The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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DANIEL CROCKER

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is October 24, 2022. This is ADST's interview with Dan Crocker principally about his time as vice president and then other leadership positions in AFSA. Dan, before we get started, you are the John and Ruth McGee Director of the Dean Rusk International Studies Program at Davidson University. Take a moment to tell us what your mission is and what your responsibilities are.

CROCKER: Okay, great. Well, I've just been here about three months, but the Dean Rusk International Studies Program has been in place since the mid-eighties. It's named after Dean Rusk, a former secretary of state under Kennedy, then Johnson. He is sometimes uncharitably known as the architect of the Vietnam War. But at any rate, he's an alumnus of Davidson College. This college is located about 20 miles north of Charlotte, North Carolina. It is a very competitive liberal arts college with about 2,000 undergraduates.

Davidson was very much a southern school, drawing from a local population and known best for educating doctors, lawyers, and Presbyterian ministers. By the early 1980s, well after Dean Rusk had retired as secretary of state, some key alumni were concerned about Davidson's competitiveness. It was felt that the students who were coming to Davison were quite intelligent and studious, but they didn't know that much about what was going on around the world. They were provincial, in other words. That's no longer the case. But at the time, because of that, the program was founded, and several generous donors have given money to the mission, which is, quite simply, to help students go overseas and experience the rest of the world. There are several endowments that have made that possible for hundreds of students every year, initially through Semester Abroad. But even beyond that it has continued to grow, including through unstructured experiences in the summertime and during winter breaks. These experiences are meant to challenge students in various ways – the challenges can take the form of research, service, internships and in some cases educational experiences that fall outside of the classroom.

Q: Excellent. Now, prior to your entry into the Foreign Service, you had a professional career combining practical engineering, applied engineering, finance and so on. As you think back on this, what were the most important experiences in your pre-Foreign Service life that prepared you for success in the Foreign Service?

CROCKER: That's interesting. First, I think the impetus for having a good Foreign Service career is a strong sense of mission and public service, particularly in international settings. Thinking back, both my parents were public school teachers – but they both taught German, although neither was of German heritage. My father was a civil engineer who fell in love with German and Austrian culture after working in both countries for years during post-World War II reconstruction under the Marshall Plan. He met my mother there, who was the daughter of an Air Force chaplain. And I lived overseas – initially during college, when I worked in a dietetics hospital in France one summer. My first job out of college was with Schlumberger – they sent me to Angola doing oil exploration during the civil war, which was quite interesting. In addition, I worked as an engineer in operations manufacturing in the automotive and railroad space. I was doing trips to Mexico for after-market sales and servicing. So, as an engineer I had strong exposure to the international environment.

But there is also something else. I joined the Foreign Service after a few years of professional work experience. I think that just having work experience, and then particularly in international settings, made me a more mature contributor to the Foreign Service. I brought with me a sense of how corporate culture and organizational structure should be. Even though the Foreign Service culture is considerably different from the private sector—and there are certainly gaps in efficiency—I was able to bring transferable skills in navigating a new work environment. I think that contributed to success in my assignments.

Q: Immediately prior to your service with AFSA, you were a deputy assistant secretary in the Foreign Commercial Service. That is a high-level position with management responsibility. Moving from management to representing labor in the same institution, were there similar transferable skills?

CROCKER: Well, my experience was a little bit different in that, in the deputy assistant secretary position, I oversaw some 280 people in about 28 different countries and jurisdictions throughout Europe and Eurasia, mainly focused on trade and investment because it was a Commerce Department deputy assistant secretary position as opposed to State Department.

But I left relatively soon after getting that position because I disagreed with the manner in which then-President Trump was deciding on certain policies – particularly in Russia and Turkey. John Bolton, who was serving as national security advisor but was then fired by Trump, has written about these issues in his 2020 book *The Room Where it Happened.* As foreign service officers, we are entrusted with saluting, serving, and implementing policies made at the highest level. At times we can inform the direction of those policies. But ultimately we will encounter policy orders we disagree with. In those cases, each officer must make a decision – carry it out or leave? To do anything otherwise is an act of insubordination. I chose at that time to leave the foreign service – quietly and without any fanfare. It was after I'd served for just over two decades, both in the State and Commerce Departments.

There is something really special about the Foreign Service in relation to career management that is worth mentioning. The Foreign Service, like the military, is an up and out system in the sense that everyone starts, so to speak, as a second lieutenant. You're commissioned at a relatively low level as you must be, and then you work your way up through the system. The beauty of that is—it has its drawbacks—but the beauty of it is that you were once doing the work in the trenches, and it's often the case that good management comes from a position of credibility, of having done that work and having been capable of doing that work and doing that work well enough to get promoted. And modeling a certain level of behavior, which is an empathetic understanding of some of the trials and tribulations of that work.

So, all of that cascades up to, I think, some effective leadership because of coming in at the base and then working one's way up to the top, which has some bearing for how AFSA represents its members – it is not like other unions where there is a clear dividing line between members and management. Most of the career managers within the Foreign Service continue to be AFSA members as well – and they often, regardless of rank, need that representation.

I will say that in my most recent stint with AFSA one of the challenges for those of us on the AFSA board was that we tend—as Americans, we tend to do this, I think we also tend to do this internally, and that is that we personify, we personify something that goes well, we personify things that go badly, which is to say that we tend to attribute praise or blame to a person, and we hold that person responsible for all the dysfunction that we see around us. That was certainly true during the Trump Administration. Everyone—a lot of people who were uncomfortable with what was going on in terms of policy implementation tended to blame the president at the time. Maybe they did so internally because we salute and serve when we're active duty, but there was a sense, quite simply, that when President Biden was sworn in that a number of things that we found dysfunctional or not working so well could be fixed in relatively short order and in this most recent AFSA board assignment, I think it's fair to say that we found that not to be the case. There are a lot of things that need fixing in the Foreign Service, at State, Commerce, other agencies, AID (United States Agency for International Development) , certainly, and that need to be addressed. But here's the challenge. The Biden administration brought in extremely well-qualified political appointees who had the best of intentions. But a large part of their roles was necessarily external-facing – solving the latest crisis du jour – rather than internal repairs of the organizations they headed. And accolades create incentives to focus energy on the external side, particularly in the foreign affairs space. As a result, I think members of AFSA – and the board I served on – were disappointed that more of the internal bureaucratic challenges were not being addressed more quickly. But perhaps we were not being fair to the Biden administration, which had its hands full from day one.

Q: I want to go back one step. What decided you to run for the Foreign Commercial Service vice president on the AFSA board?

CROCKER: Yeah, that's a great question. The official reason, there's an official reason and a personal reason, and most people make big decisions not based on one thing, but a set of issues, factors. So, the personal one's interesting. My mother-in-law was relatively sick. So my wife was not comfortable where we were, which sounds ridiculous because my last posting was Madrid, which sounds like a nice place, right? And my daughter was unhappy as well because there was that rupture of a high school experience for her. Both were presenting in a way that frankly was clearly, even at the time, a depressive state. I was accordingly worried about my family, at the same time that professionally I believed that what I was working on in Madrid—how do I put this—could be done by a number of other capable officers. The scope of my assignment for four years was something that could have been done by other officers, but then I had a window of opportunity where I could contribute in a more distinctive way as the AFSA vice president for the Foreign Commercial Service. There were several factors that led me to conclude that. I tend to approach issues with an engineer's mindset – I felt that life was short, that I wanted to make a larger impact for our organization, and that I was more well-suited for taking on organization-wide challenges rather than Spain-specific challenges. And I knew that it would be easy to backfill the Madrid position – always a popular assignment!

Q: Following up on that, did someone convince you to run for professional reasons? This would be going back to the sense of service you mentioned earlier as a motivating factor for joining the Foreign Service.

CROCKER: So, the professional decision rested on multiple factors as well. First, the then-president of AFSA was Barbara Stephenson. She had served as ambassador in Panama, and I worked for her there. I was the commercial counselor. I had immense respect for her leadership. At that time, under the Trump Administration, the Foreign Service, quite simply, was under attack. As an institution it was perceived as being too supportive of then-candidate Hillary Clinton during the campaign of 2016. And remember, she had been Secretary of State in recent memory. But the suspicion among President Trump's supporters was that Foreign Service Officers were actively undermining Trump's foreign policy—there was a sense that the Foreign Service was part of a "deep state" movement. Trump and his political appointees therefore called for drastic cuts to the Foreign Service in their budget proposals.

Barbara Stephenson was running for re-election as AFSA president. I talked with her, and she convinced me to run as part of her slate called, "Strong Diplomacy." The proposal was simple. We asserted that America's national interests were best served by a strong Foreign Service, regardless of political party. Our argument was that country came before party and that it didn't matter who was president—we needed to be in force on the ground to advance our national interests. So we pointed out that cutting positions was counterproductive when countries like China were increasing their presence and embassies in every country. We insisted that we needed more people out in the field rather than bumping into each other inside Washington, DC, and that having forward-based Foreign Service Officers was a lot cheaper than deploying military units when we might head off military action with a little diplomacy. This approach had broad bipartisan support. It helped us prevent the large, across the board cuts to the State

Department that the Trump management team wanted to impose. I wanted to be part of that effort.

Our strategy was strong diplomacy. But we needed to be careful of the tactics to accomplish our goals. It would have been easy to sound alarmist, to criticize the Trump management team for nurturing an animus against the "deep state." We needed to craft a more positive message, an upbeat message that was systemic or institutional in nature. We needed narratives that transcended partisan politics. We needed to reemphasize that Foreign Service Officers were there to salute and serve and to carry out policies. But even more than that, we needed examples of how our quiet, behind-the-scenes work brought measurable achievements that average Americans could understand.

Q: As you enter AFSA as the vice president for the Foreign Commercial, what were the key responsibilities for the Foreign Commercial Service domestically and abroad. That is the context in which you represent your constituency

CROCKER: I'm glad you asked that. The U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service (Commercial Service is its informal name) is relatively small. Its budget is $300 - $400 million and is itself a unit within the International Trade Administration, which is one of the smaller agencies in the Commerce Department. Its main mission is threefold. It is first to promote U.S. exports, especially from small and medium-sized businesses, defined roughly as businesses with fewer than 500 employees. The second is to defend U.S. commercial interests overseas, so U.S. investments, non-tariff barriers, corruption, problems with rule of law, all of those things that adversely affect U.S. businesses. Third, promote inward investment into the United States. All of those are related to growing jobs and growing the economy in the United States – companies that export tend to be more competitive and stable, and pay higher compensation to their employees.

The Commercial Service delivered this mission relying first on a domestic footprint of approximately 250 officials in 100 U.S. cities – a unique feature among the U.S. foreign affairs agencies and critical to initial contact with businesses that are dispersed throughout the U.S. The second leg is our overseas presence, with approximately 250 commissioned Foreign Service Officers and 800 locally engaged staff responsible for representing commercial interests overseas. They are situated in 77 countries, often with regional responsibilities. These countries are chosen as the most propitious for U.S. trade and investment, i.e. Brazil but not Belize - countries with the most significant market weight. And our third leg is within Washington, DC with dedicated officials ensuring policy communications and operational oversight. The results are amazing. With that force of roughly 1,200 people in the U.S. and overseas field in seventy-seven countries and 100 U.S. cities, we were able to help 30,000 or so U.S. companies every year deliver over $100 billion worth of economic benefit, which could be related to hundreds of thousands of U.S. jobs. And we were meticulous about keeping track of who we helped and what sort of outcomes they had as a result of our help, using a state of the art customer relationship management (CRM) software application from Salesforce.

A typical example of how we operated was to work with the U.S. company to determine what success looked like—market entry, expansion, or defense of interests—and which countries we should focus on. Then we would agree on the services we could provide in a scoping exercise. As we conducted our work and after completion, we would ask our client for feedback—we actively sought it even if we failed to deliver results. When we tried and failed, we learned from the experience since it would often relate to changing conditions on the ground that can't always be predicted in advance such as changes in government, corrupt solicitation of bribes, lack of transparency, downturns in local economic growth, etc. When we saw challenges like these we still fought for our client's objective.

We went to bat for every company we could. In the face of such obstacles as corruption, we sometimes needed to distinguish between company-specific success and U.S. national interests. Even if we couldn't resolve the situation for that company, we wouldn't let it go to waste. We would go to the government authorities that oversee trade and investment. We would tell them, "Look, you are not running a competitive, clean, transparent environment for this U.S. company. Do you realize that we're required by law to inform other U.S. companies that are thinking about investing in the country of this situation? We do this through our Investment Climate Statement every year. This is a public document. Not only do U.S. companies see it, but other nations see it too. These anti-competitive practices can have a knock-on effect for overall investment in your country."

Q: So, that is the background of the work of FCS. Let's move on to your service in AFSA. You enter the AFSA board just as Rex Tillerson enters with a mandate to reduce the budget and personnel of the State Department. At the time if I remember right, there were 30 jobs on the chopping block out of only 250 Foreign Commercial Service officers.

CROCKER: It was actually more like a 30 percent cut in budget and almost all of it was in payroll and the overhead associated with payroll. For instance, if you have an officer and a family overseas that drives practically all variable overhead costs. So, in looking at the actual numbers that were being discussed there were a decent number of post closures, probably roughly a third of post closures across the seventy-seven countries. And then roughly two dozen U.S. field offices were being targeted for closure. There was a recognition that it would be very hard to lay off Foreign Service officers. So, as you note, the number of Foreign Service officer layoffs looked relatively small, but if you close a post overseas, you're automatically firing all the locally engaged professionals. The nature of our work, Mark, leant itself to unclassified engagement, which means that we were able—we had a ratio roughly of one to three Foreign Service officers to locally engaged staff, many of whom that all spoke English fluently, they had MBAs, they were well tied into the local business community, and we were able to delegate enormous authority to them. All of those people at every post closure would have been laid off. So, the multiplier effect would have been severe.

Q: That brings us to what seemed to be the major aspect of your job as FCS vice president, which was outreach to Congress to try to prevent the cuts that were coming down. How did you begin? What were the tools or the networks you used?

CROCKER: I learned so much in doing this. First of all, AFSA's President Barbara Stephenson was very smart about this. She hired an experienced legislative aide who had been on the Hill and was very effective at working across the aisle. She wasn't tarred with being on the far right or the far left of members of Congress or anything. She was extremely effective and helpful, and she's still with AFSA. But I started simply by targeting the committee that appropriates money. So I started with the Appropriations Committee writ large, but then within the Appropriations Committee there are subcommittees. Ours was the Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee, and I wanted to make sure that every one of those members knew exactly what the Commercial Service did for their constituents. And this is where I think I had some distinctive value to add.

It just so happened that before I had gone to Spain for my previous overseas assignment, I had a leading role in procuring and implementing that Salesforce CRM within the Commerce Department. This CRM was used by our global workforce to document all of the work that we did for those 30,000+ U.S. companies each year. And we included in the CRM a Dun & Bradstreet plug-in as an integrated tool to scrub and maintain all of our data. So if we were helping Acme, Inc. in Greenville, South Carolina, we knew exactly what congressional district that company was in and how many employees it had in that congressional district, and we knew how much we'd helped them and in what countries. All that data was there. So, I was actually able to mine that data and come up with cleared stories from companies that loved the work we did for them and go to that member of Congress's staff and basically say, "This what this small but mighty army of people does for your constituents, your voting members in your district, and we help create and retain jobs in your district through this work." So, it was a very targeted sort of approach at the level of a congressional district, district by district, with an impact of what we actually did in that district for the constituents. That was the first part.

There was a second part. I realized in the first year that I needed help – I was just one guy going to the Hill making these points. So I worked with the National Association of District Exports Councils (DECs) and their state-level organizations. The members of the DECs are from companies that export and care immensely about political support for even more exporting. They are also formally appointed to the DECs by the Secretary of Commerce – but they can speak independently because they are private citizens. As prominent members of local communities, they also often knew their members of Congress personally. And they typically had grown their exporting business with the help of the Commercial Service. So they in turn became a force multiplier for us in getting out the message to relevant members of Congress.

It is worth noting the importance of the Hatch Act here. As a union representative, I was able to speak directly with members of Congress and advocate for the Commercial Service. And of course the DEC members were not government employees, so the Hatch Act did not apply to their conversations on behalf of the Commercial Service with

Congress. But other active-duty members of the Commercial Service could not do so. That so many of my domestic and overseas colleagues were able to restrain themselves in the face of potential layoffs was impressive. It also imbued me with a sense of duty to represent them since I could speak more openly. Even then, it is important to note AFSA's discipline with messaging. We were never complaining about the Trump administration. Instead, we were simply arguing that the administration's goals were best met with a strong showing on the ground in every country – that we couldn't take on China in Africa, for instance, without full staffing in those countries where China had as many as ten times the number of diplomats as we did. The message of Strong Diplomacy was consistently upbeat and supportive of an assertion of U.S. national interests, regardless of administration.

Of course, as AFSA vice president for the Commercial Service, I had constituent services to consider at the same time. Technically, the AFSA vice president for the Commercial Service only represents commissioned Foreign Commercial Service Officers – in other words, my formal constituency was no more than 250 members. But I took a broader view of my responsibilities. I went beyond the remit for better or worse in advancing the interests of Foreign Commercial Service officers because I felt very strongly that we were only one leg of a three-legged stool. Every agency has a big home team inside Washington, DC – that's a given, and we had some extraordinarily dedicated civil servants in our headquarters. But frankly the larger challenge for our agency was the fact that the Trump administration was proposing that the cuts fall mainly on the domestic field and overseas offices. I believed strongly that protecting our U.S. field staff was just as important as protecting our overseas officers. Similarly, we had to protect our overseas local staff, who often did the leg work in identifying and maintaining contacts – and expanding our contact base to better serve our American company clients. So, I advanced the idea that all three legs of the stool, domestic, overseas officers, and overseas local hires, were essential for serving the constituents of members of Congress. And so, I pushed to maintain funding authority and appropriations for those three types of employment classes. It was up to me because our Foreign Service Officers and domestic employees could not in any way indicate concern or disagreement with the official administration policy – that would then violate the Hatch Act.

Q: How about outreach to other foreign affairs organizations that could help amplify your messages and influence congress?

CROCKER: Barbara Stephenson and I went and met with Liz Shrayer, the director of the Global Leadership Coalition. I think the world of her. She's just a dynamo of energy. However, her focus had been restoring cuts to the "150 account." This takes a moment of explanation.

The U.S. budget contains scores of carve outs for specific programs, activities, and priorities. But all those individual projects are organized into broader buckets. Specifically, the federal budget is divided into 20 categories called budget functions, although it might be easier to think about them as accounts. Each account (or function)

has all the spending for a given topic independent of which federal agency oversees the specific federal programs that will ultimately receive the money.

Function 150 is the international affairs account. It encompasses money allocated for aid for developing nations. A lot of that money is directed to humanitarian relief such as alleviating global poverty and hunger. The account also includes money for operation of U.S. consulates and embassies; for military assistance for our allies; economic assistance to be disbursed to new democracies; promotion of U.S. exports (separate from the Foreign Commercial Service); payments to international organizations; and international peacekeeping efforts.

Function 150 primarily provides funding for the Departments of State, Agriculture, and Treasury, as well as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Funding in this account constitutes about 1 percent of the entire federal budget.

This is a little bit unfortunate for the Commercial Service, which is instead funded from the Commerce, Justice, and Science group of appropriations. Commerce alone has a $10 billion or to $15 billion appropriation, of which only $300 to $400 million is set aside for the Commercial Service. All of that is to say that the Global Leadership Coalition's priority, and I think properly so, was on the larger foreign affairs funding area—the 150 foreign affairs accounts. I would like to have seen the Commercial Service funded out of that appropriations pot. It would make things a lot more seamless. But it was a different battle, essentially. The Global Leadership Coalition was very supportive of AFSA in the 150 fight but not as engaged in the funding of Commerce.

Q: Part of your outreach was using the Foreign Service Journal as an opportunity to shine a light on the needs of the FCS. You authored columns in the Journal. One of them related to the Build Act, which sounded like a very good development for both your constituency of Foreign Commercial Service Office as well the Commerce Department overall. Could you take a moment and comment on that?

CROCKER: Well, my role was really small. I will say that the BUILD Act (Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development) was a rare case of bipartisan accord within Congress. It reflected the growing understanding of a need to replace our peashooter with a laser-guided munition in the gunfight with China over advancement of national interests through commercial and economic diplomacy in the developing world. Now, part of the U.S. response was through the 150 account for USAID which now included money to help promote private sector competitiveness overseas.

Specifically, BUILD merged the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) with the economic development components of AID to create a new standalone agency - the U.S. Development Finance Corporation (DFC). The newly created DFC provides loans, loan guarantees, direct equity investments, and political risk insurance for private sector-led development projects, feasibility studies, and technical assistance. DFC invests across several sectors including energy, healthcare, critical infrastructure, and technology.

It's also supposed to help women's empowerment, promote innovation and investment in West Africa and the Western Hemisphere, and alleviate climate change. As with OPIC, its predecessor organization, it is predominantly self-funded through the fees and interest collected during its regular operations.

My part in the development of the BUILD Act was when I was deputy assistant secretary at Commerce. I worked with a political appointee, David Bohigian, who was instrumental in transitioning OPIC to the DFC. David had lots of good experience and was able to bring a lot of people together. My recommendation to him was quite simple. I said that if you want to maximize the effectiveness of DFC, you need forward-based, trained Foreign Commercial Service officers and their local employee support to find out what the Chinese competitors were doing and identify upstream projects where we could bring in our companies to influence the requirements so they wouldn't disadvantage U.S. companies. We could also identify coalitions of multinationals that included not only U.S. companies but let's say Dutch companies and Italian and South Korean and Japanese companies, and then help that company walk through a transparent and level playing field, sort of procurement experience to counter the Chinese. That's really the idea behind the Build Act and the DFC. I'm not sure it's been fully implemented, but it certainly has the congressional authorities to do that. What it does *not* have is a field forward force overseas. So my focus was on selling the idea that the Commercial Service was ideally suited to be that force. I believed strongly that it would bolster the basis for having a strong Commercial Service if the U.S. wanted to be serious about starting to win against the Chinese in these countries. The alternative – having the DFC field its own cadre of Foreign Service officers – would be prohibitively expensive and was not its core competence.

Q: Since you mentioned the need for forward-based FCS officers to assist the DFC, another part of that effort is encouraging and hosting congressional and state delegations to explore commercial opportunities overseas. To what extent was that outreach also part of your job?

CROCKER: I made it part of my job in part because of what I mentioned earlier, this data mining of opportunities in strategic parts of projects. You want to show congressional delegations this kind of engagement and they are usually quite interested in the ground truth you can provide. What I would typically do in those cases is, I would arm a Commercial Service officer, let's say the commercial counselor in Jakarta, Indonesia, with talking points on how what that post was doing for constituents in the members' districts, both from a global perspective, and, if possible, directly in that part of the country. We could say things like, "You know, over the past couple of years we've helped 68 of the companies in your district that employ a total of 7,300 men and women in your district. That employment was generated in part by the business we help generate in Indonesia, Brazil, Chile, and India, for example." These points are not a violation of the Hatch Act.

I continue to bring up the Hatch Act because it is so important to have active duty officials know where the red lines are. Once members of Congress heard what the

Commercial Service was doing for their constituents, an inevitable question would be "are you doing ok and what do you need?" So my instructions were quite specific: you can tell a member what the Commercial Service is doing for their constituents, but you can't complain and you can't ask for more money. Educate and demonstrate, but don't lobby. The most common mistake that members of Congress make in receiving our briefings is thinking that our officers are employees of the State Department. It's an honest mistake to make. And in fact, in many countries, the State Department economic officer doubles as the FCS rep as well. As I mentioned earlier, our officers are present in only 77 countries. So it was incumbent on them to clarify that distinction.

Q: Another kind of outreach was public speaking whether in person on-line. Two examples come to mind: speaking at the Foreign Affairs Councils and think tanks and conducting on-line interviews with foreign affairs experts. How effective were those in promoting your goals?

CROCKER: For that two-year period, it was not effective. When I would explain the Commercial Service's mission to people and related it directly through well-captured metrics to the growth of American jobs everyone gets the value of it. But getting the value of that and translating that into actual votes in favor of funding is another matter entirely. It's too big a jump. Washington inside the beltway and then up in the New England corridor is replete with studies on how the Foreign Service can be better and how it should be funded. In the end, I realized that a very targeted approach was to speak directly or through intermediaries who are better connected than with members of Congress. That was the focus, starting with the members of the Commerce, Justice, Science subcommittee, if I could get to them.

Because here's the thing, Mark. We were—I was defending, first, stabilized funding rather than a dramatic cut, which would have crippled us. And then I was saying, if we had more appropriations, here's how many more companies, how many more of your constituents, in other words, we could assist and how many more jobs we could grow, because we essentially had a provable, mature model of helping companies and growing jobs, and that model is scalable, just as if you were with a consulting company and you had more client demand for your services, well you would hire more consultants and you would grow your top line revenues. And so, there's a lot to be said for that. And so, I wanted to be very focused with my time. I will say that I went to a number of inside the beltway forums, usually because there were members of Congress speaking there, and so I could go and talk to them before and after, and that was quite successful because I have found almost universally that members of Congress are approachable and personable and they want to engage, and they're very receptive to talking frankly about these things. Now, whether that translates into more money is another thing entirely, but I've never had a problem getting that face time, especially at those forums.

Q: Turning to a more strategic-level consideration for the Foreign Commercial as a whole is its interaction with the State Department. Since there can only be a limited number of Foreign Commercial Officers in foreign posts, is there a growing overlap between the State Department Economic Officer and the FCS rep?

CROCKER: This is a really interesting question. I think good, healthy collaboration is episodic, that there is significant overlap in authorities and appropriations that the remit for the economic officer is often—often seems to include an overlap with that of the Commercial officers sitting down the hall, and that can be problematic at times. On the one hand, it allows both people to work on an issue collectively and share success and get rewarded by their respective agencies. Success, as they say, has many fathers. But it was often the case that there was an inherent tension, and, in some ways, I believe that intent—whenever you have an organization you have intentions about who does what, right? I think that in this case we're probably at a point where the tensions are exacerbated by a structural division for Commercial Service, which once sat inside the State Department and was taken out against State Department's will, and there have been episodic rumblings about bringing it back, in other words, having State reacquire it. That in turn might create yet other challenges. Frankly, there is so much work to go around that I would much rather see the administration and the secretary of Commerce fully support and seek adequate funding for the current structure.

Q: Would it be better for efficiency and all-of-government approaches to promoting U.S. business overseas that the Foreign Commercial be reintegrated into the State Department?

CROCKER: I served two and a half years with State as an econ officer, and seventeen and a half years with Commerce as a commercial officer. Based on my experience, and the difficulties we have encountered in resourcing and growing a first-rate Foreign Service, I continue to believe that we should have a frank and open conversation about that. The secretary of State comes into office knowing that they have a Foreign Service and that it is essential to doing the agency's business. The secretary of Commerce comes into office often not knowing that the agency has a Foreign Service, simply because it is so small and its budget (4% of the total) pales in comparison to that of other divisions of the agency.

There are still some divisions of labor that need to be worked out between the economic cone and the commercial cone. I do believe that the economic cone will be well-served by doing more business work. But they need to be rewarded for it, and that's a separate conversation about the organization's design within State and its system of rewards. It's a statement of fact that the economic cone, I believe, has something like 1,500 officers roughly speaking, whereas FCS has about 250, so five times as many officers. But the economic officers have been getting promoted within State Department at half the rate of the other cones, which speaks to a huge problem within the State Department right now. And I suspect it's related to a misuse of human capital, that is, that most econ officers at any given moment are not actually overseas in pure economic positions. That's very problematic for the economic cone right now. So, that's something larger that I think needs to be worked on. A move of the Commercial Service to State is not a trivial exercise, since it also involves the shift of appropriations from one subcommittee in Congress to another. members of Congress, as a rule, don't like losing authority over money. Any administration who seeks to shift appropriations to restructure the executive

branch will need to burn a great deal of credit. And it is hard to see why this restructuring ranks even among the third tier of priorities. Far better for there to be more clear role definitions and incentives for collaboration. In my tours in the overseas field, I've been lucky to have worked constructively with my counterparts from State – not just economic officers – and when I've been able to do so I've accomplished much more for American businesses. That, ultimately, is the goal.

Q: As you are approaching the end of your tour as AFSA vice president for FCS, is there anything else about the period of your vice presidency that I've forgotten to ask you that stands out in your mind?

CROCKER: We had a particularly strong team at the time. Tom Boyatt, Tony Wayne, Barbara Stephenson. At that time that really coalesced around a goal during a very trying period where the Foreign Service as an institution was under attack. We turned it into a positive and Congress was resoundingly supportive across the board. I was really proud to be part of that team for those two years.

Q: You conclude your time as vice president in 2019, but then you decide to remain on the board, initially on the Foreign Service editorial board. What motivated you to take that position?

CROCKER: Well, I guess I'd written an article at one point for the *Foreign Service Journal*. I thought it was an extraordinary megaphone for the value of the Foreign Service. I was acutely sensitive to the image, the public image of the Foreign Service and I thought that the *Foreign Service Journal* was not simply speaking to its members, but instead was a platform for external promotion of what the Foreign Service was at its best. And so, it was a real opportunity to reach out to potential writers on salient topics and help refine those articles with a great group of people.

Q: On the editorial board, what were the key topics or themes tried to press?

CROCKER: I would say first of all, we wanted news to be relevant and there was a certain lag in our publication time so part of my role was to help—and this was always in a collective, never individually—but I would seek to creatively find articles or authors who could speak to the challenges of today. So, if we thought cybersecurity was an issue, I would go through my network and try to find a cybersecurity expert outside of the Foreign Service quite frequently who could speak eloquently to a better understanding of that as an article, as an author. One of the things that's always been a work in progress is some sort of hybrid model where many of the readers now read the *Foreign Service Journal* as a digital journal, so updating the technology platform was something that we tried to describe a roadmap for and we were pretty far away from that. I just left the board in September 2022, but the idea would be that we would not only continue to have the print version and the digital version at a one-month tempo, but also in sort of on a floating basis, on an ongoing basis we could take in articles and very quickly review them as an editorial board by email and make a quick decision to post them digitally and push them out digitally.

Q: Did your position on the editorial board also include oversight of any of the social media that AFSA did?

CROCKER: We discussed ways in which we could amplify the message and it's not a very sophisticated strategy. We weren't buying ads on Google or Facebook. What we tried to do was simply use the multiplier effect where we would share an article, not just, you know, the *Foreign Service Journal* edition in total, but we would share an article at a time on social media, usually Facebook or LinkedIn. And then, we would have members of the editorial board share those and so those articles would end up in our feeds to our connections and you get a little bit of a multiplier effect that way. Nothing really sophisticated, pretty low-grade, guerilla marketing. Nothing as viral as a funny cat video, unfortunately.

Q: After working on the editorial board of the Foreign Service Journal, you complete your service as secretary and a member of the governing board. How did that position change your responsibilities, or did it?

CROCKER: Well, it changed them rather dramatically because even while I would—I'd like to think I had an expansive view of the Foreign Service while I was vice president, my main constituency was the Commercial Service, even if I did include civil servants in the U.S. domestic field offices and locally engaged staff overseas. It was Commerce and the focus was on making sure Commerce had a strong budget so that it could maintain people and not lay them off and maybe even hire a few more. With the secretarial role, that was Foreign Service-wide, so all of a sudden, most of the constituents were actually State Department employees and then secondarily USAID employees. One of the things that I attempted to focus on, and to be fair, when I joined the board I didn't think it would only be for one year, was to help the Foreign Service in terms of its employment practices move into the twenty-first century by getting more comfortable with the idea that officers should be able to join, work a few years and then leave and be alumni and network to be tapped, and then could more seamlessly come back in if needed, maybe not at a higher level, but at least laterally in a relatively seamless way as needed because I thought that was more consonant with a younger generation's desires and that it was quite a decision to ask a twenty-something year old to make a twenty-five plus year decision on the spot. So, I did want to push for that. And one of the ways I did that was really quite informal and that was working pretty actively on social media forums, private groups, and sort of helping connect people, for instance, with jobs where they could feel comfortable leaving the Foreign Service and then, in some cases, they came back in. But the idea was to be comfortable with the idea—how do I put this? And it's not something State Department or Commerce is comfortable with, the idea that it's okay, in fact we should welcome someone who wants to serve as a Foreign Service officer for five to ten years and then leave. And I don't think people should feel bad about that or ashamed or that they failed or anything because circumstances change, you get better job opportunities, you fall in love, your child has special needs and you don't want to move them around every two years, there are all kind of—life, you know, intervenes and people should feel good about

leaving, just as they feel good about leaving the military after serving for a few years, or Goldman Sachs or McKinsey, right?

Q: As you look back now from this vantage point, are there things you would recommend to AFSA as an organization to change or improve or do differently?

CROCKER: You know, it's interesting you ask this. I found that AFSA's—one of the things, the underlying things that it does and I think very well is something within what they call labor management, which is if I as an officer am accused of something, what recourse do I have to make sure that, whether I'm guilty or innocent, I have some sort of due process that's followed consistently and that I understand and that the agency which is alleging that I did something respects. That's something that's a constant challenge and we have a very capable team of people doing it. The direction of AFSA, I think, through the leadership, first of Barbara Stepheson and then of Eric Rubin, has changed a little bit based on the inclinations of them as leaders, and they're very strong leaders, both of them, but also what they need to be responsive to. And so, it's that exogenous environment, who's president and what that president is saying with regards to the Foreign Service. That's the biggest driver. And I think to AFSA's credit its leadership is flexible enough to adjust to those changing climates. I think one of the biggest challenges, if I were advising Eric Rubin still as president, I would say that we probably should have been less trusting of the Biden Administration, not with regards to some sort of malintent, you know, and malevolence or anything, but there was a working assumption that the Biden Administration would put more effort into internal building in organizational excellence and that's really been ignored. And I think it took us a long time to really come to peace with that because the assumption was that things would be so much better moving from the Trump Administration to the Biden Administration. But many of our challenges are in fact internal and need patient, focused attention. Again, I think the Biden administration officials had their hands more than full, and I think AFSA might have been unfair to appear to call them out on not addressing the internal issues.

There is a bigger issue here and I've now seen this one from the inside. And it is that regardless of administration, I think there is a serious need to recruit and retain political appointees who are more internally oriented – who want to take on and champion the cause of organizational excellence. Trust in government is at a real low, I believe. And if we are spending taxpayer dollars on agencies, I would very much like to see that money be spent as efficiently as possible. The Commercial Service was and continues to be extraordinarily lean. It can show that it creates hundreds of dollars of economic benefit for every taxpayer dollar of appropriations. But that is unusual, and I am keenly aware that even within the Commercial Service there is considerable room for improving organizational excellence. On the State side, it is widely acknowledged that Colin Powell did an extraordinary job as secretary – in large part I think because he applied all of his learning as a career military officer to State's internal bureaucratic challenges and was serious about improving the organization from within.

Q: Since you've mentioned the changes in management that come with a change of administrations, looking at the arrival of Secretary Blinken, were there, in your view, salutary changes that helped the Foreign Service as an organization?

CROCKER: I can present an example of what you're asking. It was during the tenure of Colin Powell. Remember that I left the State Department for two and a half years to go work in startups in Silicon Valley. But after two years I wanted to return to the Foreign Service. Part of the reason that I got an offer relatively quickly from State as well as Commerce, was because Powell set a very clear tone that we needed to build up capabilities fast and it would be entirely logical to make sure that we could bring people back in. So, I was offered a return, an expedited return, which was quite nice.

I don't know about Secretary Blinken. But I do have to say that one of the first points I made about our up-or-out personnel system is that Colin Powell did not start his career as a lieutenant colonel or a colonel, much less a general. He had to start as a second lieutenant. And so, his lived experience informed much of that attitude towards professional development. That helped make him an extraordinary secretary, someone who can set aside all of the external crises of the day, and think more broadly about how to organize, resource, and train the Foreign Service for the years to come. There are certainly many challenges for Secretary Blinken. For example, the evaluation process. Is an officer in the first five years getting a transparent, appropriate review? Is six months of training early in an officer's career—versus the only one-month training now—a better way to prepare for a full career? Actualizing these proposals, which AFSA has urged as part of our recommendations on professionalization, would go a long way to continue the strategic planning that Colin Powell did.

Q: As we conclude, what were your aspirations for post-AFSA service?

CROCKER: I wanted to take a job at Davidson College in North Carolina. Since I had to be resident there, I couldn't continue on the board of AFSA.

Q: From your position at Davidson University, are there insights you gained from your time at AFSA that help you in teaching and advising students who may want to consider the Foreign Service as a career?

CROCKER: Absolutely. One of the—there are a couple of factors. One is that when I ask students to go overseas and give themselves permission to get outside the classroom and not focus on grades in the summertime, I need to have something else to present them with sometimes as options and so, one of the things that we look for are service opportunities, internships, the like, and so that global network has really helped. For instance, many of my former colleagues are members of the boards of the American Chambers of Commerce in these various countries, which themselves are composed of U.S. multinationals and strong local companies. They in turn are a rich sort of fertile ground for internships for Davidson College students. So, that would be one example.

The other example would be that I'm able to bring some of those former colleagues in as speakers, so we're scheduled to have a session on the Balkans and Russia's sort of covetous eying of the Balkans region from the former U.S. ambassador to Kosovo, Greg Delawie, and current ambassador, Judy Reinke, in Montenegro, because she's finishing her tour of duty, I think by the end of the year. They'll come in, I believe, in March of next year and do a joint presentation, so it's wonderful to be able to have known them as colleagues and friends and to be able to call on them to come to talk to Davidson students. So, there's a programming element as well.

And then, finally from a public service point of view, because I did the Foreign Service and because Davidson students are smart and motivated, it really helps to be able to draw on Foreign Service officers who are willing to counsel them. And so, the second of November, for instance, we're having a Foreign Service panel where we've got a State Department officer, we've got a Commercial officer, a USAID officer, and then we're going to have somebody from the Consular Fellows Program speak on a panel to students who are interested in public service. So, AFSA's been very supportive of that. We have two AFSA board members who helped with that, and then two Davidson alumnae who happen to be Foreign Service officers. And so, it's really paid off enormously.

Q: Are there any other conclusions you'd like to address as we end the interview?

CROCKER: This is an interesting question that you ask. I think that AFSA is a strange animal in that it's a hybrid of a professional association and a union. And characterizations matter immensely. And public sector unions right now don't have the greatest of reputations. Here I mean, besides the Foreign Service, at the local levels where they may appear more focused on preservation and growth of benefits rather than a focus on the constituents they serve. I think these can sometimes be denigrated. I think AFSA's at its best when it presents itself as an association that advances the concept that we need a strong Foreign Service. It's at its best when it does that because that speaks in a bipartisan, positive way about the importance of a Foreign Service. And in Tom Boyatt's ringing words, in his contributions to the Foreign Service Act of 1980, it's unabashedly an elite institution. I mean elite in the sense that it's highly selective in its intake process and that it prides itself on an up and out system where if people fail to perform, they're selected out. And it's very hard to imagine a public sector union defending a process by which poor performers are selected out, but AFSA is distinctive in that regard as well. AFSA does not contest that. Its members don't strike. And so, I think AFSA continues to need to set itself apart and present itself as representing Foreign Service officers in an employment class that is much like the military in terms of the up and out process and the professionalism.

Q: I'd like to thank you very much, both on behalf of AFSA and ADST for taking part in this series of interviews to mark the 100th anniversary of AFSA.

End of interview