

Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources
Richard R. Verma's Testimony
"Empowering the State Department to Meet Today's Challenges"
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
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Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding our management of the State Department and the significant progress we have made on key reforms.

I want to thank the Committee for the strong support of the Department and our nearly 80,000 people spread across every corner of the world, serving in nearly every conflict zone. We are proud that our workforce hails from every state in the country, with an estimated 20% who are also military veterans.

It's been an enormous honor to return to the Department as Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources, after serving as Assistant Secretary of Legislative Affairs and as U.S. Ambassador to India. In my first year, I've been to more than 45 of our embassies and consulates around the world.

From the war in Ukraine, to the attacks of October 7th, and the resulting broader escalation across the Middle East, to the intense global competition with the People's Republic of China, the conventional geopolitical landscape is as challenging as ever. Add the transitional threats of terrorism, pandemics, climate change, migration, and cyber security, and you have a rising set of challenges that require even greater international coordination, cooperation, and leadership from the United States. This mix of old and new threats puts even greater weight on the important work done by diplomats and development experts across the world.

I'm pleased to say that the Department is proactively adapting to new mission sets and is laser-focused on building and supporting our workforce to be better equipped to tackle today's global challenges. Under Secretary Blinken's leadership, we have advanced an ambitious Modernization Agenda focused on building new capacity and fostering expertise across emerging critical mission

areas; hiring, training and retaining a diverse, dynamic and entrepreneurial team; and leveraging innovative new technologies and platforms in a risk aware way to work more effectively and efficiently around the world.

We launched, for example, several new offices and bureaus designed to centralize expertise in these areas and support our colleagues around the world, including the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, the Office of Critical and Emerging Technology, a consolidated China House, and the Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy.

- As we equip a worldwide workforce for new missions, it becomes even more important that we are attracting, training and retaining the right talent. Let me name just a few of the reforms we are pursuing to ensure a model workplace: We've greatly increased our training opportunities, especially in critical mission areas – we have dramatically expanded our training float, we have new mid-level training programs at the Foreign Service Institute, we've rolled out a new learning policy and we are creating new opportunities and incentives for civil servants and foreign service professionals to fill essential assignments.
- We are reaching out and recruiting in new and innovative ways, expanding the pool of highly qualified applicants. Small but impactful changes such as how and where the foreign service exam is administered helps break down geographic and other barriers. We also now have paid internships for all our interns, thanks to the support of Congress, and this committee in particular. This is a gamechanger for so many young Americans of diverse backgrounds hoping to start a career in foreign affairs.
- We have established an employee Retention Unit, which collates data from across the employee experience and uses exit interviews to provide insights into why people stay and why they leave. This team is developing the first Department-wide retention plan.
- I also want to note the gratitude of the Department of State, and our 50,000 Locally Employed staff around the world, for the efforts of this committee, to preserve the availability of Special Immigrant Visas through the GRATEFUL Act. Our local staff remain able to move their families to the United States at the conclusion of a career of long and faithful service to the U.S. Government.

An empowered and educated workforce also needs modern tools and technology infrastructure. Our new Enterprise Artificial Intelligence Strategy outlines how we are leaning forward responsibly on AI, building the secure infrastructure we need to lessen rote or repetitive tasks and enable our diplomats to spend less time face-to-screen and more time engaging face-to-face.

In terms of American citizen services, today, more Americans have passports than at any time in our history with more than 160 million valid U.S. passports in circulation. We issued 24 million passports in 2023, shattering our record while also getting wait times back to pre-pandemic levels.

Similarly, more people can travel to the United States now than ever before. In Fiscal Year 2023, we issued more than 10.4 million nonimmigrant visas and 563,000 immigrant visas. In recent years, international visitors have contributed as much as \$239 billion in annual spending to the U.S. economy and have supported an estimated 9.5 million American jobs. Though there are still places where visa interview wait times remain stubbornly high, the global median wait time is now under 40 days. We continue to focus on those few posts where wait times remain high.

The safety of American citizens overseas remains our highest priority. Since rolling out a new crisis management communications system in 2021, we have communicated with and assisted more than 70,000 individuals through 15 different crises around the world. In recent months, we have helped evacuate over 1,300 U.S. citizens and family members from Haiti and 1,800 U.S. citizens from Gaza.

Finally, I want to note in closing our gratitude for the passage of the national security supplemental, which will greatly aid our efforts to support Ukraine and Israel, counter China's malign influence in the Indo-Pacific region and provide urgent humanitarian support in key regions.

While the range and complexity of challenges confronting the United States and our allies and partners around the world can seem daunting, I am heartened and encouraged by our incredible workforce and the missions they take on each day. While the vast majority of their work goes unreported or unseen by the media or even known by most Americans, the work they do, with your support, helps make

the world a more secure and more prosperous place. I am so grateful to our entire State Department team, and I know the Secretary and our leadership team will continue to support them in every possible way.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify. I look forward to your questions.

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