



PRESIDENT'S VIEWS

Speaking Up

By JOHN K. NALAND

Near the end of my first tour as AFSA president in the spring of 2003, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told me: "I can't believe that you people put up with such inadequate resources during the 1990s." I was speechless. Didn't he realize that we had put up with inadequate resources because we believed that we had no choice? Political officials in the White House and Congress had consciously decided to reduce funding for diplomacy, so who were we as career officers to speak up about the inevitable adverse consequences?

But since then, the more I have thought about Mr. Armitage's words, the more I have become convinced that he was right. We should not have "put up with it" during the 1990s when staffing and operating budgets were slashed. Nor should we put up with it now that the hard-won budget and staffing gains made during the Colin Powell years have fallen behind the demands of new mission requirements. Once again, positions worldwide are going unfilled and operating budgets are under pressure.

Thus, even as the Foreign Service has "stepped up to the plate" to staff an unprecedented number of unaccompanied and other hardship posts in recent years, our national leaders have failed to meet their responsibility to



provide the resources that we need to do our jobs. Loyalty, it seems, is a one-way street.

As we know all too well, a Foreign Service career requires many sacrifices. Therefore, over time, it is vital that those sacrifices be counter-

balanced by the rewards (material and emotional) of service. Unfortunately, we are once again in a period in which rewards have declined even as the sacrifices intensify.

AFSA, of course, continues to lobby Congress for more resources for diplomacy and for pay modernization. We continue to submit bread-and-butter proposals to agency management seeking to bolster the rewards of service and ameliorate the burdens. But those details are topics for another column.

The purpose of this, my 50th *Foreign Service Journal* column, is to suggest that, under current circumstances, the Foreign Service should start refusing to be shortchanged. In the March 2000 issue, I made an observation that, unfortunately, is just as applicable today:

"Increasingly, the Foreign Service is a career out of balance. Years of lean budgets, expanding commitments and poor management have resulted in understaffed offices, overworked employees, and rising stress levels. This house of cards would have collapsed long ago were it not for our own individual dedication to duty and can-

do attitude."

How then should we respond this time? As individuals, each of us should strive to establish our own family-friendly environment. We should maintain a balance between our jobs and our non-work life. We should insist on being allowed to take those training courses that would strengthen our skills set. We should hold out for that six-week home leave about which our family has been dreaming. We should not let our leave accrue to "use or lose" proportions.

As a group, we should stop acting as "enablers," whose polite silence about mounting shortfalls in diplomatic readiness allows our national leaders, like alcoholics in denial, to avoid facing up to urgent problems. We should not agree to do "more with less." We should not grudgingly accept poor leadership. We should speak out about inadequate staffing.

AFSA has indeed been speaking out in the face of inadequate resources over the last few years. In doing so, we are guided by our responsibilities as the voice of the Foreign Service. We are also guided by a recent member survey showing that two-thirds of respondents want AFSA to be more vocal and assertive, even at the cost of more friction with management (just 1 percent of respondents want us to be less vocal and assertive). With this strong backing, you can expect to see an increasingly vocal AFSA in the coming months. ■

John K. Naland is the president of the American Foreign Service Association.