



## House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Holds Hearing on Diversity in the State Department

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### Body

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House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee On Oversight And Investigations Holds Hearing On Diversity In The State Department

June 17, 2020 01:00 P.M.

SPEAKERS:

REP. JOAQUIN CASTRO (D-TEXAS), CHAIRMAN

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REP. ADRIANO ESPAILLAT (D-N.Y.)

REP. TED LIEU (D-CALIF.)

REP. TOM MALINOWSKI (D-N.J.)

REP. DAVID CICILLINE (D-R.I.)

REP. ELIOT L. ENGEL (D-N.Y.), EX-OFFICIO

REP. LEE ZELDIN (R-N.Y.), RANKING MEMBER

REP. SCOTT PERRY (R-PA.)

REP. KEN BUCK (R-COLO.)

REP. GUY RESCHENTHALER (R-PA.)

REP. MICHAEL MCCAUL (R-TEXAS), EX-OFFICIO

[\*]CASTRO: (AUDIO GAP)

--Update you all. This has been a additional challenge today for I think a few of the committees. Because there's so much work going on right now. Apparently I guess our video and audio feed is set up through YouTube and I guess there's--looks like there's some kind of capacity issue. So they're working to fix it.

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I don't believe we're on video right now. The audio is still going but I think everybody's muted. So, just if you all could relax for a second and they're working on fixing it, so.

(AUDIO GAP)

Let's bring the committee back to order. I apologize for the delay. And we'll go back to Mr. Bair to continue his statement.

BAIR: Alright. Thank you, Chairman Castro. We were just talking about the--changing the proportion of women at the State Department. We also examined the distribution of groups across different ranks in the workforce, and identified two notable results: first, the proportion of racial or ethnic minorities was generally much smaller in the higher ranks. For example, in the civil service, racial or ethnic minorities accounted for 65 percent of employees at the GS-10 level or below, but only 13 percent of executives.

Second, the proportion of women was progressively smaller from the lower to the higher ranks. For instance, in the civil service women compose 69 percent of employees at the GS-10 level and below and 38 percent of executives. A second key issue we identified is variances in promotion outcomes for different groups.

A key message from our analysis is that promotion outcomes were lower for racial or ethnic minorities than for whites at almost every level from early career to executive. For example, in the civil service we found that promotion rates from GS-11 through Executive rank were 16 to 42 percent lower for racial or ethnic minorities relative to their white counterparts.

Although our analyses do not completely explain the reasons for these differences or establish causal relationships, the results certainly warrant attention both from the state department and Congress.

We also took things a step further and built a statistical model that controlled for factors such as education, length of service, and special language skills that might influence promotion rates. The resulting analysis also found significantly lower promotion outcomes for racial or ethnic minorities through their civil service careers and in the early career for the foreign service.

My third and final point is that state has identified some diversity issues but should consider other issues that could indicate potential barriers. Since 2009, State's annual reports to EEOC have identified a total of 11 diversity issues such as underrepresentation of Hispanics. However, State's employee groups and our data analysis identify that there are more issues that need to be addressed at the state department.

Until State addresses at--such barriers, they may impede groups across the department. As a result, we recommended that the Secretary of State identify the root causes of diversity issues that could indicate potential barriers to equal opportunity. The State Department concurred, and we will follow up regularly to determine what steps they take to address our recommendation.

Chairman Castro, Ranking Member Zeldin, and members of the subcommittee this concludes my prepared statement. I look forward to your questions.

CASTRO: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Bair. And now I want to call on Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley for her testimony. Oh, I think you may still be on mute there.

(LAUGHTER)

There you go.

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: Okay. Good afternoon. Thank you Chairman Castro, and Ranking Member Zeldin for today's focus on what it's going to take to create a truly diverse workforce. The department has lost too many of us because of bias, quite discrimination, and indifference. The GAO report doesn't try to explain causality, but the numbers speak for themselves.

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Our problems begin at the beginning, with recruiting. Our rigorous testing process brings us smart, educated, and intelligent foreign service officers but it has also welcomed racists, sexists, and those who are indifferent to both. And this moment in America has shown us just how dangerous a culture of indifference can be.

A solid start to changing that culture is to require the Board of Examiners--the gatekeepers--to be significantly diverse. A friend of mine was recently pulled from a job of being an assessor for incoming classes to take a more prestigious job, but his departure left the assessment team with not a single African American. That lack of diversity among gatekeepers can have a huge impact on whether a minority candidate is judged ready to represent America.

Success can rest on something as simple as whether a candidate is asked to speak about Tom Wolfe or Ta-Nehisi Coates. Once in, the skills the foreign and civil service care about are clear. In both we are judged on our leadership skills, our management, and our substantive knowledge. Rated highly on these in the foreign service, and your next promotion is yours. But fail to meet those standards and you will be low ranked and removed.

Now, department leadership says that diversity and inclusion are important, but no one is judged on their ability to help underrepresented officers improve their performance or to secure important assignments. No one gets promoted because they've burnished the quality of decision making by expanding the diversity of viewpoints and backgrounds brought to the table. No one is held back because their bureau or their embassy or their office or their section lacks inclusion.

As this report makes clear, I constantly walked into meetings at the State Department and knew instantly that everyone who should have been at the table was not there. The homogeneity of race and gender around the table is the lived experience of the GAO report. Where the department needs help--where you can help us--is holding themselves accountable.

Without accountability for those who select, assign, and promote employees it will continue to be easy to overlook, leave out, and avoid hiring women and minority officers. To get this right in the foreign and the civil service, every promotion, every job prospect, and assignment must depend in part on the ability to ensure inclusion and development of underrepresented talent.

Just as I knew my ability to communicate in Arabic would help my supervisor advocate for my next promotion, today's diplomats must know that their mentoring of underrepresented officers, for example, will strengthen their case for promotion. If you want the workforce to care, make it clear it counts.

Unfortunately, shaping the department's diversity and inclusion performance sits in many offices. From the dep--Director General to individual bureaus. An empowered Director General can make a difference, but responsibility for increasing diversity is so diffuse that everyone gets to throw up their hands and say not me; I'm not responsible.

No senior official has the responsibility or authority to focus on this foundational issue. The department has implemented several programs to help level the playing field for underrepresented minorities and women, but they often falter under the burden of being seen as affirmative action. My class of 52 had two blacks and 13 women.

And I remember attending a happy hour as a new FSO and overhearing a group of my male colleagues derisively speculating on which woman had used the Mustang proba--program to get into the foreign service because she couldn't pass the written exam. No one wants to undermine a professional foreign service by eliminating a health ladder to the senior ranks. But there's no incentive for department-wide, bureau-wide, or individual effort to improve representation.

Their saying in the civil service is that women get the training, men get the jobs. Hurdles for experienced and capable civil servants to transfer to the foreign service are unnecessarily high. Many individual officers place inclusion as a priority, and I have benefitted from those officers. I was lucky they saw something in me that pushed them to sponsor me for jobs and promotions. But the building often works against such efforts.

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When I interviewed to be a DCM for the first time for a black woman ambassador I was thrilled. There are always so few, and she was dynamic. And I was certain that my great interview would get me that job. But she told me she did not feel safe in having an all-black front office. That she felt compelled to select a white male to protect herself. And I thanked her for her honesty, and I meant it. But I am telling you when I got home that afternoon I cried. I felt betrayed by a culture that would crush the courage of even those who know how important such courage is.

There is a presumption in the department that while all--all white officers took the written exam and therefore worthy of being an FSO, and all black and Hispanic officers likely did not. It is a damaging assumption and burdens Pickering and Rangel Fellows who actually belong to the only category of Fellows who must take the written exam.

We all know that increasing diversity of all kinds among national security professionals improves policy outcomes. I and my success are not unique. But too many like me have not had the same support. We have to institutionalize and expand the successful efforts of individuals, because the department can get this right. The talent is there, the ability is there, and the time is now. I look forward to your questions. Thank you very much.

CASTRO: Thank you, Ambassador. Thank you for sharing that very powerful story of professional pain and what you experienced. Next I want to recognize Ambassador Romero for his testimony.

ROMERO: First let me thank Chairman Castro and Ranking Lee Zeldin for the opportunity to speak to diversity in the State Department and why it matters. At the outset let me just say that for a more complete reading of my recommendations, please refer to my written testimony.

America grapples with social justice and institutional violence towards our African American brothers and sisters. At the same time, the politics of resentment is complicating our ability to come together as we must as one nation. Certainly, our luster as a beacon of freedom and justice has--has been tarnished. But it's foolhardy to only rail at our adversaries for taking advantage of our current tumult and weakness. This is what adversaries do.

At this crucial inflection point in our history we must look deeply into the soul of America and commit to fixing institutional biases whether they are on the streets of our cities and towns or in the offices at State. So, why does diversity matter within the ranks of our career foreign service practitioners? Our diplomats must represent the diverse composition of our nature.

Our power to influence flows from who we are. America has lead the way since 1941. We are--not only because of our military might or our policy choices and actions--thank God--but it's because of who we are. We are a nation composed of pieces of every other country in the world. It is the American model which no one--not only inspires but has provided me and others with the ability to walk into a foreign authoritarian's office and demand the release of unjustly imprisoned Americans or people tortured simply for exercising their rights.

Our national commitment to form a more perfect union shows our enemies and friends that the U.S. is not done yet. Morale at the State Department is admittedly at a low ebb. One sees more slouch than swagger. Just in the U.S., biased discrimination and callousness to staff have plagued the department since its inception. It has worsened under the current administration. The department has made considerable efforts to--to diversify. But Payne, Rangel, and Pickering Fellowships have not succeeded in promoting diversity into the senior ranks.

In 1977 when I took the oral exam for the foreign service, one of my examiners told me, "You passed." And then thinking he was offering me a compliment he said, "For a Hispanic, you write well." I think Chairman Castro can relate to this. In conversations with diversity fellows, one gets a sense that while not said out loud this kind of bias persists in middle management. This is a failure of leadership.

Let me focus on a few recommendations. In--make mid-level officers accountable for developing all of those supervised. They should be required to set specific diversity and inclusion goals for themselves and be evaluated yearly on them. Create a diversity and inclusion scorecard that measures the success of supervisors in the recruitment, retention, promotion, and professional development. Make it mandatory that rating and reviewing officers of the supervisor reach out to all of those re--represented in his staff.

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And do 360 degree assessments, employee satisfaction responses. Raise inclusive leadership to the highest level of core competency for supervising officers and make them an absolute requirement in the precepts for promotion. More thoroughly utilize the representative of the 14 employee affinity groups that Chairman Castro spoke about earlier. And most importantly, vigorously select out all those officers who show an abusive pattern towards staff regardless of any other personal qualities, influence, or achievements in the service.

Develop and implement an adequate system to determine why officers resign. These exit surveys are absolutely essential in identifying systematic patterns that must be addressed. With respect to the last recommendation, a consistent complaint of our minority of officers is that their suggestions for new policy initiatives often met with silence or demeaning response by supervisors. Something like, "You're an FS3, you need to just listen."

Yes, millennials are impatient and cite the private sector as more welcoming to their ideas. Their spirit should be nurtured, not shut down. Every challenge that our country now faces for new approaches and novel ways of dealing with them--these will come from them, not the gray hairs. Now more than ever, the department must cultivate them and prize novelty.

Quickly on the--on the senior--on the civil service. The civil service accounts for 41 percent of State. A sharp narrowing pyramid as you rise in the civil service makes opportunities of upward mobility very difficult. They have chronically complained about the absence of opportunities as overseas postings go unfilled. The Academy--the American Academy of Diplomacy has recommended an (INAUDIBLE) service pilot program and I'm prepared to talk about that at greater length.

A passing note on Pickering, Rangel, and Payne Fellowships. These have worked. We are bringing in just the right people to represent our country in the twenty-first century. It may be the case though that the fellows accepted in these programs as undergraduates cannot compete effectively with their older non-fellow cohort, and I speak to that if--if the committee would like.

Beyond the moral imperative to better diversify State, there are comparative advantages to doing so. I know this by--by personal experience. It would give us greater cultural and linguistic competencies, arm us with critical empathy and understanding, all critical tools to influence friend and foe alike, provide us with more uniform decision making capabilities, and gain the support of all Americans for our men and women (INAUDIBLE) hazard of political and physical risks overseas and at home.

Finally I'd like to close by mentioning the passing last week of one of the true stars of the foreign service. Ambassador Simon Henshaw was a true leader and friend and he will be truly missed. Thank you Mr. Chairman and I look forward to any questions.

CASTRO: Thank you, Ambassador Romero. And thank all of you for your testimony. I'll (AUDIO GAP) for five minutes each. And pursuant to the rules (INAUDIBLE) for the purposes of questioning our witnesses. Because of the virtual format of this meeting, I'll now recognize members by committee seniority, alternating between Democrats and Republicans. (AUDIO GAP) let our staff know and we'll circle back to you.

If you (INAUDIBLE) you must unmute your microphone and address the chair verbally. And (AUDIO GAP). Then we'll go to somebody that's not on the committee and perhaps (INAUDIBLE) back for a second round. Okay? So, I'm going to recognize myself now for my questions.

Well, thank you all of you for your both enlightening and very powerful and moving testimony about the lack of diversity at the State Department. And it does appear from the GAO report that over the years there have been more women and minorities who come in (AUDIO GAP). Many--too many that have left. Not enough that have been given a fair shot at promotion. And there's a lot of work to do to provide concrete incentives to the State Department or within the State Department to improve those things.

So, with that in mind I want to ask you all a few questions. So, first (INAUDIBLE).

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My question to anyone on the panel is would you say that the experiences of people of color and women at the State Department when seeking to advance professionally can be called discrimination or discriminatory? Feel free to jump in, any of you.

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: This is Gina Winstanley. I--I feel very comfortable with the word discrimination and I use it in my (AUDIO GAP) remarks submitted for the record.

It--you know--discrimination comes in so very many forms and a (AUDIO GAP). So, you might call it unconscious bias but since we all know what the rules are it should not be in (AUDIO GAP) for training and as I mentioned before the civil service (AUDIO GAP). But does that training lead to a job (AUDIO GAP). And that's where that disconnect happens.

ROMERO: Mr. Chairman, I would (INAUDIBLE) Gina. I believe there is discrimination (AUDIO GAP). It really rests a lot with mid-level management. And I do think that there is a lack of accounting (INAUDIBLE) talk about their academic credentials (INAUDIBLE) justification for why they should be there when they have been kind of singled out by (INAUDIBLE) and supervisors because (INAUDIBLE).

I have been part of (INAUDIBLE). (AUDIO GAP). And I have to tell you that it is just as rigorous if not more rigorous than the oral assessments that--that are conducted by the State Department. And I believe that (AUDIO GAP).

CASTRO: My second question is (AUDIO GAP) in our country's history, when people are taking to the streets in protest of racial injustice. The National Security Committee hasn't stayed silent. (AUDIO GAP) as a leader of nations.

(AUDIO GAP)

ROMERO: (AUDIO GAP). To have this kind of national conversation going on, but also (AUDIO GAP). No one expects America (INAUDIBLE) perfect. (AUDIO GAP) more perfect union (AUDIO GAP) this is what we need to do right now. (AUDIO GAP). (INAUDIBLE) how we deal with this now that matters (INAUDIBLE).

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: (AUDIO GAP)

CASTRO: (AUDIO GAP)

--That. We're--we're good to go. We'll see if--if Lee's there--there you go. Ready for your questions.

ZELDIN: Thank you, chairman. While the data shows that discrimination has impacted promotion rates in the foreign service another important factor to recognize is the decision by many FSOs of color to voluntarily leave the service. We of course don't want to lose that talent. We want to keep them around so that they do apply for promotion and--and end up in senior positions.

First, Mr. Bair, have you had an opportunity to look into that aspect yet?

BAIR: Yeah, so thank you for the question. We haven't looked specifically at the attrition kind of what's behind that. I would say there is data in our report that talks about the attrition rate and I think--you know--to your points precisely--you know--there are concerns around attrition. But I think where we're coming from is there's some additional work that has to be done to understand what are the root causes there? Why are people leaving the State Department?

You know--and--and--because that's when you can really tailor solutions to address those root causes.

ZELDIN: Either of our other two witnesses--or, two Ambassadors have any thoughts on that aspect?

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: I--I think we're both highly supportive of exit interviews. And hopefully that they are constructed in a way that people can feel and be honest about the reasons that they're leaving the Department of

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State. There's lots of anecdotal information. I know many people who have left, myself included. I know why people have left.

And certainly the challenges of contributing to one's fullest ability is a huge part of that from my own experience. And the Department of State needs to be able to track that. The data is absolutely important.

ROMERO: Yes. Congressman, I agree completely with Gina. Look, nobody wants to look at exit surveys and interviews with people who leave, particularly those that leave early before retirement. This is a common kind of thing in most organizations. But I think it's absolutely crucial here that there be exit surveys done and that there be exit interviews done so that you can begin to identify the kind of systemic things that people are talking about. You know--if one person leaves because they're disgruntled for whatever reason and mentions why, well that's concerning.

But if--if five or ten people, particularly women and--and--and officers of color leave and--and mention the same kinds of things, you've got to act on it. It's a pattern. You've got to act on it. And I don't believe that State has done enough. What I've heard is from people who have left and left early--minority candidates or minority officers--is that they're given a form and basically you fill in your name and you check the box. Are you leaving because of pay, are you leaving because of a, b, c, and d. And another box other, so long. No--no questioning, no follow up. Boom. Done.

And there just needs to be more done. And I know it's uncomfortable, but it's got to be done. There's no way around it.

ZELDIN: Thank you. Mr. Bair, tables 40 through 43 of the GAO model assess a large number of factors related to promotion rates in the foreign service. It appears from the tables that having an Ivy League education may impact promotions. Do you have any thoughts you'd like to share as to why that is?

BAIR: Yeah, so thanks for the question and--and my kudos to you for getting to tables 40 through 43 of the report. I know we've got a lot of data in there. So, I appreciate when people really dive into that.

But yeah, as you referenced for those who weren't able to get all the way to that level of detail--you know--we have the results of the entire model that we built which we included variables about the educational experiences of people and their promotion experiences. We were trying to model the promotion experiences. And so we were trying to understand the impact of education.

And so what we did is we built that in, and we did find that there was a correlation between people having Ivy League educations and especially early in their career higher promotion rates or higher promotion outcomes.

ZELDIN: Are you seeing anybody being discriminated against--evidence of people being discriminated against because they don't have an Ivy League education?

BAIR: So, here I have to be cautious because we--we very intentionally don't use the word discrimination in the report. Because--you know--it's a--that's a legalistic determination which we aren't prepared to make and--and wouldn't be supported based on the data analysis that we did. So I--I would say I--I couldn't necessarily make a definitive comment on that.

ZELDIN: Okay. Adversely impacted or any other way that--that there--are you seeing evidence of someone being--being targeted negatively because they don't have an Ivy League education?

BAIR: I--I would say that what the results of the analysis showed was that there was a positive correlation if you did have an education in your--in your likelihood of getting promoted relative to this who didn't.

ZELDIN: Got it. Okay. Yeah, chairman we have a--a law in New York where they--they can't charge you more for using a credit card for gas, but they can offer you a cash discount. And I--I--I understand what Mr. Bair is--is

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certainly saying there. But--and I--and again thank you for having this important hearing on this always timely topic. I yield back.

CASTRO: Thank you, Ranking Member Zeldin. And I'll go now to Representative Lieu of California.

LIEU: Thank you Chairman Castro and Ranking Member Zeldin for holding this important hearing. Ambassador Romero, I was moved by your story. It reminded me of when I grew up in Ohio. On a number of occasions very well meaning people would come up to me and tell me that I speak English good. After a--a while I would respond and say, "Thank you. I speak English well."

So, I have a question today about assignment restrictions. And it's to both Ambassador Romero and Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley. What I want to know is let's say you are Chinese American. Would the State Department not have you work on any issues related to China or if you're Mexican American and you're in the State Department are you disallowed from working on any issues related to Mexico? Or if you immigrated from South Africa and you're in the State Department, are you prevented on working from issues related to South Africa?

Or if you have family in those countries, let's say a nephew or cousin, can you not work on issues related to those countries? I'm reminded of when I went on a Congressional delegation with Speaker Pelosi to China and we had a classified briefing before the trip. I remember we were in this room. There were about 12 presenters from different federal agencies. Not a single person was Chinese American. I don't remember an Asian American in that room as well other than me.

And I thought this doesn't seem like a very good situation. So, just want to get your thoughts on that. Whether there's a written or non-written policy regarding assignment restrictions.

ROMERO: Congressman Lieu, I don't know of any--anything written or even unsaid. And I'll leave that to--to be confirmed by Ambassador Winstanley. I think my experience has been the opposite is true. And that is that in the State Department as a Hispanic, I kind of felt that people thought that I did a good job in Latin America because--you know--that's who I am and--you know--a Hispanic working Latin American issues etcetera, etcetera.

And so there was kind of a discrimination unsaid, unspoken towards me working outside of the bureau and my ability to be able to work outside of the bureau. So, I think in many respects it's--it's--it's kind of the--the--the--the reverse. But I will have Gina--she's got some more recent experience perhaps that can answer that.

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: I'll add to that. And--and you're making me smile. You're making me smile. In my incoming class we had officers with foreign born spouses. And each of those officers, one with a Japanese born spouse, one with a French born spouse, and one with a--sorry not Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese. And they all went to those countries. I have heard from close colleagues that the thinking in the department has changed and that people were prohibited from going to countries where they had close contacts.

I haven't had certainly a--a personal experience, but many colleagues and I have a bit of confusion about it. Because I know--you know--I served in Tel Aviv and I had many friends and colleagues at the embassy with relatives in Israel that were not prohibited from serving there. So, that's why I'm not sure about the facts. Because I can only say my experience has been I've served with people at an embassy who had relatives in the country. So, if there's something different going on that hasn't been my experience. I would be very--

LIEU: --Thank you. That's--that's very helpful to know. I have a follow up question regarding security clearances. Do you believe anyone at the State Department has more difficulties getting security clearances because of their race or ethnicity?

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: I would say yes. And--and it might be a question of security clearance and suitability clearance. Because they are two separate things where people are looking at a range of issues as to whether that person is suitable to work--you know--for the department. And depending on the familial--familial connections it might have an impact or want on one or the other. But certainly, a very close look is given to those



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who have family outside of the United States. And--you know--even more so than simply travel outside the United States. I'm certain it has an impact.

LIEU: Thank you. And I yield back.

CASTRO: Thank you, Representative Lieu. I'll now go to Congressman Brad Sherman.

SHERMAN: Thank you for letting me participate though I'm not a member of the subcommittee. We talk about diversity and people say it's better than the fifties, better than the eighties. Obviously, that's not the standard. People who bring diversity to the State Department will help us more than others because we'll have a foreign service that reflects America.

But it will also undercut the propaganda of our enemies who say that America is a place of discrimination and castes. And obviously nothing defeats that argument more than people high level in our State Department serving abroad and illustrating the opposite. Of course, if there is no diversity we lead ourselves right into that.

Those outside the world of foreign policy would think it would be helpful to have people in the State Department who understand foreign countries, who have ties to those countries, who speak the languages as--as a native. And Ambassador Abercrombie--Abercrombie-Winstanley, are you saying that the State Departments--took--looks to somebody who says my God, your parents were born in this country. Your wife was born in this country. You speak this country's language. Therefore we will not involve you in our--in--in that embassy. Does the State Department actually regard it as a negative to have a better understanding of a country?

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: I don't think the department regards it as a negative with regard to understanding the question. I think the issue is concern about vulnerabilities. And I don't say that it's a valid concern. And I think our record shows that people are--

SHERMAN: --Vulnerabilities. Are you more likely to be mugged in a--because you're--

(LAUGHTER)

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: --Exactly. There you go. There you go.

(LAUGHTER)

Okay. We're on the same page with that. Yeah--

SHERMAN: --What are you--what are you vulnerable for because your wife was born in Japan or your husband was born in Germany or your parents were born in Laos or that you speak Laotian a--as a native. What--what are you vulnerable for?

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: I would argue nothing, but I am confident--

SHERMAN: --Divided loyalty, is that the argument--

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: --Yeah. It would--the--the--our diplomatic security--

SHERMAN: --I think I'm frozen--

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: --Oh, sorry--

SHERMAN: --Can people hear me?

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: I can hear you.

SHERMAN: Hello?

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ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: Yes, I can hear you. Yes.

CASTRO: We can hear you.

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: Yeah. That--

SHERMAN: --I don't know if people can see me or hear me--

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: --Okay.

SHERMAN: --Hello?

UNKNOWN: Sir--sir we can hear you and see you.

SHERMAN: (INAUDIBLE) or able to hear me.

CASTRO: Go ahead, ambassador.

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: Okay. So, the concern is that they might be more vulnerable, that they might be more easily compromised because their family is in the country. That is certainly what makes the department take a harder look. That is my understanding--

SHERMAN: --Hello--

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: --So, that--that's the short answer. And--and again, not one that I necessarily agree with. But that is the answer.

CASTRO: Thank you.

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: Okay.

CASTRO: Congressman Sherman, did you have a follow up? Are you there?

SHERMAN: They can hear me. I'm being told by my--

CASTRO: --Yeah--

SHERMAN: --I'm being told by my staff that--that you can hear me. So, I--I wish I could hear you. I--I don't want to drag on the--you know--to take too much time. So, I'll pose another question and hopefully by the time I'm done with that one they'll be some time to answer.

The GAO reports of 89 and 2000 indicate that the State Department has not been successful in identifying potential barriers to hiring and advancement of minorities and women. And--does it--do we think that there are barriers in the State Department that go beyond the barriers in other departments of the federal government? Are there particular deficiencies at State that go beyond what we see in our society and in our federal employment?

That's my additional question. And I'll leave whatever time.

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: I'd like to take a stab at that--

CASTRO: --You want to respond?

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: Yeah. I--the--the foreign service--I--I don't know if the civil service is quite as opaque or quite as dependent on personal relationships. But you absolutely don't have a clear cut way of knowing that you're going to get the assignment or knowing, and--and promotions is a different category to which I can speak as well. But certainly on the assignments, those that are considered career enhancing, you've got to lobby for that assignment. It's not based on what you've done and--and how you've been rated or ranked before. You've got

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to lobby for it, you've got to have somebody in the room where the decisions are being made to say I want X to happen.

And so often, particularly minorities and women do not understand how the system works. We do not have the same access to mentors and advisors to walk us through. I certainly didn't. I keep--tell people I'd have been Secretary of State if I'd known how the--the system worked as far as my career was concerned. I had a lot of luck and people to tell me no, in fact, assignment decisions are not made at post.

So, you writing a nice letter to the ambassador and the DCM and your predecessor--they're not the deciders. The decision happens in the bureau. You've got to push your candidacy in that. And--and so many people don't know that.

So, it is--you know--having additional mentors, having additional information about how the system works will help women and minorities. I believe we (INAUDIBLE)--

SHERMAN: --I hope we get back to (INAUDIBLE) a few seconds. I've lived this since my wife is civil service--

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: --Okay--

SHERMAN: --At the State Department for over 20 years--

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: --Uh-huh--

SHERMAN: --And there is a bar between certain positions and civil service, and I think that we would see more diversity in the State Department there. But it--there is this--a somehow this thinking that you have administrative people and they can only go so far and (INAUDIBLE). You have civil servants; they can only do certain (INAUDIBLE).

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: Yeah, as I mentioned--

SHERMAN: --(INAUDIBLE)--

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: --Yep. Yeah. It's true--

SHERMAN: --And that--those three separate castes in the State Department--I don't think they are good for the State Department. I don't think they're good for old white men who work for the State Department. And they're certainly not good for diversity at the State Department. With that I'll yield back.

CASTRO: Thank you, Congressman Sherman. Okay. Now we've--everybody's had a chance to ask the witnesses questions. We're going to go through a very quick second round and then we'll go to closing. Just in terms of my question, my question would be to any of the witnesses.

I found that there's often points that the witnesses would like to make as they've heard the other testimony or--or--you know--the other questions. Are there any points that any of you would like to make during my second round of questioning that you haven't had a chance to make?

ROMERO: If I can take that, Mr. Chairman. If even--if anyone ever wonders about whether diversity is important or not I think--I would hope that they would remember this story. I do a podcast called American Diplomat, and what we do is try to tell stories from our diplomats--personal stories. And there was a diplomat that we had on whose name we'll--we'll--I'll omit from this. But she is a first-generation, came over a little child from--from Korea.

Her uncle, her father did not make the trip and she came to this country. And was exceedingly bright. Went to--to--to school, graduated at the top of her class. Came into the foreign service. I don't whe--I don't know whether she came in through Pickering or Rangel, but she did come into the foreign service. Now she's a deputy assistant secretary of state. But when she was working on the Korea negotiations, she was sitting in the room speaking fluent

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Korean as a--as a staff person. And it mystified the hell out of every single North Korean General at the table about who she was.

And one of them came up to her at a break and said, "Sister, who are you?" And she explained that yeah, well--you know--my ancestors lived here and now they're living in the United States. And now I'm--I'm a diplomat sitting at the table.

I can't think of a more powerful example of why this kind of diversity is absolutely important. That general had to admit starkly that we are a country that values the kind of talent that we do. And you can go through all kinds of barriers to get to the top.

On another issue real quick Mr. Chairman, I would hope that the department would look at the issue of Pickerings and Rangels. I've sat on those panels. Most of the Pickerings and Rangels apply when they are graduating from undergraduate. They go through graduate school which is absolutely fantastic.

Unfortun--well, whether it's fortunate or not I'm--I'm thinking that some of the demographics that Mr. Bair is looking at with respect to the GAO report and Ivy Leagues might be affected by the fact that a lot of these Pickerings go to Ivy League schools. To include Georgetown, which is I think probably the major supplier. So, you'd have to kind of sort out for that.

But one of the things that I'm--I'm concerned about is that our Pickerings and Rangels come in at the age of 23 and 24, after they finish graduate school. In comparison to the rest of their cohort--their A100, their orientation class--the non-fellows are coming in at age 34 and 35 and older. What that means is that a lot of these--these people--and let's face it. Gina knows this better than anybody. You sing kumbaya with all your A100 classmates. You're looking forward to this fabulous career together.

But the bottom line is you're--you're competing against those same people throughout your whole career. And if they've got 10 to 15 years of more work experience there's got to be something that basically gives these--these young officers at 23 and 24 an ability to be able to go out, work in the private sector, come back. Leave without pay--excursion tours--to kind of season them in what's happening outside of the State Department, make them a little bit more savvy about exactly what Ambassador Winstanley was saying. And that is how to work in a large organization. How to--how to promote yourself.

CASTRO: Thank you.

BAIR: So, Chairman Castro I appreciate the opportunity to kind of highlight a couple of points. And I'll--I'll just be very brief. I think the first is as Congressman Sherman very astutely mentioned--you know--we reported back in 1989 on diversity in the foreign service. And now we're 30 years later and we're identifying some of the same unmet underrepresentation issues. This is not a new issue. It's a longstanding issue.

And so, this is really where we're coming at from the point of you need to get to the root causes of what exactly is going on so you can design tailored solutions to address those. And you do that by peeling back the layers of the onion to understand exactly what's going on. And--and this is really where it's time to move from words on paper, commitments, to making tangible actions that you can assess to actually demonstrate impact for improving diversity and inclusion at the department.

CASTRO: Thank you, Mr. Bair. Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley, anything?

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: Yeah, I'm going to second both of my colleagues, Ambassador Romero and Mr. Baird thank you for those. I associate myself with them fully. But the bottom line for me is always accountability. And that pulling back of the layers and taking steps and getting down to the root of the problem.

People won't bother to do that if they don't have to do that, even though it's best for the organization. I think people are inherently comfortable with the way things are and are lazy; both, I'm sure. Therefore, unless they're held

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accountable in my evaluation for getting to the very top of the organization, what have I done? Have I made the effort? Have I overseen others? Am I responsible for making sure that work of getting down to what holds us back as an organization? And until someone is held responsible, it--you'll be here again. And we can't be here again. We cannot be here again. The American people are saying enough. Enough.

So, account--whatever you do in the legislation, there needs to be a position next to who is responsible for x, y, and z so that they have to answer the questions and have the incentive to make sure things happen for the good of the organization.

I--I do want to say one other thing. You know--Ambassador Romero's remarks about Pickerings and Rangels and I would argue that one of the challenges that I don't know how public the department has been and--about it--is that those fellowship programs have in fact replaced--not intended, but in fact replaced the major intake of minority officers into the Department of State. They come through the fellowship instead of coming through the regular process.

It wasn't supposed to be that way. Our numbers are not increasing because people are not coming in the regular way. The regular way. And those people would probably be of a similar age and experience. So, you'd have a nice range of people coming in as we always have. I came in at the age of 27. There were people who were 21 in my class and there were people who were 36 in my class. So, we had a full range.

All of us are still in, by the way. So, all of us have been--I'm not in--in. But until I resigned all of us were still in and successful in the department. I don't think age and external experience should be a barrier to success. I don't think that's the case. But I do think it's the case that we have somehow set in our heads at the Department of State we're going to take brown people through these fellowship programs. And when we're assessing them, there's something in the assessors' heads that say these people aren't good enough because they haven't come through this fellowship program.

CASTRO: Well, thank you. Thank you very much. And I took a little extra time on my round of questioning. Ranking Member Zeldin, if y'all have--if you have any--any questions.

ZELDIN: Well chairman, being that you do have two very distinguished diplomats here on this call for today's hearing, I wanted to give them an opportunity to--to reflect, share--share a story or so of--of their entry into the foreign service. Maybe not as much speaking to myself or--you know--or us as members as that young man or woman who's out there looking to follow in your footsteps. So, what kind of advice do you have? So--you know--maybe a reflection, a story. And also some advice for them looking to maybe fill your shoes one day.

ROMERO: Thank you, Congressman Zeldin. If there was ever any advice that I had for the younger generation of officers--and thank you for this question. It would be that this is a long term process. Don't let career dissatisfaction or what you're reading in the newspapers affect you. Stick with it. We need the very best. We need people who--who are resilient.

I remember that I had an extraordinary career of promotions, but I thought I was going to die as an FS2, which was the mid-level. And I had a mentor of mine say, "Pete, come on. Get over it. Get over yourself. You need to be in the foreign service. The--the service needs you." And just that little bit of encouragement from that mentor meant a--meant a world to me. And I stuck it out and in fact within a matter of years I found myself as Assistant Secretary of State.

So, what I would say is again, stick it out. Be resilient. This is not necessarily all about you. It's about our country. And it's about representing our country with our--with our very best. And ultimately going back to what Gina has said, and that is that if State is going to talk the talk, Congressman, they've got to walk the walk. And they've got to put things in place that make people--particularly mid-level officers and managers accountable.

ABERCROMBIE-WINSTANLEY: I--I do a lot of recruiting for the Department of State and I'm a great recruiter. It is the best job in the world. We benefit from having all of us at the table from whatever background, gender, sexual

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orientation: we need all of us to represent the United States. Any pain that I've experienced over the years has been more than balanced out by extraordinary colleagues--white, black, Asian, otherwise--and extraordinary opportunities for myself and for those who are coming behind me.

It--it--as Pete said, we are waiting for you. America needs you and the organization needs you. And we are working today to make this happen. We do not want to come back and have this conversation again. So, this focus--we're not going to lose this focus. Come--come join. Thank you.

ZELDIN: Well chairman, thanks again for having this important hearing. I yield back.

CASTRO: Thank you. And Congressman Sherman, do you have any last questions? Maybe not. Okay. Then I'll go to the Ranking Member Zeldin. If he's got any closing remarks.

ZELDIN: So, thank you to all of our witnesses for--for being here, for their perspective. This is a--a conversation that we're having here formally one afternoon in--in June of 2020. But it's one that comes with decades of your experience and reflections and hopefully to follow years ahead--decades ahead of providing mentorship and ensuring that whoever is following us here in Congress or whoever is following senior leadership at the--the State Department and--and elsewhere that we are always learning lessons and we're always pursuing ways to--to get better.

The chairman hosted a--an extremely productive roundtable with leaders from many different areas of the State Department with very diverse backgrounds. I think it was fantastic to get everybody at one table to have that conversation. And this is a--you know--really a continuation of that. I--I look forward to as I mentioned in my opening remarks hearing more about the diversity plan. Maybe someone from the State Department would be able to come to present that to the committee to be able to answer questions.

And really this all should be a--a partnership amongst those who have the experience from the past, those who are currently in the field today not just here in the U.S. but serving abroad, and also always looking towards the future to make sure that we are pursuing a more diversified State Department and other areas of the federal government that reflect the diversity of our country.

So, I believe that today's hearing and today's conversation while--while it's a--a brief moment of--of one day, it--it is an important continuation of the chairman and his subcommittee's work on this very important topic. So, thank you again to the witnesses and--and to the chairman. I yield back.

CASTRO: Thank you, Ranking Member Zeldin. And thank you for your engagement also on these important issues. And I'd like to thank our witnesses for testifying again. Director Jason Bair, Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, and Ambassador Peter Romero.

As part of my closing I'm--I'm going to read a few quotes from the Government Accountability Office.

Quote, "The statistics on minorities and white women in the foreign service show that the State Department does not meet the criteria for representation."

Quote, "State has eliminated entry level underrepresentation for foreign service officers, however underrepresentation at the mid and senior levels of the foreign service exists." Unquote.

Quote, "According to State officials, hiring diverse classes at the lower ranks of the foreign service improves representations--representation at higher ranks over time, specifically state officials noted that because rising from class four to the senior foreign service takes approximately 20 years, the diversity of the senior ranks should improve."

The first two quotes were from the GAO report from 1989. The last one is from the 2020 report. Over 30 years later the representation of women and people of color in positions of power and leadership has not improved very much. It's clear that having diversity at the entry level isn't enough and that we can't expect the situation to improve on its

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own. We need real, structural changes in order to make progress on diversity and inclusion at the State Department.

For the people who represent America to actually be representative of the American people, diversity needs to be a long term priority backed by commitment from the State Department leadership, the President, and also from the United States Congress. We've received many recommendations from the ambassadors on how to move forward and I intend to turn those ideas into legislation.

And as the ranking member mentioned, we also look forward to hearing from our current State Department, our current administration on their plan for diversity. Today represents an important step in the right direction but as you all know there's still a lot of work to do.

Thank you, everybody, and that concludes our hearing for today. Take care, y'all.

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