

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 5, 2017

The Honorable John J. Sullivan
Deputy Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Deputy Secretary Sullivan:

We share a goal of improving the Department's efficiency and effectiveness, and stand ready to work together where possible. In that vein, we have significant concerns regarding the effect of the "redesign" effort on our country's diplomatic capacity and national security. Based on those concerns, we write to request that the Department of State reassess the assumptions guiding the reform effort, end its counter-productive hiring freeze, and strengthen its transparency with Congress.

Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department is critical to our national security given the myriad challenges our nation faces. Reforms to information technology, human resources, and procurement systems are long overdue, and we support your efforts to streamline Special Envoy and Special Representative positions. We hope that you consider Congress as a partner in these endeavors, as well as broader efforts to strengthen America's diplomatic capabilities.

At the same time, we are deeply concerned about recent developments at the Department of State that are adversely affecting America's Foreign Service and Civil Service professionals and putting our nation's ability to carry out diplomacy at risk, including the impact of the Department's ongoing hiring freeze, proposed budget cuts, and reorganization efforts.

We noted with interest Secretary Tillerson's response to some of these concerns last week at the Wilson Center. Based on his comments, we offer two observations. First, in suggesting that success in some conflict areas will reduce the overall need for America's diplomatic resources, he said, "part of this bringing the budget numbers back down is reflective of an expectation that we're going to have success in some of these conflict areas of getting these conflicts resolved and moving to a different place in terms of the kind of support that we have to give them."

There is no doubt our Department of State professionals have been working diligently to achieve progress. However, we see no evidence that there will be a decline in the need for our nation's diplomatic capabilities. On the contrary—in virtually every region of the world—we see the need for capable and effective American leadership and diplomacy increasing. If history teaches us anything, it should humble us in our confidence to predict what new challenges or crises will lie ahead for our nation. However, we can say with confidence that these challenges

and crises will require America to employ optimized and well-resourced defense, development, and diplomacy tools.

Even if the many conflicts we confront today will subside or conclude soon—which we do not believe—it is important to remember the essential role of our diplomats before, during, and after conflicts. Effective diplomacy can prevent and shorten conflict, reduce American sacrifices during conflict, and consolidate gains after a conflict concludes. Indeed, reductions in our nation’s diplomatic capabilities will tragically and predictably increase the frequency, duration, and severity of America’s conflicts.

We also see no reduction in the need for the essential role our diplomats play in facilitating trade and investment opportunities for American businesses abroad, promoting human rights, addressing new security concerns, and strengthening America’s alliances that serve as an indispensable foundation for our national security and prosperity. If anything, the challenges of the twenty-first century make these capabilities even more important.

It is for these reasons that we are concerned that the administration’s April 2017 decision related to hiring freezes did not extend to the Department of State. We are seeing a dramatic reduction in the intake of new State Department personnel and a limit on transfers, promotions, and moves that enable these professionals to further their careers. We worry about the short and long-term consequences of these developments, and we urge you to immediately rescind the hiring freeze.

Second, at the Wilson Center, Secretary Tillerson also said he wanted to ensure that discussions related to the administration’s “redesign” are rooted in facts. We share that desire. That is one of the reasons why the administration must enhance its transparency with Congress regarding Department of State and USAID reform and reorganization efforts. The few briefings that have occurred have provided little additional insight into the “redesign” efforts and raised more questions than they have answered.

Optimal and durable reform is best achieved when the executive and legislative branches work together in a transparent manner. We understand that working with Congress can be slow and frustrating, but historic reforms will not be achieved fully without the Constitution’s Article I branch of government. Reforms conducted without Congress, or in opposition to the will of Congress, will be small-scale, temporary, or both.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Department of State reassess the assumptions guiding the “redesign” effort, end the hiring freeze, and improve its transparency with Congress. More specifically, we request that the Department provide as soon as possible a detailed member-level update on the reform and reorganization effort.

We look forward to hearing from you and want to work in full partnership with you and the Secretary of State to promote American interests and values around the globe.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Todd Young
United States Senator