

Senate Bill S.789, the United States Foreign Service Commemorative Coin Act.

A Statement of Support

by

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

This legislation, which is revenue neutral, would authorize the Treasury Department to mint a special coin to honor the 100th anniversary of the Rogers Act, which when enacted in 1924 established the modern Foreign Service to represent the United States around the globe.

Based on their sacrifices, the dangers they have faced and the thousands of Americans they have protected and assisted, these non-partisan, career Foreign Service employees who have served and continue to serve as the professional staff in multiple foreign affairs agencies, are especially deserving of this recognition.

I make that statement based on the below outline of exceptional accomplishments and sacrifices by Foreign Service officers and staff, as well as my own personal experiences during my 32 year career as an American diplomat

Foreign Service Personnel Endure Significant Risks and Face Serious Injury or Death While Serving Abroad

I myself was shot at, blown up, wounded or under death threat in every foreign assignment I had during my three decade long diplomatic career. My family was subjected to these threats as well.

-- One of the most well known events that involved terror-filled danger to American diplomats was the 1979 storming of the American Embassy in Tehran and the subsequent confinement of the Embassy staff for over a year. Kathryn Koob, a native Iowan and US Information Service Foreign Service Officer was among those forcibly held in detention.

-- There are several hundred names inscribed on large black marble plaques at the formal diplomatic entrance of the State Department to honor those officers and staff who have given their lives while serving abroad. The first name is from 1780. In those earliest days of the new American Republic, diplomatic deaths were ascribed to such diverse risks as Yellow Fever, Lost at Sea and Barbary Pirates. More recently, the causes of the deaths of diplomats are listed as terrorism, the bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Lebanon or service in conflicts such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam.

-- For example, my great friend Ambassador Arnold Raphel, one of the most distinguished career Foreign Service Officers, died when a terrorist bomb exploded on a plane carrying him,

another U.S. diplomat and the President of Pakistan. Another career ambassador, Spike Dubs, was kidnapped and murdered in Afghanistan.

- - During the Vietnam War, where I served for six years, 37 State Department officers and staff had their names added to those marble plaques because they were killed by North Vietnamese artillery strikes, planted explosive devices or terrorist incidents.

Other Foreign Service Officers, including Robert Little, an individual with whom I had trained, were captured and summarily executed by the Viet Cong during the TET Offensive.

A USAID Foreign Service Officer and very close friend, Kent Paxton, was blown up by a Viet Cong placed land mine. He has had residual serious medical complications for the remainder of his life. I myself was wounded in a 122mm rocket attack.

- - In Vietnam during my six years in the war zone as a civilian Foreign Service Officer, I served as the leader of a district level US Army advisory team. In that role, I took part in military combat operations on a daily basis. I remain the only civilian to have earned the Army Air Medal for taking part in over 100 hours of helicopter combat missions.

Other State and USAID officers serving as rural development advisors in Vietnam were, like me, exposed to Agent Orange. In my case, I had to be treated at the Mayo Clinic, and have suffered significant ongoing lung damage.

- - In the Philippines during my tenure as Deputy Ambassador, terrorists murdered 10 official Americans and there were two violent coup attempts to try to overthrow the democratically elected government that threatened the entire Embassy. I was specifically targeted for assassination. As a result, my family and I were forced to travel in unmarked cars and I had five bodyguards whenever I stepped out in public.

- - In Cambodia, my ambassadorial residence was hit by a rocket and then ringed in automatic weapons fire. My wife and I had to cover our three children with our bodies to protect them. We then had to evacuate all of the American citizens in Cambodia, including my family and other Foreign Service dependents, due to the outbreak of conflict.

The Highly Significant Substantive Accomplishments of Foreign Service Officers , Including Political-Military Reporting and Policy Implementation, Such As

- - Iowa native Ambassador Nancy Powell of Cedar Falls who compiled one of the most distinguished diplomatic careers. She served as ambassador in five separate countries including Uganda, Ghana, Nepal, Pakistan and India. She coordinated the U.S. government's highly effective international response to two very significant pandemic diseases - - Avian Bird Flu and Ebola.

- - One of the most significant examples of Foreign Service reporting came in January of 1941. Then, eleven months before the December 7 sneak attack by Japan, a Foreign Service Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo sent a classified report to Washington revealing that he had obtained the information that the Japanese military had put in place a plan to "attack Pearl Harbor."

- - I had a somewhat similar political reporting experience in 1974, while serving on the remote Vietnamese - Cambodian border in the Mekong Delta. There, I personally filed the first ever report on the genocidal policies of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge, which would eventually cause the deaths of up to two million Cambodians out of a population of only seven million people.

Twenty years later, as the American Ambassador in Phnom Penh, I designed a strategy of accelerated rural development (based on the practices of Iowa Nobel Laureate Norman Borlaug) which we implemented with Foreign Service Officers from USAID and USDA. That approach led to the complete eradication of the Khmer Rouge - - the worst genocidal, mass-murdering, terrorist organization of the second half of the 20th century.

- - During the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the division of Germany, Foreign Service Officers played consequential roles in sharing critical information with factions that were leading the reform efforts that facilitated the complete collapse of the Communist system.

- - In 2018, almost a year before the start of the Covid pandemic, Foreign Service personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing warned agencies in Washington about technical security deficiencies at the Chinese Institute of Virology in Wuhan.

The Significant Efforts of the Foreign Service to Protect Endangered American Citizens, Assist Refugees and Prevent Human Rights Abuses

- - During the Covid outbreak in China, Ambassador Terry Branstad has described how under his leadership, the American embassy Foreign Service staff facilitated the evacuation of large numbers of American citizens as well as Embassy dependents.

- - I had a similar experience in the Philippines, when the capital city and particularly those areas with foreigners resident, was caught up in urban warfare. American citizens were forced to flee their homes. Foreign Service personnel at our Embassy spread vital, life-saving information over our Consular warden system directing Americans to gathering points we had pre-planned where these thousands of U.S. citizens were able to be protected until the situation was resolved.

- - While assigned on the National Security Council staff, I saw first hand how career Foreign Service Officers played an absolutely critical role in aiding 130,000 Vietnamese citizens, individuals with close association with the U.S. during the war and their families, to escape from South Vietnam as Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese communists in April, 1975.

After the war was over, I had the great privilege to work closely with Governor Robert Ray as he demonstrated global moral leadership in rescuing the Vietnamese "Boat People" refugees. I also had the honor to serve as the Executive Director of Iowa SHARES, Governor Ray's initiative to rush life saving food and medicine to Cambodian refugees in Thailand.

It was an incomparable honor for me, based on those efforts while I was a Foreign Service Officer, to have been nominated by Governor Ray to be only the 23rd individual in Iowa history to receive the Iowa Award, which Governor Terry Branstad presented to me in 2014.

- - While serving as Ambassador In Phnom Penh in 1997, I protected a Cambodian political leader, who feared death at the hands of the government. State Department and intelligence service officers put themselves at great risk to move that man to our Embassy where we hid him for two months. He is alive today and still involved in politics in that country.

- - In a separate incident in Cambodia, since we had no Marine Security Guards, I personally drove into a combat zone with only the American flag flying on my Ambassadorial car for protection, in order to rescue a large group of Mormon missionaries, who were trapped by the fighting and pleading for help. Senator Orrin Hatch personally commended me for my undertaking that significant risk to rescue his constituents.

Accomplishments Made Possible Because of Expertise in Speaking Foreign Languages

One of the hallmarks of the Foreign Service is the array of exceptional language trained officers who are able to achieve foreign policy objectives based on these language skills.

For example, during World War II, Foreign Service Officers proficient in the Chinese language partnered with U.S. Army officers to establish contacts with Chinese resistance forces in remote parts of that country.

- - When President Nixon made his historic trip to China in 1972, a Foreign Service Officer served as his interpreter. Three years later, I fulfilled that same role as interpreter in Vietnamese for President Ford in a meeting in the Cabinet Room when he met with representatives of the South Vietnamese government as Saigon was falling.

- - Twenty years later, I personally negotiated in Vietnamese with Foreign Ministry officials in Hanoi which resulted in our Defense Department personnel being permitted, for the first time ever, to have access to a North Vietnamese prison to investigate reports of live POWs from the war.

I was also part of the team that gained the first ever access to a Russian prison and to former Soviet State Security archives as part of a mission to account for American MIAs from World War II.

The actions, exploits and sacrifices outlined on the this document are only representative examples of the many, many similar accomplishments and experiences that diplomatic personnel have undergone ever since the Committee of Correspondence - - the forerunner of the modern Foreign Service - - was formed in November of 1775, the same month the Marine Corps was founded, even before the Declaration of Independence. It is a proud tradition worthy of recognition by the minting of a commemorative coin.