

Opening Statement
of
Patrick F. Kennedy
Nominee for Under Secretary of State for Management

Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 30, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and other members of the Foreign Relations Committee.

It is a distinct honor to appear before you as President Bush's nominee to be Under Secretary of State for Management. I want to thank the President and Secretary Rice for the confidence they have placed in me. As a career Foreign Service Officer who has worked in the administrative and management fields for almost thirty-five years, I regard this as a unique opportunity to serve our nation.

Over the years, my service at the Department of State, and on loan to the Department of Defense and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, has given me perspective on the many and varied challenges that America faces internationally.

Also, working and living abroad as part of a Foreign Service couple, I know well what it takes for our Foreign Service colleagues to live and work in foreign cultures, have assignments in different countries, and experience the changing profile of American diplomats over three decades of service.

As a Management Officer and as Assistant Secretary of Administration, I worked on the full spectrum of management services needed to support our diplomatic presence around the world. In all of this, I can tell you sincerely that serving our country is a privilege in any capacity and that a career in the State Department is one of the best opportunities there is.

If confirmed, I look forward to working on the numerous challenges that lie ahead; but I believe that the Department of State can meet those challenges only by working with the Congress and other U.S. Government agencies. I believe wholeheartedly that we cannot implement successful foreign policy without addressing the management and infrastructure issues on which it depends.

It is often said that an institution's major asset is its people, and I think that is nowhere more true than with the Department of State. With a few important exceptions, we are not a programmatic agency.

The Department of State advances the U.S. national interest through policy formulation and execution, public diplomacy outreach, consular support, and management services. We serve the American people through the men and women of the Civil and Foreign Services, and our foreign national colleagues abroad.

They are our most powerful, and scarcest, resource. Representing the United States of America abroad is an honor and a challenge in today's international environment. To do it well, our people must be deployed, trained, provisioned and safeguarded.

They must be sent to those assignments and posts where they can make the maximum contribution, including some of the most dangerous places on earth.

They must be trained in languages and professional skills so that they can perform their diplomatic and consular roles effectively on behalf of the President and the American people.

They must be provided with the proper tools and best possible support to operate at peak efficiency.

And they must have safe and secure facilities from which to operate.

I want to underline my commitment to recruiting, developing, and retaining a highly skilled workforce representative of America's diversity. To recruit the people the country needs, the Department must continually expand its outreach to all parts of American society. We cannot afford – and morally must not – leave any stone unturned in seeking out the people that we need to advance our national interests.

Our Civil and Foreign Services provide a dynamic workforce to accomplish the Department's mission; in addition to our diplomatic presence in over 170 countries abroad and at the United Nations, they are also deployed around the United States in passport agencies, visa offices, diplomatic security field offices, and despatch agencies.

I am pleased that the Department fully participates in the Presidential Management Fellows Program and has developed its own Career

Management Entry Program to bring in, and set on the right track, the next generation of Civil Service employees. The Department has also begun an innovative program to offer rotational opportunities to Civil Service employees.

The Foreign Service continues to recruit entry level officers from all around the country. They must also receive additional training, especially in hard languages and in working with other agencies on various national security issues facing our country.

The National Foreign Affairs Training Center is critical to fully developing the skills we need for our entire workforce – Civil Service, Foreign Service and Foreign Service Nationals. Among the many training opportunities offered, our leadership and management training at the entry, middle and senior levels provides employees with essential skills throughout their careers.

And we must look for ways to leverage the significant skills that family members bring when they accompany employees overseas.

There are enormous challenges ahead and we are not a perfect organization. Just recently, the surge in passport applications resulted in unacceptable waiting times for the American people we serve. Systemic changes have been made to forestall that happening again. The extremely competent and dedicated employees who worked incredible hours to reduce the backlog of applications are now being supplemented by additional staff and additional facilities. The Department has also benefited from numerous other employees and retirees who were mobilized from all over the United States and overseas, to complete the mission of getting us back to the timely processing of passports.

We can never lose sight of the fact that there are always new and better ways to carry out our responsibilities. These must be constantly pursued. And it is equally important that we engage in contact and vigorous oversight and accountability.

There will always be missteps, but if we are honest and forthright, and display the dedication that has been the hallmark of the Department, we can catch problems early and fix them.

The American people have entrusted the Department of State with many responsibilities in carrying out our diplomatic mission. Accomplishing them requires the full commitment of all our employees and it also requires the continuing support of the Congress, particularly our committees of jurisdiction.

If confirmed, I pledge to lead the Department's management team in carrying out our assigned tasks in support of American diplomacy throughout the world. I would take it as my number one goal to provide the Secretary of State with the management advice and management support she needs.