

Good afternoon. I want to thank you for the privilege and opportunity to add personal insight into our continuing challenge to get America's representatives to look like America. This moment in our nation is one where each of us in our spheres of influence can move us closer to our More Perfect Union. I thank you for today's focus on finally developing a truly diverse workforce —at all levels—, so that we will be able to devise and carry out the most effective foreign policies for our nation. As a 32 year diplomat, I am proud to belong to the cadre of dedicated State Department employees, civil service and foreign service, who have sacrificed much to serve our nation.

But I am not proud of how the Department of State has hindered, undervalued, demoralized and destroyed the dreams of some of her best and brightest because of bias, racism and quiet discrimination.

The GAO report doesn't try to explain causality, but the numbers speak for themselves. Our problems are foundational. The systems and processes must change. For example, our rigorous testing process brings us smart, highly functional, educated, intelligent and usually dedicated FSOs, but we don't screen for racists; we don't screen for sexists and we don't screen for indifference to either. This is a problem rooted in the culture of "the building". We can help change that by requiring the board of examiners be significantly diverse. For a year, I was one of two full-time African American assessors out of 30. A friend was recently pulled from that position for a more prestigious job but his departure left the assessment team with no African Americans. That lack of diversity can have a huge impact on whether a minority officer is judged ready to represent America. It could be the difference between being asked about James Baldwin or Ibram Kendi versus Kurt Vonnegut, or Tom Wolfe.

The skills the foreign and civil service cares about are clear and there is both accountability for achieving them, and consequence for not. The foreign service has its precepts that must be met to rise in the corps: we are judged on our success in Leadership, Management, Substantive knowledge, Communications, Intellectual capability and Interpersonal skills. Rated highly on these, and you will move up. Fail to meet the standards and you will be low ranked and removed.

But though we SAY we value diversity and inclusion, no one is judged or rated on their ability to raise the performance of underrepresented officers, or help them attain promotions or assignments. No one gets promoted because they improved the quality of decision making by expanding the diversity of viewpoints and backgrounds brought to the table. No one is judged and held back because their Bureau, Embassy, office or, section lacks inclusion.

As this report makes clear, I constantly walked into most meetings at State and knew instantly that everyone who should have been there, wasn't. The homogeneity of race and gender around the table is the lived experience of those GAO charts. Where the Department needs help is with holding themselves accountable.

Without accountability for those who select, assign and promote employees, up and down the ranks, nothing will change. It will continue to be easy and acceptable to overlook, leave out, and avoid hiring both women and minority officers. And these valuable employees will continue to stagnate, grow frustrated and leave.

To finally get this right in the foreign and civil service, every promotion, job prospect, professional development, assignment or any other professional progress or accolade 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 allow me to speak about my substantive knowledge of the region and my supervisor to cite my communications skills for promotion consideration, today's diplomats must know their encouragement of underrepresented officers; their mentoring efforts will allow them to speak about their inclusion skills, and their supervisors to provide concrete examples of their support for diversity. These abilities must be required for them to move up the ranks. It's time to add inclusion promotion. It's not rocket science. If you want the workforce to care, make it clear that promoting inclusion counts. Every employee quickly learns what skills and assignments the Department considers "career enhancing", and what is just words on paper.

The ability to improve the Department's performance sits in many places including the Director General's office and individual bureaus. Any perceived responsibility for increasing diversity is so diffuse that everyone gets to throw up their hands and say, "not me!" No one senior official has the responsibility or authority to FOCUS on this foundational issue. Or, to hold others to account. Progress comes down to personal decisions or serendipity. The title of "Chief Diversity Officer" at State sits in the office of Civil Rights.

The Department has implemented several programs that help level the playing field for underrepresented minorities, and then allowed them to be used as yet another entry point for majority applicants. In the civil service at State, there's a saying, "women get the training, men get the jobs". These programs often falter in the face of disinterest, animosity, pushback or the threat of lawsuits from majority applicants. My class of 52 had 2 blacks, two Asians and 13 women. I remember joyfully attending a happy hour gathering as a new FSO, and overhearing a group of guys derisively speculating on which women had used the Mustang program to get in. Majority Americans hold 87% of the executive positions in the State Department and you can find some in the Department who think that's not enough!

Without clear specific directives, requirements and accountability, we will not get this done.

No one wants to undermine the professional foreign service by eliminating a healthy ladder to senior positions for any FSO, but there is no accountability for Department-wide, bureau-wide, or individual effort to improve representation.

Favors are paid. favorites are rewarded. The process is opaque and often inexplicable. Hurdles for experienced and capable civil servants to transfer to the foreign service are unnecessarily high.

Many individual officers place inclusion as a priority. I have been a beneficiary of those officers. I was lucky that they made the effort and saw something in me that pushed them to sponsor me for jobs and promotions. But the “building” often works against such efforts. When I interviewed for a DCM job with a black woman, I was thrilled. There are always so few and she was dynamic! The interview went so well, I was certain I would get the job. Imagine my shock when she told me she didn’t feel safe having an all black front office; that she felt compelled to select a white male to protect herself. I thanked her sincerely for her honesty; I meant it, but I cried when I got home. I felt betrayed by a culture that crushed the courage of even those who knew how important such courage was! And I swore I would stand up for my choice, whomever it was, when I got the chance to make that decision. However, when I became an Ambassador-designee, my first choice for DCM was a highly qualified African American male who as a management officer, could offset my strengths. The bureau told me the choice was not mine and assigned a less capable white male, who was their candidate.

I must say frankly: The culture of the building is to assume that minority, particularly African American and Hispanic officers, and sometimes women are less capable. For example.

During my training to join the Board of Examiners, I, and the 20+ other incoming assessors were told, and I quote, “African Americans have cognitive difficulties with large amounts of reading material.” Am I certain that assertion colored the assessment of every black officer who was tested that year? Of course!

Many, if not most Department of State employees believe that not entering the service through the FSOT means you haven’t/couldn’t meet the same standards as “real” FSOs. Many have no idea that there are 9 categories of candidates for the oral exam who do NOT have to take the written exam to enter the foreign service. These include Boren, AAAS, Truman and Presidential Management Fellows. Very few in the Department know that Pickering and Rangels are in the ONLY category of Fellows that MUST take the written exam! There is a presumption in the Department, that all white officers took the exam and are therefore worthy of being an FSO, and that all black and Hispanic officers likely did not. It is a damaging assumption that burdens these incredible officers and one the Department could correct easily and has not. If you are presumed to have not met the standards, no one will want to hire you.

We all know that increasing diversity of all kinds among national security professionals improves policy outcomes and ensures we benefit from all of the best talent our nation has to offer. We have to take the examples of the State Department individuals who get this right and turn them into the Agency that gets this right. The talent is there, the ability is there and the time is now.

We have the opportunity now— when all of America is saying ENOUGH! Let's get on with this— to ensure employees at all levels know they MUST set aside their individual biases for the good of the organization. They must know —at all levels—, that they will be held accountable for solving this problem, and if they can't do it they will not prosper at State. Let's not have to come back here to have this discussion again. We are America. We can do this!

Specific recommendations for legislative support and action.

- 1) Ensure that of the four Assessors examining new candidates, at least two come from underrepresented communities. Add one additional year for time in class, for every two years spent as an examiner.
- 2) We need Inclusion Promotion added to necessary skills.
- 3) Move the position of Chief Diversity Officer to the Deputy Secretary's office as a direct report and empower them with authority and staff to collect and share data on diversity in assignments and promotions and to add verbiage to the EERs of officers with authority to make assignments. Ensure they can partner with the DG and Bureaus to lay out benchmarks and goalposts to allow for accountability.
- 4) Reform the mid-career conversion program to allow talented civil servants to more easily use their expertise in support of the foreign service.
- 5) Ensure the Department increases accurate understanding of how all the fellowships work. That additional information about Pickering and Rangels alone, should improve the standing of the fellows in the Department.
- 6) Change the name of the EEO award to the Diversity and Inclusion award.
- 7) Require an annual review and report out of progress and bureau specific and by grade.
- 8) Bureau Front Offices should be required to vet their shortlists for COM and DAS positions against EEO case logs.