afghans referred to the USRAP since August 2021 have yet been approved and resettled to the United States. Generally, USRAP case processing can take between 12–18 months.

Question. What is Consular Affairs doing to expedite the processing of SIV applications?

Answer. The Department continues to expedite SIV applications at every stage of the SIV process, including by transferring cases to other U.S. embassies and consulates around the world where applicants are able to appear. The Department recognizes it is currently extremely difficult for Afghans to obtain a visa to a third country or to find a way to enter a third country, but is developing processing alternatives so the Department can continue to deliver these important consular services for the people of Afghanistan. The Department will also continue to expedite processing of SIV applications at stages of the process that are performed in the United States, such as assessing applicants for Chief of Mission (COM) approval.

Question. Has the Department surged resources and people to review SIV applications?

Answer. The Department quintupled the size of its Chief of Mission (COM) review team from 10 to 50; cross-trained an additional 54 personnel at the National Visa

Center in SIV processing to manage the increased demand; and sent additional officers to Embassy Kabul to assist with visa processing before the suspension of operations in August 2021. Embassies worldwide devoted consular staff to processing SIV applications remotely; our Consulate General in Guangzhou alone processed over 500 SIV applications, paving the way for nearly 1,500 individuals to depart Afghanistan and enter the United States.

Question. And at the current level of personnel and resources, what is the expected processing timeline for SIV applications?

Answer. Processing times vary on a case-by-case basis and have fluctuated throughout 2021 because of shifting resources to surge processing capacity; however, the Department continues to report average processing times in quarterly reports to Congress on the SIV program. As of the FY 2021 Q3 report, total average processing time was 665 days.

Question. Reemployment Opportunities for Afghan Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs): The U.S. Government acted swiftly in relocating many of the State Department's foreign service nationals out of Afghanistan to the United States. Beyond the housing and integration assistance that the United States is providing via non-governmental organizations, how is the Department supporting those who may be interested in continuing their careers with the State Department?

Answer. The Department has provided information to the former Locally Employed Staff from Kabul to find U.S. Government employment opportunities should they wish to continue working with the Department and if their resettlement location allows them to do so. The Department has also identified a number of individuals whose skills are needed immediately and is working on employing them via contract.

Question. Who is leading the Department's efforts to rehire its FSNs, either via contracts or as direct hires?

Answer. Former Locally Employed Staff from Kabul are eligible to apply for vacant U.S. Government positions, provided they have received work authorization, and they have been provided with information on how to find these positions. Given that the resettlement agencies in the Washington Metropolitan Area are oversubscribed, the Department's Bureau of Global Talent Management, in coordination with the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs and the Bureau of Population, Migration and Refugees, is focused on encouraging the Locally Employed Staff to resettle in areas where there are many employment opportunities and where they can receive support.

Question. Fulbright: What actions will the Department take to allow current 2021–2022 Fulbright scholars and other F and J visa holders, like international students and faculty, to remain in the United States after their visas expire?

Answer. The Department of State is committed to supporting the current cohort of 2021–2022 Afghanistan Fulbright students and scholars and their academic success by providing additional monitoring and support for their exchange programs. Regarding the future status of students and scholars after the completion of their programs, however, I would respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security, which is responsible for the status of persons once they have entered the United States.

Question. What plans do the Department have for the future of the Fulbright program in Afghanistan?

Answer. Since 2003, the Department's longstanding commitment to the Afghanistan Fulbright student and scholar programs has resulted in 950 Afghan participants studying in the United States. In 2021, we welcomed the largest cohort to date of degree-seeking Fulbright students (109) at U.S. universities. The Department is committed to supporting these Afghan students' academic success by providing additional monitoring and support. The selection process for FY 2022–2023 Fulbright student program semi-finalists is currently on hold while we address significant safety, logistical, and programmatic constraints. The safety and welfare of Fulbright applicants and participants remains of paramount concern.

Question. Civil Service: The structure of the Department's civil service means that civil service employees lack career mobility tracks. This makes career advancement and professional growth extremely difficult. What steps do you plan to take to enable civil service employees to grow professionally and to advance in their careers, just as foreign service officers can?

Answer. I am committed to listening to the workforce and ensuring we retain high performers by investing in their professional development and strengthening programs that create viable career mobility pathways for those who aspire to reach their full potential. I support efforts such as developing a mobility float program that promotes and fosters continual employee career growth in a variety of ways and incentivizes bureaus to allow their Civil Service employees to participate in professional development opportunities while simultaneously filling gaps when needed, thereby reducing concerns of hiring managers that their mission goals will go unaddressed.

The Department is also looking at next steps in developing a cadre of Civil Service talent development champions and advisors to help guide Civil Service careers, and developing Civil Service career mapping software to help employees explore career paths and build lasting careers with the Department.

Question. State Department/USAID Reorganization, Budget, Leadership: Even with the previous Administration's reform efforts now dead, there are still a great many legitimate questions concerning the relationship of the State Department and USAID—how they coordinate on policy and implementation, how they are run, and how to balance funding they each require to conduct their operations. What are your views on how to improve the relationship between State and USAID?

Answer. When State and USAID partner to advance the President's priorities in defending democracy, mitigating climate change, or ending COVID-19, our relationship is highly complementary. Because our policy priorities drive our resource decisions, I work closely with USAID leadership and rely on the comparative advantages and expertise of each agency. Currently, State and USAID teams are collaboratively developing a Joint Strategic Plan that will articulate shared U.S. Government priorities, goals, and objectives for the next 4 years. Our team at State builds budgets that incorporate USAID's corporate perspective as we ensure the coherence and efficiency of foreign assistance programs across State and USAID. Most important, at our embassies and missions around the world, our teams work closely together, collaborating to integrate diplomatic and development priorities.

Question. Budget: For many years, the Department has faced deep budget cuts, even as the challenges we faced around the world were gathering and growing. And as they say, "if you show me your budget, I'll tell you your priorities." Congress pushed back repeatedly against these proposed cuts in previous years, and I was pleased to see that this Administration's initial budget proposal is seeking to reverse the trend and ensure that we have a robust international affairs budget equal to the challenges American faces on the world stage. What is your view of what an appropriately resourced Function 150 budget and State Department budget looks like?

Answer. The \$58.5 billion FY 2022 request for the Department of State and USAID demonstrates the importance the Administration places on diplomacy, development, and multilateralism and positions the Department to help deliver security and prosperity for the American people. The request meets the climate emergency head-on, strengthens global health, and enables us to defend and advance our democratic values, counter malign activity by our adversaries, and protect the rules-based order we helped to build, including by fully funding our commitments to international organizations and providing robust support for humanitarian assistance.

Question. How do we ensure that "base" funding is restored to the Department after so many years of relying on "OCO" to fill the gaps?

Answer. The \$58.5 billion FY 2022 Request for the Department of State and USAID represents a 10 percent increase above the FY 2021 Estimate. No Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding is requested, but previous OCO-funded activities are included in the request. This budget supports President Biden's bold agenda for strengthening America's place in the world through development and diplomacy and constitutes the largest staffing increase in State/USAID history to address our most pressing diplomatic and development challenges.

Question. Embassy Security: I am interested in your views on managing the Department's personnel security needs. For example, there are competing organizations within State that have overlapping areas of responsibility, including Diplomatic Security and Overseas Building Operations. How do you plan to de-conflict and align the different demands of different organizations inside the Department to assure the security of the Department's personnel?

Answer. The Department's mission to advance U.S. national security interests and the safety of U.S. citizens requires our diplomats to operate around the world in a variety of security environments. Department leadership acknowledges that our

mission entails diverse types of risk and is committed to managing it smartly and appropriately. The Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) is the chair of the inter-agency Overseas Security Policy Board (OSPB), which develops security standards for our facilities abroad to ensure we are able to meet mission objectives while protecting our personnel. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) and DS work together to build facilities to those standards.

Question. State Department Staffing—DRL and PRM: During the Trump administration, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration were hollowed out, and remain understaffed to this day. These bureaus are critical in implementing President Biden's foreign policy agenda and in responding to ongoing crises, including in Afghanistan. What steps are you taking to remove barriers to fully staffing these bureaus as quickly as possible?

Answer. In 2021, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) was approved to add 68 new direct-hire positions and worked to quickly staff these positions utilizing all available recruitment mechanisms. Despite a slow security clearance process as well as unprecedented Afghanistan refugee resettlement operations, PRM has already filled, or is in the process of filling, 46 of the 68 new positions and is actively working to fill the remaining 22 positions.

In 2017, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) had 30 vacant civil service positions as a result of the hiring freeze, which have all been filled. Since 2017, Congress has increased DRL's administrative funding by 50 percent, which allowed the bureau to purchase 21 full-time positions to focus on foreign assistance programs. Most of these positions have now been filled, and continued recruitment remains a DRL priority.

Question. State Department Staffing—Africa Bureau: During your confirmation process, I asked about a September 2020 Inspector General's report that identified \$200 million in potentially wasteful spending on Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership programs due to mismanagement and inadequate oversight from staff in the Africa Bureau caused, in part, by staffing shortages. The report found that the State Department has not appropriately prioritized the Africa Bureau's needs. This neglect appears to extend to overseas postings, where our embassies in Niger and the Central African Republic, among others, lacked key staff for months on end. You pledged to work with the Bureau of African Affairs to ensure it has the resources, including personnel, necessary to meet the Bureau's objectives, and to explore enhancing incentives to serve at hardship posts, including those in Africa. What have you been able to accomplish in your first 6 months?

Answer. In addition to requesting 35 new Foreign Service positions in the FY22 budget for the Bureau of African Affairs, the Department is taking a two-pronged approach to improve both the assignments process as well as incentives to serve at hardship posts, working to correct long-standing system imbalances. One of the approaches under consideration is an additional 10 percent pay incentive for those who are assigned to a Service Needs Differential post for a normal 2-year tour of duty. The Department already increased the number of Special (additional) R&Rs for those at our tougher postings. On assignments, we are working to produce an assignment system which encourages a greater number of FS employees to seek and accept positions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Question. U.S. Mission Iraq continues to operate at reduced capacity due to staffing shortages, security deficits, and U.S. Consulate Basra's persistent closure. This state of affairs impairs the ability of the State Department to advance U.S. interests in Iraq. Ordered Departure Status: When will the Department next make a determination on Embassy Baghdad's ordered departure status?

Answer. The Secretary has been clear that the safety and security of our personnel is the Administration's highest priority, so the Department regularly assesses the security, threats, and health environment in Iraq. Mission Iraq went on Ordered Departure (OD) status effective March 25, 2020. OD for Embassy Baghdad and the Diplomatic Support Center will expire December 14, 2021, and the Department must make a determination whether to extend or end OD by that date.

Question. What is Embassy Baghdad's current position regarding the need for a sustained ordered departure status?

Answer. Discussions on ordered departure status are ongoing as Embassy Baghdad and the Department regularly review the security, threat, and health environment in Iraq.

Question. What exact conditions must be met to pull down ordered departure and restore the Embassy to normal operations?

Answer. The Secretary has been clear that the safety and security of our personnel is the Administration's highest priority, so the Department regularly assesses the security, threats, and health environment in Iraq. To terminate Ordered Departure for Embassy Baghdad and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, the Acting Under Secretary for Management must determine that those conditions support a return to normal operations.

Question. Has Embassy Baghdad's ordered departure status impacted the populations of U.S. contractors and third-country-nationals at post, or only affected U.S. direct hires?

Answer. Embassy Baghdad's ordered departure status has had minimal impact on the populations of U.S. contractors and third-country nationals.

Question. Impact on Embassy Staffing: What staffing increases at U.S. Mission Iraq has the Biden administration implemented since assuming office?

Answer. To date, the Administration has not implemented any staffing increases at U.S. Mission Iraq. The Department of State routinely reviews and adjusts staffing levels at embassies and consulates throughout the world to ensure we have the proper resources to meet our national security objectives. The Department will continue to assess staffing needs and will make necessary staffing adjustments.

That said, Embassy Baghdad had drawn down considerably in anticipation of the first anniversary of the killing of Qassem Soleimani. The personnel affected by that drawdown returned to post in the summer of 2021.

Question. Consular: How many consular officers are currently at Embassy Baghdad and how does this relate to the number of U.S. direct hire consular position bills allotted to Embassy Baghdad?

Answer. Embassy Baghdad's U.S. direct-hire consular positions are appropriately staffed under Ordered Departure status. We can provide a full break-out of our staffing at Embassy Baghdad in a briefing.

Question. What is the impact of reduced manning in Embassy Baghdad's consular section on the provision of American citizens' services and visa processing?

Answer. Embassy Baghdad's reduced staffing numbers have not had significant impact on their ability to process applications because the section has lacked public access since the destruction of the secure consular access point in the attack on the Embassy on December 31, 2019. Since the attack, Embassy Baghdad has issued 1,939 U.S. passports, including 50 emergency passports, mostly for Embassy-affiliated individuals and for emergency cases requiring complex movements outside the Embassy by our local employees. Embassy Baghdad continues to provide limited, but critical emergency services to U.S. citizens and some limited emergency visa services, while all other services in Iraq have been provided on a limited basis by Consulate General Erbil. Immigrant visa applicants may choose to apply at any embassy or consulate in a country to which they can travel. Once the secure consular access point is rebuilt, the Consular team at Embassy Baghdad is prepared to resume providing routine services to the public.

Question. Diplomatic Security: How many diplomatic security officers are currently at post and how does this relate to the number of officers present when Embassy Baghdad is fully staffed? What is the impact on Embassy security of this discrepancy, and how is the mission compensating in their absence?

Answer. The Secretary has been clear that the safety and security of our personnel is the Administration's highest priority. Staffing numbers fluctuate due to regular permanent change of station and rest and recuperation travel, but internal coordination and staggered departure and arrival times ensure all sections, including the Regional Security Office, are appropriately staffed to meet this critical function. For a more detailed answer we are happy to provide a briefing.

Question. Other sections: How many State Department officers are presently supporting the Embassy's political, economic, and pol/mil portfolios from post and how do these numbers relate to normal operations?

Answer. U.S. direct-hire positions in the political, economic, and pol/mil sections are filled pursuant to regular staffing reviews conducted by the Department and the Embassy. We can provide a full break out of our staffing in a briefing.

Question. How, if it all, have reduced manning levels impacted the U.S.-Iraq bilateral relationship?

Answer. The Department has no higher priority than the safety and security of our personnel, and we regularly review the security conditions dictating Mission Iraq's Ordered Departure status. We do not take lightly the decision to maintain reduced in-country staffing levels, but the safety of our people must come first. Although lower in-country staffing levels have undoubtedly strained Mission Iraq, our determined and resourceful diplomats consistently go above and beyond to make outsized contributions to U.S.-Iraq relations. The bilateral partnership is strong, thanks in no small part to these dedicated public servants.

Question. Physical Security: Please provide the status of physical security repairs and facilities upgrades at Embassy Baghdad and the Department's current approach to determining the trajectory of U.S. Consulate Basra's future operations.

Answer. Embassy Baghdad implemented short-term repairs and solutions following the December 31, 2019, and January 1, 2020, attacks. They include guard tower window replacements and an interim Consular screening area. The Department has awarded a contract to restore a Compound Access Control facility to support vehicular traffic and consular activities. Additional long-term solutions will be developed in the coming months.

The Department does not foresee the security situation in southern Iraq improving in a way that would permit resumption of operations at Consulate General Basrah in the coming year.

Question. When did the most recent attacks on Embassy Baghdad, the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, and Consulate Erbil take place?

Answer. In 2021, there have been three indirect fire (IDF) attacks or incidents in the vicinity of U.S. Embassy Baghdad (BEC), most recently on July 29, although this was likely targeting Iraqi officials, and three in the vicinity of the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center (BDSC), most recently on May 2. There have also been three unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) attacks or incidents against the BEC, most recently on July 6; there were two against the BDSC, most recently on June 15. There were no UAS or IDF attacks that targeted Consulate Erbil. By comparison, there were 25 IDF incidents at the BEC and 13 at BDSC in 2020 and no UAS incidents.

Question. What changes in physical security posture and policies have been adopted in response to the December 31, 2019 breach of U.S. Embassy Baghdad?

Answer. Embassy Baghdad has one of the most robust security program of any embassy in the world and the Regional Security Office maintains a very high level of multi-layered security at Embassy Baghdad. Since the breach of December 31, 2019, we have continued to enhance security at the Embassy with additional personnel, physical security, and training. The embassy also continues to partner with the U.S. military to employ a DoD Security Force at the Embassy compound and has also employed enhanced countermeasures to protect against indirect fire and unmanned aerial systems.

Question. Does the Department anticipate a potential threat to the Embassy's physical security pertaining to the December 31, 2021 deadline for withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraq? If so, what contingency plans have been developed to address this potential threat?

Answer. Militia groups aligned with Iran have been very vocal about their desire for U.S. forces to depart Iraq by the December 31 "deadline," when U.S. forces are slated to be fulfilling only an "advise and assist" role, and not a combat mission. Following December 31, while militias will likely focus their attacks on military targets, it is possible that militias could resume targeting diplomatic facilities in Baghdad, should they deem their efforts against the military presence to be ineffective or the political landscape to be unfavorable to their continued desire for power. Contingency plans and procedures to mitigate these potential threats are continually developed and refined in coordination with DoD.

RESPONSES OF DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE BRIAN McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES RISCH

Question. Is State Department leadership sharing information on Anomalous Health Incidents (AHIs) with U.S. missions, including RSOs and medical unit personnel? Does that information include information on AHIs at other posts?

Answer. Yes, State Department leadership is sharing information on AHIs with U.S. missions, including Regional Security Officers (RSOs) and medical unit personnel. We have released multiple communications to Department personnel and

posts, offering guidance and support, that underscore reporting protocols, share the latest updates and knowledge on the Department's standardized response to posts who report possible AHIs, and reinforce the Health Incident Response Task Force's (HIRTF) significant role as the primary source for AHI-related materials including support from Washington, press engagements, and foreign engagements.

Question. What is the role of the RSO and medical personnel at posts in working with those affected?

Answer. The RSO guides those affected through the process of reporting the incident and sets up an interview to complete a health incident questionnaire and consent form. The Health Unit (HU) conducts a medical assessment and may complete a Triage Tool as deemed clinically necessary. The HU provider works with the MED Health Alert Response Team (HART) to determine next steps in appropriate care, including MEDEVAC when needed. RSO and medical personnel at posts treat every report seriously, objectively, and with sensitivity. There is no higher priority for me than the health, safety, and security of our personnel and family members serving domestically and overseas.

Question. What is the medevac policy for AHI victims?

Answer. The Bureau of Medical Services ensures that timely medevac support is available as needed based on a comprehensive clinical assessment. We recently secured a contract with Johns Hopkins University Hospital, which serves as a focal point for the network of top-tier centers of excellence where employees and eligible family members who have reported an AHI overseas have received care.

Question. Are you sharing information and updates on AHIs with victims groups?

Answer. Yes, we are. The Secretary, the new Coordinator for HIRTF, Ambassador Jonathan Moore, new Senior Care Coordinator Ambassador Margaret Uyehara, along with other members of HIRTF, held a video teleconference that I initiated with affected employees and family members on November 23, 2021, not only to share information and give updates, but also to answer questions from the community. It was my fourth bi-monthly meeting with this group and the second such meeting for the Secretary. I have also directed the release of multiple ALDAC cables relaying information about the Department's response, and we proactively contact Posts that have reported possible AHIs to assure speedy care and response for those affected.

Question. Are those affected by AHIs considered "victims" by the Department?

Answer. The Department's investigation surrounding these incidents is a fact-based mission. At this time, we lack evidence to declare exactly what or who is causing these incidents. There are many theories on the cause of these incidents, and whether they may be attributed to a foreign actor. What is certain, however, is that the experiences and symptoms of our affected employees are real. They cannot and should not be diminished.

Question. Has the Department been working to provide victims the same benefits as victims from other government agencies? Are there certain benefits that have been provided by other government agencies that the Department has decided not to provide?

Answer. We are currently working in collaboration with the interagency to ensure we proceed in lockstep with respect to those benefits provided to affected employees. Within the Department, I have convened a working group composed of representatives from the HIRTF, the Bureau of Administration, and regional executive directors, to address broader issues, such as information disclosure and housing, to ensure better and more consistent support for posts grappling with this challenging issue.

Question. Is the Department requiring locally employed staff to be vaccinated?

Answer. Post policies on vaccination for Locally Employed (LE) Staff will depend on local law. The Department will not mandate vaccination for LE staff where such a requirement would violate laws in the host country.

Question. In places where local laws may prohibit vaccine requirements for locally employed staff, is the Department considering alternatives to vaccine requirements that would encourage locally employed staff to get vaccinated? If yes, what alternatives?

Answer. All LE Staff are encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccination and may contact their post Health Unit with questions about the COVID-19 vaccination or to schedule an appointment to be vaccinated. Around the world, our LE Staff have had a very high vaccine uptake.

Question. In places where local laws may prohibit vaccine requirements, is the Department aware of other foreign missions that have required (or plan to require) their locally employed staff be vaccinated?

Answer. We are not aware of such instances.

Question. Restrictive security measures imposed by the State Department often keep our brave diplomats from leaving the walls of their embassy or consulate compounds, hampering their ability to interact with host government officials and locals. While it is important to keep our personnel safe, effective diplomacy cannot be conducted behind the walls of a fortress. Since being confirmed, what concrete steps have you taken to improve this situation? What steps do you intend to take in order to provide better access to our diplomats outside of embassy walls?

Answer. While our data shows that over 95 percent of movement requests are approved and undertaken at our high threat/high risk diplomatic missions alone, I agree that the Department must balance the essential need to protect our people with the need to engage our partners and publics around the world to advance U.S. interests. I have reviewed the American Academy for Diplomacy's study and, under Secretary Blinken, finalized the Department's internal "Operational Security Panel" assessment and report. These, combined with draft legislation in Congress revising the current Accountability Review Board process, provide a roadmap for the Department with regards to potential legislative, internal processes, and organizational culture changes to ensure we aggressively, but smartly, pursue our national security interests.

Question. How much input do regional bureaus have into the site selection and current and future needs assessments of a new embassy compound or new consulate compound?

Answer. The site selection and acquisition for each new embassy and consulate project spans many years with constant touch points with the regional bureaus in the form of memos, briefings, trips, and Congressional notifications. Similarly, for the needs assessment, posts and regional bureaus are continuously consulted during the planning phase. Initially, a multi-disciplinary team from the Bureaus of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) and Diplomatic Security and a post representative scores every site under consideration. The regional bureaus typically clear on a minimum of two action memos advanced for the OBO Director's approval as well as on the site acquisition Congressional notification (CN).

Question. How many SECCA waiver requests did the Department issue in FY2020? How many waiver requests did the Department deny? Would you provide me with a list of the waiver requests that were denied?

Answer. The Department issued nine SECCA waivers in FY 2020. There were no formal requests for SECCA waivers in FY 2020 that were denied.

Question. Would you provide me with the recently completed Overseas Security Panel review led by AMB Bass?

Answer. The State Department's mission to advance U.S. interests and to protect the safety of U.S. citizens requires our diplomats to operate around the world in a variety of security environments. The Operational Security Panel (OSP) evaluated existing policies, processes, and legislation as they impact our ability to adjust our presence quickly and cost-effectively in response to challenges and opportunities. The OSP report and its recommendations were shared with our oversight committees in December.

Question. On March 12, my staff requested feedback from the Department on my Diplomatic Support and Security Act. I still have not received any Department comments on the legislation. Given that I introduced it months ago, the time for Department input has long passed. However, is this the type of wait I should expect on requests for comment in the future?

Answer. I was briefed on your and Senator Murphy's bills, which were both referred to the Committee on ARB reform earlier this year, and I want to assure you we share many of the bills' sentiments and concerns, such that the bills may provide a starting point for a dialogue on updates to the ARB. While we continue to review the bills and their potential impact, I note that while we are in agreement on the broader goal of updating the process, we would urge that if legislation were to proceed, it should preserve maximum flexibility for the Secretary to operate with agility. Flexible authorities could advance important U.S. national security priorities and U.S. foreign policy, while considering the Department's security priorities. My team looks forward to an opportunity to engage with you and your team as the bill proceeds.

Question. In order to create and continue employee excellence at the Department, accurate and direct employee evaluation reports (EERs) for Foreign Service Officers are imperative, though often lacking. Do you believe that it is important to provide employees with accurate, constructive feedback on their performances in order to encourage improvement and reward those who most succeed in their roles?

Answer. The Department believes it is imperative to provide employees with constructive and robust feedback through the Employee Evaluation System. The Department strongly encourages Foreign Service employees at all grades to complete an Employee Evaluation Report (EER), Form DS-5055, to account for their performance during a rating cycle, demonstrate they have the potential to perform at a higher grade, and identify areas of improvement that can be addressed in the upcoming rating cycle. Additionally, the Department requires that supervisors and employees communicate through multiple performance counseling sessions over the course of an evaluation period and maintain a continuous dialogue to ensure employees have the information and guidance they need to succeed and excel.

Question. What is the Department doing to support and encourage clear, accurate, and direct feedback to employees in order to improve performance and reward high achievers?

Answer. The Department and the Bureau of Global Talent Management strive for transparency with employees of all grades throughout the Foreign Service and Civil Service evaluation processes. For example, Foreign Service Selection Boards provide feedback to rated employees, raters, and review panel chairs through counseling, criticism, and commendation letters. The Office of Performance Evaluation is conducting a Performance Management Reform review to improve the Foreign Service evaluation process and the decision criteria for tenure and promotion; this will enhance clarity of requirements and expectations within the promotion and performance management process, increase transparency, and reduce bias. We are undertaking similar efforts in our Civil Service Performance Evaluation process. High achievers, both Civil Service and Foreign Service, are rewarded through Meritorious and Quality Step Increases, Performance Pay, Presidential Rank Awards, and a variety of Department and Bureau recognition awards.

Question. If the Department were given a “training float” (as you noted in your testimony), how would the Department use it? What specific types of training or professional development would a training allow?

Answer. If enacted, a training float would allow more employees to participate in meaningful professional development opportunities, including long-term education and training, developmental rotations, domestic and overseas TDYs, and details. It would also allow the Department to explore additional education, learning, training, professional development and partnership opportunities with other USG agencies, local governments, and the private sector. These full-time professional development training/backfill positions would incentivize supervisors to empower employees to take advantage of these opportunities and support bureaus experiencing staffing gaps when employees are pursuing long-term career development opportunities.

Question. Should the Department move towards a greater emphasis on professional development training (e.g., leadership training) in the Foreign Service? If yes, should this training occur at specific points of an officer’s career?

Answer. The Department recognizes the value of professional development for Foreign Service Officers. In addition to the leadership courses at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), completion of which are required at specific points of an officer’s career for consideration for promotion at the mid and senior levels, FSI is currently designing professional skills training for mid-level employees to strengthen their analytical, communication, and advocacy skills. Officers at the mid and senior levels may also participate in external training at many academic institutions and military war colleges, as well as in detail assignments that broaden professional skills. We continue to grow both the number and breadth of these types of opportunities.

Question. Do you support the Department’s best and brightest Foreign Service Officers participating in interagency details? If yes, how is the Department encouraging these details, which are often not viewed as career advancing?

Answer. We have long supported detailing Foreign Service Officers throughout the interagency and recognize these assignments as significant opportunities for professional growth. The skills and experience developed in such positions help our FSOs to lead in the interagency environment. To ensure that these positions are widely advertised, the Department offers a distinct cycle to highlight all interagency details.

Question. Do you support the Department's best and brightest Foreign Service Officers participating in congressional fellowships? If yes, how is the Department encouraging these fellowships, which are often not viewed as career advancing?

Answer. Congressional fellowships are one of the most highly competitive assignments for Foreign Service Officers (FSOs). Each year the Department selects at least 20 of our best FSOs for assignments as Pearson Fellows in Congressional offices. These are considered outstanding opportunities for improved communication with, and a better understanding of, Congress. To build upon these fellowships, we've approved a pilot to expand the program to include an immediate assignment in our Bureau of Legislative Affairs following the year with Congress. This will continue to strengthen the skills of FSOs as they promote strong communication between the Department and Congress. We have similar programs and numbers for Civil Service Congressional Fellowships.

Question. At the outset of the pandemic, the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) took the proactive step of holding weekly congressional outreach meetings with senior Bureau officials. These weekly meetings have provided Congress with the information necessary to provide extraordinary funding and authorities to CA during its budget crisis created by the pandemic. While both the pandemic and CA's enormous budget issues remain, the weekly congressional outreach has stopped. Do you pledge to continue CA's weekly congressional staff calls?

Answer. In March 2020, the Bureau of Consular Affairs proactively began to hold weekly congressional outreach calls with senior committee staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the Senate and House Appropriations Committees with a focus on COVID repatriation efforts. The calls moved to a biweekly schedule later in 2020 and turned to broader consular issues. While these meetings have been cancelled occasionally due to scheduling conflicts, and for a period while the bureau focused on Afghanistan, we have returned to a regular schedule of Thursday calls, usually occurring biweekly. The Bureau of Consular Affairs finds these calls a valuable way to communicate consular issues to Congress and is fully committed to continuing them.

Question. The military takeover in Sudan this week, just hours following the departure of Special Envoy Feltman, further highlighted the lack of a full-time, high-level diplomatic presence for the United States in Khartoum. The coming weeks and months will be critical for the U.S./Sudan relationship. Is the naming of a nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Sudan a priority for the State Department? If yes, what are you doing to identify a qualified and experienced candidate and expedite their nomination with the White House? If no, why?

Answer. The naming of a nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Sudan is a priority for the State Department. We are working closely with the White House to ensure that a qualified and experienced candidate is nominated at the earliest possible opportunity.

Question. In the Questions for the Record for your nomination hearing in March, I raised the issue of chronic challenges with staffing the Africa Bureau, which you acknowledged and committed to exploring ways to remedy. You have now been in your position of Deputy Secretary of State for 6 months. What actions have you taken to address the staffing challenges faced by the Africa Bureau?

Answer. In addition to requesting 35 new Foreign Service positions in the FY 2022 budget for the Bureau of African Affairs, to correct long-standing system imbalances we are taking a two-pronged approach to improve both the assignments process as well as incentives to serve at hardship posts. One of the approaches under consideration is an additional 10 percent pay incentive for those who are assigned to a Service Needs Differential post for a normal 2-year tour of duty. We already increased the number of Special (additional) R&Rs for those at our tougher postings. On assignments, we are working to produce an assignment system which encourages a greater number of FS employees to seek and accept positions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Question. Burundi: In a briefing by the Office of the United States Trade Representative held with SFRC staff on Monday October 25, 2021, we were informed that Burundi will be receiving a benchmarking letter to outline a path toward its eligibility for trade preferences under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The justification for this positive step forward with Burundi was Burundi's "good election last year." President Ndayishimiye was also described as a "Tshisekedi-like figure" who was eager for a better relationship with the United States. My staff was informed that this decision was made in coordination with the Department of State. Do you agree with this assessment?

Answer. Since his election, President Ndayishimiye has undertaken reforms across multiple sectors and reengaged with the international community. While remaining cautious, we believe it is important to react positively to these actions to support the trajectory of reforms, which is in line with U.S. interest and years-long advocacy, while continuing to press the Government of Burundi to improve the human rights situation. If the Government of Burundi continues to make progress on meeting the AGOA eligibility criteria and refrains from engaging in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights, we will work with USTR and the interagency to assess whether Burundi is eligible for reinstatement in 2023.

Question. What are you doing to strengthen the U.S. Foreign Service's Economic Corps as well as civil servants to ensure we are better postured to compete economically with China? Please be specific.

Answer. We are working to ensure the Foreign Service and Civil Service have the resources—including sufficient personnel—and support they need to ensure U.S. businesses are positioned to compete and win on a global stage, and to confront the PRC's economic abuses. The State Department is focused on attracting highly qualified and diverse Economic Officers for the Foreign Service and Civil Service. We are strengthening our training and professional development in economic tradecraft, infrastructure, investment, commercial diplomacy, export controls, and sanctions. We have 19 Regional China Officers at posts around the world to help address the increasingly global nature of the challenges posed by the PRC, and we also recently created the Regional Technology Officers program to better position the United States to compete on technology issues.

Question. You mentioned during the hearing that EAP will receive the greatest plus-up in personnel numbers in future budget requests. Please provide specific projected increases.

Answer. Our FY 2022 request includes an increase of 30 new positions for EAP, nearly all for new Foreign Service positions overseas. The new political, economic, and public diplomacy officer positions will increase the Department's ability to combat undue influence throughout the region; strengthen U.S. diplomatic, economic, and security engagement; and counter the perception that the U.S. lacks staying power. Once finalized, I look forward to discussing our FY 2023 request, which will continue our focus on supporting the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Question. In his public comments, President Biden indicated the U.S. struck a deal with the Taliban for Kabul evacuations and continued evacuations after 31 August. Specifically, what was agreed to between the U.S. and the Taliban with respect to the evacuation of U.S. citizens and vulnerable Afghan allies?

Answer. The United States communicated with the Taliban on matters of important U.S. operational interests, including the departure of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents from Afghanistan. As part of this communication, the Taliban altered their actions in ways that allowed us to continue to facilitate the departure of U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents, and our Afghan allies.

Question. Section 1217 of the NDAA FY 2021 requires that the Administration transmit any agreement or arrangement with the Taliban to Congress within 5 days. Why has the State Department not provided Congress any such agreement or arrangement as required by law?

Answer. The Department remains committed to keeping Congress informed of any agreement or arrangement with the Taliban subsequent to the February 29, 2020, U.S.-Taliban Agreement, as well as materials relevant to such agreement or arrangement, consistent with section 1217(b)(2) of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (P.L. 116-283), which the Department has identified and is under the purview of the State Department.

Question. Do you commit to providing Congress any agreement or arrangement, and relevant materials, made between the U.S. and the Taliban since August 14?

Answer. The Department remains committed to keeping Congress informed of any agreement or arrangement with the Taliban subsequent to the February 29, 2020, U.S.-Taliban Agreement, as well as materials relevant to such agreement or arrangement, consistent with section 1217(b)(2) of the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (P.L. 116-283), which the Department has identified and is under the purview of the State Department.

Question. Section 1215 of the NDAA FY 2021 restricts funding for the Department of Defense for any activity to reduce force levels below both 4,000 and 2,000, until DoD submits a report to Congress or the President provides a written waiver. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, troop levels again exceeded 4,000 on the ground.

Why has Congress not received either the required report or written waiver as mandated by law?

Answer. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Defense.

Question. President Biden previously said the United States “will not conduct a hasty rush to exit. We’ll do it responsibly deliberately and safely. And we will do it in full coordination with our allies and partners.” However, scenes from the U.S.-led evacuation effort based out of Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA) suggested anything but a responsible, deliberate, and safe exit. Can you elaborate on the scale of forward planning?

Answer. The safety and security of U.S. citizens, U.S. Government personnel, and their dependents are the highest Department priority. U.S. Embassy Kabul completed an annual Crisis Management Exercise in December 2020 to prepare for a potential large-scale Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO). U.S. Embassy Kabul and various Department of State offices participated with the interagency in NEO planning discussions throughout the spring and summer of 2021. Planning efforts included a range of evacuation scenarios. U.S. Embassy Kabul worked closely with U.S. Forces-Afghanistan to ensure close coordination with the U.S. military on the ground in Afghanistan, and with U.S. Forces based in the region.

Question. What contingencies were put in place in the wake of President Biden’s April announcement that the United States would withdraw all forces by September 11, 2021?

Answer. The Department of State engaged in contingency planning for a range of scenarios. The planning scenarios were based on a range of potential security conditions on the ground and a declining level of mission functions. The scenarios assumed reduced embassy footprints while maintaining core mission functions under various scenarios. Planning continued following the change in Administration in January 2021.

Question. How many U.S. citizens are currently in Afghanistan? Please address how many total U.S. citizens are in Afghanistan, independent of how many may have indicated at some point an interest in staying in Afghanistan. Of the persons evacuated from Afghanistan in August, how many are U.S. citizens?

Answer. As of the conclusion of noncombatant evacuation operations, the United States facilitated the evacuation or relocation of over 124,000 individuals, including nearly 6,000 U.S. citizens, through Kabul International Airport. Since August 31, and as of December 13, the Department has directly assisted in the departure of 479 U.S. citizens from Afghanistan. As of December 13, there are a few dozen U.S. citizens who have requested assistance with departure and are ready to depart. As of December 13, there are an additional 144 U.S. citizens in Afghanistan with whom we are in contact but who are not yet ready to depart. We are prepared to help them depart Afghanistan if and when they are ready to do so. Additionally, this number fluctuates depending on those who have made their presence in Afghanistan known to the Department, whether through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program enrollment or other direct or indirect communication; expressed a desire for departure assistance; or have returned to Afghanistan and are again requesting assistance. Most U.S. citizens still in Afghanistan are there because they do not wish to leave non-U.S. citizen extended family members.

Question. How many are U.S. legal permanent residents?

Answer. LPRs are not required to register their location with the Department of State. As a result, we are unable to determine the number of LPRs in Afghanistan or any other given country. Since August 31, and as of December 13, however, we have directly assisted the departure of 450 LPRs from Afghanistan.

Question. How many are Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants?

Answer. We estimate that more than 40 percent of the Afghans who we are admitting through Operation Allies Welcome are SIV eligible, some of whom were already in the SIV pipeline. Others are eligible but never applied. Additionally, many of the Afghans are family members of U.S. citizens and Green Card Holders (i.e., Lawful Permanent Residents), or they worked in careers that put them at risk, including as journalists, human rights activists, and humanitarian aid workers or for the former Afghan Government.

Question. How many SIV applicants remain in the pipeline and what is the plan for processing their respective applications moving forward?

Answer. The SIV application pipeline continues to grow as prospective applicants inquire about the SIV program and submit new applications for Chief of Mission

(COM) approval, which determines threshold SIV employment qualifications. As of December 7, there were more than 41,000 principal applicants in the SIV pipeline. Most of these applicants, approximately 32,000, are in the pre-COM approval stage pending applicant action to submit a complete SIV application. Once that step is taken, a large portion of the ensuing SIV process takes place in the United States.

As a result of the resources the Biden-Harris administration has surged into the SIV program and the steps we have taken to significantly increase staffing and eliminate redundancies, we are continuing to expedite processing at these stages. We have reduced processing times for the SIV program by more than 50 percent since taking office and have substantially increased the number of SIVs being issued. This year alone, the State Department has issued more than 8,200 SIVs. Additionally, SIV applicants who have reached the interview stage may request to transfer their case to any immigrant visa processing U.S. embassy or consulate to which they are able to travel.

Question. How many SIV applications did the Department process between April 2021 and August 2021? Specifically, what steps has the Department taken to streamline the process since President Biden took office in January 2021?

Answer. The Department submits SIV issuance data to Congress through fiscal year (FY) quarterly reports, which are also posted publicly on travel.state.gov. According to the FY 2021 Q3 report, from April 1 through June 30, the Department issued SIVs to 615 principal applicants and 1,975 derivative applicants. The Department of State has issued more than 8,200 SIVs since January 20 and continues to process SIV applications daily. (The Q4 report has not yet been released.)

We continue to look for ways to streamline the application process for SIVs and have already made significant changes make the program more efficient. Since January 2021, we have reduced processing times for the program by more than 50 percent and the Department increased total staff dedicated to SIV processing at the National Visa Center and quintupled staff on the team reviewing applications for COM approval. Before the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul, the Department sent 26 additional consular staff to support SIV processing. After enactment of the Emergency Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021, the Secretary exercised his joint authority with the Secretary of Homeland Security to issue medical exam waivers for certain SIV applicants in Afghanistan. To further expedite processing, during Operation Allies Refuge, the Department issued foil-free electronic visas to SIV applicants ready for visa issuance traveling on U.S. chartered flights. The Department also recommended to DoD that they legally verify applicant employment and provide letters of recommendation required by statute, leading the DoD to set up Project Rabbit, which has expedited employment verification, a significant barrier for many applicants.

Question. What is the U.S. plan for evacuating U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and SIV applicants from Afghanistan? Has there been any process in State's efforts to work with the Taliban to define appropriate travel documentations?

Answer. Since August 31, the Department continues facilitating the departures of U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents, and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders. The Department is continuing to facilitate the departure of Afghans affiliated with the U.S. Government, specifically our locally engaged staff and SIV holders. The Taliban and other countries that receive travelers from Afghanistan continue to require proper travel documents such as passports and visas.

Question. Are you aware of reports of evacuated Afghans "walking off" of U.S. bases without completing proper vetting/medical measures and screenings? Please explain why you believe this is happening.

Answer. Afghans who have departed the safe havens were vetted prior to arrival in the United States and underwent additional screening at the Port of Entry. They are required to receive critical vaccinations as a condition of their humanitarian parole.

The vast majority of Afghans who have joined communities across the United States received initial resettlement assistance from resettlement agencies. The remaining number were Afghans with close ties in the United States who did not require resettlement agency support in finding housing in a new community, although many may access longer-term resettlement assistance. That is because they had strong support networks, such as U.S. citizen family members or friends, and chose to leave the safe havens to begin their new lives in the United States, consistent with the terms of their humanitarian parole.

Question. What documentation providing proof of identity did the Department deem was sufficient for Afghan refugees transiting into the United States?

Answer. We respectfully refer this question, regarding documentation at U.S. ports of entry, to the Department of Homeland Security.

Question. The private sector and NGOs continue to seek opportunities through private charter flights and other means of evacuation for groups of Afghans, but are continuously being met with substantive bureaucratic obstacles. Can you please elaborate why the U.S. Department of State is inhibiting private entities from allowing chartered flights to evacuate at-risk Afghans?

Answer. Operation Allies Welcome is a historic endeavor. We appreciate the desire and willingness of non-governmental organizations and private citizens to assist and are grateful to our governmental and NGO partners as we continue to improve our coordination. The Department reviews requests to support privately organized flights on a case-by-case basis. This support involves evaluating the passenger manifest provided to us by the private group or groups organizing these flights to determine which proposed passengers, if any, are potentially eligible for permanent resettlement in the United States. There have been significant challenges with some of these privately organized flights. Without personnel on the ground to ensure the fidelity of the intended manifests, there is no ability to determine whether the passengers aboard the plane would be eligible for relocation or resettlement in the United States.

Question. Please provide a plan that will facilitate these flights and necessary clearances for remaining American Citizens, SIV holders, Legal Permanent Residents, and other at-risk populations to be evacuated in a timely manner.

Answer. The Department continues to focus on supporting departures, including for U.S. citizens, LPRs, and SIV holders. Locally Employed Staff and SIV applicants who have Chief of Mission approval and their qualifying relatives are also eligible for relocation and resettlement assistance through Operation Allies Welcome. We are also focused on family reunifications, particularly those separated during the NEO, and unaccompanied minors. Although we expect winter will impinge on Kabul Airport's ability to function reliably, we hope to bring out 2,000 people per month, including 1,000 SIV holders and post-COM SIV applicants, each month through at least September 1, 2022, consistent with the Memorandum of Understanding Between the United States of America and the State of Qatar of Cooperation in Temporary Hosting of Individuals at Risk Due to the Situation in Afghanistan. This MOU was signed by Secretary Blinken and Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani and entered into force on November 12. It formalized the U.S.-Qatar partnership to facilitate the travel of Afghans who are at risk as a result of the situation in Afghanistan and serve as a transit point for eligible Afghans as they complete their SIV application process. This MOU has been reported and provided to Congress under the Case Act.

Question. U.S. Service Members have family members still stuck in Afghanistan. They are getting little to no help or guidance on evacuations from the Departments of Defense or State. What is the Department doing to facilitate the immediate evacuation of family members of U.S. service members?

Answer. The Department of State continues to work with U.S. service members who alerted us of their immediate relatives in need of relocation assistance. The Department is also working closely with the DoD for those service members who still have immediate relatives in Afghanistan.

Question. There has been great inconsistency regarding the reporting of American Citizens still left in Afghanistan. At your hearing, you said that "around 400 Americans" were still in Afghanistan with "225 ready to leave." At the end of the non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO), Congress was routinely told there were only "100 or so" Americans left in Afghanistan. Please explain this discrepancy.

Answer. The number of U.S. citizens of whom the Department of State is aware is in Afghanistan fluctuates depending on those who have made their presence in Afghanistan known to the Department, whether through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program enrollment or other direct or indirect communication; expressed a desire for departure assistance; or have returned to Afghanistan and are again requesting assistance. As of December 13, there are a few dozen U.S. citizens who have requested assistance with departure and are ready to depart. Most U.S. citizens still in Afghanistan are there because they do not wish to leave non-U.S. citizen extended family members. As of December 13, there are an additional 144 U.S. citizens in Afghanistan with whom we are in contact but who are not yet ready to depart. We are prepared to help them depart Afghanistan if and when they are ready to do so.

Question. Please explain why the Administration insisted on using the “100” figure for over 2 months and why it was not until October 26th that the number skyrocketed to 400.

Answer. As Secretary Blinken said on August 30, *“If an American in Afghanistan tells us that they want to stay for now, and then in a week or a month or a year they reach out and say, ‘I’ve changed my mind,’ we will help them leave.”* That has happened as an additional number of U.S. citizens have now come forward and said we do want to leave.

Others have come forward who had not previously made their presence in Afghanistan known to the Department of State. U.S. citizens are not required to register their location when they enter the country, so the information we have is dependent upon those U.S. citizens who decide to self-report their presence either through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program or other communications. Additionally, some U.S. citizens have returned to Afghanistan and are again requesting assistance.

Question. How many of the following remain in Afghanistan: American Citizens?

Answer. As of December 13, there are a few dozen U.S. citizens who have requested assistance with departure and are ready to depart. Additionally, this number fluctuates depending on those who have made their presence in Afghanistan known to the Department, whether through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program or other direct or indirect communications; expressed a desire for departure assistance; or have returned to Afghanistan and are again requesting assistance. Most U.S. citizens still in Afghanistan are there because they do not wish to leave non-U.S. citizen extended family members. As of December 13, there are an additional 144 U.S. citizens in Afghanistan with whom we are in contact but who are not yet ready to depart. We are prepared to help them depart Afghanistan, if and when they are ready to do so.

Question. How many of the following remain in Afghanistan: Legal Permanent Residents?

Answer. Since August 31, and as of December 13, we have directly assisted the departure of 450 Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) from Afghanistan. We do not have a figure for how many LPRs have departed overall. LPRs are not required to register their location with the Department of State. As a result, we are unable to determine the number of LPRs in Afghanistan or any other given country.

Question. How many of the following remain in Afghanistan: Special Issuance Visa (SIV) holders?

Answer. More than half of the foiled SIV holders in Afghanistan have departed via USG support, and we are actively assisting those SIV holders who remain in Afghanistan, of which there are several hundred.

Question. How many of the following remain in Afghanistan: SIV Applicants?

Answer. We cannot offer an exact number of SIV holders and SIV applicants in Afghanistan, as some have already departed Afghanistan independent of our assistance, some were relocated and are in the United States, and some have not responded to our attempts to contact them.

As of November 23, we estimate that more than 32,000 SIV principal applicants and derivatives who have received Chief of Mission (COM) approval remain in Afghanistan, the first step in the SIV application process where the applicant demonstrates they meet threshold employment requirements, as well more than as 32,000 SIV principal applicants and an undetermined number of derivatives still preparing their applications for COM approval or awaiting a COM decision.

Question. How many of the following remain in Afghanistan: Locally Employed Staff?

Answer. A small number of Locally Employed Staff chose not to be relocated in August. We remain in close contact with them to provide ongoing support. We also continue to work with contracting companies who had Afghan employees working at the Embassy to relocate those employees.

Question. How many U.S. taxpayer dollars have funded Operation Allies Welcome and will continue to fund the resettlement efforts as spearheaded by the Departments of State and Defense?

Answer. As of October 13, 2021, the Department has obligated \$689.9 million in support of Operation Allies Welcome and related Afghanistan efforts, primarily involving relocation and resettlement of individuals at risk as a result of the situation in Afghanistan.

I respectfully refer you to the Department of Defense and other agencies for details regarding their funding of Operation Allies Welcome.

Question. Were you ever made aware of any evacuation plans before the fall of Kabul? If so, when were they developed? Did they account for evacuations of every American Citizen and the necessary steps to ensure proper safety precautions for doing so?

Answer. The Department of State engaged in prudent contingency planning with interagency partners for a range of scenarios. The planning scenarios were based on a range of potential security conditions on the ground and planned for a reduction in the Embassy footprint while maintaining core mission functions under various scenarios, including a scenario that planned for suspending operations at the Embassy.

Question. What vetting measures are in place at the “lily pads” abroad before final resettlement in the United States?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security is the lead agency on security vetting and screening before travelers are admitted into the United States. I respectfully refer you to DHS.

Question. The United States evacuated Afghan nationals to various U.S. military bases around the world, including some in the continental United States. How long will the U.S. bases house refugees?

Answer. Departments and agencies, under the leadership of the Department of Homeland Security, continue to work to resettle Afghan guests as quickly, safely, and securely as possible. Processing time on safe havens may vary depending on arrival time at the base; the time necessary to complete health assessments and to address any medical issues that arise; and how long it takes to complete the necessary administrative steps to apply for work authorization. Travel availability to their final destination and the absorptive capacity of local communities may affect the amount of time people will spend on the base. We are working with resettlement agencies to ensure Afghans can reach their new communities as soon as possible.

Question. What happens to an Afghan national if they “fail” security vetting while overseas? Where does that individual go and what are next steps?

Answer. I defer to the Department of Homeland Security regarding any more specific information on the screening and ports of entry process.

Question. During the evacuation the U.S. Government used the Dulles Expo center as a place to screen arrivals from Afghanistan. How many State Department staff worked at the Dulles Expo center?

Answer. Approximately 733 personnel from the Department of State staffed the Dulles Expo Center, providing 24/7 coverage, throughout the facility’s use as a port of entry for arrivals from Afghanistan.

Question. How much money did the State Department spend in order to operate the Dulles Expo Center?

Answer. Outside of the funding authorized by the President for Operation Allies Welcome and related expenses, the Department does not have a specific breakout for costs and expenses attributable to the Dulles Expo Center at this time.

Question. Under what authorities and with what funding was State operating the refugee intake centers at the Dulles Expo Center and in Philadelphia? What other agencies have contributed or are contributing funding?

Answer. The Department of State provided support for individuals relocated from Afghanistan at the ports of entry at the Dulles Expo Center and in Philadelphia using Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) Funds appropriated to carry out section 2(c) of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 (MRAA). On July 23, the President authorized the use of \$100 million in ERMA funds to meet the unexpected urgent refugee and migration needs of refugees, victims of conflict, and other persons at-risk as a result of the situation in Afghanistan, including applicants for SIV visas, and he authorized an additional \$500 million in ERMA funds for the same purpose on August 16. On October 22, the President authorized the use of \$976.1 million in ERMA funds to meet unexpected urgent refugee and migration needs to support Operation Allies Welcome and related efforts by the Department of State, including additional relocation of individuals at risk as a result of the situation in Afghanistan and related expenses. Other agencies supporting this effort, including USAID, DoD, DHS, HHS, and Peace Corps, are also relying on funding and authorities that may be available to these agencies for this purpose,

including, as necessary, the drawdown directed under section 506(a)(2) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

Question. Why was State, which does not handle domestic immigration or law enforcement, playing a leading role in a domestic intake facility for Afghans attempting to immigrate to the United States as refugees or visa holders?

Answer. The Department of State provided support for individuals relocated from Afghanistan at the ports of entry at the Dulles Expo Center and in Philadelphia using Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) Funds appropriated to carry out section 2(c) of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 (MRAA), which authorizes the President, when he determines it to be important to the national interest, to furnish assistance to meet unexpected urgent refugee and migration needs. The Department acted as part of a whole-of-government effort, alongside significant and vital roles played by the Department of Homeland Security, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Department of Health and Human Services, which ensured vaccination requirements were enforced and unaccompanied minors were cared for appropriately. U.S. federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies played similarly vital roles in close coordination with Customs and Border Protection in the screening and vetting of Afghan arrivals.

For more information, I refer you to the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Question. Approximately how many of the Afghans processed through Dulles/Philadelphia have no identifiable connection to the U.S. Government?

Answer. The decision on admission category—U.S. Citizen, Lawful Permanent Resident, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holder, or other category—for any individuals arriving to the United States, including Afghans who were relocated from overseas as a part of OAW, resides with the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection. The Department of Homeland Security, as the lead agency for Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), is in the best position to provide the most accurate breakdown of the various admissions categories of Afghans relocated as a part of OAW.

Question. How many Afghans are believed to have left the Dulles facility without authorization?

Answer. A small number of Afghans (approximately 242, or 0.68 percent of all arrivals to Dulles under the airlift) chose to depart from Dulles with close family, friends, or an employer without any initial resettlement assistance or heading to safe havens to receive the services they provide. In these rare instances, these individuals are required to fulfill the conditions of their parole independently. This does not constitute an unauthorized departure from the facility, as Afghan arrivals were not under detention following their admission by CBP. The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Customs and Border Protection fully screened and processed all arrivals under the airlift, regardless of their admission category. This included security screening involving law enforcement and intelligence partners, and a determination of admissibility to the United States for those arrivals who were not U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents. This also included required medical screening for COVID-19.

Question. How long did it take the Department to clarify the guidance governing whether Afghans were free to leave the facility or not?

Answer. The Department released continuously updated guidance to employees at ports of entry regarding Afghan arrivals under the airlift, including guidance on how Afghan arrivals who may wish to depart independently could do so. All guidance was updated in real time as needed to address the changing circumstances at ports of entry. Therefore, guidance on the ability of an arrival to depart, and the terms and conditions of any such departure, would have been substantially contemporaneous with requests to depart.

Question. When did the Department start keeping track of Afghans who left the Dulles facility upon arrival?

Answer. This information was tracked from the beginning of processing operations for Afghan arrivals at the Dulles Expo Center.

Question. Did the Department possess sufficient biometric equipment to collect the samples necessary for vetting the Afghans transiting through the ports of entry in Dulles and Philadelphia? If not, what steps were taken to rectify the situation and ensure sufficient data was collected for vetting?

Answer. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security for information regarding vetting at U.S. ports of entry.

Question. Is the State Department paying for flights for Afghan evacuees to arrive at lily pads from third countries? If yes, how much has this cost?

Answer. The Department is using funding from the Emergencies in the Diplomatic and Consular Service (EDCS/K Fund) account to support relocation efforts associated with Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). As of January 10, the Department has committed or obligated \$174 million for Kabul evacuation and OAW relocation flights, including \$37 million to reimburse the Department of Defense for Kabul evacuation flights.

Question. When will the State Department begin processing refugee applications for Afghans who have arrived in third countries?

Answer. The Department of State has already begun processing refugee applications for Afghans who have arrived in third countries.

Question. Please provide the latest record of the number of Afghan refugees currently awaiting processing at each lily pad, with a country-by-country breakdown.

Answer. As of December 13, there were 3,277 individuals at the two remaining "lily pad" locations: 1,555 in the UAE and 1,722 in Qatar.

Question. Please provide State Department estimates for the total number of Afghan refugees outside of USG custody being hosted by allied governments.

Answer. The Department of State knows of over 14,000 Afghans who relocated from Afghanistan on allied government flights and private charters concurrently with, but separate from, the August 2021 noncombatant evacuation operation. We know many Afghans continue to find ways to depart Afghanistan independently and we do not have clear data as to numbers of Afghans who departed Afghanistan after August 31 on private charter or commercial flights and have arrived in third countries.

Question. Please provide State Department estimates for the number of Afghan refugees outside of USG custody being hosted by allied governments that you expect will be transferred to U.S. lily pads for processing into the United States.

Answer. The Department does not have control over privately organized flights. Therefore, we do not have an estimate of Afghan individuals who arrived in third countries on private flights nor their potential eligibility for relocation through Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). We are working with our interagency partners to mobilize additional capacity that will enable us to additionally process eligible Afghans who are in third countries for onward relocation to the United States in their current host country.

There have been significant challenges with some privately organized flights. In several instances where private entities have chartered aircraft to transport individuals out of Afghanistan, identity checks on arrival at transit destinations have revealed that many passengers were not eligible for relocation to the United States and, in some cases, that the manifests were not accurate, despite the best efforts of the private organizations supporting these charters. This can put the individual travelers at-risk with no plan for relocation to the United States; has the potential to put strain on the bilateral relationship of the United States with the destination countries; and could make it more difficult for the U.S. Government to rely on those partner countries to assist in future relocations out of Afghanistan.

Question. Please provide State Department estimates for the number of Afghan refugees outside of USG custody being hosted by allied governments that you expect will be granted visas to remain in the country, or to enter another country?

Answer. The Department does not have data on Afghan individuals' personal applications for visas or asylum requests in third countries.

Question. How has the State Department interfaced with governments hosting Afghan refugees to assist their process for determining whether these refugees can seek asylum within the country they are in, or whether they will be transferred to a lily pad for processing to the U.S.?

Answer. Eligibility for asylum in third countries is determined by laws of the host country. As in other humanitarian crises, the United States engaged bilaterally and with international organizations to advocate for international protection for Afghans seeking asylum, as well as humanitarian assistance for refugee-hosting countries. This humanitarian diplomacy was carried out by bilateral missions and embassies and amplified by Washington in calls with partners and allies. We have worked closely with countries offering to host Afghan refugees to determine the most expe-

ditionous process for providing safe haven to the most vulnerable cases—whether in the United States or abroad.

Question. Is the U.S. Government providing financial assistance for allied countries to host Afghan refugees? If so, what is the amount of financial assistance per country?

Answer. The U.S. Government provides humanitarian assistance to independent organizations in countries hosting populations of Afghan refugees. In FY 2021, the United States provided nearly \$474 million in humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and for Afghan refugees in the region, including \$96 million to humanitarian organizations assisting Afghan refugee populations in countries such as Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This assistance aims to safeguard Afghan refugees in need of international protection; secure access to health and medical services; and advocate for proper asylum procedures. In Pakistan, which hosts the largest population of Afghan refugees, the United States provided nearly \$52 million to humanitarian partners for malnutrition assistance, medical services, education, and registration pathways.

Question. Camp Bondsteel, the same base from which we operate KFOR, is now being used to process those Afghan refugees who failed initial security screening. How many refugees are at Camp Bondsteel?

Answer. Given the periodic movement of individuals into and out of Camp Liya (located within Camp Bondsteel) in Kosovo, the Department is not able to provide a reliable and current estimate of individuals there since Afghans and their families are permitted to travel onward if they are cleared through screening and vetting and they have received critical immunizations that are required and provided as a condition of their humanitarian parole. We can note that many individuals there are family members of individuals undergoing additional screening, so not all individuals located there are themselves undergoing additional screening.

Question. What was the criteria for the initial security screening that they failed?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security is the lead agency for the security vetting and screening on foreign nationals requesting to enter the United States. I respectfully refer you to DHS.

Question. What does the U.S. plan to do with those refugees that cannot pass screening and therefore cannot enter the U.S.?

Answer. If an individual referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is denied refugee status, they will not be admitted to the United States. They may choose to remain in the third country or seek asylum in a country other than the United States.

Question. In Albania, over a thousand Afghan refugees are being housed through the generosity of the Albanian Government. These refugees are the cream of the crop: judges, former employees of U.S.-funded organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy, and activists. Yet they are being told that they will likely have to remain in Albania for the next 18–20 months to be processed, while many Afghans who, despite not having worked with the U.S. or our allies, were lucky enough to find their way into the belly of a U.S. transport plane and are now walking the streets of the United States on humanitarian parole. These refugees are understandably disconcerted that they followed the rules and have found themselves stranded in a strange country, while those who did not follow the rules are now happily stateside. We understand that no one from the U.S. Federal Government (save the Embassy in Tirana) has visited these refugees. Why have they not been visited?

Answer. We are grateful to the Government of Albania for providing a safe haven for these individuals. Our priority remains to ensure all individuals entering the United States meet the proper security and health vetting requirements. Embassy personnel in Tirana regularly visit the individuals relocated from Afghanistan and report to Washington on their status. The Senior Official for the Office of Global Women's Issues also visited the relocated Afghans in Albania. For those who are eligible for Operation Allies Welcome or referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, the next step in their relocation process is vetting by the Department of Homeland Security, not by State Department personnel. Once the DHS-led vetting is complete, they can be considered for relocation to the United States.

Question. Is there any consideration being given to sending embassy employees from the region for short-term TDY's to help process these individuals?

Answer. The next step in their relocation process is vetting led by the Department of Homeland Security, not State Department personnel. Once the DHS-led vetting is complete, they can be considered for relocation to the United States.

Question. Many embassies are sending their Foreign Service Officers to Camp Bondsteel to assist with processing. Why has this not been done in Albania?

Answer. The individuals from Afghanistan hosted by the Government of Albania are sponsored by NGOs, not the U.S. Government, and for those who are eligible for Operation Allies Welcome or referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, the next step in their relocation process is vetting led by the Department of Homeland Security, not by Foreign Service Officers or other State Department personnel. Once the DHS-led vetting is complete, they can be considered for relocation to the United States.

RESPONSES OF DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE BRIAN McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CHRISTOPHER A. COONS

Question. How is the Department preparing for the virtual Democracy Summit that President Biden will convene on December 8-9? What steps can the Department and Congress take to modernize our tools for democracy assistance to meet 21st century challenges like digital authoritarianism, disinformation, and crack-downs on internet freedom? Would the Department welcome legislation from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that provides new tools to address these challenges and modernizes and authorizes our democracy programs like NED, IRI, NDI?

Answer. The Summit will provide a forum for well-established and emerging democracies to discuss strengthening their resilience and overcoming challenges to advance freedom, prosperity, and respect for their citizens. The Department monitors program performance, results reporting, and academic research to assess the effectiveness of our programs and adjusts strategies to meet emerging global challenges to democracy and human rights. With respect to internet freedom, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) conducts Congressionally mandated coordination activities for funding appropriated to address these critical concerns. Current legislation provides us with important tools to continue our work in combating digital authoritarianism, disinformation, and crackdowns on the internet, but the Department welcomes congressional engagement on these vital issues.

RESPONSES OF DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE BRIAN McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. Can you provide specific numbers of personnel and funding that have been freed up as a result of the withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Answer. The Department is assessing the personnel and funding associated with Afghanistan and the needs associated with the continuing diplomatic mission with Afghanistan as well as optimizing support of Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). The Department plans to redirect personnel and funding to establish an Afghanistan Affairs Unit (AAU) in Doha, Qatar, which would be the U.S. diplomatic mission to Afghanistan. Should resumption of operations in Kabul be possible at a future date, AAU personnel would be among the first to return. Additionally, the Department continues to review the staffing and funding necessary to facilitate the timely relocation and resettlement of Afghans in the United States or other endpoint locations. The Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) will incorporate OAW operational support and logistics resources necessary to achieve this end.

Question. How does the Department plan to redirect the personnel and funding that previously was directed towards Afghanistan?

Answer. The Department continually seeks to optimize available resources. The FY 2022 Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman's mark proposes substantial rescissions and reductions to Afghanistan operations and assistance and redirects those savings to other priorities, which would constrain available resources in FY 2022. The Department currently has a team working on Afghanistan issues at Embassy Doha, and we will soon initiate congressional consultations on plans to establish an Afghanistan Affairs Unit (AAU) in Doha that would be the U.S. diplomatic mission to Afghanistan. The Department also continues to review the staffing and funding necessary to facilitate the relocation and resettlement of Afghans in the United States or other endpoint locations, including ensuring there are appropriate resources to support the work of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE).

Question. In your testimony, you stated that the Department “did not pull officers from missions in Asia” to deal with the crisis response in Afghanistan. Can you confirm that no State Department personnel working in the Bureau of East Asia and the Pacific, whether in missions overseas or in Washington, DC, were redirected, re-assigned, or placed on temporary duty travel to assist in the Afghanistan evacuation and related crisis response efforts?

Answer. The transcript indicates that I stated that I was “unaware that we’ve pulled officers from posts in Asia to work on the task force. We did have some consular officers, at some of our bigger posts in the world, like in Manila and New Delhi, helping to call American citizens in August. But we’ve not pulled officers from missions in East Asia[n] and the Pacific.”

The State Department did, however, request volunteers from throughout the Department to assist with our crisis response and continues to request volunteer support. To date, 16 employees from the East Asian and Pacific Bureau traveled on TDY orders to support our crisis response and one employee was in Afghanistan when the crisis began. In Washington, around 20 of our staff from the East Asian and Pacific Bureau supported the taskforce. They did this with full support of their supervisors and on a voluntary basis. The Department continues to ask for volunteers to help with the increased workload and several employees have volunteered to support in the future.

Question. On October 7, State spokesman Ned Price said there were dozens of Americans who wish to leave. On October 21, Ambassador Beth Jones told SFRC staff there were 363 Americans still in Afghanistan seeking to leave the country. On October 22, Mr. Price said there were between 100–200 Americans ready to leave. On October 26, Undersecretary for Defense Colin Kahl told the Senate Armed Services Committee that there were 439 American citizens still in Afghanistan. In your testimony, you said there were a little over 400 Americans in Afghanistan. These numbers had to come from somewhere. How can you explain this dramatic difference in numbers? Why do the numbers of total Americans in Afghanistan seem to increase with time?

Answer. This number increases and decreases depending on those who have made their presence in Afghanistan known to the Department of State, expressed a desire for departure assistance, those who later changed their minds, and those who have returned to Afghanistan and are again requesting assistance. In addition, U.S. citizens are not required to register their location in Afghanistan with the U.S. Government, so the number is dependent upon U.S. citizens self-reporting their presence whether through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program or other direct or indirect communications.

Question. Why did it take so long to give the Committee and the American people accurate numbers?

Answer. The Department continues to provide Congress with regular updates on numbers of U.S. citizens evacuated from Afghanistan and those remaining in Afghanistan, with the most accurate figures we have at the time of reporting.

Question. Is State confident that it has identified all Americans seeking to leave Afghanistan?

Answer. The number of U.S. citizens fluctuates depending on those who have made their presence in Afghanistan known to the Department of State, expressed a desire for departure assistance, those who later changed their minds, and those who have returned to Afghanistan and are again requesting assistance. In addition, U.S. citizens are not required to register their location in Afghanistan with the U.S. Government, so the number is dependent upon U.S. citizens self-reporting their presence whether through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program or other direct or indirect communications.

Question. The State Department Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), allows U.S. citizens to voluntarily register with the Embassy to be kept informed of the latest updates. Presumably, many Americans in Afghanistan participated in this program. How many Americans were registered in STEP in Afghanistan as of August 30?

Answer. There were 5,721 U.S. enrollees in STEP for Afghanistan on August 30, 2021. This does not necessarily mean they were physically in Afghanistan at that time. Any person can enroll in STEP. While intended for U.S. citizens, the system cannot verify enrollees as citizens automatically. Duration of enrollment can greatly vary from enrollee to enrollee; individuals may disenroll at any time, or they may remain enrolled. While STEP may provide a good snapshot of the numbers of U.S.

citizens potentially in-country and important contact information as it is a voluntary tool, it should not be considered precise or authoritative.

Question. How many are currently registered in STEP as being in Afghanistan?

Answer. There were 3,830 U.S. enrollees in STEP on October 27, 2021. The number of enrollees changes daily as individuals enroll and others either disenroll or the timeframes for their stated presence in-country expires. As there is no citizenship or presence requirement for STEP registration, the count of enrollees does not necessarily mean that this number of U.S. citizens was physically in Afghanistan on October 27, 2021.

Question. Of those that were registered in STEP as of August 30, how many have been confirmed as departed Afghanistan?

Answer. Since August 31, and as of December 13, we have directly assisted in the departure of 479 U.S. citizens from Afghanistan. We cannot confirm whether these 479 individuals were enrolled in STEP on August 30.

Question. What further efforts is the Department taking to find and assist American citizens in Afghanistan?

Answer. Our mission to assist U.S. citizens in Afghanistan, including those who have made known their wish to depart or have had that information relayed to the Department of State by family members or other concerned parties, has no deadline. Effective December 31, the Qatar Government will assume the role of protecting power of U.S. interests in Afghanistan and, as such, will assist the United States in providing limited consular services to U.S. citizens. Consular assistance may include accepting passport applications, offering notarial services for documentation, providing information, and helping in emergencies. We are grateful to the Qataris for their willingness to assume this responsibility.

Question. Can you describe the various entities working on Afghanistan now within the Department? How is this all being coordinated?

Answer. Secretary of State Blinken provides overall policy direction and oversight to the various Department entities working on Afghanistan. The Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) oversees the Special Representative for Afghanistan, SCA Afghanistan Desk and Executive Office, Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Effort (CARE), and U.S. bilateral mission to Afghanistan based in Doha, Qatar. The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) oversees Embassies Doha and Abu Dhabi, which support Operation Allies Refuge (OAR) and Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). Ongoing coordination among these and other entities occurs through regular Deputy-level meetings, working-level coordination calls, and in-person TDY support. I am briefed regularly on the work of the CARE team, as is the Secretary.

Question. We understand that there is growing pressure to have refugees leave military bases as soon as Thanksgiving. At the same time, I am concerned the pressure and rush of the process may lower the quality of the vetting process. What steps is the State Department taking in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that we are rigorously vetting refugees here in the United States?

Answer. The Afghans in the United States that were relocated as part of OAW were not admitted as refugees and were not processed through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. The Department of Homeland Security allowed them to enter the United States on Humanitarian Parole, which is valid for either 1 or 2 years, depending on their date of arrival. All guests are thoroughly vetted prior to arriving in the United States.

For more information on the screening and vetting process, I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security.

Question. Last year, the State Department helped resettle less than 12,000 refugees in the United States. We have around 55,000 Afghans at U.S. bases as of last week. How long does the State Department estimate it will take to resettle these refugees?

Answer. The interagency, under the leadership of the Department of Homeland Security, continues to work to resettle Afghan guests as quickly, safely, and securely as possible. Processing time on safe havens may vary depending on arrival time at the base; the time necessary to complete health assessments and to address any medical issues that arise; and how long it takes to complete the necessary administrative steps to apply for work authorization. Travel availability to their final destination and the absorptive capacity of local communities may affect the amount of

time people will spend on the base. The Department is working with resettlement agencies to ensure Afghans can reach their new communities as soon as possible.

Question. Has this resettlement process diverted resources away from the immigration crisis occurring at our southern border?

Answer. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security for information on whether Operation Allies Welcome has impacted the response to the situation at the southern border.

RESPONSES OF DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE BRIAN McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TED CRUZ

Question. In September, Secretary Blinken confirmed in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United States had given the Taliban lists of Americans and Afghans who we hoped to evacuate from Afghanistan. He declined to provide the number of names on such lists, but confirmed “we gave a manifest to the people at the checkpoint to demonstrate that those people were expected” and “This happened in a handful of situations.” Has the Department of State figured out how many names we gave the Taliban of Americans and/or Afghans that we wanted out?

Answer. In order to facilitate the safe movement of Locally Employed (LE) Staff to Kabul International Airport, there were a few instances in which Department officials on these Department-chartered transport buses for LE Staff confirmed with the Taliban at checkpoints those on the bus were in fact being evacuated with the help of the U.S. Government.

Question. How many of the people on those lists—or what percent—were ultimately successfully evacuated?

Answer. Every Locally Employed Staff who wanted to leave during the August evacuations did leave on the Noncombatant Evacuation Operation flights prior to August 31.

Question. Afghanistan / Child Brides: On August 27, according to public reports, the Department of State distributed internal documentation highlighting numerous instances in intake centers of sexual abuse, in which much Afghan males appeared with young girls and claimed they were their wives. And the documents said the Department of State request “urgent guidance” about what to do. Subsequently, news emerged that there had been multiple cases and arrests at intake centers and of evacuees for sexual assault. In September, Secretary Blinken confirmed in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that there have been “a limited number of cases where we have separated people” over concerns related to child brides and sexual abuse. How many instances of human trafficking, polygamous marriages, and “child brides” has the Department of State identified?

Answer. Protection of Afghans at-risk in U.S. safe havens is among our key objectives in relocating SIV holders, parolees, and their family members. This includes protection from gender-based violence, human trafficking, and forced marriage. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security as the lead federal agency at U.S. safe havens for the number of cases of human trafficking, polygamous, underage, and forced marriage identified.

Question. How many cases have there been in which administration officials separated people due to concerns related to human trafficking, polygamous marriages, or “child brides”?

Answer. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security as the lead federal agency at U.S. safe havens for the number of cases of separation due to concerns related to human trafficking, polygamous or early marriage.

Question. In light of statutory authority under Title 8 of the United States Code Section 1227 to remove individuals who engage in smuggling, trafficking, marriage fraud, crimes of moral turpitude, child abuse, and domestic violence, has the Administration deported these offenders?

Answer. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security for all matters related to immigration, including any individuals found to be inadmissible to the United States or placed in proceedings.

Question. What steps has the Department of State taken to investigate reports of human trafficking, sexual abuse, child marriages, including opportunistic marriages facilitated by the evacuation process itself, among Afghan evacuees?

Answer. The Department of State takes all reports of such actions very seriously. The Department is part of the recently constituted Gender and Vulnerable Population Protection Working Group (GVPP) of the interagency Unified Coordination Group, which focuses on these issues in particular. The GVPP has drafted standards and protocols clarifying how to identify and report such violations; what investigations and other actions would be taken in response to any reports, including by criminal law enforcement agencies; and how various mitigation measures might prevent them from occurring at all. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security for additional information related to immigration.

Question. To what extent is the Department of State coordinating with other agencies to deter future instances and punish past instances of human trafficking among those evacuated from Afghanistan?

Answer. The Department of State is coordinating across the U.S. Government and with domestic and international partners to detect potential cases of forced marriage or other forms of abuse among vulnerable Afghans at relocation sites, as well as to prevent and investigate crimes and to protect any victims identified. At overseas processing locations, U.S. Embassies and military officials coordinate with local law enforcement authorities to refer alleged criminals for prosecution according to their jurisdiction.

Question. What actions has or will the Administration take to address, such as through detention or deportation, the individuals who have engaged in human trafficking, polygamy, or sexual assault during the evacuations?

Answer. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security for all matters related to immigration, including any individuals found to be inadmissible to the United States or placed in proceedings.

Question. What steps, if any, has the Department of State taken to address child exploitation, including forced marriages and other sexual exploitation, inside transit and intake centers in the United States?

Answer. The Department of State is coordinating across the U.S. Government and with domestic and international partners to detect potential cases of forced marriage or other forms of abuse among vulnerable Afghans at relocation sites, as well as to prevent and investigate crimes and to protect any victims identified. U.S. funding to international organizations supports the deployment of expert protection staff to identify and assist Afghans with particular vulnerabilities at overseas processing locations, including those at-risk of early and forced marriage. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security as the lead federal agency on steps taken at U.S. safe havens.

Question. For reports of rape, sexual assault, or other sexual abuse, where did these acts occur? What guidance or orders have been issued to military bases if they witness or receive reports of a minor being sexually assaulted or abused by another Afghan evacuee, including by those claiming to be married to the victim?

Answer. The Department of State, in coordination with USAID, issued guidance on protection standards for all Afghan relocation sites that aims to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, child abuse, and other risks. The State Department continues to monitor protection conditions at overseas processing locations. I respectfully refer you to the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security for relevant guidance or orders issued to U.S. military bases and U.S. safe havens.

Question. Will DHS commit to deport individuals evacuated from Afghanistan who have violated 8 U.S.C. § 1227 by committing the following offenses: smuggling, § 1227(a)(1)(E); marriage fraud, § 1227(a)(1)(G); crimes of moral turpitude, § 1227(a)(2)(A)(i); crimes of domestic violence, stalking, and child abuse, § 1227(a)(2)(E)(i); and trafficking, § 1227(a)(2)(F)?

Answer. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security for all matters related to immigration, including any individuals found to be inadmissible to the United States or placed in proceedings.

Question. How many cases of sexual assault by evacuees is the Department of State aware of?

Answer. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security, which is the lead federal agency for Operation Allies Welcome safe havens, and the Department of Justice.

Question. We now know that rapes by evacuees have occurred across your intake centers. In my home state of Texas, at a Fort Bliss shelter complex for refugees, a female service member was assaulted by 3–4 Afghan male evacuees. At Fort

McCoy in Wisconsin, two Afghan males have been charged with crimes as a result of investigations by the FBI and Fort McCoy Police Department. One, for allegedly sexually abusing two young boys, and the other for violently attacking his wife. I have been briefed on additional crimes, which for various reasons haven't been made public. I asked Secretary Blinken about the Department of State's request for guidance and about the scope of child trafficking facilitated by the Biden administration. He said that he was not aware of the guidance but was aware of a "handful" of cases. I'd like to ask you to clarify these answers—How many cases is the Department of State aware of where child brides were presented at intake centers?

Answer. The Department of State is coordinating across the U.S. Government and with domestic and international partners to detect potential cases of forced marriage or other forms of abuse among vulnerable Afghans at relocation sites, as well as to prevent and investigate crimes and to protect any victims identified. U.S. funding to international organizations supports the deployment of expert protection staff to identify and assist Afghans with particular vulnerabilities at overseas processing locations, including those at risk of early and forced marriage. I respectfully refer you to the Department of Homeland Security as the lead federal agency on steps taken at U.S. safe havens and to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for information on domestic law enforcement actions.

