

Statement of Rufus Gifford
Nominee to be Chief of Protocol
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Tuesday, July 27, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you.

Eight years ago almost to the day, I sat grateful and humbled before this distinguished committee as President Obama's nominee to be Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark. Today, I sit before you, doubly humbled and grateful to be nominated by President Biden to once again serve the country I love. If confirmed as President Biden's nominee for the Chief of Protocol for the United States, I am eager to showcase the best of America - and all of America - while reaching out to our friends, allies, and partners throughout the world.

I also wish to extend gratitude to Secretary of State Antony Blinken. If confirmed, I look forward to working together with the Secretary and the over 50,000 State Department employees made up of civil and foreign service professionals, locally engaged staff, eligible family members and contractors to continue bringing America back to the table.

I am joined here today by my veterinarian husband Dr. Stephen DeVincent, who was a fellow at the State Department when we first met and who is joining me for the second time on this great journey. I am also joined (virtually?) by my Mom and Dad and several close friends. I want to thank them for supporting me today.

Today, in these unprecedented times, traditional diplomacy - like so much else in our great country - has been challenged by COVID-19. However, the United States has remained strong and resilient through the pandemic and has proven that we can work in new and creative ways. In Denmark, I led our amazing team of Americans and locally engaged staff to strengthen our bilateral relationship and modernize diplomacy while fully embracing the fact that diplomacy starts and ends with human relationships, face to face interactions, shaking hands and breaking through our differences. These are the fundamental ways to carry out the art of protocol, but I also believe that we now have the ability to leverage new tools and technology to build and strengthen our relationships at home and abroad.

We also have a responsibility to model and represent America's diversity by being more inclusive and equitable at every opportunity. This can begin from the moment protocol engages with each and every visiting delegation.

If confirmed, I pledge to support the Administration's foreign policy goals and reach new audiences, using both traditional and modern diplomatic methods of engagement. To do that, I believe I must fully invest in the people who have been at the core of the Office of Protocol for years, across administrations, empowering them and building a true team – one with clarity of mission to work together to advance American foreign policy interests.

Today, the Office of the Chief of Protocol has seven divisions which focus on specific elements of protocol diplomacy.

The Blair House, the Presidential guest house, has hosted official delegations since it was sold to the U.S. government in the mid 1900s. The Blair House operates similar to a boutique hotel and can serve as a representational venue or provide contingent lodging.

The Ceremonials division executes events for both the White House and the Secretary of State involving the diplomatic corps and visiting high level officials, as well as Presidential inaugurations, state funerals, and other ceremonies. Ceremonials Officers advise on flag etiquette, forms of address, and event logistics.

Diplomatic Affairs is responsible for maintaining the Diplomatic Corps Order of Precedence and the publication of the foreign Diplomatic List. It coordinates the accreditation of bilateral Chiefs of Mission, Heads of Delegation, Chargés d'affaires and Deputy Chiefs of Mission and their dependents. It directs the agrément process for new bilateral Chiefs of Mission and Heads of Delegation, including arrivals and presentations of credentials to the President at the White House.

Diplomatic Partnership, a revived division, is responsible for outreach to the diplomatic corps domestically and will engage audiences both through social media and through other forums. It has several programs, including Experience America, State of the Administration, Issue Roundtables, and American Heritage Series.

Major Events is responsible for planning and executing multi-lateral summits, major conferences, and other large-scale events. Most recently, the Major Events

division carried out the largest virtual official event through the April 2021 Leaders Summit on Climate, reaching out to 40 world leaders.

The Visits division assists and accompanies Presidential delegations abroad. It works closely with other federal agencies and takes a lead role in the logistical planning of bilateral meetings with the President, First Lady, Vice President, and Secretary of State, as well as Official and State visits and large-scale international meetings and summits.

Finally, the Management division keeps all the other divisions running, making sure that they have all needed resources.

If confirmed as the Chief of Protocol, I pledge to lead the team of experienced protocol staff to showcase the very best America has to offer.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your consideration of my nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to serving the United States and working with Congress to help advance our foreign policy.

I look forward to your questions.