

**STATE DEPARTMENT AUTHORIZATION:
STRENGTHENING U.S. DIPLOMACY
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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TUESDAY, MAY 3, 2022

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert Menendez presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Schatz, Van Hollen, Risch, Portman, Young, and Cruz.

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

The CHAIRMAN. The Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for joining us today. Before we get to the regular work of the committee, I want to take a moment to recognize an important day in history. It is a day that we are blessed to have Senator Risch in our lives. It is his birthday.

[Singing.]

The CHAIRMAN. Happy birthday, Mr. Ranking Member.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am honored you would take time to do this. When you get to this many, it is kind of like every other day, but I am blessed.

My successor governor has the same birthday I do and he—however, he is much older than I am. He was born in 1942, and he says “Happy Birthday, my friend. Eighty really doesn’t feel that bad.” I said, “I will keep that in mind when and if I get there. Seriously, looking back, neither one of us can complain about the hand we were dealt,” and he says, “God’s got a crush on both of us. We are blessed.” I said, “Amen,” and that is exactly where I am. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much. Happy birthday. Many more healthy and happy ones.

It is refreshing to have the Department’s engagement on partnership as we look forward towards putting together this year’s State Department authorization bill.

As you know, last December, Congress passed the first State authorization bill in nearly two decades. It was not an easy task, and I want to commend the ranking member and his staff for partnering in that process.

It was a truly bipartisan accomplishment supported by nearly every member on the committee and I look forward to replicating that this year.

The American people and our nation's foreign policy benefit when we can work together. As we have discussed before, when Secretary Blinken, you, and other senior officials took your positions last year, you inherited a damaged, neglected, and underfunded department.

Morale was low. The expertise needed for successful effective diplomacy was leaving. The pipeline of new Foreign Service officers was languishing. Critical bureaus had been gutted. Our ability to promote and protect our interests and our values had been decimated.

As recent world events have reminded us, we need our diplomats and development professionals on the ground to advance our national interests, to counter Russia and China, to support threatened democracies, and to strengthen alliances.

These are not abstract priorities. They matter. When we have a strong presence in place, the United States and the world is better for it.

So I very much appreciate the efforts now underway to address years of underinvestment, restoring and rebuilding critical bureaus, creating new offices like the Cyber Bureau.

I want to commend the incredible public servants at bringing the Department up-to-date to face the challenges of the 21st century, even during the trying times of the global pandemic.

In particular, I want to applaud the Department's push to modernize and increase diversity, something I have long advocated for.

From the shores of Alaska and New Jersey to the ranches of Idaho and the border towns of Detroit, we must draw on America's extraordinary range of backgrounds and perspectives to advance our nation's interests abroad.

Naming the first ever Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer was a good start. All Americans should have the opportunity to serve and represent our country on the global stage. A disability should not be an obstacle in accessing or working at our embassies.

Adding as many as 200 paid internships beginning this fall semester is another positive step that will remove barriers for students who might not be able to afford working in an unpaid position.

I also support the Department's forward-looking equity plans including the announcement of a special representative focused on racial equity. I support consular affairs officers offering passports with inclusive gender markers and I support diplomats engaging with underrepresented communities worldwide.

It is also vital that the Department modernize its recruitment process to attract a talented top-notch workforce. It is heartening that after years in which applications were declining, now, under your leadership, the Department is now on pace for the largest annual hiring of Foreign Service officers in a decade.

It is not enough to simply recruit an incredible workforce. We must also retain it with professional training, expanded incentives, and modernizing the promotion process.

Today, I hope to hear from you on what additional authorities or resources you think the Department needs to continue these rebuilding and modernization efforts. I cannot promise we will deliver on all your asks. There may be some for which we have different views.

I know that the ranking member and I and all members of this committee are committed to working with you in a constructive manner as we put together and pass into law this year's State Department authorization bill.

Let me close by saying the Department of State has come a long way from its humble beginnings when Thomas Jefferson had a staff of six and only two diplomatic posts.

When the Department of State lives up to its aspirations and the aspirations of the American people, it sets the standard other U.S. Government agencies and departments must strive to meet as well.

This is a time for action to make sure that the Department of State is aiming for excellence. The Administration has been in office for over a year now. The clock is ticking. We cannot wait any longer.

Congress and this committee are standing by to work with you as a constructive partner. We want to see results, the American people want results, and I believe the future of the United States foreign policy depends on it.

As Russia's unprovoked war rages in Ukraine and the Administration is requesting billions of dollars more in assistance, which I support, but I also look forward to hearing some of the details about our plan, going forward, including plans to reopen our diplomatic posts there.

With that, let me turn to our distinguished ranking member, Senator Risch, for his opening statement.

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

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

Like the chairman, I am proud of this committee's work to see the first successful reauthorization of the State Department in nearly two decades passed last December after years of work. I think everyone is to be congratulated who worked on this and pushed it forward.

I think it would be unfair not to recognize, clearly, the leadership of the chairman of this committee in making this happen. So congratulations, especially to you, Mr. Chairman.

While the reauthorization was a success, the bill demonstrated the enormous amount of work to be done at the State Department in terms of management and operations. That is probably one of the most significant accomplishments of the bill is to underscore these matters.

The Department and this committee must examine the needs of 21st century diplomacy and move the State Department forward to advance our national interest while being effective stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Before I get into that, I want to note that it is imperative for the State Department to reopen our embassy in Kyiv to better support

Ukraine and send a strong message that the U.S. Government stands with the Ukrainian people.

I am equally concerned with the status of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. As the Russian Government squeezes out U.S. diplomats, those who remain have gone above and beyond to keep the embassy up and running. They need our help.

I look forward to hearing what you are doing to better support U.S. personnel in Moscow, realizing that this is an open setting and we cannot talk about all the details of that.

When it comes to 21st century diplomacy, we must start with the basics—getting our diplomats outside of embassy walls and meeting with local populations, just like diplomats used to do.

We need a State Department that is firing on all cylinders in order to compete with Chinese, Russian, and Iranian adversaries who do not have the restrictions our diplomats do.

To begin addressing this issue, I have a bill recently passed out of committee that updates how State investigates security incidents abroad in order to rebalance the State Department's risk calculus. I would appreciate your thoughts on that legislation.

I am also currently working on an update of security requirements for our embassies that make it easier for our diplomats to access local populations while also saving U.S. taxpayers millions of dollars.

When we make it easier for our diplomats to get out and about, we must make sure we are doing our best to protect them. Anomalous health incidents, or Havana syndrome, as it is known, still needs to be addressed and quickly.

Who is attacking our personnel? How do we keep them safe? How is the Department ensuring those officers who have sustained long-term injuries are provided for and how are we harmonizing care and access to treatment with interagency partners?

Other departments are taking this issue very seriously. I would appreciate you addressing these questions. The State Department needs to do this.

Also, U.S. diplomats in China are spending time in fever prisons. The treatment of our personnel is deeply disturbing and I want to know what State is doing about that.

While the State Department has generally focused outward on foreign audiences, the Department also provides services directly to the American public. At the top of this list is passports.

The huge backlog that have accumulated because of COVID has made getting a passport take longer than it has in decades. This is an essential government service and one that needs to function efficiently.

Without passports, U.S. citizens cannot travel the world to promote American business. Without visa services foreigners cannot come to America and spend money.

The Idaho economy and, indeed, the economy of all states benefits enormously from tourism and foreign seasonal workers, and we need passport and visa systems functioning in order to continue benefiting. I hope you can provide us with an update on the Department's efforts to achieve that.

The enacted State Department authorization requires that starting in January most special envoys will have to come before this

committee. I look forward to this new process of greater congressional scrutiny of senior officials who are handling substantive and sensitive portfolios.

After 18 years without an authorizing bill, the Department has a lot of catching up to do. Last year's bill was a good start and I look forward to continuing our work to get the Department into shape to address 21st century threats.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Secretary, the floor is yours. Your full statement will be included in the record. We would ask you to try to summarize it in 5 minutes or so so we can have a discussion with you.

Please go ahead.

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, Senator Risch, Senator Coons. Nice to see you all. Thanks for having me here today.

Mr. Chairman, I think you have a future in singing. Your voice is actually quite good.

I welcome the opportunity to be here to talk about the issues that you have set forth, including engaging on State Department authorization, and we very much appreciate the committee's work on legislation in the last year.

Let me begin by expressing our appreciation for your continued support for equipping us to lead globally on behalf of the American people.

We are especially grateful for the supplemental resources and flexible authorities you have provided in response to Moscow's brutal war against Ukraine and for the supplemental funds for Afghanistan last year.

This partnership between the Administration and Congress has been essential to a strong united American leadership.

When I came before this committee last October, it was the day the Secretary announced his vision for modernizing American diplomacy, an agenda that will shape the Department to meet the challenges of the 21st century by delivering an even stronger, more effective, more diverse, and more agile institution to lead America's engagement in the world.

While the modernization agenda includes a range of cross-cutting actions aimed at ensuring the Department can effectively execute American foreign policy for the next generation, the Secretary has identified three key priority initiatives.

First, we will build the Department's capacity and expertise to address 21st century missions. We want to ensure that the Department is organized, resourced, and equipped with the skills and abilities to effectively develop and execute foreign policy in areas of China, climate, health security, cyberspace, and emerging technologies, multilateral diplomacy and economic tradecraft.

Launching the new Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy last month was an important step in advancing this goal. We are also in the final stages of reviewing how we are organized for global

health security in consultation with this committee and other stakeholders.

Our modernization approach includes using new tools such as AI and integrating data analytics to inform policy decisions. Data scientists want to come work at the State Department, believe it or not. We just had a job announcement for 50 positions and we closed it after a few days because we got 400 applications.

Second, we are working to modernize training and professional development. We look to embrace a culture of learning where employees are offered and expected to engage in a wide range of opportunities to acquire new skills, expand their experiences, and grow throughout their careers.

This entails expanding courses in emerging fields such as cyber, tech, STEM, health, climate expertise, and increasing accessibility, incentives, and accountability for employees to train and develop.

With your help, we will expand our Foreign Service training and development float and establish a civil service equivalent. This was an objective first set out by Secretary Powell two decades ago and we are making every effort to try to realize it with your help.

The third initiative is to institutionalize a hybrid workforce. We will ensure that the Department's workforce transitions to a mission-first hybrid work environment that is resilient, agile, secure, and inclusive.

As I noted, the launch of the Cyberspace Bureau is one example how we are establishing new capabilities to address emerging challenges. There are many others.

Thanks to your support, as the chairman mentioned, we will expand our paid internships starting with a group of 200 this fall and plan to make all internships paid in 2023. About 1,200 people will be paid when interning with us. This should be a game changer to diversify our recruitment pool.

We have updated the performance management process used for both the Foreign and Civil Service which includes manager accountability and integration of DEIA principles. We have established an employee retention unit to develop the first Department-wide retention strategy to understand why people are leaving but also to understand why people are staying.

We established a 500-person volunteer recruiter corps with representation from all of our Departments' affinity groups. We have offered Foreign Service specialists oral assessments virtually.

We also conducted a review of the Foreign Service exam and, as you may have seen, we recently announced it will expand the focus on a candidate's education and experience and will end the practice whereby the written exam is the sole gateway to the rest of the process.

With regard to assignment restrictions, we have lifted now nearly 70 percent of those and we will soon finalize the revised appeals process for officers who have restrictions sustained against them.

Many of these achievements were only possible with your support and the support of the Appropriations Committee. So we thank Senator Coons, who chairs the subcommittee.

We will continue to rely on your advice and partnership to make further progress and this includes ensuring that we have the re-

sources and authorities to take care of our people and fulfill our mission.

Lastly, I want to thank the committee for their work on confirming our nominees. I know we have a lot of them. We have moved about a hundred through the process in the last year, many by bipartisan votes, but we still have a number of nominees pending and it is critical to have our team on the field, particularly as we respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

So we appreciate, Mr. Chairman, your prompt action to schedule a hearing for Ambassador Brink, which I understand is next week.

We ask for your continued support for the many nominations that we have pending and I suspect we will be sending you more over the coming weeks.

So with that, I will stop and look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McKeon follows:]

Prepared Statement of Mr. Brian P. McKeon

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

I welcome this opportunity to continue our discussion from last fall, and to build on Secretary Blinken's testimony from last week.

I would like to express the Department's appreciation for your continued support and for helping to equip us to lead globally on behalf of the American people. We are especially grateful for the supplemental resources and flexible authorities you have provided in response to Moscow's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as for the supplemental funds for Afghanistan last year. This partnership between the Administration and Congress has been essential to a strong, united American leadership.

When I testified before this committee last October, it was the day that the Secretary announced his vision for Modernizing American Diplomacy—an agenda that will shape the Department to be ready to meet the challenges of the 21st Century by delivering an institution that is even stronger, more effective, more diverse and more agile to lead America's engagement in the world.

In a world defined by new threats, new competitors, and extraordinary opportunities to advance the needs and aspirations of the American people, the renewal of American diplomacy is vital and urgent.

The modernization agenda will strengthen the Department for the challenges of this century, and is designed to align our work, our resources, and our expertise with the issues that most directly and consequentially affect Americans' lives, livelihoods and security.

While the modernization agenda includes a range of cross-cutting actions aimed at ensuring the Department can effectively execute U.S. foreign policy over the next generation, the Secretary has identified *three priority initiatives*:

First, we want to build the Department's capacity and expertise to address 21st century missions. We want to ensure the Department is organized, resourced, and its workforce is equipped with the skills and abilities to develop and execute U.S. foreign policy in the areas of China, climate, health, cyberspace and emerging technologies, multilateral diplomacy, and economic trade/craft.

The launch last month of the new Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy is an important step in advancing this goal. We are currently in the final stages of a review on how we are organized for global health security, and are consulting with this committee and other stakeholders in Congress.

This reorientation to address these 21st century challenges includes using new tools, such as Artificial Intelligence, and better integrating data analytics to inform our policy decisions. We have an eager community of data professionals ready to join us. Last month, we advertised 50 new positions for data scientists, and closed the announcement after a few days, when we received 400 applications.

Second, we are working to modernize training and professional development. We will revitalize the Department's approach to training and professional development to embrace a culture of learning where employees are offered, and expected to engage in, a wide range of opportunities to acquire new skills, expand their experiences, and grow personally and professionally throughout their careers.

This entails expanding content offerings in emerging fields such as cyber/tech, STEM, health, and climate expertise; and facilitating increased accessibility, incentives, and accountability for employees to train and develop.

And with your help, we will expand our foreign service training and development float—and establish a civil service equivalent—to provide the capacity for our workforce to take the time necessary to learn and grow. This was an objective first set out by Secretary Powell two decades ago; we are making every effort to realize it. We appreciate congressional support for our FY22 staffing request, which enables us to allocate an increase of 80 positions for professional development and training this year. Our FY 2023 budget request seeks to expand on that by adding 250 positions for this purpose.

The third initiative is to institutionalize a hybrid workforce. We will ensure the Department of State workforce transitions to a mission-first hybrid work environment that is resilient, agile, secure, and inclusive. Enabled by modern technology, workplace functionality, and updated workforce policies, Department employees will be equipped to meet mission needs in the 21st century.

Underpinning these initiatives are foundational actions we will undertake as part of the modernization agenda to build and retain a diverse, dynamic, and entrepreneurial workforce; leverage new tools and technologies to work more effectively and solve policy challenges; shift our culture to lead, and become risk aware, not risk averse; and foster initiative and innovation.

As I noted, the launch of the Cyberspace and Digital Policy Bureau is one example of how we have started making progress on new capabilities to address the challenges over the next several decades. There are many other examples:

- We established new Foreign Service climate diplomacy positions in all geographic regions and key overseas posts.
- We have developed a first of its kind “Demographic Baseline” report and dashboard with detailed views of who we are as an organization. We can now analyze the gender, race, ethnicity, and disability status of our direct hire cohort—approximately 24,500 employees—broken down by bureau, rank, and employment type. We are making this dashboard available to State’s entire workforce.
- We have updated the performance management process for both foreign service and civil service, which include manager accountability and integration of DEIA principles.
- We are moving toward realizing the goal of paid internships for all our interns. Thanks to the support of Congress, we will start with a group of 200 interns this fall, and we plan to expand the program to all State Department internships in 2023—that is, about 1200 people will get paid when interning with us. This is a gamechanger for so many young Americans of diverse backgrounds hoping to start a career in foreign affairs.
- We have established an employee Retention Unit, which will review data and talk with the workforce to understand why people stay and why they leave. This team will develop the first Department-wide retention strategy.
- We established a 500-person Volunteer Recruiter Corps with representation from all our State Department affinity groups.
- For the first time, we offered Foreign Service specialist oral assessments virtually and requested FY22 funds to provide a needs-based stipend for some in-person oral assessments. We are also revising the Foreign Service exam process so that we undertake a holistic review that expands the focus on a candidate’s education and experience, and ending the practice whereby the written exam is the sole gateway to the rest of the process.
- We have lifted over 70 percent of the assignment restrictions and will soon finalize a revised appeals process for officers who still have such a restriction.

Many of these achievements were made possible only with your support, and we will continue to rely on your advice and partnership to make further progress on this agenda. That includes ensuring we have the resources and authorities to take care of our people and carry out our mission domestically and abroad.

The Department hopes to return to a regular process of authorizations for the Department of State and we are currently developing legislative proposals for consideration by the Congress. Once finalized, we look forward to working with you to ensure the Department has the authorities it needs to improve our operational effectiveness and strengthen efforts to build capacity and foster greater ties with our partners and allies.

Finally, I want to thank the Committee for its work to confirm State Department nominees. Over the course of last year, you moved nearly 100 nominees through the

process, most of them by bipartisan voice vote. It is critical to have our team on the field, particularly as we respond to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Unfortunately, we are still not operating at full strength, and I want to ask for your support in confirming the many nominees who are currently pending consideration in the Committee.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. We are fully engaged in trying to pursue hearings and markups for all of the nominees.

We will start a round of questions. Let me start off with Secretary Blinken has noted that the State Department is returning diplomats to Ukraine and beginning the process of resuming operations at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, and we all looking forward to the nominees' hearing.

How does the State Department intend to weigh the imperatives of establishing a physical diplomatic presence in Kyiv and mitigating risks to the safety and security of U.S. personnel assigned there?

Mr. McKEON. Mr. Chairman, as you know, our diplomats assigned at Embassy Kyiv have been working out of Poland for the last couple of months. We have started day trips back into western Poland into Lviv—Kristina Kvien, the chargé d'affaires, was there yesterday for several hours—and we are planning to try to get back into Kyiv in the near future. Our security professionals will have to go in and do an assessment of our facilities and make a judgment about how we can mitigate risk.

Obviously, the Russians can—even though they are not on the ground threatening Kyiv they can still range the whole country with missiles and aircraft as we saw last week. We will have to take that into account, but the Secretary is determined to get us back into Kyiv in the near future, and I understand Undersecretary Bass is coming up to do a closed briefing for Senator Cardin's subcommittee this afternoon.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me turn to the question of diversity. I have long championed since my days in the House a diverse workforce at the Department, which is why I commended last year's appointment of the Department's first Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley.

I understand that the Department's diversity and inclusion strategic plan as required by Executive Order 14035 was completed in March. It still hasn't been released.

Given that the plan is critical for executing the Chief Diversity Officer's work, including communicating new policies and procedures to State's global workforce, when will the plan be released and what steps are being taken to ensure that everyone in the Department will be held accountable for the goals of the plan?

Mr. McKEON. Mr. Chairman, we released internally a preliminary draft of the plan back in the fall and invited comments from across the workforce, and around that same time the OMB or OPM—I forget which agency—issued executive branch wide guidance on what they wanted to see in these plans.

So we had to take a look at that and update the draft plan to conform with that and all the agency plans are sitting over at the White House being reviewed. So we are waiting on their action to release it.

The CHAIRMAN. So do we have any projected timeframe?

Mr. McKEON. I do not know the latest. I will check on it when I get back to the Department.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate knowing that.

Mr. McKEON. I can get back to you.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The requested information referred to above follows:]

We are pleased to announce that the Department's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Strategic Plan will be released to the public before the end of September and will be posted on our website at state.gov/deia-strategy.

To ensure accountable implementation of the Plan, the Secretary's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (S/ODI) is chairing an Implementation Team comprised of the Department bureaus and offices that have a role in implementing the goals and objectives laid out in the Plan. This Implementation Team, which held its inaugural meeting in June, will meet quarterly to ensure goals are being met.

We consider the Plan a living document, as it will be adjusted to reflect new evidence, knowledge, and best practices to enhance DEIA across the Agency.

The CHAIRMAN. Within this context, how are individuals within the Department, particularly those in leadership positions, going to be held accountable for the goals, which it is great. Starts off with the top.

I tell this to the Business Roundtable and same for the government—when leadership at the top makes it a priority and people understand it is, then it—ultimately, the diversity officer is a great action forward, but then there has to be accountability, right, because otherwise it makes no consequence. People have to know that this is part of their evaluation, for example.

So any sense about that that you can share with us?

Mr. McKEON. I would say a couple of things. The Secretary has made it clear this is everyone's job. It is not merely the job of the senior leadership.

When I meet with ambassadors who have been confirmed and are about to go out to post, which I try to meet with all of them, I tick through a list of issues that are a priority for the Secretary that they need to pay attention to, and this is one of them.

As I mentioned, we have updated our promotion rules or standards. So in the Foreign Service it is called the promotion precepts, and we have issued updated precepts, which includes a specific precept on what they have done on DEIA.

We have a Department-wide DEIA Council, which the Secretary attends those meetings when we are—when he is in town and when we have these meetings we usually have a couple of bureaus present on best practices that they have been undertaking to advance these objectives.

So it is—this is a mission for everyone in the Department and we have got to make sure that everyone understands that. What we have heard anecdotally is that the workforce understands this is a priority from senior leadership. They are not always hearing it further down. So we have some work to do to make sure that middle managers understand this is part of their job description.

The CHAIRMAN. I will look forward to that happening.

Finally, on April 26 of his year, the State Department announced it would cease using the written Foreign Service Officer test as a pass/fail gateway test and instead consider each candidate's performance on the test among several factors in the application process. This is one of those things that I have always said has been

an impediment to people. It is very subjective that you cannot orally communicate.

What impact is this expected to have on tracking the broader American population to work with the Department and what has been the response to this news?

Mr. McKEON. As you said, Mr. Chairman, we will continue to have the written test, but it will not be the gateway to the rest of the process. Someone will take the test and then they submit—they also submit a personal narrative statement, and then we have what we call a qualification evaluations panel that will look at the officer—the aspiring officer *in toto*, looking at all of their background and qualifications and what they—what their skill sets may be and then they would go on to the oral test if they made it that far through this process.

We think, and some of the data show, that this may increase the diversity of our entry classes. Some people do not take tests well. Some people have the resources to take courses to help them pass the written test.

We want to make sure that we are not screening out qualified officers by just the written test. For my part, I failed the Foreign Service exam in the 1980s. I came out okay. So not everybody can pass the test.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. That is an interesting tidbit that—Senator RISCH. Make a note of that.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. —you can become the—one of the chief secretaries of the Department in that way.

All right. Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I missed it if you did—did you give us any timetable for when you might be looking at trying to get back into Kyiv or, particularly, starting the process?

Mr. McKEON. We are starting the process to look at it now, Senator. The Secretary would like us to get in there this month.

Senator RISCH. That is a good goal, at least.

I spoke briefly about the issue in Beijing with our people there and being in what they call the fever prisons there. What can you tell us about that?

Mr. McKEON. Mr. Chairman, I am pretty sure we have not allowed any officers to go into the so-called fever hospitals. When officers come in from outside the United States they have to quarantine and there are quarantine hotels, I believe, but let me double check that fact.

We have objected to the possibility that people who are already stationed in China, if they test positive, going into a fever hospital.

There was a threat at one point a few months ago where an officer might be separated from their child because the child tested positive. So we have made that clear to the Government of the People's Republic that that is not acceptable to us.

We are now on ordered departure status in Shanghai because of the lockdown. A number of officers were having challenges with that. So we have skinnied down substantially because of that and it is something Ambassador Burns is watching very closely.

I know Under Secretary Bass just talked to him about it last night because you can see the reports of Beijing where they are imposing more testing requirements right now.

Senator RISCH. I have been informed that there have been U.S. personnel that had been forced in the fever hospitals. You might want to check on that, and if that is the case probably ought to be revisited what is happening. So that is the information I have. If yours—

Mr. McKEON. That was not my information, Senator, but I will double check—

Senator RISCH. I hope you will check on that for me. I would appreciate that.

One of the issues that has been reoccurring with me for some time is getting—I understand there is a level of risk always in everything that is done. Obviously, you want to reduce the risk as much as possible, but reducing it has really impeded our people from getting out more than what, I think, that they should and I have been complaining about this for some time.

Is there any thought at all about revisiting the policies in that regard?

Mr. McKEON. Thank you, Senator. Thank you for your work on the accountability review forward process. It is definitely something we are working on and Under Secretary Bass, before he was confirmed, entered a temporary assignment where he looked at this very issue with a retired diplomatic security officer.

I would say a couple things about it. One, we have, in statute, some security standards that were put in place—I confess, I worked on them in the late nineties after the East Africa bombing—that imposed pretty rigid standards for our facilities in terms of what we need from—setback from the street and the size of the walls around the complex, et cetera. We think we can relook at some of that because of the advancements in technology where it can—maybe do not need as much setback.

We have tried to encourage people and we have put out risk principles that had been looked at last fall and we—in the fall of 2020 by the last team and we revalidated them, and I sent out a workforce message calling everyone's attention to it.

What we are trying to do is make people risk aware and not risk averse because this is a risky business that we are in. That is not to say people should be gambling with people's lives, but they should take smart risks. That is a cultural change that we are going to have to keep working on, but we are with you. We completely agree with what you said previously.

Senator RISCH. Thanks. I appreciate that. Just to be clear, I am not complaining at all about the review of the thickness of the wall setbacks and that sort of thing. I think that is a job for somebody who has clear expertise in that area.

What I am talking about more is the restrictions on movement of personnel, and I can tell you that out there amongst the community the belief is that we are under the most restrictive regulations and constraints that there are for diplomats in various countries, and I know there is a lot of people that feel they could do better if they could have less restriction in that regard.

Obviously, risk adversity is something that we are all concerned with. On the other hand, there is also a job that has got to be done. So I appreciate your thoughts in that——

Mr. MCKEON. Yes, I completely agree, Senator Risch. Obviously, the Accountability Review Board process was one of the things hanging over people's heads as they calculate risk, and other investigations that have occurred in the past tend to make people a little more risk averse. So I appreciate your encouraging us in this respect.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. Thank you for your service.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Coons.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Happy birthday to Ranking Member Risch, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for once again gracing us with your musical talents. You, literally, have the nicest voice in the entire Senate, and that you used it today to celebrate the ranking member was one of those rare moments of——

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Coons, I like to eat so I am not giving up my day job.

[Laughter.]

Senator COONS. It bears repeating that your strong bipartisan work to achieve the first time in, I think, two decades reauthorization of the State Department is well worth celebrating and I want you to hear my appreciation for how hard you and your staff have worked.

I hope to contribute to it in a few small ways that I would like to review, if I could, with you, briefly, Mr. Deputy Secretary.

First, I introduced a bill with Senator Graham back in December called the Democracy in the 21st Century Act. It recognizes that in the digital age we may need to modernize some of the tools that we fund for defending democracy.

It would establish funds with flexible terms and resources for confronting emerging challenges to democracy through the State Department, USAID, and the National Endowment for Democracy with a particular focus on election integrity, emerging technologies, and combating kleptocracy.

Do you think it would be helpful for this committee to take up and pass that legislation in advance of the President's Summit for Democracy at the end of this year?

Mr. MCKEON. Without having read it, Senator Coons, I hesitate to give you a full-throated endorsement, but we welcome the conversation and we, certainly, welcome flexible funds.

It has been 40 years since the National Endowment for Democracy and Institutes were established. They have done a lot of good, but it is certainly worth the conversation to see what other tools we could use.

Senator COONS. This is a piece of legislation I reviewed with both Secretary Albright, a blessed memory, and Senator Sullivan, who has had a leadership role in the IRI. I hope you will consider it and give us some prompt feedback. I think it is well worth taking up and passing.

In 1948, Congress passed the Smith-Mundt Act and it is my understanding that this outdated Cold War era law, along with some of its subsequent amendments, has, at times, had a chilling effect

on the extent to which our career diplomats feel comfortable or feel empowered to share domestically information about the importance of foreign policy.

Foreign policy certainly impacts the American people from public health in a global pandemic to trade issues to national security issues.

Is State exploring any efforts to help ensure that our diplomats are fully engaging with both foreign and domestic audiences and do you think making some modernization revisions to this Cold War era statute that restrains some domestic public diplomacy efforts is worth undertaking?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, the complexity of this—of the Smith-Mundt reforms became enhanced when USAID was merged into the State Department in the late 1990s. We have the Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, and the Public Affairs Bureau certainly has a mandate to talk to the American people and explain what we are doing.

We have always been guided by the Smith-Mundt restriction in not using public diplomacy program dollars, which are aimed at influencing foreign audiences, to communicate with American people.

In the age of the internet, it is more challenging, obviously, than it was when Smith-Mundt was written or even in the late 1990s when the internet was not so common.

So we, certainly, encourage engagement with domestic audiences, not just by the public affairs professionals, but by senior leaders, but I am happy to take a look at what you are proposing.

Senator COONS. I am, frankly, just trying to clear out what I think is some outdated underbrush, that at least from encounters with mid-level Foreign Service officers they have understood to restrain them.

As the chairman mentioned, diversity is a critical and important goal. I have had some folks recently connecting with our HBCU about internship opportunities now that there are paid internship opportunities at the State Department, and I just—I think we can and should do more to actively encourage effective outreach domestically.

Last, if I could, I worked hard to try and remove the barrier to our rejoining UNESCO to get a UNESCO waiver in the SFOPS bill this past year. My view is that we are ceding leadership at the United Nations through a number of different bodies to China.

The Israeli Government supports our returning to UNESCO under certain conditions. Is this something that you think would be an important part of our reengaging effectively with the U.N. community?

Mr. McKEON. We do, Senator, and we support rejoining UNESCO for the reasons you have stated. UNESCO is doing some work on standard setting not just in education, but on things like AI, and if we are not there the Chinese are going to be filling the vacuum. So that is why we support rejoining.

If I could, on the diversity issue and recruiting, as you may know, we have what we call diplomats in residence—regionally focused recruiters around the country—and I believe seven of them are either at HBCUs or Hispanic-serving institutions.

I was just down at Florida International in late March, which is the largest Hispanic-serving institution in the country, to do an event and the Secretary recently did an event at Howard University.

So we want to do more of these, but we are, certainly, trying to get out there.

Mr. Chairman, if I could clean up my answer to Senator Risch on the fever hospital. I had a misunderstanding.

The CHAIRMAN. Sure.

Mr. McKEON. As I said, nobody who is currently stationed in China has gone into a fever hospital if they have tested positive, but they have gone into them if they tested positive when they had come from overseas. So my mistake, Senator.

Senator COONS. Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. I look forward to working with you on this bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, and let me thank Senator Coons, who, as the chair of the Foreign Ops Subcommittee on Appropriations, has worked with us on issues to maximize the Department's—to the Department's benefit.

I also appreciate that things that are within the authorization element we have worked together to try to preserve the authorization versus the appropriating part. So I just want to recognize that and I appreciate it.

I understand Senator Portman is with us virtually.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your having this hearing.

I understand, Mr. Deputy Secretary, that the State Department is returning diplomats to Ukraine. Can you tell us when that is going to happen and, specifically, when are they going back to the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv?

As you know, 17 other countries have already announced returns and most have personnel in place already, including the EU, including France, and I wonder what our timing is.

Mr. McKEON. Yes, Senator. We have already returned to western Ukraine with our diplomats assigned to Embassy Kyiv, have gone into Lviv a couple of times on day trips, including most recently yesterday.

We are doing the security assessment about returning to Kyiv and we are hoping to get back there in the very near future.

Senator PORTMAN. Are you concerned that we are moving too slow and losing a leadership position amongst other countries? Again, 17 countries have already announced returns. Many are already in Kyiv.

I know it is a dangerous environment, but what is your view on our relatively slow return to Kyiv and the impact it is having on the impression of the United States' leadership?

Mr. McKEON. I do not think it is having a negative effect on our engagement with the government in Kyiv. Even when the war started and for the last 2 months, our diplomats based in Poland were in regular communications with Ukrainian Government officials and, as you know, of course, the two—the Secretary of State and Defense were there last weekend and the Speaker was just there.

So I think the Ukrainian Government well understands our commitment to their cause and we are committed to getting back into Kyiv as soon as we can.

Senator PORTMAN. Okay. I appreciate that. Having been in Poland and met with Embassy Kyiv and also, of course, met with them in Kyiv several times, I know they are eager to get back, to say the least.

On this issue of the Global Engagement Center, as you know, in last year's testimony, Secretary Blinken, with regard to the budget, gave his commitment that he would follow through on President Zelensky's request to set up a center for combating disinformation in Ukraine in partnership with GEC.

He also stated that the appointment of a special coordinator, which is the leader of the Global Engagement Center, would happen quickly and was being reviewed.

I am concerned about two things. One is the fact that we still do not have a leader of the Global Engagement Center at a time when there is more disinformation than ever, particularly related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and second, that the funding request this year only asked for a \$5 million increase. Given the disinformation climate that we face today, that seems to me to be inadequate.

Can you give us an update, first, on the efforts of the Global Engagement Center in Ukraine? Are we coordinating with them as they had requested, and then second, why have we still not appointed a special coordinator for the Global Engagement Center 2 years into the Administration?

Mr. McKEON. It hasn't been quite 2 years, but it feels like it some days. I believe we have somebody identified and is in vetting at the minute. The Acting Coordinator, Leah Bray, is very capable, a retired military officer who I worked with in my last government job at the Department of Defense.

We are engaged across the board in exposing disinformation by the Kremlin and coordinating with not just Ukraine, but other partner governments in the region.

Senator PORTMAN. So you are not going to answer my question as to why we do not have a lead for the office yet and what the timing is on getting someone?

This is not a position that has to go through our confirmation process. This is a matter of you all identifying somebody and putting someone in place as the leader. I like Leah Bray also, but she is not the lead. She is in an acting role. So what is your answer to that?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, the personnel process even for those that do not go through the Senate takes a long time sometimes. I am not trying to dodge the question. I believe we have someone identified for the position and that person is in vetting. I do not know the timing, but I will check on it when I get back and let your office know.

Senator PORTMAN. Great. I would love to get a commitment from you today that you will move on that. Again, it seems to me that is the least we should be doing in terms of pushing back on this disinformation that is, as you indicate, an increasing problem.

How about the budget? Do you believe that the \$5 million dollar increase is adequate, given the disinformation environment we face today?

Mr. McKEON. I do. The GEC is undertaking one aspect of their work, which they are trying to normalize their workforce, they have a lot of contractors and we are trying to convert a number of them to full time equivalents and that the resources they have now, I think, meet the moment, but we will take another look at it as we begin the work on the 2024 budget, which we have already started conversations on.

Senator PORTMAN. Yes. I would just say the obvious, Mr. Deputy Secretary, which is that the other countries are spending billions. We are spending tens of millions, and it seems to me this ought to be a huge priority.

I noticed that the Department of Homeland Security is now setting up their own disinformation board of sorts. I think a lot of what they are talking about doing the GEC should be doing at the Global Engagement Center, and if the State Department is not doing it, apparently, other agencies are willing to step up and be more engaged.

I think it is in everybody's interest, including the State Department, to really focus on this effort because it is the—unfortunately, it is the 21st century way that Russia and other countries, including China, Iran, North Korea, are partly waging their conflicts.

With regard to Uniting for Ukraine, last week you announced a new program that I am happy to see us move forward on. The notion is to streamline this process for Ukrainian citizens who have been displaced.

I have heard personally from so many Ohioans who told me, hey, I am willing to help—I want to open my home. More than 500 people have called or emailed our office, by the way. A number of businesses have expressed interest in offering jobs. So there is a big demand out there. I think Ohio alone could take a substantial number of these humanitarian parolees.

How long do you envision this application process taking? Is this a matter of weeks or a matter of months? Could you tell us a little more about how this is going to work?

The CHAIRMAN. So this will be the final question for Senator Portman. It is a minute 40 over so—

Senator PORTMAN. I am sorry. I apologize. I do not have a clock in front of me.

The CHAIRMAN. It is quite all right. You can answer the question, Mr. Secretary.

Mr. McKEON. Senator, I think it will be weeks. The Department of Homeland Security is in the lead on this, though the State Department is helping to facilitate. I was on an interagency call this morning where the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security said we have had about 10,000 people apply already. A lot of this—the application process—can be done electronically. So I do think it will be a matter of weeks.

Senator PORTMAN. Great. Thank you. Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Deputy Secretary, for your service.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Deputy Secretary, good to see you again. I mentioned this at Secretary Blinken's hearing last week. This is really for my colleagues. If you haven't had a chance to see this Foreign Affairs Security Training Center facility at Fort Pickett in Virginia, I would really encourage you to go.

I took a visit during the recess. State Department colleagues were with me. This came through this committee back in 2014–15 and it is truly impressive. I took some staff there on a Friday. Forty-one weeks a year, they run week-long programs for FSOs and their family members to get security training, and Friday is the day of the exercise where they have to put all the security training to good purpose.

It is in a mockup of a town square with an embassy compound that involves an attack on an embassy that is frightening. Even though I was told what was going to happen and knew what was going to happen, it was very, very intense.

Looking at the care that has been devoted to developing this security program, in addition to the fact that—that is the 1-week-long program for all FSOs. There is also, if you want to be in the security side of State, you do 11 weeks there in your first year, 17 weeks there in your second year, and another 11 weeks in your third year before you do an overseas deployment.

I just want to applaud the State Department for this really comprehensive security training. Sadly, we need it in ways we didn't in the past.

Mr. MCKEON. Yes.

Senator KAINE. What I saw firsthand would be hard to describe. I just hope some of my colleagues might have a chance to see it.

Mr. MCKEON. Yes. Thank you for going, Senator. I was there on a Friday as well last fall and it is quite realistic—the training. Just to amplify that point, I have heard two anecdotes in the last few months of officers who have been in a circumstance overseas where they said my training at FASTC made a difference.

One was in Oman where a contractor assigned to the embassy was stabbed in the lungs and the officer jumped in—he was a neighbor—and did whatever medical procedure—emergency medical procedure that he learned at FASTC and he said it came back from that training and probably—and the medical units said it probably saved that person's life.

So it is—we appreciate the support that you have, but also the Congress for this facility. It is really state of the art, and I understand we took you out on the fast driving track and glad you survived.

Senator KAINE. Yes. I had a very calm driver, and as long as he wasn't sweating I wasn't sweating.

Let me ask you this. In the security space, update us on the Administration's effort to determine the cause of Havana syndrome.

Mr. MCKEON. This is a continuing effort on the part of the intelligence community and across the interagency. Earlier, or last fall and earlier this year, we had two panels, one that the Director of National Intelligence commissioned and one that our Diplomatic

Security Bureau commissioned of the JASON, which is academic experts.

Some of the JASON report is unclassified so that is out there for you to read, but there is a classified portion and the DNI issued an unclassified summary, and what both of them found, roughly, is a number of these cases can be explained by environmental and health factors.

There is still a percentage of them for which we do not have an explanation and we are still—we have not identified or attributed this to a particular actor. It is still a frustrating head scratcher that we haven't been able to figure that out.

Senator KAINE. Then frustrating is a good word because a number of State Department personnel have expressed frustration about what they maintain are actions by the Department leadership to either deny them or family members affected by this access to proper medical care.

Talk a little bit about what you are trying to do within State to make sure that our State Department members and their families get access to medical care for this condition.

Mr. McKEON. At post, if somebody reports an incident they are supposed to both report it to the Diplomatic Security Bureau official at post and to the medical unit, and in both cases they go through a questionnaire to try to get a common set of data.

If their symptoms are sufficient that warrant medevac back to Washington, that will be authorized, and then people who need care quickly at a higher level, we have set up a contract with Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore to get holistic care, if you will, for officers and we are also getting some officers into the program at Walter Reed if that is warranted.

Senator KAINE. One last quick question. In February 21, the Department rolled out a new payroll system. There were a number of glitches with that that has delayed people getting paid.

I understand Secretary Blinken has indicated that in instances where pay was long delayed, the State Department will commit to paying interest on those. Just give us an update on how—is the system now fixed and are you taking steps to remedy situations that were caused by people not getting paid on time?

Mr. McKEON. Unfortunately, the system is not fixed yet. The software was implemented. Its implementation was planned by the last team, but it was put in place in March of last year and, in shorthand, I think we were a little too ambitious with this software, doing everything at once, and it is had a lot of errors.

The Secretary just sent out a workforce message apologizing to the workforce and committing to where we owe people to pay interest, and we have engaged some professionals, including a former CIO of the Department, to help us figure this out—it is at our center down in Charleston—and try to work through the glitches.

We have also set up an online-based portal for people to report their challenges because we had a not very efficient system for that to try to improve the response time to help people get the compensation they are owed.

Senator KAINE. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Schatz.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for being here, Secretary.

Freedom House says that global internet freedom has declined for the 11th consecutive year. I was pleased to see the State Department announce its Declaration for the Future of the Internet this past week.

U.S. Government efforts on internet access and protecting journalists and civil society from undemocratic restrictions exist in several places with overlapping functions and resources.

Russia's war in Ukraine puts further pressure on our resources. The Chairman has introduced the INFO Act, which would authorize funding for State, AID, and the U.S. Agency for Global Media to further advance the important work that we are already doing.

Beyond funding, are there organizational or operational changes that you are planning across the Department to kind of consolidate all of these efforts and make sure that one part of the Department, one part of the government, knows what the other side is doing?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, within the Department we recently established the new Bureau on Cyberspace and Digital Policy. So part of their mandate is focused on digital freedom. The Democracy and Human Rights Bureau also works on this issue and we have given them some additional resources to work in this space.

Senator SCHATZ. So what I worry about is scale. I have been in this space for a couple of years now and lots of very important individual efforts are ongoing, but this problem is global, and so I want you to pay particular attention to when we find a model that works when we are working with a country and reversing this trend that it is sort of—not in the literal sense, but it is sort of hand-to-hand combat, right. It is our country working with our counterparts and trying to increase global internet freedom with that country.

My question is scale. Is there someone in charge of figuring out what works and scaling it across the planet, which is sort of, in my view, the State Department's job?

Mr. McKEON. In the bureau I mentioned and also the USAGM and some of its grantees they have a fund. I forget what the name of it is, but open technology that helps with people overcoming restrictions on the internet in a particular country. I mean, this is part and parcel of the broader democratic recession, if you will, where autocrats are using the internet for not good outcomes.

So it is not a standalone policy. It is a part of our broader work on democracy and human rights.

Senator SCHATZ. So today is Global World Press Freedom Day. What do you think about adding press freedom training to Foreign Service Officers?

Mr. McKEON. I will have to take that back and think about it, to be honest. I do not know if it is part of our training for human rights officers. It probably is. I confess I do not know for certain about that.

The Secretary is marking this day today by going to the Foreign Press Center, which has not had an in-person briefing for 2 years. So we are, certainly, as a department giving lift to the brave work of journalists around the world.

Senator SCHATZ. Yes. I just want it to be part of the curriculum. I want it to be part of where the rubber hits the road, which is, as you know, in the Foreign Service.

Finally, in response to my questioning last week, Secretary Blinken said that additional resources may be needed for negotiations for the Compact of Free Association. How are you ensuring that the Department is organized to prioritize and successfully conclude the negotiations, given that Ambassador Yun will need resources and political will not just throughout your Department, but through Interior and Defense?

Mr. McKEON. Broadly, we are focused on this issue, not just what Ambassador Yun is doing on the compacts, but on the challenge in the Pacific Islands because the Chinese are, obviously, making a big play there.

When Secretary Kerry and Assistant Secretary Medina were out in Palau recently for the Our Oceans Conference they heard this in stereo sound that we needed to up our game on resources.

So we are taking a hard look at both how we can adequately fund the compacts, but also the Tuna Treaty that we have with several countries in the South Pacific and, more broadly, our resources for diplomacy in the region. We are going to be planning to open a new post in the Solomon Islands.

Senator SCHATZ. So two questions that I hope will be a quick yes. First, I assume you will get back to this committee on resources required. That is number one.

Mr. McKEON. Yes.

Senator SCHATZ. Secondly, one of the things that I have heard is that although the Department of Defense looms large and in a positive way as it relates to the Compact of Free Association, they are, understandably, not the tip of the spear as it relates to the sort of negotiations themselves.

I would like to see a DoD representative in all the meetings. It doesn't necessarily have to be at the secretary level, but someone to convey that this is a whole-of-government effort with State, Interior, and Defense, and I am wondering if you can talk to your counterparts to make sure we have DoD in the room.

I have heard a little bit of chatter that they are not quite in the room, that they are waiting to see how this resolves and support it at the end. I think we need them to convey that the entire U.S. Government is behind the renegotiation.

Mr. McKEON. I will check on that. I was not aware they were not in the room, and we will get back to you.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. McKeon, welcome.

Mr. McKEON. Good morning.

Senator CRUZ. I want to ask you about the State Department's ongoing efforts to finalize a nuclear deal with Iran.

Last week in this committee I discussed the IRGC terrorism sanctions with Secretary Blinken and he said that dismantling some sanctions would be worth it because the deal has benefits that will meaningfully roll back Iran's nuclear program.

I want to ask you about those benefits because I do not think that is true and I do not think you do either. Since President Biden was elected, Iran has made enormous unprecedented progress on its nuclear program, including enriching uranium to 60 percent, deploying advanced centrifuges, and acquiring significant knowledge.

The Biden administration has a secret assessment that says there is a point after which the nuclear progress would make the deal meaningless. Secretary Blinken has referenced that point in public numerous times since last year, but you have never revealed to this committee what that point is publicly. Administration officials have told this committee in classified briefings what your assessment is but, again, it has been kept from the public.

This weekend, Chairman Menendez said, "We are told by the Administration that if the negotiations didn't conclude by the end of February that, in fact, the time that would be lost and what we would gain would be of very little importance or value to us."

Now it is the end of April. So if the end of February wasn't going to buy us what we need, certainly, the end of April is not there. That is entirely consistent with everything I have heard and seen.

So my question is does the State Department intend to make your internal assessment public?

Mr. McKEON. Senator Cruz, I think that is probably an assessment of the Intelligence Committee that is classified. So my answer to you right now without knowing more would be not in the near term, but this is not a topic I work on so I will have to take that question back.

Senator CRUZ. So if the State Department has an assessment that says the deal's benefits became meaningless months ago, why is the State Department still negotiating?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, as I said, I do not work on this issue literally. I am not in any briefings. I am not up to speed on what is happening. I do not have a different answer than the Secretary would have given you last week.

Senator CRUZ. I think the State Department needs to come clean with the American people about an assessment that impacts the safety and security of every American and the safety and security of our allies.

Let us turn to a different topic. I want to ask you about the new so-called Disinformation Governance Board that the Biden administration recently announced. The board is an interagency team assembled under the Department of Homeland Security allegedly to combat disinformation, and it shows every sign of potentially becoming an Orwellian tool to target Americans whom Democrats consider to be their political opponents.

In defense of the board, Biden administrations have rushed out to say no, no, no. You do not understand. The board is not going to target Americans. It is about targeting foreign disinformation.

I got to say, I was surprised to hear that and I expect many members of this committee were equally surprised and that is because the U.S. Government already has an interagency organization built to counter foreign disinformation. It is the Global Engagement Center at the Department of State.

Its mission is, "To direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand,

expose, and counter foreign state and nonstate propaganda and disinformation.”

The GEC was created and has been consistently supported by bipartisan legislation that has come out of this committee. Last year, Senators Portman and Murphy filed a new authorization for \$150 million for the GEC, again, to “counter foreign state and nonstate sponsored propaganda and disinformation.”

It would seem that either the Biden administration has created a completely redundant organization to target foreign disinformation, duplicating and undermining this committee’s work over years, or they are not being honest about what the new board is designed to do and that it is actually designed to target Americans.

So I want to ask you, how do you understand the GEC’s mission to differ from the new disinformation board and what activities currently being conducted by the GEC would State contemplate ceding to this newly created board?

Mr. McKEON. The GEC, Senator, is outward facing, engaged in exposing to foreign publics the disinformation that we see our adversaries putting out there, whether it is the Russian or Chinese or some other entity.

I am not familiar with this new DHS entity. I just saw the headline in the paper this morning. I had not heard of it so I do not know how it would differ.

Senator CRUZ. So State was not consulted even though, ostensibly, what this new agency does is something already assigned to State and there is already an effort stood up to do this?

Mr. McKEON. I do not know if the folks at the GEC or in our public diplomacy—public affairs office were consulted. I will have to find out and get back to you.

Senator CRUZ. You were not consulted?

Mr. McKEON. I was not. No.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Deputy Secretary, great to see you, and I want to associate myself with the comments the chairman made in his opening remarks about your efforts to make sure that the State Department reflects the great diversity of talent in the country, and appreciate the efforts you are making in that regard and associate myself with the remarks of the ranking member and the comment that you made distinguishing risk awareness, which we want to be very focused on, but contrasting that with risk adversity because I do think it is important that our State Department officers get out and about to the extent that they can do so without putting themselves at great risk.

The issues we cover in this hearing are not the ones that make headlines, but they are fundamental to the success and implementation of our foreign policy, and I want to start by asking you about implementation of the Foreign Service Families Act.

I asked Secretary Blinken about this when he was here and, again, I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member for

working with Senator Sullivan and I to pass this, which we think is essential to continuing to attract and retain top-notch talent.

Passing the bill was just the beginning. There are lots of pieces to implementation. I just want your commitment to work with us to try to expedite a lot of the details we need to put in place to make it real.

Mr. McKEON. You have that commitment, Senator. Thank you for your work on it. I remember we discussed it in my confirmation hearing back in March of last year.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. If there is somebody in addition to yourself—and I appreciate your being available on your team—who we should be in contact with who would that be?

Mr. McKEON. I think most of the provisions, if I remember from reading it, fall on the workforce so it would be the Director General of the Foreign Service, Ambassador Perez.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you.

So I have a couple questions regarding the Priority 2 system that we established for Afghan refugees back in August 2021. There seems to be an awful lot of confusion about the current status of this program, and we are contacted daily by NGOs who have staff members who they believe and we believe, looking at the facts, would be eligible for the P-2 applications.

Can you give me a sense of how many P-2 applicants have arrived in the United States?

Mr. McKEON. I do not know that number, but it is not a large number because in order to be processed as refugees they have to get out of Afghanistan in the first instance.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I understand that and we have been working hard to communicate that fact, but there are also a number of people who have gotten out of Afghanistan and did so with the expectation that they would then qualify, and so they are sitting now in third countries.

Let me just read to you a reply that we received from the Department of State's Afghanistan Task Force when we inquired about some of these P-2 applicants. "We are unable to provide status updates for individuals referred to for P-1 or P-2 access to the United States Refugee Admission Program at this time. Eligible referrals will be processed and individuals who have been referred will receive notification by email once updated information or instructions are available," and it has been radio silence.

Mr. McKEON. How recently was that response?

Senator VAN HOLLEN. This was sent some—I will get you the exact date, but I would just ask, again, for your—

Mr. McKEON. I think we can do better than that.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Yes. I appreciate—

Mr. McKEON. We can follow up with your staff on the cases.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. I appreciate that. At the very least what I want to do is let these individuals know whether they have a chance, right? Because right now you have got a lot of expectations and where people are just not getting information. So I appreciate that. We will follow up with you.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The requested information follows:]

Since July 2021, the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) has received a total of 45,028 P1 and P2 referrals to the United

States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for Afghan applicants. As of August 10, 2022, nearly 24,000 of those referrals have been deemed complete and accepted into our program. Because of the heavy volume received, acceptance and processing timelines were initially delayed. As of August 10, 2022, over 13,000 additional applications have been flagged for further information or additional follow-up from the sponsoring individual or organization. Another approximately 7,500 applications have been closed or found ineligible for acceptance into the USRAP.

A small number of applications are presently pending review, as a result of resubmission by sponsors providing additional information or other circumstances. We recognize and regret previous delays in processing, but are pleased to report that at this time we are not currently running a backlog. The Department of State provides applicants with information on the status of their application and instructions on next steps once their referral has been accepted. That communication informs them that as soon as they are outside of Afghanistan their cases will begin to undergo processing.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Finally, security clearances. This is driving me crazy. I just had an example of somebody who had been on my staff who was accepted for a position dealing with arms control at the State Department.

The security clearance process took 10 months at a time when the people who wanted him really needed his expertise and talents, given everything that is going on in the world right now.

This is a longer conversation, but I would—this is a broken area. It is one of the areas that doesn't get a lot of attention. Can you speak to how long it takes, on average, for somebody at the State Department to get a security clearance?

Mr. McKEON. I do not know the average number. I know the pain point you described of taking too long in the case of officers. We sometimes lose aspirants for the Foreign Service because it takes too long.

We have had a working group underway for a couple of years trying to speed up the process and there is a broader governmental effort for the last several years to try to speed up the process.

I can report some good news. We have started to use some automation tools—bots—to speed up some parts of the process. For example, it used to be the case if you were transferring from one civil service position to another for reasons nobody can explain it would take 6 weeks to transfer the clearance.

We can now do that in one day because of this automation. So we are working to fix it. I hear—I do town halls virtually with posts around the world. The number-one question all the time is eligible family employment, which is part of your bill, and related to that is clearance for eligible family members seeking employment.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. I do look forward and we will be following up with you and your team on this.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Murphy.

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

Good to see you. Thank you for being here today. First, let me just associate myself with some of the remarks I heard from the ranking member.

I want to thank Senator Risch and Senator Menendez for working with this committee to reform the Accountability Review Board process and I just look forward to continuing to work with you to make sure that the Department can shift its approach to risk to

make sure that we can get our diplomatic staff out into high-threat environments to expand our footprint. Absolutely essential.

I know it is integral to our conversation about reopening in Kyiv, but it is also really important when it comes to a lot of other dangerous places where State Department personnel need to be out on the frontlines.

Second, I do think Senator Cruz fundamentally misunderstands what the Global Engagement Center is and how the mission of it is fundamentally different than the mission of the Department of Homeland Security.

The mission of the Department of Homeland Security is to protect the homeland, to protect the United States from misinformation and propaganda attacks from foreign actors. The mission of the Global Engagement Center is to work with partner countries around the world to protect them and their citizens from those misinformation attacks.

In fact, the Global Engagement Center makes no grants to U.S. nonprofits or institutions. The Global Engagement Center, which Senator Portman and I have championed, makes grants to foreign media sources, fact checkers, watchdogs, to try to combat Russian and Chinese misinformation outside of the United States.

They are fundamentally different missions. I am not sure that there is any contention that one would steal from the other.

Two questions for you, Mr. McKeon, if I can. One is just a follow-up on a question I asked you, perhaps at your confirmation hearing on the issue of subnational diplomacy and I just want to keep on hammering this home.

Here is an example of how other countries approach empowering city and state local actors to engage in diplomacy. The city of Shanghai has 100 staff dedicated to building diplomatic relationships around the world simply for the city of Shanghai.

The United States has no office at a federal level, at the State Department level, dedicated to the same mission. In China, there is a hundred-person office in one city dedicated to this.

So I know that you said earlier that this was something of great interest to the Secretary. I would look forward to any update you have on efforts to establish—reestablish a office of subnational city and state diplomacy at the Department of State. We have got legislation that would do that pending before this committee.

Any updates on efforts to raise the profile of our local and State actors in diplomatic efforts around the world?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, it is still our intention to set up an office within the Department to deal with this issue and I believe we have identified the person to lead it. I do not know the timing. It has been hanging for a little bit, but I know we have positions identified and where it would be lodged. So I will come back to you in a couple of weeks to give you an update.

Senator MURPHY. Yes. I just think we are leaving a lot of talent on the playing field when we do not sort of purposely organize our local elected officials, Republicans and Democrats, to represent the United States around the world.

Then, lastly, to back up a little bit from Senator Van Hollen's question, this year's budget requests includes a 50 percent increase

for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. You set this very ambitious target for admissions from Ukraine.

We haven't seen that flow really start and my understanding is because there is a lot of work to do to rebuild USRAP from a lot of the damage that was done by the last Administration.

Can you just, in a minute, talk about why this budget request is so essential to be able to build back up the capacity so that we can specifically target that hundred thousand number for Ukrainian admissions?

Mr. MCKEON. So just on the Ukrainian target of a hundred thousand that the President has set, I think a lot of those will end up being people coming through the United for Ukraine program that DHS has announced. They will come in on temporary parole authority.

There are some refugees through the Lautenberg program that we are trying to accelerate and some people will just come through normal visas—family reunification immigrant visas.

On the broader Refugee Admissions Program, we have a lot of rebuilding to do because the program was decimated by the previous Administration. The backbone, the local resettlement agencies, a lot of them went out of business, and we have been hampered in the last year-plus with COVID.

There is still a restriction overseas in processing refugees, and our partner, USCIS, also needs to rebuild its workforce. They do the interviews overseas for people coming through the refugee program.

The President has given us a very ambitious target. We are not going to hit it this year, but we have got to make progress so that we can hit it in the next couple of years.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Secretary, just a couple of follow-ups. The Department's request for implementing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, as required by several Executive orders, is \$65.6 million. Can you give us an insight as to what specifically that funding will be used for?

Mr. MCKEON. I think the number that I am tracking is actually a little bigger than that, Senator, with \$73 million in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. It would be a range of things, the Office of Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley, for one, getting resources to do some data analysis and surveys, some additional money for the Foreign Service Institute for training, additional resources for our Human Resources Bureau, and in the strategic plan that we discussed earlier there are a lot of specific projects and targets that the plan sets out and we will need some funding to implement those programs.

The CHAIRMAN. Then given that racial equity became a priority of the Department as a result of the Executive order, this past year, following global racial justice efforts, we will be receiving a budget—will we be receiving a budget request for dedicated funding to address global racial equity?

The 2023 budget request provides \$2.6 billion to advance gender equity and equality. How at all will the racial and gender equity goals be coordinated?

Mr. McKEON. So the Executive order you speak of the President issued on his first day in office and then all departments were asked to put together plans to implement it, which we just released ours, and an officer on my team led a cross-department effort to develop this plan, and it is really designed to embed in our programs in both public diplomacy, foreign assistance, our overall diplomatic engagement, more outreach to underserved and marginalized communities overseas.

There is money integrated in the foreign assistance budget, about \$40 million, to advance these principles. The gender equity piece that you reference, some of that is not new money, but it is attribution exercises, looking at existing programs and shifting some of the focus to make sure that it has a gender equity component, and I think over time we will be doing more of that on the racial equity side.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate that. As I have said, this is of great importance to us and you know we believe in leading by example. I want you to know that as the Department hired a Chief Diversity Officer, as the chairman and I have hired a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the first time that committee has ever had one, Mischa Thompson, who is here with us today.

So I look forward with her working with the Department, at the end of the day, to achieve some mutual goals that we can make real groundbreaking breakthroughs on some things that have been lasting for so long.

As part of your March 3 confirmation process, you responded to questions that the Bureau of African Affairs is chronically understaffed both in terms of positions and vacancies, and you committed to me to work with the Bureau of African Affairs to ensure it has the resources, including personnel, necessary to meet the Bureau's objectives.

It has been 14 months since that hearing. Can you give me a sense, have you undertaken a review of the Africa Bureau's resources, including personnel? What did your review reveal and what actions are we taking?

Mr. McKEON. As part of both the 2022 and the 2023 budgets and, as you know, we have talked about this, we have asked for hundreds of additional positions, both in the Foreign and Civil Service, and I want to say the Africa Bureau is second in line for—behind the East Asia Bureau in getting new positions. Let me confirm that for you. Off the top of my head, that is my recollection.

The challenge we have a lot of times in Africa posts, and I have heard this from both the current assistant secretary and the previous acting assistant secretary, is getting people to bid.

Even though the positions may be there at a post—a hardship post—it is finding people to bid and to do a tour like that. The school may not be particularly good if they have kids in—school-aged children.

So the Bureau of Global Talent Management is working with the Africa Bureau to look at additional incentives to try to encourage people to serve at Africa posts, and we can get you an update on that work.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. If you would do that I would appreciate it.

Lastly, there was some discussion here on refugees. The Migration and Refugee Assistance Account funds assistance programs to protect vulnerable people around the world including refugees, conflict victims, internally-displaced people, stateless persons, vulnerable migrants.

The Fiscal Year 2022 requests included \$550 million for refugee admissions and resettlement efforts that would be used to rebuild the refugee resettlement infrastructure within the U.S. and admit up to 125,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2022.

I think you just said we are not on track to meet that goal, as I understand it. Where are we at in this regard? Do we have allocations on the number of refugees we plan to admit from different geographic areas? Where is the rebuilding process now?

Mr. McKEON. On that geographic allocation, that would have been done last September before the start of the fiscal year, announced by the President or the Secretary. So we can get you those numbers. I do not have them at hand.

As I was saying previously to Senator Murphy, the rebuilding has to happen in a few places, one internally in the Population and Refugees Migration Bureau. They have staffed up the admissions office but I think we are probably going to be looking for more officers to—or more positions to assign to them.

Second, the local network of resettlement agencies around the country, a lot of them went out of business because of lack of funding in the last Administration. So we have got to rebuild that infrastructure.

We have done some of that through the Afghan evacuees that we processed and resettled last year, but we have also undertaken to forward fund some money to the resettlement agencies to help them rebuild.

Then overseas, we do the work, but also USCIS goes out and does so-called circuit rides to interview refugee applicants, and USCIS has a number of personnel shortfalls that they are trying to fill so that we can rebuild.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Mr. Deputy Secretary, welcome to the committee. We have seen dramatic disruptions in consular services over the past several years.

First, COVID upended the entire model of fee-based funding as global travel dramatically declined. Second, tens of thousands of Afghan translators and allies were left stranded after the Administration's bungled withdrawal from Afghanistan, and now there are new pressures from the massive crisis in Ukraine.

How does the Department plan to make consular services more resilient to global disruptions?

Mr. McKEON. Senator, you are right that the fee-funded foundation that we have for our programs undermined our consular services during the pandemic, but—and Congress has helped us in the last couple of years with direct appropriations to fill some of the gaps.

I think we are in a better place financially now because travel is picking up so the passport and visa fees—the income is coming in and Congress also in the 2022 appropriations bill allowed us to

keep some more of the fees that were previously remitted to the Treasury.

So I think in terms of our financial base, we are in a good position. We still need to rebuild at post and we have a new Assistant Secretary, Rena Bitter, who is focused intensely on this.

I know we have had a conversation, I believe, with your office about visas for nurses. So she has gone around to some of our biggest visa-issuing posts to make sure they are well postured to deal with what you have described.

Senator YOUNG. Very good. I hope you will keep this committee and my own office updated if the projections are off. Incidentally, what are the contingency plans if the fees do not increase as much as the Department is projecting?

Mr. McKEON. Right now, we have a good base and we see that travel is picking up around the world. The demand for passports is up as we head into summer travel season and, certainly, we have got a lot of visa applications that are backlogged.

At the moment, I do not think we have a concern that the revenues are going to fall significantly again. We may have to come back to Congress to help for—ask for a little more help, but I do not anticipate that we will.

Senator YOUNG. As you and I have discussed previously, I remain gravely concerned by the delays we have seen in issuing visas for the nurses, which you were kind enough to mention, and other travelers providing lifesaving services here in the U.S.

As embassies reopen following the pandemic, how is the Department prioritizing among the many competing demands for consular services?

Mr. McKEON. One of the biggest—the posts that issue the most visas for nurses which, off the top my head, are Manila, Kingston, Jamaica, and I forget the third one—I think it is in Nigeria or Kenya—we have prioritized these visas for nurses coming to the United States, obviously, filling a critical gap, particularly in rural hospitals.

We have given posts flexibility to make decisions about how to prioritize certain issues. During the pandemic, the priority was, really, just American citizen services and immigrant visas.

We recognize, depending on the post, there are other priorities that we need to fill, whether it is student visas, visas for shipping crews. There is a range of priorities that we are hearing from industry about that we are trying to be very responsive to.

Senator YOUNG. Is there a list of prioritized categories?

Mr. McKEON. Each post would have their own prioritization. I mean, we have given guidance from Washington, but we also want to allow them the flexibility to manage their workload.

As I said, in a post, for example, that has a high demand for nurses visas those are one of the top priorities.

Senator YOUNG. The National Visa Center has almost a half million cases that are documentarily complete, yet only 32,000 were scheduled for interviews this month. What resources does the Department need to reduce this massive backlog?

Mr. McKEON. Are those immigrant visas, Senator, that you are referring to? I am not sure I am tracking this particular—with respect to this.

Senator YOUNG. Yes. Yes, they are.

Mr. McKEON. I will have to get back to you with a more thorough response. My instinct—the answer to that question is simply bandwidth within a visa post that are still—where COVID is still a challenge.

There would be constraints in the waiting room how many people can be there under local conditions at any one time, and we have fewer consular positions because of the funding challenges we had in the last couple of years.

We are trying to rebuild the workforce and get more positions assigned out, but let me get Consular Affairs to come back with a more thorough answer.

Senator YOUNG. Sure, but in light of the critical visa categories that we need to run through here and the ongoing pandemic, I think a number of us would be ready to offer some surge capacity if presented plans.

Mr. McKEON. Some of the things—one of the things we have done, Senator, with some nonimmigrant visas is to get authority working with DHS to waive the interview requirement for certain categories of applicants. So that eases the burden on some posts.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Secretary, I have been around here long enough to know that gratitude and thank yous are few and far between. So let me just say I want to thank you and Assistant Secretary Bitter, in particular, for the hard work that you have helped in my office—I know others as well—in terms of some challenging Consular Affairs cases.

I know you understand how important that work is and I appreciate the notable change in the Department's attitude and engagement in this regard. So thank you for that. Thank you for the—

Mr. McKEON. Thank you for saying that, Senator. Assistant Secretary Bitter is one of our best. I make it a point when I travel domestically to go to our passport offices and I went to the National Visa Center national passport center, which is in New Hampshire, a couple of months ago and customer service is their mantra. This is what they do and they are very committed to it.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. Whenever I travel abroad, I always ask to see the chief consular officer because they do incredibly important work.

So with the appreciation of the committee for your appearance and thoughtful answers and for the work we are doing together on State Department reauthorization, this record will remain open to the close of business tomorrow.

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

[Whereupon, at 11:30 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN P. McKEON TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: I have long championed a diverse workforce at the Department and equity in the implementation of U.S. foreign policy, which is why I commended last year's appointment of the Department's first

Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer—Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley. Given longstanding racism around the globe affecting numerous communities and our American troops, diplomats, students, and business professionals living and working overseas, I also welcomed the Department's announcement of a Special Envoy for Racial Equity and Equity Action Plan last week. Both efforts demonstrate our commitment to democratic values and are critical to the long-term success of our foreign policy interests overseas, which is why I would like to work closely with you to ensure their success. Given the Department cited equity as a “strategic National Security imperative” and included equity in the Joint Strategic Plan with USAID, will the Special Envoy on Racial Equity sit in the Secretary's front office and hold the status of Ambassador similar to others appointed to lead critical efforts of the Department?

Answer. The Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice (SRREJ), a Senior Executive Service-level position, will be located in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor's (DRL) front office, given DRL's responsibility for a range of equity, social justice, and human rights issues. The SRREJ will work with the Secretary, Under Secretaries, U. S. Ambassadors, multilateral institutions, civil society, and host governments worldwide to combat systemic racism and advance the human rights of members of marginalized racial and ethnic communities. The SRREJ is responsible for successfully integrating Executive Order 13985 into all aspects of the Department's foreign affairs mission.

Question. While the work of the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer was included in this year's budget request, I did not see a funding request for the Department's large-scale equity efforts, from increasing procurement opportunities for minority-owned businesses to establishing a new Special Envoy on Racial Equity's office and work. Will you be submitting a budget request for this important equity work to this Committee?

Answer. The Department's FY 2023 Congressional Budget Justification Appendix 1 includes a table (page 10) outlining diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) priorities. The Department also created a Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice based in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to advance racial equity in State's policies and programs and support Executive Order 13985. Similar equity-based efforts include initiatives in the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons, Special Advisor for Disability Rights, the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, and the Office of Civil Rights. Work on procurement opportunities is the responsibility of two existing offices: the Office of the Procurement Executive and the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. The director of the latter office reports directly to me.

Question. With an eye towards identifying opportunities for us to work together to achieve equity and workforce diversity goals in foreign affairs, can we schedule regular meetings on these efforts and consultations on significant developments and decisions between our staffs?

Answer. Yes, we welcome the opportunity for regular meetings to discuss the Department's progress on equity in foreign affairs and workforce diversity.

Question. Cyber Bureau: I was glad to see the official launch of the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy a few weeks ago—and to see that building capacity in cyberspace and emerging technologies is a priority for this year's budget ... these steps will be essential in addressing some of the most critical challenges in the coming decades. What will be the key priorities for this new bureau in the next year?

Answer. I see building an integrated team while also advancing our diplomatic objectives as crucial to our success over the next year. That means hiring the right leadership and staff throughout the bureau, as well as coordinating and advancing the security, economic, and values-based elements of cyberspace policy and diplomacy. Through our diplomacy, we will ensure the United States remains the world's innovative leader and standard setter, keeping universal rights and democratic values at the center of innovation while working to ensure digital technologies deliver real benefits to people's lives. We will also support and work with partners and allies to develop and deploy digital technologies to tackle the most urgent challenges we face.

Question. The next 5 years?

Answer. Within the next 5 years, the Cyberspace and Digital Policy (CDP) bureau will be leading and coordinating, at State and throughout the interagency, work with foreign and domestic counterparts to shape an open digital future by preventing cyber attacks that target our businesses, working to ensure that digital

technologies help advance human rights, and promoting a digital economy based on our democratic values. Our task will also be to put forth and carry out a compelling international vision for how to develop, deploy, and use digital technologies in a way that serves our people, protects our interests, and upholds our democratic values.

Question. Will you commit to keeping this Committee apprised of the new bureau's work and to consult with this Committee on significant developments and decisions? Will you commit to the same with respect to the planned Special Envoy for Critical and Emerging Technologies?

Answer. Yes, we are committed to maintaining open and regular communications with Congress and this Committee on issues related to the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy's mission, objectives, and progress. We are committed to doing the same with regards to the Office of the Special Envoy for Critical and Emerging Technology. We are grateful for the bipartisan support as the Department reorganized to elevate and institutionalize these critical foreign policy issues.

Question. Bureau of African Affairs: The Committee has received nominations for career foreign service officers to serve in key posts in Africa—Sudan, South Sudan, and Mali. All candidates seem to be imminently qualified to become Ambassadors, and I will move their nominations as quickly as possible. I would note that none of them has served as Ambassador before and none of them has served in Africa over the course of their careers. What message does it send to Foreign Service officers and civil servants who have spent considerable time working in Washington or at posts in Africa about prospects for career advancement?

Answer. The Bureau of African Affairs (AF), alongside the other regional bureaus, seeks to fill Chief of Mission (COM) positions with individuals who have substantial senior leadership experience from varying backgrounds and who have substantial experience working in hardship conditions. AF firmly believes in ensuring embassies mirror the America they represent and recommends qualified COM candidates with proven track records. By including qualified candidates regardless of prior regional experience, AF can draw from a more substantial pool of diverse applicants. This message of inclusion is highly valued by our employees, who know they too may be considered as candidates for leadership assignments throughout the Department of State, regardless of prior regional experience.

Question. Do you think it has had an impact on morale?

Answer. Opening leadership opportunities to qualified staff, regardless of their previous regional expertise, is an important factor in maintaining morale among the senior ranks of the service, as it makes opportunities more inclusive. For officers with extensive experience in one bureau to be competitive for positions in others, bureaus must be open to fair competition from officers throughout the Department who have relevant skills.

Question. What accounts for the fact that we are sending first time Ambassadors with no Africa experience to some of the most challenging posts on the continent?

Answer. Successful Chief of Mission candidates have strong, broad leadership, management, and foreign policy experience, independent of regional expertise. The Bureau of African Affairs makes every effort to recruit candidates who have applicable regional and functional experience based on post specific qualifications. This includes a proven track record of leading a large, diverse workforce and working with interagency counterparts, particularly in hardship conditions. Those nominated for senior leadership positions quickly become knowledgeable of their future areas of responsibility through substantial consultations with experts of various fields and bring a comparative perspective and valued diversity of experience to the region.

Question. Is this a legacy of the loss of senior staff during the last Administration?

Answer. With robust interest from qualified candidates, the Bureau of African Affairs has found qualified candidates from various backgrounds, while not excluding applicants with experience on the African continent. With 46 Chiefs of Mission (COM) in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is frequent turnover. This is sometimes due to retirement, but other times due to regular transfers and onward assignments, either as COM elsewhere or to a leadership position back in Washington. The President has nominated superbly qualified candidates to fill these vacancies.

Question. Embassy Baghdad Staffing: The Administration's move to end combat operations and transition the U.S.-Iraq relationship to a strategic one centered on bilateral diplomacy are positive steps, which I fully support. However, I remain concerned that the drawdowns of the previous Administration left Embassy Baghdad understaffed, relative to the size and scope of its mission. While the safety and security of U.S. personnel is always paramount, I believe that a robust diplomatic pres-

ence, including in southern Iraq, will be key to this new phase of the U.S.-Iraq relationship that is centered on bilateral diplomacy. What is your assessment of current staffing levels at Embassy Baghdad and what do you need to see on the ground before considering an increase to those levels?

Answer. I and the team at Embassy Baghdad are committed to ensuring the embassy is not only secure, but also appropriately staffed to meet Department goals. While current in-country staffing levels in Iraq are temporary and reversible, they are consistent with the existing Ordered Departure status. As with all our posts, we continue to assess both the security and health environment in Iraq and hope to revert to higher in-country staffing levels as soon as circumstances permit.

Question. Similarly, what would you need to see on the ground before reopening the U.S. consulate in Basrah?

Answer. The Department suspended operations at U.S. Consulate General Basrah in 2018 as a result of heightened security threats. We continue to evaluate the security situation in Basrah and will, of course, continue to keep Congress apprised of any decisions.

Question. What is the status of physical security repairs and facilities upgrades at Embassy Baghdad?

Answer. The December 2019 attacks left the Baghdad embassy compound with significant damage, destroying three of the five Compound Access Control (CAC) facilities. The Department is currently executing an expedited design-build repair project to return the main CAC to its original, pre-attack condition and functionality, scheduled for completion in September. In addition, the Department has allocated funding for design of the remaining CAC replacements and wall enhancements. Once the design is complete, the Department intends to review available prior year funds to award a construction contract for the work, currently planned in FY 2023.

Question. Yemen: As we currently do not have an embassy presence in Yemen, all U.S. diplomatic operations take place out of the Riyadh-based Yemen Affairs Unit. Given the recent on the ground developments surrounding the UN-brokered truce between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition, do you imagine any changes to the current U.S. footprint and embassy operations?

Answer. No. At this time, I do not foresee any changes to our current U.S. footprint and embassy operations in Yemen. We continue to monitor the situation in Sana'a and work with our allies and stakeholders to develop a long-term solution regarding our presence in Yemen. However, it is important to note the Houthis are still detaining a dozen of our current and former local staff and remain in breach of the U.S. embassy compound in Sana'a; we continue to press for the unconditional release of our staff. The Department also intends to comply with all applicable Congressional consultation and notification requirements should we decide to increase our footprint in Yemen. Our ultimate objective is to ensure our presence in Yemen furthers U.S. national security interests and enables our government to carry out the full range of diplomatic activities while maintaining the safety of diplomatic personnel.

Question. The U.S. has hundreds of locally employed staff in Yemen, many of which have recently become targets. Over 30 Yemeni U.S. Government employees have been forcibly detained by the Houthis. How does the Department plan on ensuring the safety of the locally employed staff and what efforts are being taken to protect the U.S. compound in Sana'a?

Answer. Ensuring the safety of our local staff in Sana'a remains a top priority and is extremely challenging for a variety of reasons, including the lack of host nation government presence in the city. The Yemen Affairs Unit in Riyadh and multiple other offices of the Department continue to collaborate in pursuit of options for our local staff that include potential immigration to the United States and employment at other posts, on both temporary and permanent bases.

The Houthis remain in control of the U.S. compound in Sana'a. The Department is engaged in several diplomatic efforts to recover control of the compound which, if successful, will lead to a reassessment of its security infrastructure.

Question. Libya: I understand that the Department is exploring the resumption of a diplomatic mission in Libya. In March, Ambassador John Bass visited Libya to further assess the prospects of resuming the U.S. embassy's operations in Tripoli. Where do these discussions stand and have the recent political developments in Libya impacted U.S. consultations?

Answer. Following his trip, Ambassador Bass authorized the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and Overseas Building Operations to survey potential interim mission sites with the intention, security conditions permitting, of establishing a semi-permanent presence staffed by rotating officers. Our efforts to restore a full diplomatic mission continue, and we will brief Congress on the next steps. We, of course, monitor the political and security environment in Libya closely and will continue to do so.

Question. Last I heard, the Tunis-based embassy staff is able to go in and out of Libya at least 1 day per month. Is there more flexibility in how often staff is able to travel in and out of Libya for diplomatic engagements?

Answer. Because of the ongoing suspension of U.S. embassy operations in Libya, the Under Secretary for Management must approve all travel for personnel under Chief of Mission security responsibility into Libya. Consideration of whether to approve travel into Libya takes into account an assessment of threats, security resources, and the necessity for travel, and each trip requires significant logistical and security support. The frequency of our diplomatic engagement has steadily increased over the last few years, but increased engagement will depend on the availability of facilities and resources to ensure the security of our personnel.

Question. What are the current security needs for ensuring the safety of these individuals?

Answer. As in all locations, our security requirements are a mixture of fixed/static security, movement security, physical security, crisis response/quick reaction forces, and other considerations. We would be happy to detail our requirements in a classified setting.

Question. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI): Since 2002, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) has worked to address gaps in educational and economic opportunity and participatory governance across the Middle East, especially for young people, women and religious and ethnic minorities. However, funding has decreased over the years, as has the scope of MEPI's work, which now focuses on scholarships. What steps can MEPI take to expand its scope to include more of the types of programs that were envisioned at its outset, in addition to scholarships?

Answer. Since 2020, more than 75 percent of funding for MEPI has supported the Tomorrow's Leaders (TL) scholarship program, consistent with Congressional directives. The FY 2023 budget request for MEPI seeks funding to continue support for TL. It will also maintain, at a reduced scope, leadership and alumni programs and continued work with governments and citizens on locally identified and led reforms to enhance government responsiveness, democratic decision-making, inclusive economic growth, and greater opportunities for youth, women, and marginalized communities. The Department will continue to leverage MEPI and explore opportunities to expand initiatives of impact to advance U.S. interests when possible.

Question. Priority GAO Recommendations: For several years, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has sent the Secretary of State (along with other Department heads) a letter identifying the most important outstanding recommendations for your agency to address. In its 2021 letter, GAO highlighted issues including embassy construction planning, cyber diplomacy, and security assistance vetting. Will you commit that senior leadership will review the list of recommendations GAO highlights as the most important and taking steps to ensure they are addressed?

Answer. Yes, I am fully committed to closing GAO recommendations, including the priority ones, in a timely manner. We value these recommendations to improve our programs and operations. In the recently released (May 2022) Priority Open Recommendations letter, GAO noted the Department's implementation rate was 94 percent. We will continue to work with GAO to assure that recommendations are closed as quickly as possible.

Question. Embassy Construction: In 2018, GAO reported that State's Overseas Buildings Operations Bureau had built 77 embassies under its Capital Security Construction Program since 1999, at a total cost of about \$24 billion. However, GAO found that the pace of the embassy construction program had slowed. Furthermore, State had not provided Congress with information on the potential effects of construction inflation on Program capacity or timeframes for building the nearly 50 embassies identified for replacement beyond 2022. Have you assessed the effects of worldwide construction inflation on the Program? If so, how is it going to impact the pace of new embassy construction?

Answer. The Department has assessed the effects of the worldwide construction inflation on the new embassy construction program and estimated the effects of lost

purchasing power on the program's capacity. The average inflation rate of 3.55 percent between FY 2014 and FY 2023 on a new embassy construction program that ranged between \$2.2 and \$2.6 billion dollars resulted in a \$75 million loss in purchasing power in FY 2015 and will reach a cumulative total loss of \$704 million in purchasing power in FY 2023. Without continued increases in funding to offset the impact of lost purchasing power due to worldwide construction inflation, as well as current price inflation surges, the pace of our construction program will slow proportionally.

Question. Does your budget request take into account the effects of construction inflation?

Answer. The FY 2023 budget request maintains funding for the construction of new, secure facilities at levels consistent with the recommendations of the Accountability Review Board. In accordance with a 2018 recommendation from the Government Accountability Office, the Department estimated the effects of cost inflation on planned embassy construction capacity using construction industry indices. The average inflation rate of 3.55 percent between FY 2014 and FY 2023 on a new construction program that ranged between \$2.2 billion and \$2.6 billion resulted in a \$75 million loss in purchasing power in FY 2015 and reached a cumulative total of \$704 million lost in purchasing power for FY 2023.

Question. Leahy Vetting: In 2016, GAO recommended that State develop time frames to establish policies and procedures to implement a vetting process that would enable the U.S. Government to provide a more reasonable level of assurance that equipment is not transferred to foreign security forces where there is credible evidence of human rights violations. In July 2021, State issued new guidance to address this recommendation. What steps has State taken to ensure that overseas posts are implementing this new guidance?

Answer. In 2022, the Department of State undertook a global survey regarding implementation of the Leahy law. The survey showed that most countries are expected to receive assistance for which vetting of recipient units can be done in advance. For the other countries, the U.S. Government is seeking to enter into agreements with recipient governments in which the governments agree not to provide covered assistance to units we identify to the governments as credibly implicated in a gross violation of human rights. We have completed 15 agreements with such governments thus far.

Question. What challenges have posts faced in implementing the guidance?

Answer. Some U.S. embassies face challenges in implementing the 2021 guidance in cases where the assistance is not easily tracked to a specific recipient unit. In those cases, the Department of State is seeking to enter into agreements with recipient governments in which the governments agree not to provide covered assistance to units that we identify as credibly implicated in a gross violation of human rights. To date, we have completed 15 agreements. The Department has also developed and is implementing a process to identify such ineligible units in connection with the agreements.

Question. Democracy Assistance: In 2018, GAO reported that of 10 State bureaus providing democracy assistance, 3 were unable to provide reliable data on democracy activities they funded. In particular, GAO found that the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) did not correctly code its data to identify democracy assistance provided to countries such as Colombia, Egypt and Kenya. While State has made improvements to data tracked in its financial systems, INL has not yet demonstrated how it addressed GAO's recommendation to improve the reliability of its democracy assistance data. What actions has INL taken to improve the completeness and accuracy of its funding data for democracy assistance, such as correctly identifying beneficiary countries?

Answer. On May 18, INL met with GAO to discuss the status and criteria needed to close out the recommendation. INL provided GAO documentation containing the updated INL Bilateral Desk Guide and Foreign Assistance Data Review (FADR) guidance used when entering an obligation into the financial system. Combining the FADR guidance and the desk guide establishes a process that will ensure project codes are a requirement in the Department's financial system and therefore must be inputted to create an obligation. INL is also producing an updated report with FY 2021 democracy assistance data to prove to GAO that the process changes reflect more reliable data.

Question. Anomalous Health Incidents: The Department is requesting new funding for the Bureaus of Medical Services and Diplomatic Security to research Anoma-

lous Health Incidents (AHI). While these incidents have also been referred to as Havana Syndrome and were previously unseen, U.S. Government personnel have reported potential incidents around the world. What steps is the Department taking now to ensure it is prepared to respond to future emerging health-related incidents?

Answer. There is nothing more important than protecting the health, safety, and security of our people. First and foremost, while communicating with our entire workforce and investigating incident reports, we are focused on delivering the best possible care and treatment for our affected colleagues and their families. Our provision of medical care at posts is supplemented, when needed, by care here in the United States at centers of excellence, including Johns Hopkins and Walter Reed.

We are applying what we have learned from our experience with AHIs, as well as our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to prepare for future health events we can predict and those we cannot. Our commitment to global health security is not only diplomatic, but applies to our workforce, too.

Question. Suspension and Reprogramming of Assistance to Central America: According to a recent GAO report, the 2019 suspension and reprogramming of assistance to the Northern Triangle adversely affected implementation of many State projects. Specifically, 65 of State's 168 projects were adversely affected. State reported that commonly experienced adverse effects on project implementation were delays from planned timeframes and decreased frequency, quality, or types of services provided to beneficiaries. What is State doing to overcome the effects of the suspension and reprogramming of assistance on the implementation of projects?

Answer. The Department used existing prior year funding and FY 2019 and FY 2020 funds to continue implementing programs consistent with U.S. Government priorities in Central America and to expand programs delayed and reduced due to the reprogramming.

Question. Will you provide an update on the level of assistance State is currently providing compared to prior to the suspension?

Answer. The Department and USAID allocated nearly \$804 million in FY 2021 bilateral, regional, and humanitarian assistance for Central America, and the President's FY 2022 request included nearly \$861 million to support the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America. Prior to the reprogramming of assistance, the Department and USAID allocated approximately \$807.5 million in FY 2016 and \$769.3 million in FY 2017 bilateral, regional, and humanitarian assistance to Central America.

Question. Economic and Commercial Diplomacy Training: A December 2021 GAO report recommended that State's training related to economic and commercial diplomacy would benefit from periodic, comprehensive assessments to identify whether its training is covering needed topics. GAO also recommended that State should consult with stakeholders outside of State regarding whether its economic and commercial diplomacy training is adequately equipping personnel to perform their jobs. State concurred with both of these recommendations and stated that it would establish a Trade and Expansion Advisory Committee as set forth in the Championing American Business through Diplomacy Act to obtain some of this external feedback. Has State conducted a comprehensive assessment of its training needs to support its economic and commercial diplomacy efforts? If so, what has State found through this assessment?

Answer. On January 11, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) re-established its annual, comprehensive assessment across the economic and commercial diplomacy issue areas. The review included discussion and analysis of current policy priorities, FSI's Economic and Commercial Training Division's current training and course offerings, course attendance records, and course evaluation results for FY 2021. This assessment resulted in recommendations including elimination or reduction of less relevant training, continued and ongoing needs assessments, increasing resources to meet needs, and reinitiating annual meetings with all economic and commercial diplomacy subject matter expert course coordinators.

Question. Is State's training providing its people with the tools they need to support U.S. businesses abroad?

Answer. The Department of State offers a range of economic and commercial diplomacy courses and activities that equip foreign affairs professionals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to advance U.S. economic and commercial objectives. The Department appreciates the recognition that it has taken important steps in its planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of its economic and commercial diplomacy training. The Department will continue to strengthen its training ef-

forts, including through continued assessments of training needs, additional career guidance for State personnel, and further consultations with external stakeholders.

Question. What is the status of the Trade and Expansion Advisory Committee?

Answer. The Trade and Expansion Advisory Committee (TEAC), as established by the Championing American Business through Diplomacy Act (CABDA), will provide comments and advice on priorities for trade expansion initiatives to U.S. Government agencies and policymakers. We are working with our interagency partners, in particular the Department's Economic Diplomacy Action Group (EDAG) co-vice-chairs—the Department of Commerce and the U.S. Trade Representative—to formally establish the EDAG, which is a prerequisite to standing up the TEAC.

Question. Who is included in this advisory committee and what are their roles?

Answer. The Department is working with our interagency partners to establish the Economic Diplomacy Action Group (EDAG), which is a prerequisite to the establishment of the Trade and Expansion Advisory Committee (TEAC). We envision the TEAC providing comments and advice to agencies and policymakers on potential priorities for initiatives to expand trade. The Championing American Business through Diplomacy Act includes a diverse TEAC membership comprising representatives of the U.S. private sector and other organizations, including labor, who have direct and operational experience in importing and exporting, particularly to and from developing countries. The TEAC will advise the EDAG on ways agencies and posts can better support U.S. companies abroad. It also is expected to assist the EDAG in soliciting private sector advice for strategic planning purposes and in advancing the overall mission and goals of U.S. national security.

Question. What feedback has State received from external parties related to its economic and commercial diplomacy training?

Answer. The Department of State meets with the Department of Commerce to discuss training initiatives and collaborative efforts for outreach to private sector and industry groups on a quarterly basis. The Trade and Expansion Advisory Committee (TEAC), set forth in the Championing American Business through Diplomacy Act, will be utilized as a vehicle to facilitate direct engagement with private sector and industry groups on training. We are working with our interagency partners to establish the Economic Diplomacy Action Group (EDAG), including laying the groundwork for the requisite Presidential Action, prior to the EDAG establishing the TEAC.

Question. State Department Staffing: A March 2019 GAO report found that, according to staff at overseas posts, State's Consular Fellows Program was helpful in hiring applicants from outside the Foreign Service to perform duties and to fulfill responsibilities similar to those of entry-level career Foreign Service consular officers. GAO's review found that consular fellows filled over 200 Foreign Service consular positions that otherwise would be vacant. Do you consider the program to be a success? If so, would it be possible to create a similar program to help reduce the high vacancy rates for other positions at overseas posts, such as information management?

Answer. The State Department continues to utilize the Consular Fellows program to meet the needs of the service. As needed, the Department uses limited noncareer appointment Consular Fellows (CFPs) to fill entry-level consular positions, where they are primarily responsible for adjudicating visas. The Department considers this program very successful because it allows staffing to expand and contract based on visa demand. For example, during the past year and a half during the pandemic, the Department did not hire any Consular Fellows. The Department regularly reviews current and future staffing demands and necessary resources to ensure the optimal intake and staffing for all skill codes.

Question. Employing Eligible Family Members: A March 2019 GAO report found that, according to staff at overseas posts, posts have widely employed eligible family members (EFMs) to supplement Foreign Service employees and, in certain cases, to take on the duties of Foreign Service positions that are vacant. However, staff at overseas posts noted the challenges of relying too heavily on EFMs to help address Foreign Service vacancies. In particular, staff noted that some EFMs may lack the skills, qualifications, training, or interest needed to fill vacant staffing needs at post. Has the number of EFM positions at overseas posts increased, decreased, or stayed the same over time?

Answer. Eligible Family Member (EFM) positions at post may supplement overseas staffing needs. For more specialized EFM positions, such as Expanded Professional Associates Program (EPAP) positions, EFMs often provide substantial sup-

port to their sections, but do not replace the need for trained Foreign Service Officers, who are ultimately responsible for direction and management of a section. The number of centrally funded EPAP positions has remained at 400 worldwide since 2018, while the number of other EFM positions has either remained static or decreased over time.

Question. Has State assessed the extent to which the EFM program is addressing the needs of overseas posts?

Answer. All of our Eligible Family Member (EFM) programs fill staffing needs overseas, but the Expanded Professional Associates Program remains one of the most popular EFM programs. Each year, posts request more positions than are available through the State Department's central funding. Other administrative positions may be filled by EFMs at post as needed.

Question. What steps has State taken to ensure that EFMs are qualified for their assigned positions?

Answer. When Eligible Family Members (EFMs) are accompanying their employee spouses on an overseas assignment, they may apply to available positions. EFMs must meet the qualifications required for the position, regardless of the nature of the position. However, many jobs available to EFMs inside an embassy or consulate are administrative in nature and do not require specialized training or skills to qualify. The State Department offers functional training to EFMs on a space-available basis as funding permits.

Question. State also hires eligible family members to certain specialized positions, such as facility managers, through its Expanded Professional Associates Program. Has State assessed the extent to which this Program has addressed specialized position vacancies at overseas posts?

Answer. The Expanded Professional Associates Program (EPAP) helps address the staffing needs of overseas posts, including the need for specialized positions. Each year, posts request more positions than are available through the State Department's central funding. These positions are professional level full-time positions in Economics, Management, Political, Public Diplomacy, Financial Management, General Services, Human Resources, Office Management and Medical (Registered Nurse) areas.

Question. Democracy Assistance. Multiple State bureaus are involved in providing democracy assistance around the world. In 2020, GAO reported that State officials in its case study countries said they generally lacked information about the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor's (DRL) democracy assistance projects, including project descriptions and funding amounts. State's existing information-sharing mechanisms, including data systems and strategies, do not consistently address these gaps. What actions has State taken to improve information sharing on democracy assistance projects between the HQ-based DRL bureau and embassies abroad?

Answer. DRL coordinates closely at all stages of the procurement cycle with relevant stakeholders, including regional offices, embassies, and USAID. As part of the Office of Foreign Assistance-led planning process, all Department offices and bureaus, including regional offices and embassies, are able to review and request changes to DRL's intended programming. Per DRL policy, all program solicitations require regional office and embassy clearance and, in consultation with the relevant embassy, regional desks serve as voting members on all application review panels. DRL strives to improve information flows with embassies by sharing information bi-annually regarding ongoing programming to address knowledge gaps due to turnover at posts.

Question. Funding for Consular Services: Recent changes in the fee structure for Consular Affairs should generate additional revenue to fund the Bureau's operation. Specifically, the Passport Security Surcharge was increased by \$20 per passport. In addition, the FY 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act allows State to retain the passport application fee, which State historically transferred to the General Fund. Nevertheless, State has requested additional, expanded fee setting and expenditure authority for several consular fees. Please explain why these recent changes are insufficient to address the imbalance that State has identified in the structure of Consular Affairs fees.

Answer. Recent Congressional action has had a significant, positive impact on the longstanding structural imbalance of the Consular and Border Security Programs (CBSP) account. Continuation of the expenditure authorities in section 7052 for the Passport Security Surcharge and other fees, as well as renewing the expenditure authority for the Passport Application and Execution Fees, however, remains critical

to ensure the CBSP account is able to manage future fluctuations in demand for consular services. The FY 2023 Congressional budget request seeks to ensure the Department has the flexibility to address remaining structural gaps as a result of non-retained and no-fee services.

Question. Why does State need additional flexibilities? Please describe why each of the requested changes, or which subset of the changes, would be sufficient to ensure that Consular Affairs collects sufficient revenue to ensure full cost recovery and the targeted threshold for carry over balances.

Answer. The State Department requires the requested additional flexibilities to continue addressing the long-standing structural imbalance of the Consular and Border Security Programs account and maintain resilience against unforeseen fluctuations in demand. Enactment of these requests, and the continuation of the new Passport Application and Execution Fee expenditure authority, would support the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) in fulfilling its mission of providing critical support to U.S. citizens overseas and upholding national security. CA looks forward to briefing committee staff on the rationale behind each section.

1. Extending broader expenditure authorities (sec. 7052)
2. The CBSP visa services cost recovery proposal (sec. 7062)
3. Modification of PSS and IVSS authority (sec. 7063(b))
4. Extension of the WHTI authority (sec. 7025(i)(1))
5. Border Crossing Card for Minors (sec. 7063)
6. Transfer Authority (sec. 7025(i)(9))

Question. Embassy Maintenance: State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations operates and maintains over 8,500 owned and leased real property assets, including both buildings and structures. State has an estimated \$3 billion maintenance backlog. However, we reported in September 2021 that State did not have a plan to address this backlog and has not specifically requested funding to address the backlog in its congressional budget requests. State officials estimated it could take 30 to 40 years to eliminate the backlog with current funding levels. Is State developing a plan with specific information on the funding and timeframes needed to reduce its deferred maintenance backlog?

Answer. The Department's real property portfolio includes more than 25,000 leased and government-owned assets. The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) is addressing the overseas deferred maintenance backlog by implementing a Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization (SRM) framework that will better project operational and maintenance costs for the life cycle of facilities in our overseas portfolio. The SRM framework will include site surveys and data collection for Facility Performance Evaluations. The Department continues to prioritize funds for programs that address deferred maintenance and repair.

Question. Does State plan to specifically request funding to address the deferred maintenance backlog in its Congressional budget requests?

Answer. The FY 2023 request includes more than \$365 million to fund programs intended to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog for overseas facilities. We are currently collecting data that will inform future budget requests, as well as the internal allocation of resources.

Question. U.S. Assistance to the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen: Since 2015, the United States has provided intelligence, military advice, and logistical support to the Saudi Arabia-led Coalition in Yemen. In February 2021, the President announced an end to all American support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen, including relevant arms sales. How, if at all, has State sought to determine whether requested equipment is offensive or defensive in nature?

Answer. The Department adheres to the President's February 2021 guidance that suspended arms sales relevant to offensive operations in Yemen and maintained support for Saudi Arabia's capabilities to defend its territory, where more than 70,000 U.S. citizens reside. Pursuant to this direction, the Department suspended air-to-ground munitions sales. The Administration continues to evaluate proposed arms transfers on a case-by-case basis, informed by previous use. The Department has briefed Members and staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee regarding issues related to this distinction and provided classified details of the current policy that puts into effect President Biden's guidance to cease support for offensive operations in Yemen. We will continue to consult with Congress to ensure that sales and support to Saudi Arabia are considered with this question in mind.

Question. We understand that the Administration plans to release a new version of the Conventional Arms Transfer Policy in the near future. How, if at all, does State plan to use this policy to guide its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) transfer decisions in a way that aligns with the Administration's policy not to support offensive operations in the war in Yemen?

Answer. The Conventional Arms Transfer (CAT) Policy provides a global framework under which U.S. Government agencies review and evaluate proposed transfers of military articles, defense services, and certain commercial items, to foreign countries or organizations. Under the CAT Policy, proposed arms transfer decisions continue to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to ensure transfers align with U.S. foreign policy and national security interests. The Administration will continue the policy of denying arms transfers where we believe there is significant risk of diversion, civilian harm, or misuse, including human rights abuses. While the CAT Policy does not specifically address the conflict in Yemen, we apply the same standards to those partners who are operating in Yemen.

In reviewing and updating the CAT Policy, the Biden-Harris administration is working to emphasize our foreign policy priorities, including leading with diplomacy, elevating human rights, and renewing and revitalizing America's alliances.

Question. Countering China's Economic Espionage and Technology Transfer Efforts: The Government of the People's Republic of China has publicly stated its intent to acquire foreign technology as a key element of its strategy for international competitiveness. State's visa adjudication process is integral to identifying which prospective foreign visitors, from China and elsewhere, may pose specific types of threats, such as a risk to sensitive technology transfer. In January 2021, the White House's Proclamation on Ending Discriminatory Bans on Entry to the United States directed State to, among other things, provide a report within 120 days on various visa processing topics, including recommendations to improve screening and vetting activities to further integrate relevant government data into the vetting system. According to State officials, this report was transmitted to the White House in the fall of 2021. What, if any, recommendations has State identified to improve the screening and vetting process, particularly to address technology transfer threats presented by the PRC and other countries of concern?

Answer. As required by Presidential Proclamation 10141, section 3, the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security submitted a report underscoring a multifaceted approach that continually and deliberately strengthens multi-layered screening and vetting procedures for visa applicants. The proposed approach includes 11 recommendations that leverage existing processes and programs, such as international data sharing and domestic coordination, to improve our ability to detect and counter security threats, including that of technology transfer. The Department's recommendations in the report are classified. We request that you contact the National Security Council for additional information.

Question. What, if any, challenges may exist that would impede the implementation of these recommendations?

Answer. The Department's report to the President is classified, and we request that you contact the National Security Council for additional information. The report identified several challenges, as well as possible remedies to address them. The Department of State is committed to strengthening national security and will continue to work to identify and address these issues. We will continue to collaborate with the National Security Council, the Department of Homeland Security, and other interagency partners on these efforts.

Question. Promoting Equity Abroad: Protests around the world against racism and injustice have highlighted opportunities for U.S. leaders to advance racial and ethnic equity and to support historically marginalized groups around the world. To this end, in 2021, the President issued several executive directives that outlined policy commitments for his Administration. These include advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities, preventing and combating discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, and promoting and protecting the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons. The 2023 Budget request provides \$2.6 billion to advance gender equity and equality and to support underserved communities across a broad range of sectors. This includes \$200 million for the Gender Equity and Equality Action Fund to advance the economic security of women and girls. How does State plan to spend the remaining \$2.4 billion?

Answer. The FY 2023 President's budget request includes an historic request of \$2.6 billion for gender equity and equality across the Department of State and U.S.

Agency for International Development, more than doubling such funding over the FY 2022 request. In addition to the Gender Equity and Equality Action Fund (GEEA), the request includes funding with a primary purpose of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, preventing and responding to gender-based violence, and promoting women, peace, and security. The request also includes funding for other assistance programming across development sectors and security assistance that will integrate gender equality and women's empowerment.

Question. Given the Administration's focus on racial equity and equity for all, how does State plan to promote equity amongst other underserved populations?

Answer. The Department of State employs a range of diplomatic and programmatic tools to address the intersectional barriers that limit members of all marginalized communities from fully participating in civic and economic life, including by integrating racial equity and support for underserved communities into the Department's strategic plans at the mission, bureau, and agency levels. For example, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor champions the access, inclusion, and equality of all people by leading and supporting Department efforts to identify and address barriers for marginalized and underserved groups within society, including those experiencing discrimination, violence, or other forms of injustice, through both diplomacy and programming.

Question. Definitions for marginalized groups are somewhat expansive due to the need to include all those who may experience marginalization. Do you anticipate any challenges with directing sufficient resources to any particular group due to the number of populations covered by expansive definitions?

Answer. As the lead for democracy and human rights in the Department, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) supports programs that contribute to the promotion, protection, and advancement of nondiscriminatory practices and laws around the globe through strategic resource allocation to ensure we are meeting the needs of all marginalized populations. DRL prioritizes inclusive and integrated programming to address the barriers to access for individuals and groups based on their unique needs, including communities that experience intersectional discrimination. Our resources are targeted based on connections between discrimination and the weakening of democratic institutions, and where specific types of marginalization are a global issue.

Question. Your budget request expands programs to foster diversity and inclusion. In support of the President's DEIA-related Executive Orders, the Department's request is \$65.6 million, which includes funding for 30 new positions for DEIA efforts. What efforts and how many positions, if any, will be directed to promoting DEIA in State's foreign assistance provided abroad?

Answer. As outlined in the Department's recently released Equity Action Plan, the United States is addressing systemic racism and strengthening democracy and human dignity worldwide as a core tenet of President Biden's foreign assistance. In addition to orienting our external work around the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, we are placing just as much emphasis on bolstering Department leadership to amplify and accelerate assistance that is comprehensive in its approach to advancing equity for all. Accordingly, we expect to see new and enhanced leadership across sectors and regions, the details of which will correspond to Department personnel announcements and staffing timelines.

Question. State has taken numerous actions in response to E.O. 13985, such as creating the Agency Equity Team and increasing the focus on equity in new strategy documents. How does State plan to institutionalize these changes, such as through multiyear funding or permanent dedicated staffing?

Answer. The Department created an Equity Action Plan outlining actions, commitments, and accountability mechanisms to integrate equity across our foreign affairs work. We will institutionalize this plan by prioritizing engagements with diplomatic partners from underrepresented and underserved communities, establishing reporting requirements and equity analysis tools for international aid, embedding the executive order's principles into public diplomacy programming and communications strategies, updating the interpretation and application of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and requiring reviews under current federal contracting processes to provide more equitable access to underserved and small business partners.

Question. Child Trafficking Programs: In 2013, Congress authorized Child Protection Compacts (CPCs), multi-year bilateral agreements between the U.S. Government and selected partner countries that are managed by the Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP). These compacts focus

on bilateral efforts to prevent child trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute cases of child trafficking. Since 2015, J/TIP has selected five CPC partner countries to work collaboratively with the government through a joint commitment (with a sixth CPC to be negotiated soon). How, if at all, are these bilateral government partnerships more effective than individual State awards/projects in combatting trafficking?

Answer. Child Protection Compact (CPC) Partnerships are negotiated with the partner government and are multidisciplinary in nature, engaging a wide variety of governmental institutions and systems across the three “Ps” of prevention, protection, and prosecution to reduce child trafficking and protect victims. Unlike our typical foreign assistance, foreign governments make formal commitments to address child trafficking and often their own investments to advance the goals of the partnership. This level of coordination with the CPC partner government is deeper than typical bilateral programs, which tend to focus on one or two issues or institutions within a country and are not intended to take the multidisciplinary approach that the CPC program does.

Question. Does State believe it would be useful to adopt this type of compact partnership model for delivering foreign assistance in other areas?

Answer. The Department is constantly examining new and innovative ways to be more effective with our foreign assistance funding. We examine each proposal on a case-by-case basis to determine what is most appropriate for a given program and account. However, per our response to Senator Menendez’s previous question about Child Protection Compact Partnerships, J/TIP has found that programs can have particularly strong and sustainable impacts when there is a multidisciplinary approach that includes increased engagement with government stakeholders at all levels.

Question. Global Health Programs Funds: The Global Health Programs (GHP) account funds health-related foreign assistance to control the HIV/AIDS epidemic, prevent child and maternal deaths, and combat infectious disease threats. Between fiscal years 2018 through 2020, State typically carried over an average of about \$9 billion in unobligated balances. In fiscal year 2021, Congress appropriated \$4 billion in emergency funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please provide an update on State’s GHP obligations and describe how, if at all, the global pandemic is affecting your ability to obligate and distribute funding before available GHP funds expire.

Answer. Please see the chart below for an update on unobligated GHP balances.

Global Health Programs Obligation Status as of 5/13/2022						
	Appropriated	Obligated	Unobligated	Unobligated as % of Appropriation	Global Fund Unobligated	Non-Global Fund Unobligated
Total GHP	26,515,950,000	21,492,298,091	5,023,651,909	18.9%	1,809,656,946	3,213,994,963
GHP-USAID	3,265,950,000	1,814,635,922	1,451,314,078	44.4%	-	1,451,314,078
FY 2021/2022	3,265,950,000	1,814,635,922	1,451,314,078	44.4%	-	-
GHP-State*	23,250,000,000	19,677,662,169	3,572,337,831	15%	1,809,656,946	1,762,680,885
FY 2018/2022	5,670,000,000	5,642,542,751	27,457,249	0.5%	-	27,457,249
FY 2019/2023	5,720,000,000	5,516,678,935	203,321,065	3.6%	-	203,321,065
FY 2020/2024	5,930,000,000	5,165,835,452	764,164,548	12.9%	249,656,946	514,507,602
FY 2021/2025	5,930,000,000	3,352,605,031	2,577,394,969	43.5%	1,560,000,000	1,017,394,969

*Includes unobligated amounts reported by PEPFAR Implementing Agencies and State Department

Thus far, the pandemic has not significantly impacted PEPFAR’s ability to obligate funds before they expire. While some costs decreased (e.g., travel, certain program interventions like voluntary male medical circumcisions), others increased (e.g., virtual platforms, internet bandwidth, need for personal protective equipment, and supply chain costs). One significant program disruption has been to our Peace Corps programming as volunteers departed most programs during the pandemic. However, this has not yet specifically resulted in the expiration of funding.

USAID fully obligated the \$4 billion in FY 2021 COVID-19 emergency funds during FY 2021. While there continue to be challenges in the programming, obligation, and implementation of GHP funds as a result of the pandemic, USAID remains committed to the timely obligation of GHP funds to achieve our three strategic global health goals. USAID does not foresee any insurmountable challenges to fully obligating FY 2021 funds this fiscal year.

Question. Embassy Security, Construction, and Maintenance Funds: State's Embassy Security, Construction, and Maintenance (ESCM) account provides funding to maintain safe, secure, and functional facilities for U.S. diplomatic and consular missions abroad. Between fiscal years 2018 and 2021, State has typically carried over an average of about \$7 billion in unobligated balances. In fiscal year 2022, State noted that it planned to use part of the ESCM funding for Embassy and Consulate construction and renovations worldwide. Specifically, about \$2.1 billion in unobligated funds were to be used for several major construction contracts. Given the current global pandemic and supply chain shortages, please provide an update on State's planned construction and renovation contracts. Is State planning to move forward with all of its planned efforts?

Answer. The Department is planning to award an estimated \$3.1 billion worth of construction and renovation contracts in FY 2022. We continue to work with our partners in the construction industry to overcome challenges created by the global pandemic and supply chain shortages. We will manage the impact of changes using existing contingency funds when possible. When that is not possible, we will reprogram funding when needed in consultation with Congress following the regular notification process.

Question. Climate Preparedness: Congress has supported measures that improve the climate resilience and adaptability of the Department of Defense's assets and installations located overseas. It stands to reason the State Department should take similar measures to secure our non-defense facilities and assets abroad. Is the State Department aware of the provisions pertaining to the climate preparedness of the Defense Department included in the FY 2019 and FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act?

Answer. The Department of State is aware of the Department of Defense's efforts to adapt their operations and infrastructure to the effects of climate change and has initiated collaboration with them on best practices for data sources, risk analysis and adaptation planning. The Department also agrees that our overseas diplomatic platforms are critical infrastructure and takes seriously the responsibility to adapt our facilities and operations to be resilient to the unavoidable effects of climate change and other natural hazards. Although not inclusive of all the provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act, the Department is addressing the resilience of its overseas assets and installations, as outlined in its 2021 Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan.

Question. If these provisions were appropriately modified to apply to State Department facilities and resources, and other non-defense assets and facilities that operate under chief of mission authorities in foreign countries, would the State Department be able to meaningfully execute such laws?

Answer. Modifications to the existing National Defense Authorization Act provisions and appropriate resources would enable the Department to meaningfully execute those provisions as it implements the priority adaptation actions. Specifically, the Department's 2021 Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan includes a priority adaptation action for "Program Building in Support of Climate-Ready Sites and Facilities," taking measures to secure our non-defense facilities and assets abroad.

Question. How important is it to the security of Americans serving abroad under chief of mission authority, and for the safety and security of U.S. Government civilian assets abroad, for the State Department to take protective and preventive measures against the effects of climate change?

Answer. The Department's Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan calls on diplomatic missions to include climate hazards in emergency management activities. The Department has assessed overseas facilities for several climate hazards and has reviewed emergency plans to identify gaps. From an emergency planning perspective, natural disaster and weather-related events are assessed at the post level. Post's hazard-specific response plans are documented in the custom content section in its Emergency Action Plan that lays out protective and preventive measures for the safety and security of U.S. Government civilian personnel, facilities, and residences. Climate hazards are now being incorporated into site selection, new construction, and renovations.

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN P. MCKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. U.S. Diplomats in China: How many U.S. personnel under chief of mission in China have been forced by the Chinese Government into "fever hospitals"?

Answer. Prior to the arrival of Ambassador Nick Burns to Beijing in late March 2022, Mission China had a total of 30 personnel (employees or family members) test positive for COVID-19 upon arrival in China and submit to hospitalization until cleared by People's Republic of China (PRC) health authorities. On his first day, the Ambassador committed to the Embassy community and subsequently communicated to the PRC that he would not permit any American Mission personnel to be forced into a fever clinic or COVID hospital. No American personnel of the Mission have been admitted to PRC facilities since that time. Ambassador Burns has reaffirmed this new U.S. position to senior PRC officials since then.

Question. What is the longest stay in a fever hospital experienced by U.S. personnel?

Answer. The longest stay in a fever hospital experienced by U.S. personnel occurred between July and October 2021, during which time a family stayed in a COVID-19 hospital for 56 days. Throughout this stay, Mission China and EAP exerted constant advocacy and pressure on PRC authorities for better treatment and release of the family. The employee chose to remain in China and proceed with his assignment after release.

Question. What is the second longest stay in a fever hospital experienced by U.S. personnel?

Answer. The second longest stay in a fever hospital experienced by U.S. personnel is 39 days. Throughout this stay, Mission China and EAP exerted constant advocacy and pressure on PRC authorities for better treatment and release of this employee.

Question. What MOU or other agreement governs the compliance of U.S. personnel with the PRC COVID protocols?

Answer. There is no MOU or other agreement specifically governing the compliance of U.S. personnel with the PRC COVID-19 protocols. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and two applicable bilateral conventions between China and the United States govern the PRC's obligations vis-à-vis the treatment of U.S. diplomatic personnel and their families in the PRC. None of these agreements establish detailed rules concerning the extent to which diplomatic personnel must abide by host country health regulations during a health emergency.

Question. Are there any current PRC requirements that exceed the terms of the original agreement?

Answer. The Vienna Conventions require diplomatic personnel to respect local law as long as local law does not prejudice the privileges and immunities enjoyed by diplomatic personnel. Some PRC COVID-19 protocols are inconsistent with the immunities enjoyed by U.S. diplomatic personnel, notably requiring submission to long stays in fever hospitals by those who test positive. To secure our privileges and immunities in this context, on his first day, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community and subsequently communicated to the PRC authorities that he would not permit any American personnel of the U.S. Mission to be forced into a fever clinic or COVID hospital.

Question. Are Mission China and EAP satisfied with the current arrangement with the PRC regarding COVID protocols for U.S. diplomats?

Answer. The United States expects all governments, including the PRC, to adhere to their commitments under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Senior Department officials have raised our concerns in Washington and Beijing regarding the challenging circumstances as the PRC responds to the COVID-19 pandemic. On his first day, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community and subsequently told PRC authorities that he would not permit any American personnel of the Mission to be forced into a fever clinic or COVID hospital.

Question. Are Mission China and EAP taking any actions to improve or modify COVID protocol arrangements?

Answer. On his first day on the job, Ambassador Nicholas Burns committed to the Embassy community and subsequently communicated to the PRC authorities that he would not permit any U.S. personnel of the Mission to be forced into a fever clinic or COVID hospital. No U.S. personnel of the Mission have been admitted to PRC facilities since that time.

Question. Are the Bureaus of Medical Services, Diplomatic Security, and Overseas Building Operations able to inspect the fever hospitals for health, safety, and security? If so, how many such inspections have been conducted, when did they occur,

and what were the findings? If not, why is the Department unable to inspect these facilities, and what is the Department doing to change that?

Answer. Despite repeated requests by Mission China leadership and engagement by the Secretary with his PRC counterpart over China's "Zero COVID" policy, PRC officials have refused requests by post personnel on behalf of the Bureaus of Medical Services (MED), Diplomatic Security, and Overseas Buildings Operations to access fever hospitals to ensure these facilities are safe and secure. Ambassador Burns told PRC authorities that he would not permit any U.S. Mission personnel to be forced into a PRC facility. In addition, MED has made evacuations available for personnel under Chief of Mission security authority to enable them to avoid involuntary admission to fever hospitals.

Question. Are the Bureaus of Medical Services, Diplomatic Security, and Consular Affairs able to access U.S. personnel forced into fever hospitals to check on their safety and security?

Answer. Because of PRC COVID-19 restrictions, these facilities are inaccessible to diplomatic personnel or other visitors. Mission China's personnel have been able to communicate with U.S. personnel in fever hospitals and deliver food and other items to them via facility staff. Once when the Embassy's medical staff was unable to get needed medication to a patient in a fever hospital, the Department medically evacuated the patient.

Question. How would you describe the conditions of a fever hospital? Are they comparable to a U.S. hospital?

Answer. Fever clinics—the initial isolation facilities where suspected patients remain for 1 to 3 days while being confirmed COVID-19-positive—range in quality, though in general the Embassy views them as unacceptable for U.S. standards. Several have moldy walls, no running water, overcrowded conditions, and a general lack of cleanliness. COVID-19 hospitals—where patients remain until they test COVID-19-negative—are generally better and on par with those in the United States. On his first day, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community and subsequently told PRC authorities that he would not permit any U.S. Mission personnel to be forced into a PRC facility.

Question. Are U.S. personnel in a fever hospital provided with a translator in order to fully understand their medical situation?

Answer. Translation has not been a problem for our personnel. These facilities have staff who speak English, and Mission China's personnel have also been able to communicate with U.S. personnel and with facility staff. However, we see these facilities as unacceptable for U.S. standards. On his first day, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community and subsequently communicated to the PRC authorities that he would not permit any U.S. personnel of the Mission to be forced into a fever clinic or COVID hospital. No U.S. personnel of the Mission have been admitted to PRC facilities since that time. Ambassador Burns has reaffirmed this new U.S. position to senior Chinese officials.

Question. Are U.S. personnel administered medical tests in a fever hospital by Chinese doctors? If yes, are U.S. personnel able to decline tests?

Answer. PRC doctors administer COVID-19 tests to U.S. personnel in a fever clinic or COVID hospital. Personnel can decline tests, but for a patient already tested to be COVID-19-positive, declining further tests lengthens their hospital stay as they will not be permitted to leave until testing negative. These are among the reasons we see COVID hospitalization in China to be unacceptable for our Mission's U.S. personnel. Upon arrival on March 28, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community and told PRC authorities that no U.S. personnel of the Mission would be subject to a fever clinic or COVID hospital. He has reiterated this in every official encounter with PRC authorities.

Question. Does the MED Unit at post have access to the test results of any medical tests administered in a fever hospital?

Answer. MED units receive test results directly from the PRC Ministry of Health. The PRC Ministry of Health has been, at times, less than forthcoming with this information. This is among the reasons we see COVID hospitalization in China to be unacceptable for our Mission's U.S. personnel. On his first day, Ambassador Burns committed to the Embassy community and subsequently told PRC authorities that he would not permit any U.S. personnel of the Mission to be forced into a fever clinic or COVID hospital. No U.S. Mission personnel have been admitted to fever hospitals since that time. Ambassador Burns has reaffirmed this new U.S. position to senior Chinese officials since then.

Question. Does the “patient” have access to the test results of any medical tests administered in a fever hospital?

Answer. The patient in a fever clinic or COVID hospital being tested has access to test results administered to them, though not always as those test results are finalized; they often must wait until discharge.

Question. What does the Department know about what happens to the medical data collected from U.S. personnel while they detained in “fever hospitals”?

Answer. PRC authorities are unable to provide assurances that medical data, in the form of samples, will be destroyed after processing in all cases.

Question. Are U.S. personnel in China allowed to medevac if they receive a positive COVID result?

Answer. From his first day in Beijing, Ambassador Burns has insisted no U.S. Mission personnel would be subject to a fever clinic or COVID hospital. The PRC has agreed that arriving U.S. personnel who test positive may remain in their quarantine hotel and be medically evacuated within 72 hours rather than enter the PRC health care system. Personnel already in China may be evacuated if they receive a positive COVID-19 result, the Department confirms a need for medevac, and after further negotiation with the MFA on a case-by-case basis.

Question. What is the process for U.S. personnel in China who choose to medevac?

Answer. If U.S. personnel in China are medically evacuated, post will coordinate their departure with local MFA officials, who will in turn coordinate with local PRC Center for Disease Control officials. They are transported to the nearest accepting location, which is currently Guam, to board an aircraft contracted by the Bureau of Medical Services. They are treated in Guam and once they are recovered and can be released, they are transported to the United States. From there, they decide whether to continue their tour of duty in China and if so, they must meet the travel requirements to re-enter China.

Question. Are U.S. personnel who medevac allowed to return to Mission China after they have recovered from COVID?

Answer. Yes, U.S. personnel who are medically evacuated are allowed to return to Mission China after they have recovered from COVID-19. They must meet the PRC’s testing requirements for travel to China. For a person with prior COVID-19-positive testing results, meeting these requirements can take months and may involve additional diagnostics, including chest x-rays.

Question. If the policy regarding U.S. personnel medevac has been modified, when has it changed and why?

Answer. In April 2022, the Department of State developed a mechanism by which personnel testing positive, but who are asymptomatic could, nevertheless, depart China via appropriate means. The Department created this option in recognition of the unacceptable hardship presented by isolation in a PRC Government facility for diplomatic personnel or their family members.

Question. Does the U.S. Government force Chinese diplomats in the United States to submit COVID tests periodically to demonstrate that they aren’t spreading COVID while living in the United States?

Answer. No, the United States does not force any diplomats to submit to COVID-19 testing. The United States strives to always respect its diplomatic law obligations and does not suspend them as a reciprocal matter.

Question. If Chinese diplomats in the United States receive a positive COVID test result, are they forced to enter a U.S. hospital?

Answer. No, diplomats who test positive for Covid-19 are not required to hospitalize.

Question. If Chinese diplomats in the United States receive a positive COVID test result, are they forced by the U.S. Government to quarantine?

Answer. Foreign diplomats, including those from the PRC, are required to observe local COVID-19 mitigation measures. To the extent those measures require a COVID-19 positive individual to remain in quarantine for a certain period of time, the Department would expect PRC diplomats to do so.

Question. Has the State Department discussed the lack of reciprocity in how American and Chinese diplomats are treated vis-à-vis COVID? If yes, what has been the Chinese Government’s response?

Answer. We continue to assert to the PRC that many of its COVID-19 mitigation measures are inconsistent with the privileges and immunities diplomats enjoy under applicable diplomatic law instruments. The Department has also pointed out to the PRC the disparity in treatment between U.S. diplomats and those of the PRC. The PRC has refused to make significant exceptions to its “Zero COVID” policy with respect to its obligations toward diplomatic personnel entering or residing in the PRC. PRC authorities are adamant all residents, including diplomats and their families, must comply with its public health measures.

Question. Mr. McKeon, you corrected your initial answer on questions regarding U.S. personnel in China and COVID protocols with, “Nobody who is currently stationed in China has gone into a fever hospital if they tested positive, but they have gone into them if they test positive when they come from abroad.” Can the Department confirm that not one person under chief of mission authority in China has been forced into a fever hospital, except upon entry into China?

Answer. The Department confirms that not one person under Chief of Mission authority in China has been forced into a fever hospital, except upon entry into China.

Question. Lockdowns in China: Since the determination to go to ordered departure in Shanghai, what kinds of routine and emergency services is the consulate able to provide to U.S. citizens? Please be specific.

Answer. Ambassador Burns ordered the creation of a 24-hour Task Force of 80 officers to support U.S. citizens and provide reinforcement to Consulate General (CG) Shanghai. From April 7 to May 27, CG Shanghai and Embassy Beijing staffed this task force, providing extensive assistance to U.S. citizens. Diminution in demand for the Task Force’s services led to its dissolution. Mission China continues to provide emergency and routine services to U.S. citizens, including passport renewals. Mission China is also urging PRC officials to open residences of U.S. citizens that city officials have blocked, and to allow U.S. citizens to quarantine at home.

Question. Does the Department of State currently have regular access to detained Americans, especially those located in facilities in areas that the Chinese Government has locked down? If not, what is the Department doing—both at Mission China and from Washington—to ensure regular consular access?

Answer. Since the start of the pandemic, all Mission China posts have sent multiple diplomatic notes to PRC authorities requesting regularized consular access and to address individual U.S. citizen inmate concerns. Consulate General Shanghai requested welfare status updates for every U.S. citizen inmate in its consular district, within which all prisons and detention centers have been locked down with no consular access in any form. Visits with detainees in Beijing’s consular district are being conducted by phone, where possible, due to recent PRC restrictions. Mission China is discussing with other likeminded missions how to collectively advocate for regular consular access.

Question. The Office of Sanctions Coordination: The President’s FY 2023 Budget Request includes a request for contractors in the Office of Sanctions Coordination. When Congress created the Office of Sanctions Coordination it included a 2-year direct hire authority. How many personnel have been hired using that direct hire authority?

Answer. The Office of Sanctions Coordination (S/SC) has certain direct hire authority as provided by Congress through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. S/SC is in the process of using this authority to hire three members in addition to securing the services of a contracted Office Management Specialist. The request for contractors in the President’s FY 2023 Budget Request is for the Office of Sanctions Policy and Implementation in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs Division of Threat Finance and Sanctions (EB/TFS/SPI). The direct hire authority was not extended to EB/TFS/SPI, which reports up through the Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs (EB). The direct hire authority provided was specific to the Office of the Sanctions Coordinator (S/SC), which reports directly to the Secretary of State.

Question. Why does the Department need contractors in the Office of Sanctions Coordination if it has a direct hire authority?

Answer. The Office of Sanctions Policy and Implementation in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs Division of Threat Finance and Sanctions (EB/TFS/SPI) employs roughly 43 contractors in the development and implementation of economic sanctions authorities implemented by the Secretary of State. These contractors began supporting sanctions work for EB/TFS/SPI in 2019 with a focus on Iran. Since

that time, their scope of work has expanded and they have supported the implementation of sanctions against more than 300 Russian, PRC, Iranian, Burmese, and Nord Stream 2-related actors. The Office of Sanctions Coordination (S/SC) has certain direct hire authority as provided in the Congress through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. S/SC is in the process of using this authority to hire three direct hire members in addition to securing the services of a contracted Office Management Specialist.

Question. Consular Affairs: According to the State Department's website, the wait time for obtaining an interview for a visitor visa to the U.S. can easily take longer than 200 days and in some instances more than 2 years. While the State Department has, like the rest of the world, been challenged responding to COVID-19, it seems as though certain consulate's visa processing wait times are getting longer. What is the ideal time for the State Department to process the average visa?

Answer. The Department of State is committed to reducing wait times in all visa classes, and to meeting visa demand safely and efficiently at our posts around the world. Consular sections assess local conditions, staffing capacity, and seasonal priorities to allocate the maximum number of interviews for applicants. They also maintain expedited appointment programs to facilitate travel for people with emergent or urgent needs. Given the wide range of conditions at each embassy and consulate, nonimmigrant visa wait times fluctuate depending on visa class, as well as local conditions and resources at each post.

Question. What steps is the State Department taking to speed up the visa approval process?

Answer. The Department is committed to reducing appointment wait times for all visa classes, through policy innovations, including the expansion of the interview waiver authorities, and staffing and resource increases, such as additional hiring. Consular sections also maintain expedited appointment programs to facilitate travel for people with emergent or urgent needs and have done so throughout the pandemic. For the majority of nonimmigrant visa cases, the key factor in processing length is the wait for a visa appointment. Once an applicant appears for their visa appointment, a consular officer makes a decision about the applicant's visa eligibility. Issued visas are typically provided to applicants within 5 working days of their interview.

Question. Are there viable alternatives to in-person interviews for visas?

Answer. Under statutory authorities, the Department has waived the in-person interview requirement for several categories of nonimmigrant visa (NIV) applicants. Consular officers' ability to waive this requirement will allow a larger number of some categories of NIV applications to be issued without an in-person interview, reducing the number of people present in waiting rooms and improving processing efficiencies. The Department, in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security, will continue to explore means for exercising the statutory interview waiver authorities. Immigrant visa applications require biometrics taken at an embassy or consulate, limiting processing efficiencies of virtual or mail-in processes for those applicants.

Question. Due to the wide variation in wait times for visa appointments, is the State Department focusing on consulates with longer than average wait times? If so, what is the Department doing to support consulates with a longer than average wait time?

Answer. The Department is committed to reducing wait times in all visa classes through policy initiatives, including the expansion of the interview waiver (IW) authorities, and rebuilding staffing and resources that were constrained during the pandemic. Consular sections also maintain expedited appointment programs to facilitate travel for people with emergent or urgent needs and have done so throughout the pandemic. An increasing number of nonimmigrant visa (NIV) applicants will benefit from IW. In addition, we are training and onboarding new employees. Staffing resources are directed to posts with the most urgent needs, such as those processing Afghan Special Immigrant Visas, supporting Ukraine efforts, and high-volume immigrant visa posts.

Question. Do you have the funding and other resources necessary to reduce wait times for appointments? If not, what do you need in order to reduce the backlog?

Answer. Thank you for your support through COVID Supplementals and Appropriations, as well as expanded expenditure authorities. The wait time issue is not presently a question of funding. The Bureau of Consular Affairs continues to work with the rest of the Department to rebuild lost capacity and fill positions left vacant

during the pandemic. Despite the easing of the funding challenge, the processes for hiring, security clearances, training, and deployment for an overseas consular officer to arrive at an assignment take over a year.

Question. When will the State Department return to pre-pandemic processing times?

Answer. The Department is working to reduce wait times in all visa classes, and meet demand safely and efficiently, through policy initiatives and staffing and resource increases. Wait times for consular services vary from post to post; all consular sections maintain expedited appointment programs to facilitate travel for people with emergent or urgent needs and have done so throughout the pandemic. Staffing resources are directed to posts with the most urgent needs, such as those processing Afghan Special Immigrant Visas, supporting Ukraine efforts, and high-volume immigrant visa posts.

Question. State Department Authorization: The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has been working on a new State Department authorization for months. Absent from our work have been State Department requests for inclusion in a Department authorization. When should the Senate Foreign Relations Committee expect to receive the Department's requests?

Answer. Thank you for the committee's work on State Department authorization. The Department is actively working on interagency coordination and expects to be in touch shortly with you on our legislative priorities. The Department looks forward to engaging with the committee on this.

Question. In your remarks, you noted that diversity was now included as a promotion precept. In practice, how will diversity as a promotion precept be operationalized?

Answer. The Foreign Service issued new decision criteria for tenure and promotion, identifying core skills and abilities that employees must demonstrate to show potential to succeed at the next level. Employee evaluations, which are reviewed for promotion consideration, must document how the employee has met these criteria. The new criteria elevate the critical importance of demonstrating through action and achievements a commitment to fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility and ensuring this important work is woven into all that we do as an institution. The new Foreign Service performance objectives—or Core Precepts—went into effect in April 2022.

Question. How will the diversity precept be measured or evaluated for promotion?

Answer. The diversity-specific precept describes the competencies employees must demonstrate to meet the objectives of the precept and is one of five areas of performance evaluated. Through evaluation of these competencies, Selection Boards identify and rank-order employees who demonstrate potential to succeed in positions of greater responsibility. In the evaluation narratives, raters and reviewers must appraise the employee's potential in these areas and cite specific examples of institutional impact.

Question. What types of activities will reflect positively for promotion in terms of diversity?

Answer. The new diversity precept was drafted in concert with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Bureau of Global Talent Management, and the America Foreign Service Association. Each employee must demonstrate their contributions to that precept. For example, exhibiting cultural awareness, achieving goals through inclusive teamwork, showing support for workplace flexibilities, organizing programs and events to discuss actionable ways to advance diversity, infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion in foreign policy work, and working to ensure the workplace is accessible, are all ways in which any employee at any level can demonstrate a commitment to the principles of diversity and inclusion.

Question. Professional Development: A training float for the Civil Service will inevitably look different than the Foreign Service because the Civil Service does not require consistent changes in positions. How will the Civil Service training float differ from its Foreign Service counterpart?

Answer. The Department is developing pilots, prototypes, and expanded concepts for implementing additional training and professional development programs, particularly at the mid- and senior levels for both Foreign Service (FS) and Civil Service (CS) employees. The current FS training float covers primarily long-term language and new hire intake positions, which will affect orientation, Consular training, tradecraft, and language training for new FS professionals as well as family

member support. The FS training float also covers NDU and other interagency rotational opportunities that FSOs can bid. Because FSOs rotate and 'bid' on these positions, they are reassigned when they rotate. Generally, CSOs are not reassigned to 'long term training'—they are detailed and stay assigned to their position of record because they need a specific job/position to return to as a result of the rank in position system versus the FS rank in person system. With no formal training float for the CS, the Bureau of Global Talent Management has been working to develop and pilot a professional development mobility program. This will provide backfill capability to eliminate the challenges associated with supervisors not approving developmental and rotational opportunities due to staffing gaps when CSOs are detailed from their positions.

Question. A transparent promotion process has the potential to improve the quality of the workforce while also increasing diversity. What is the Department doing to increase transparency in the promotion process?

Answer. In 2020, the Director General announced the launch of a new, long-term Foreign Service Performance Management Reform initiative. The Bureau of Global Talent Management is conducting a comprehensive review of the Foreign Service performance management system to ensure the Department develops, evaluates, and promotes employees in a fair, inclusive, and effective manner. These initiatives will support wider Department efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, support employee training and development at every stage of their careers and improve retention of top talent. The initiative draws on best practices from other organizations, Department and federal government data, and employee and union input. All changes are communicated to the workforce via Department-wide notices and cables, as well as performance management related webinars and presentations.

Question. Is the Department considering changes to the promotion process? If yes, at what levels?

Answer. The Department's Bureau of Global Talent Management has a team looking at our performance management and promotion processes and deploying new initiatives to enhance our ability to develop and advance outstanding members of our workforce. For example, we have updated the precepts against which performance is assessed at all levels to ensure we have the modern skills needed to meet current and future foreign policy goals. In addition, we are using technology and best practices learned through experience over the past 2 years to enhance transparency and efficiency in our processes.

Question. State Department Congressional Briefings: When Secretary Blinken testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 26, 2022, he noted that it was the 100th time he has briefed Congress. That is a large number given that Sec. Blinken was sworn-in on January 26, 2021. How is the number of Congressional briefings calculated?

Answer. The Secretary is committed to maintaining a forward-leaning posture with Congress—with members who are both on and off the Department's authorizing and appropriating committees. The Bureau of Legislative Affairs (H) facilitates official Department engagements and communications with Capitol Hill. H calculated the number of congressional briefings, which can be virtual, telephonic, or in person. We do not include unofficial communications or engagements that are strictly social in nature.

Question. Does a short phone conversation count as a briefing?

Answer. We do not consider the length of time of a conversation to be an appropriate determinant of whether something is a briefing. Ultimately, if a phone call is set up either at the Department or Congress' request and has the purpose of relaying information related to a foreign policy or Departmental matter, we would consider that the Member of Congress with whom this engagement is taking place is being briefed on a matter. If the purpose of a call is social or personal in nature, then it would not be considered a briefing.

Yes, a phone conversation can count as a briefing if it fits the criteria outlined above. Virtual meetings can also be briefings.

Question. Does a passing discussion at a diplomatic event?

Answer. No, a passing discussion at a diplomatic event is not considered a briefing. We do not keep track of such engagements for the Secretary or any other Department official or principal.

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN P. McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Question. Changes in recruitment of Foreign Service Officers and the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT): I understand that the State Department will no longer use the Foreign Service Officer Test as a pass/fail gateway test, but will evaluate the education, experience, and personal narratives submitted by candidates alongside the FSOT score. The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) has already expressed its concerns about this new policy, calling for fuller transparency regarding hiring decisions made through this new system. Why was this change made, and how will the State Department ensure that transparent hiring decisions are made in a timely manner under this new system?

Answer. Standardized written tests can only assess a portion of the skills and qualifications required to succeed in the Foreign Service. This change allows us to consider a candidate's previous experiences—what they did and how they did it—in addition to their education, skills and abilities. We expect that, after this change, candidates moving to the next stage of the assessment process will be those more likely to pass, making the process more efficient. I am committed to a fair and transparent hiring process. While changes to the Foreign Service assessment are an exercise of management's right to select employees and are not subject to bargaining, the Department briefed the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) and welcomes continued constructive dialogue with AFSA leadership.

Question. Funding for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access programs: the Biden administration is seeking \$65.6 million in FY23 to implement diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) programs, which includes funding for 30 new positions for DEIA efforts. How will this request advance the goals of the State Department's forthcoming Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan?

Answer. The Department's FY 2023 CBJ Appendix 1 outlines \$78.6 million in diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) priorities to include the Paid Internship Program and the Accessible Housing Program. Additional staffing is key to ensuring we can implement our DEIA program, including: hiring personnel to run an anti-bullying program to report and mitigate toxic management practices that do not have an EEO basis and improve harassment report response time; hiring more data scientists and analysts to identify barriers to equal opportunity and analyze best practices to better ensure equity in career outcomes; and commensurately increasing personnel dedicated to improving and sustaining increased career advancement efforts.

Question. When does the State Department intend to release this plan?

Answer. Pursuant to the executive order, the Department submitted its 5-year diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility strategic plan. We look forward to sharing the plan once it is released by the White House.

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN P. McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. Deputy Secretary McKeon, I want to thank you for your leadership in ensuring that our world-class U.S. diplomats receive the support they need in all circumstances, including for those afflicted by directed energy attacks. My colleagues and I are focused on ensuring that these diplomats work for an institution that has their full support, especially when attacked in the line of service. I appreciate your leadership in ensuring that after years of doubt, they have access to the services that they need. My legislation with Senator Collins, the HAVANA Act, provides compensation of those who have been affected. When will State release its interim rule as required by the HAVANA Act, and can you preview for us what that rule will say?

Answer. We appreciate your leadership on supporting the U.S. Government response to Anomalous Health Incidents.

Taking into consideration Congressional and Administration intent, interagency views, and input from affected colleagues and family members as well as medical and security professionals, the Department developed its draft rule for implementing the HAVANA Act. The draft rule is currently under review by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). We look forward to OMB approval so that the draft rule can be released for a 30-day period of public comment.

I believe our draft rule is faithful to the HAVANA Act and look forward to the opportunity to discuss it with you in more detail. I remain grateful for your continued support for the Department's efforts on Anomalous Health Incidents (AHI).

Question. Are there any changes to the definition of a qualifying brain injury?

Answer. The Department's draft Interim Final Rule includes a definition of qualifying injury to the brain as mandated by the HAVANA Act. That definition was developed in consultation with medical professionals and the interagency. Once OMB approves the draft rule, it will be available for a 30-day period of public comment.

Question. Can I receive your assurance that State is working with all agencies to ensure equity in access to treatment for all victims of these attacks?

Answer. Yes. The Department is actively working with the NSC, OMB, and the interagency to ensure implementation of the HAVANA Act is consistent and coordinated.

Question. In congressional testimony last week, Secretary Blinken noted that the State Department was implementing a program focused on improving retention of members of underrepresented groups who join the State Department workforce. Could you please describe the different components of this program?

Answer. It is imperative that the Department recruits, retains, and supports a workforce that truly reflects the country it represents. Under the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM), the newly established Retention Unit is developing the Department's first comprehensive retention strategy, a key component of the Secretary's Modernization Agenda. The Retention Unit is collaborating with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, along with GTM's Innovation Unit and Office of Talent Analytics, to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data to assess and better understand retention trends. The Retention Strategy will outline concrete steps the Department can take to strengthen retention across all employee groups.

Question. What data does the State Department have to underpin its current understanding of factors that may cause members of underrepresented groups to leave the State Department's workforce at higher rates than their peers?

Answer. The Department's new Retention Unit, under the Bureau for Global Talent Management (GTM), is collecting and analyzing data to inform the Department's first Retention strategy. Key data initiatives include the launch this month of the Department's first in-person exit interviews, ongoing analysis of exit surveys that were revamped in 2019, and a Department-wide "stay survey" later this year. These efforts will provide critical insights that will strengthen the Department's understanding of the extent to which various retention factors may affect underrepresented groups more significantly than the broader workforce.

Question. As you may know, I have been working on the Special Immigrant Visa program since its inception, originally with the late Senator John McCain, who was a fierce ally of those who sacrificed in support of their country, be they American or Afghan. As the program was written in 2009—and as it stands today—Afghans are eligible for a SIV if they were employed "by or on behalf of the United States Government." Successive administrations have chosen to interpret this in a way that excludes Afghans who worked under U.S. Government grants and cooperative agreements, despite nothing in the statute drawing such a distinction. I appreciate that the Biden administration announced a Priority 2 designation for refugee admissions intended to capture this group, but the slow trickle of individuals approved under this program does not make it a viable option for Afghans in immediate danger. Why has this State Department chosen to arbitrarily exclude grants and cooperative agreements from SIV eligibility and what would it take for Congress to demonstrate to State its original intent in capturing these individuals under the SIV program?

Answer. Since enactment of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended (AAPA), the Department of State has consistently interpreted and applied the AAPA to not include individuals working pursuant to grants or cooperative agreements. This interpretation is consistent with the SIV program in Iraq. I understand that Congress has considered adding language to the AAPA to explicitly include Afghans working pursuant to grants and cooperative agreements several times, but ultimately did not do so.

Question. I understand you recently visited the National Visa Center in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. We are very proud of the work of the NVC and its dedicated staff. However, they face a staffing shortage that is making it harder for them to do their jobs and slowing down the adjudication of applications and the response time to applicants and congressional offices. Can you share what you learned from your visit to the NVC and what the State Department is doing to best support the NVC workers and individuals whose visas are processed at the NVC?

Answer. The Department shares your positive view of the incredible work by the dedicated staff at the National Visa Center (NVC), which is a critical part of overseas visa operations. In particular, the influx of inquiries and new SIV cases for Afghanistan created a tremendous challenge for NVC's staff, and the Department is committed to finding solutions and increasing productivity. The Department works closely with NVC's contractor to enhance its recruiting efforts and allocate staff from its other worksites to provide temporary support to NVC's efforts.

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN P. McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

Question. The National Visa Center has almost half a million cases that are documentarily complete, yet only 32,000 were scheduled for interviews in April. What resources does the Department need to reduce this massive backlog?

Answer. The National Visa Center (NVC) schedules immigrant visa interviews at immigrant visa processing posts based on the interview capacity that posts provide to NVC. The Department is working to quickly hire, train, and deploy consular officers to visa processing posts with the goal of returning to pre-pandemic processing times. Thanks to the U.S. Congress, in 2022, the Omnibus Bill temporarily gave the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) the spending authorities it needed to accomplish this goal. In the FY 2023 budget, CA requests the same support from Congress as in FY 2022 to complete our recovery. With this support, CA projects deploying more than 700 new consular officers between FY 2022 and 2023, which will enable CA to reduce COVID-related backlogs.

Question. The Committee asks of all Senate-confirmed nominees a commitment to respond promptly to requests for information. Unfortunately, there continue to be significant delays in responding to questions for the record and other requests for information. What accounts for the delays in the Department responding to the Committee's questions in a timely fashion? How are you working to improve communication with the legislative branch?

Answer. Partnering with Congress in the foreign policy making process is a top priority for the Department and Secretary Blinken. The Department seeks to provide information to Congress that accurately and completely answers inquiries, which often takes time to draft and subsequently clear with the many offices and bureaus that may have equities. However, we also agree that such responses must be timely, and there is room for improvement. Currently, the Department seeks to turn around QFRs for nominations within 1 week or less, when possible. It is important to note that the volume of written inquiries from Congress has expanded dramatically: in 2021, the Department, through the coordination of the Bureau of Legislative Affairs (H), answered a record 5,010 QFRs. To date this year, 2,850 QFRs have been answered. Secretary Blinken regularly emphasizes to the Department workforce and senior officials that responsiveness to Congress at all levels must be the way we do business. The Department will continue working to implement this instruction and seek to improve the timeliness of our written responses. We also continue to encourage congressional offices to request briefings to receive timely information.

Question. An IG inspection report last year noted that the Bureau of Legislative Affairs "struggled to accomplish routine tasks" and that its organizational structure "was not well-aligned with operational needs." What is the Department doing to reform the Bureau of Legislative Affairs in accordance with the OIG's recommendations?

Answer. The IG report referenced examined the H Bureau during the period from August 31, 2020, to January 4, 2021. In May 2021, under new leadership, the Bureau of Legislative Affairs (H) concurred with the 14 recommendations of the Department's Inspector General (OIG) 2020 inspection of the Bureau. This includes OIG's recommendation that the Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) conduct an organizational assessment of H with the goal of aligning H's structure with operational needs. GTM's assessment is underway, and H has participated in completion of survey and interviews conducted by GTM. H also continues to take steps to implement and close all OIG recommendations, including by recently hiring a career operations director to ensure better alignment and continuity of operations.

Question. The Foreign Affairs Manual (1 FAM 312b) states that the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Legislative Affairs should be a Career Foreign Service Officer. Why has the Administration chosen to encumber this posi-

tion with political appointees without experience in Department management processes?

Answer. The Department is committed to including career officers, including Foreign Service and Civil Service officers, within the leadership of the Bureau of Legislative Affairs (H). In June 2021, the Senate confirmed Naz Durakoglu as Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs. Since that time, Assistant Secretary Durakoglu selected a career SES DAS to oversee the Regional, Global, and Functional portion of the H bureau. There are also active recruitment efforts under way in regard to the H PDAS position. Assistant Secretary Durakoglu would be happy to brief on this matter.

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN P. McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

Question. Visa Processing: International travel is increasing as pandemic restrictions eased. Does the State Department have the funding and resources necessary to process visas efficiently and reduce backlogs to effectively manage consular affairs? If not, what additional resources are necessary?

Answer. Yes, the Department has the resources necessary to process visas efficiently and reduce backlogs. We are committed to reduce wait times in all visa classes at our existing funding levels, and to meet visa demand safely and efficiently at our posts around the world. We appreciate the flexibility that Congress has provided by permitting us additional authority to retain and use many of the fees we collect for services.

Question. Remote Consular Services: The pandemic has forced many consular services to take place remotely. As the world transitions out of strict lockdowns, what lessons learned is State taking away from remote programming?

Answer. The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the operational and resource capacity of the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA). CA implemented new processes, including expanded interview waiver authorities, and increased domestic remote processing of certain interview-waiver eligible nonimmigrant visa cases; expansion of programs to process overseas passport renewals in the United States, video and telephonic provision of U.S. citizens services, and a robust and flexible hybrid work structure to accomplish our mission. The Department continues to examine lessons learned and the feasibility of making some of these efforts permanent, to the extent allowable under the law, policy, and available resources.

Question. Are there plans to maintain a remote option for certain formerly in-person consular activities including some previously in-person visa interviews?

Answer. To minimize applicants entering consular waiting rooms, the Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) increased remote consular processing. CA successfully conducted a remote interview pilot at select posts overseas to register U.S. citizen births. Additionally, the Secretary waived in-person interviews and fingerprint collection for several categories of nonimmigrant visa (NIV) applicants. Use of these interview waiver authorities could allow a greater number of NIV applicants to be processed without appearing at a consular section. The Department continues to explore the feasibility of making permanent and expanding remote interview and work capabilities to the extent allowable under the law, policy, and available resources.

Question. Employment Relocation Challenges: Military spouses face challenges finding and retaining employment, and military spouses who are Department of State or USAID employees face a unique set of hurdles due to coordinating civilian and military relocations. What is the State Department doing to avoid unnecessary family separation, prevent income loss due to leave without pay, and improve retention of military spouses who work for State or USAID?

Answer. The Department of State is sensitive to the issues confronting all federal employees who are also military spouses, including State and USAID employees. To support family unification, the Domestic Employees Teleworking Overseas (DETO) program is a workplace flexibility program that enables certain federal employees to continue performing their domestic civil service jobs from an overseas location, thus avoiding both family separation and income loss. We are aware of the difficulty that some prospective DETOs face—specifically those whose military spouses are assigned to a military base overseas—and we are actively engaged with the Department of Defense on a solution to facilitate approval of these types of DETO arrangements.

Question. Resources required for COFA Negotiations: What resources is the State Department anticipating needing for negotiating certain provisions of the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the Freely Associated States (FAS)?

Answer. As the interagency determines the requirements to successfully engage in negotiations related to the Compacts of Free Association, I look forward to working with Congress on aligning resources appropriately. I would defer to OMB for further information on resources.

Question. How is the Department ensuring that any required resources are prioritized commensurate with the level of strategic importance of the FAS and the successful conclusion of negotiations?

Answer. The Indo-Pacific—inclusive of the FAS—has become an area of increasing strategic importance and competition, underscoring the importance of the Compacts of Free Association. The State Department recognizes the vital nature of the Compacts of Free Association, which is reflected in the priority we are giving to successfully complete Compact negotiations.

Question. DoD Participation in COFA Negotiations: What is State Department's position on the inclusion of dedicated Department of Defense officials participating in COFA negotiations?

Answer. The State Department works closely with many interagency partners, including the Department of Defense (DoD). We remain open to increasing our already significant collaboration with the DoD and would be pleased to further explore the possibility of including a dedicated DoD official, as appropriate, in negotiations related to Compacts of Free Association.

Question. How are you and other State Department leaders ensuring that DoD is participating at the level that our FAS partners would want to see, especially given the evolving strategic landscape in the Indo-Pacific?

Answer. We closely coordinate with our colleagues at the Department of Defense (DoD), and DoD representatives participate in negotiations related to the Compacts of Free Association (COFA), and other discussions with the Freely Associated States, as appropriate. DoD is actively participating in COFA negotiations at each negotiating round through in-person participation of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, UNINDOPACOM, Joint Region Marianas, and U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command levels.

Question. COFA Positions Staffing: Is the State Department adequately staffed for the COFA negotiations?

Answer. The Biden-Harris administration has prioritized Compact negotiations with the Freely Associated States as a U.S. foreign policy objective. Recognizing the urgency of completing these negotiations, the Administration announced the appointment of Ambassador (retired) Joseph Yun as the Special Presidential Envoy for Compact Negotiations (SPECN) on March 22, 2022. Since the SPECN's appointment, the State Department has added two staff to the Compact Team, with an additional senior officer who was scheduled to begin in June.

Question. Given the increased importance of the Indo-Pacific, the Pacific Islands, and the Freely Associated States, how is the State Department planning for staffing and associated resources for the period beyond the conclusion of negotiations?

Answer. The U.S. Government is continually assessing how to expand our diplomatic, programmatic, and development efforts in the Pacific. In the past 5 years, the Department of State has increased staffing in the Pacific by approximately 10 personnel, and USAID has expanded its presence as well. In February 2022, Secretary Blinken announced our intent to open a U.S. Embassy in Solomon Islands. As the interagency engages in negotiations related to the Compacts of Free Association and the Economic Assistance Agreement associated with the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, we look forward to working with Congress to align resources appropriately to ensure the United States remains the preferred partner in the Pacific.

Question. ECA Pacific Island Scholarship: How is the State Department, including the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), prioritizing scholarship and fellowship programs focused on the Indo-Pacific?

Answer. Community engagement and strengthening people-to-people ties, including through academic exchange, are important elements of our Indo-Pacific Strategy. We are working with EAP and partners like the East-West Center (EWC) and others to deepen our outreach to students, scholars, and professionals in the region, including through EWC's Pacific Islands Development Program and ECA's Young Pacific Leaders Fellowships. We are also expanding ECA's educational exchanges

benefitting undergraduate and graduate participants in the Indo-Pacific through Fulbright and Global UGRAD. More than 7,500 people from Pacific Islands Forum member countries are alumni of U.S. Government funded exchange programs, and we are working to expand that network.

Question. Is ECA planning on allocating additional resources in FY22 to scholarship programs for Pacific Islands students to study in the United States, given the importance of increasing U.S. influence in the region?

Answer. In FY 2022, ECA is increasing funding for Fulbright awards in the South Pacific by 25 percent, on top of an increase of 33 percent in FY 2021, to facilitate engagement and exchange with more South Pacific islanders and to allow more diversity of participating islands in the region. ECA is also prioritizing English-language preparation, with some participants benefitting from an added semester of long-term English prior to commencing their studies. In addition, ECA added South Pacific Island nations to the Global UGRAD exchange program for semester undergraduate study in FY 2021. These efforts complement our continued support for the U.S. South Pacific Scholarship Program, which provides opportunities for undergraduate and graduate degree study.

RESPONSES OF MR. BRIAN P. McKEON TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

Question. Imprisonment of U.S. citizens in Ecuador: In 2017, Maryland residents John Roja and Ronell Stephenson were arrested in Ecuador on charges of possession of illegal drugs, weapons, and homicide. Despite the gravity of these charges, it appears as if there were multiple serious due process issues in the course of their prosecution, including destruction of potentially exculpatory evidence and a failure to provide a translator in court for the brothers. The drugs and weapons charges were later dropped, but the murder charges remained; the brothers were later convicted and sentenced to 34 years in prison. The brothers strongly maintain their innocence and allege that they have been framed for the murders. Ronell Stephenson was subsequently diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer in 2021. He remains hospitalized in a perilous environment, and John Roja Stephenson remains in prison in what the brothers' lawyer says are dangerous conditions. What are the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Quito doing to engage Ecuadorian authorities about the Stephenson brothers' welfare?

Answer. The welfare and safety of U.S. citizens abroad is one of our top priorities, and we follow up on all health issues raised by U.S. citizen prisoners abroad to ensure they have access to appropriate medical care. The U.S. Embassy in Quito and the Consulate General in Guayaquil have provided consular services to Ronnell and John Roja Stephenson throughout the pretrial investigation, trial, and incarceration phases of their criminal proceedings. U.S. Embassy officials raised Ronnell and John Roja's request for a domestic transfer from a maximum-security prison to a minimum-security prison at the highest levels of the Ecuadorian Government. John Roja was transferred in January, and Ronnell's transfer request is pending completion of his medical treatment. We regularly visit the Stephenson brothers virtually to ensure their health and well-being.

Question. Have they raised with Ecuadorian authorities the alleged serious due process issues in this case?

Answer. The U.S. mission in Ecuador has provided consular services to Ronnell and John Roja Stephenson throughout the pretrial investigation, trial, and post-trial incarceration phases of this criminal matter. The embassy has engaged with the highest levels of the Ecuadorian Government to ensure the brothers continue to receive fair treatment during their incarceration and have been afforded full access to, and impartial treatment by, the Ecuadorian criminal justice system.