

Testimony of Ambassador Arnold A. Chacon
Nominee to be Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Tuesday, January 28, 2014

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources for the Department of State. I deeply appreciate the confidence the President and Secretary Kerry have shown in nominating me for this key position.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to advance American diplomacy through strengthening the Department of State workforce. If confirmed, I look forward to directing the recruitment, hiring, assignment, welfare, professional development, promotion, and retirement processes of the Civil Service, Foreign Service, Locally Employed Staff, and other colleagues who work at the Department of State.

Mr. Chairman, for over 30 years, I have had the pleasure of working with highly motivated Department of State employees serving both overseas and domestically. I am excited about the prospect of helping to ensure that my colleagues are ready and able to meet the diplomatic challenges of today and tomorrow.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take a moment to introduce my wife, Alida, who is also a career member of the Foreign Service. We have had the privilege of serving together with our three children throughout Latin America and Europe, as well as in a number of positions in Washington, DC. Growing up in Colorado, I learned from my parents the values of justice, compassion, and service to a cause greater than myself. My family gave me a moral compass based on love of God and country, which has guided my life. My wife and I share these values with our children. As a family, we care deeply about promoting U.S. interests abroad and the future of the Department and its people.

The global environment has changed over the past several decades. The world has become more interconnected, but also more dangerous. I believe that our approach toward managing our workforce also must evolve. Diplomacy today requires flexibility, creativity, and a diversity of ideas that reflect the conscience of America in deploying the talents of all of our people to ensure success in an ever more complex environment.

As Secretary Kerry has said, "Global leadership is a strategic imperative for America, not a favor we do for other countries. It amplifies our voice, it extends our reach. It is key to jobs, the fulcrum of our influence, and it matters to the daily lives of Americans. It matters that we get this moment right for America, and it matters that we get it right for the world."

The Department and its diplomats are, in the words of Secretary Kerry, “an enormous return on investment. Deploying diplomats and development experts today is much cheaper than deploying troops tomorrow.”

Diplomacy and development are ever more important to safeguarding national security and the prosperity of our people and the United States, because if we can successfully manage or solve problems diplomatically, we save the lives and the money that would otherwise have to be spent in dealing with conflict. Today, as the United States and the world face great perils and urgent foreign policy challenges, we must use all of the diplomatic, economic, political, legal, and cultural tools at our disposal, along with military tactics when needed.

Like Secretary Kerry, I believe that the men and women of the Department of State are among the most talented, loyal, and hard-working people I have ever met. They and their families deserve the best possible support. If confirmed, I will work hard to equip them with the training, tools, and supportive personnel policies they need to fulfill our critical mission.

The increase in personnel through the Diplomacy 3.0 hiring surge over the last five years has had a major, positive impact on diplomatic readiness. First, the mid-level staffing gap, a result of reduced hiring in the 1990s, is shrinking. Our overseas vacancy rate has dropped from 16 percent to 10 percent. Second, we have a strong commitment to provide training, particularly in foreign languages. In the last fiscal year, 79 percent of employees assigned to language-designated positions met or exceeded the proficiency requirement. And third, we have been able to support new and important initiatives, from Economic Statecraft, which promotes efforts by U.S. companies and foreign investment and leads to jobs and opportunities here at home, to the empowerment of women politically, socially, and economically around the world.

Our mission has also grown significantly. Our responsibilities overseas continue to expand, as does our presence. In recent years, we opened a new embassy in South Sudan, and a new consulate in China; in Brazil, we have plans to open consulates in Belo Horizonte and in Porto Alegre. The Department has also added three new domestic bureaus to strengthen our expertise and diplomatic efforts in the fields of energy, counterterrorism, and conflict and stabilization operations. If confirmed, I will seek your support for staffing increases that are critical in meeting the President’s foreign policy objectives.

I will continue our hard work to hire, develop, and retain a diverse, skilled, and innovative workforce – one that truly represents America. As Secretary Kerry has said, “Our commitment to inclusion must be evident in the face we present to the world and in the decision-making processes that represent our diplomatic goals.” I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude for your unwavering support for increasing minority recruitment and retention. As my predecessor before me, I pledge to work closely with you to achieve a more diverse workforce. I have personally seen that as our embassy teams engage with foreign audiences, our support of

the American values of social inclusion and freedom resonates far better when they see that we “walk the talk” by employing a workforce that includes people of all cultures, races, and religions, drawn from across the United States.

The Department’s Diversity and Inclusion Plan provides a useful framework for action, but we have a ways to go. We continue to seek ways to reach out towards new audiences. After learning that many underrepresented groups rely heavily on mobile communications, the Department developed and released “DOSCareers,” a mobile app that educates and engages aspiring Foreign Service candidates and others to familiarize them with diplomatic careers. Launched in March and available on Google Play and the App Store, this app expands our outreach to these populations and helps candidates link up with our DC-based recruiters, as well as our 16 Diplomats in Residence at colleges across the United States, learn about upcoming recruitment events, and even practice for the Foreign Service Officer Test. I was delighted to learn that in the first few months, DOSCareers had more than 10,000 downloads. With innovative outreach and bold action, we can make the inroads that will help us reach our diversity goals.

The Foreign Service represents the United States around the world – at embassies, consulates, and, increasingly, at less traditional missions where our diplomatic skills play an important role in promoting our priorities and safeguarding our nation. Throughout history, there has always been a need for diplomats, but now, as we face issues such as terrorism, violent extremism, and widespread economic instability, the need is greater than ever.

The 14,000 members of the Foreign Service and 11,000 Civil Service employees are vital to America’s national security. They play essential roles in: advancing peace, security, and freedom across the globe; pursuing economic opportunity overseas; creating jobs at home; and protecting Americans from the dangers posed by drug trafficking, weapons proliferation, and environmental degradation.

Mr. Chairman, operations at our high-threat posts are increasingly demanding and changing. The Department remains focused on filling positions in priority staffing posts (PSPs) – our embassies and consulates in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Libya – while ensuring that we adequately staff our other posts around the world and advance major initiatives in such areas as economic statecraft, food security, energy security, climate change, and nuclear nonproliferation. The Department expects to fill more than 700 jobs in these five PSP countries in summer 2014. Since September 2001, the number of unaccompanied positions overseas has increased from 200 to more than 1,000. We are asking our diplomats to serve in more difficult and dangerous places, increasingly without the company and comfort of living with their families.

If confirmed, I will work with others in the Department to ensure that all employees are fully trained, prepared, and compensated for the mission we have assigned them, and that they have the support they need to serve in these high-stress assignments and to cope with the pressures such service places on them and their families. This support must include the requisite staffing, training, and accountability to provide our employees the world over with the safest possible working conditions. In this regard, full implementation of Foreign Service overseas comparability pay continues to be a top priority.

While the Department's Foreign Service employees spend most of their careers overseas, our Civil Service employees provide the institutional continuity and expertise in Washington, DC, at passport agencies, Diplomatic Security field offices, and other offices throughout the United States.

Civil Service employees contribute to accomplishing all aspects of the Department's mission, encompassing human rights, counternarcotics, trade, environmental issues, consular affairs and other core functions.

The Department of State is broadening the experience of its Civil Service workforce by offering opportunities to serve in our missions abroad. This flexible approach not only helps close the mid-level gaps resulting from the below-attrition hiring of the 1990s, it also provides employees with additional development opportunities that expand their knowledge and experience base. The results of such workforce flexibilities have been very positive and we hope to expand these in the future.

The Civil Service has an admirable record of volunteering for service in Iraq and Afghanistan and in hard-to-fill positions overseas. If confirmed, I will continue to build on the concept of "one team, one mission," to ensure that Civil Service employees are well trained, and that we benefit fully from their skills.

The Department of State has also expanded its use of limited non-career appointments (LNAs) to meet unprecedented visa adjudication demand in Brazil, and China. Backlogs for visas in China and Brazil have been eliminated, facilitating international travel for business and tourism that in turn will help boost our economy. In fact, according to the Department of Commerce, every additional 65 international visitors to the United States generate enough exports to support an additional travel and tourism-related job. As a result of our increased staffing in Brazil and China, nearly 1.5 million Chinese and 1.8 million Brazilians visited in 2012, helping to create approximately 50,000 new jobs in the United States.

Our 46,000 Locally Employed (LE) Staff represent the largest group of employees in the Department of State and are an essential component of our 275 embassy and consulate teams around the world. LE Staff fulfill many functions critical to our overseas operations, and we

could not accomplish our mission without them. Our LE Staff often serve under dangerous and challenging circumstances, with sometimes hyper-inflated currencies, and they continue to help advance our nation's goals, even as they have endured the same three year pay freeze as American federal government workers. We want to provide them with the very best support. If confirmed, I will strive to properly recognize their contributions to our missions and U.S. interests by ensuring, to the extent that our budget allows, that their compensation keeps up with market trends and attracts the best and the brightest.

I was proud to learn that *Washingtonian* magazine just named the State Department as one of the *Great Places to Work* for 2013, noting that "employees at the State Department feel that their work makes a difference in foreign affairs, helping to make the world more secure." We also ranked in the top five in the Partnership for Public Service's 2013 *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government* survey, placing fourth overall and second in strategic management among the 19 large Federal agencies. A poll of liberal arts undergraduates placed State among the top three ideal employers because we provide the opportunity to do challenging work, make a positive difference in people's lives, and develop skills. If confirmed, I will do all that I can to make State an even more attractive employer.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address you and the Members of the Committee. If confirmed, I ask for your help in strengthening the security and prosperity of America by leading and building an effective civilian workforce in the Department of State. I look forward to helping the Secretary to ensure that we are prepared to do just that.

Thank you. I respectfully request that my full statement be entered into the record, and I look forward to your questions.