

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
American Foreign Service Association Series

AMBASSADOR ERIC RUBIN

*Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
Initial interview date: March 14, 2023
Copyright 2024 ADST*

INTERVIEW

Q: Okay, today is March 14, 2023. This is our interview as part of our 100th anniversary series with Eric Rubin, president of AFSA [American Foreign Service Association]. Eric, let's start with a little background on you. Where were you born and raised?

RUBIN: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, and lived there as a kid until the age of six, or actually aged five. And then, we moved to the suburbs and I grew up in New Rochelle, New York, in Westchester County.

Q: Right. And is that where you did your elementary and high school education?

RUBIN: All the way through K to 12, public school.

Q: During that time, were you ever exposed to, did you ever get any knowledge about labor unions?

RUBIN: I was. I grew up in a house that was very labor focused. My parents were very involved with the labor movement, in various activities which included civil rights work in the 1960s. And I grew up with labor songs, with folk music, with Pete Seeger. I grew up knowing all the great American labor songs, you know, from *Which Side Are You On?* to John Henry to *Solidarity Forever*. There was a program on WQXR, which was then the radio station of The New York Times every Sunday and that played a lot of labor music. So yeah, I did, and also just with the values. I grew up, as a very young kid, I learned that you do not cross a picket line. You don't even ask whether you agree with it or not, you just don't cross picket lines. And so, it was a very pro-labor family. My paternal grandfather was very involved in the garment workers union in New York so yeah, definitely part of my upbringing.

Q: Yeah, that is definitely a labor pedigree, probably almost unique among foreign service officers. But let's go on a bit. In high school, did you have a part time job? Did that also sort of give you a personal, sort of individual understanding of how labor unions operate?

RUBIN: Not a whole lot. I was a budding journalist starting in junior high school. An editor in my junior high school, in high school newspapers. I did an internship at the local Gannett Newspaper my junior and senior year of high school and my focus was on journalism. The Gannett newspaper was unionized so I was aware of that but interns didn't have to join. But you know, again, I was very much conscious of and aware of the whole set of issues, and it was important to me.

Q: All right. Then as you were preparing to go to college, what were your parents talking to you about? What were you thinking about? How did you make a decision on college?

RUBIN: Well, I think, first of all, I have been very interested in history since I was very young, so I was looking for a place where I could study with a good faculty in history. And that gave me a lot of options because at that time, there were a lot of fantastic history departments. They probably still are although some of them are suffering right now. But it was, you know, basically journalism and history where my focus is.

I was also very involved, very involved in international things. I went on a high school exchange to France, with our sister city, LaRochelle, on the west coast of France. And then, I also went on a high school exchange to Israel when I was seventeen. And you know, I traveled quite a bit with my parents starting about the age of, I don't know, seven or eight, and even maybe six. My father was a television producer and got August off every year. They didn't take shows in August so we traveled every August somewhere overseas and I got a real taste for it and found that I really liked it.

Q: Yeah, the age of summer reruns.

RUBIN: Very much.

Q: Okay, so, those are the areas of interest. Then, how did you decide on which college or university?

RUBIN: I wanted to stay on the East Coast and was pretty much focused on the Ivy League. I was interested in a big, big school. I didn't want to go to a small New England college or Pennsylvania College, even though I applied to a few. I applied to Swarthmore and I think Amherst, but my focus was more on universities. And I applied to a whole bunch because in those days you could, and there was no limit on how many you could apply to early. So, I applied to a whole bunch early but I applied to Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Penn, Columbia, and then I think a couple of smaller colleges like Swarthmore, I definitely remember applying to.

Q: And where did you get in?

RUBIN: I got into Yale and Princeton, and Penn. I'll be honest, I don't remember the rest. I think I got into Cornell. I went to visit all of them and they all had their great strengths. At that point, I made my decision like people do based on factors that maybe aren't the right ones. My cousin was already at Yale and I visited him when I was a senior in high

school, stayed with him, and had a really great time. And I liked the idea of an urban-ish campus. Not too urban, I thought Penn was a little too urban and Philly [Philadelphia] in the late '70s was a little gritty, to put it mildly.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

RUBIN: But I went to Princeton for a visit and I thought I was on the set of a movie.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: And it felt unreal to me, too perfect. I feel the same way about Stanford when I go there periodically now. It's just too perfect. And I liked what I heard about Yale and I had a good friend in high school who was focused on going to Yale as well. I visited Harvard. I ended up not getting into Harvard anyway. I was waitlisted but I didn't particularly like it. I did not find it as friendly. And then, the other thing that I liked about Yale at that time was that there were no fraternities or sororities. There were a few secret societies but that was not something I was interested in. But the fraternities had disappeared in the '60s. They later came back when the drinking age was raised to twenty-one. But I was part of the last year of kids in America who could drink at eighteen. And so, the fraternities were not attractive until they became the only way to drink, unfortunately.

Q: Okay. Did you go ahead with your plans for history and journalism?

RUBIN: I did. So, I got very active in Yale Daily News, which we were proud to call the oldest college daily, and became the news editor my junior year, and I became the stringer for *The New York Times* on campus. At the same time, I majored in history and had some fantastic mentors, one of whom is probably the reason I am in the Foreign Service.

Q: Oh, go ahead. No, how did that---

RUBIN: I was originally focused on Russian and East European Studies. I first studied Russian in high school, starting junior year in high school with a wonderful teacher who later became National Teacher of the Year, who was a Holocaust survivor. And when DoD [Department of Defense] offered our public high school money to teach Russian, the school jumped at it. He had learned Russian as an orphaned interpreter for the Red Army in wartime Hungary.

Q: Yeah, interesting.

RUBIN: And so, I had Russian and I visited the Soviet Union once with my parents as a teenager, and our family roots were in that part of the world, long, long time ago. Late 19th century, early 20th century. But it was just what I thought I wanted to do, and the whole time I was at Yale, I did study Russian and Russian-East European Studies. But I

attended a class by a professor named Robin Winks and he was probably the leading specialist in decolonization and postcolonial studies, and it caught my imagination.

I ended up focusing on that, writing my senior essay about Anglo-American relations in the British decolonization of India. It turned out he had served both in the Foreign Service as a cultural attaché at Embassy London, on some kind of academic exchange. And he had also served in the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and he tried to recruit me for both.

Q: Interesting.

RUBIN: Coming from a fairly liberal left-wing family, the CIA was not something I felt I could even consider. This was, you know, the early 1980s and we were not so far away from the Church Committee hearings and all of that.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: So, I told him, you know, “I’m not interested in the CIA”. But he said, “You should take the Foreign Service exam”. And so, I was still thinking I was going to be a journalist but I said what the heck, it was free at that point. And so, I took it in my senior year and I passed, and then it took a good two years. Meanwhile, I went from there to *The New York Times* after graduation as a reporter trainee, still thinking I wanted to do journalism. And lo and behold, I met my wife there the first week I was there. The first week after graduating from college. We had our first date, Labor Day weekend, 1983, and we have been together ever since. That is forty years.

Q: The internship with Times was in New York, or how did they hold that?

RUBIN: In New York, in the newsroom. It wasn't really an internship. It was a paid job. It was a union job so that was my first union membership in the newspaper guild. And it was an old fashioned apprenticeship program, you started out as what were known then as “copy boys” and “copy girls”, and worked your way up to being first, a news clerk and then, a news assistant. And meanwhile, you were expected to try to write articles in your free time, come up with ideas, work with reporters, and then, you had a chance to get hired as a new reporter if they liked your work, including most importantly, the articles you wrote during your non paid time, which probably is illegal now. And to be honest, I didn't really like it. At that point, it was a very tense newsroom. Labor relations were terrible.

Q: Wow.

RUBIN: The then editor Abe Rosenthal was in constant conflict with the newspaper guild. But it was also not a very friendly place at that time. No one said good morning or good evening. No one said hello. Very competitive. And honestly, it didn't click with me and I started to think, maybe this is not what I want to do. And meanwhile, my wife was actually doing much better than I was and ended up staying in journalism for quite a

while longer. But then I got a letter from the board of examiners of the Foreign Service about a year and a half after I passed the exam and they said, “We have a place for you in the 28th class in May or June 1985, and we are offering you a place in the political cone, which was my first choice”.

And so, you know, first I asked my parents and they were very excited by it. Their first question was, “Do you really want to do this overseas for your whole career?”. And I said, “You know, there is no commitment but it sounds really, really interesting and exciting”. And then, I asked my then girlfriend—not even yet fiancé but we were already pretty serious—and I said, “Well, I don't like journalism so I am thinking of applying to law school. She said, “I do not want to be married to a lawyer and the Foreign Service sounds really fascinating”. I said, “Well, you know, if we stay together, it means you know, traveling a lot and going overseas and all that”. And she said, “That sounds really exciting”. She had traveled a lot as a kid with her parents to some very exotic places. And so, I said, “Yes”, and gulped hard and came down to Washington in May '85 thirty-eight years ago, almost exactly, and had a very good experience.

I've met an incredible group of people in my A-100 class and absolutely was really thrilled by the whole experience. And then, they asked us, “Well, where do you want to go?”. And I said, “I'm up for anything”. At that point. I spoke pretty good French and pretty good Russian so I said, you know, “I'd like to use my French and my Russian”. And they said, “Where don't you want to go?”. And I said, “Well, I definitely don't want to go to Saudi Arabia because I'm Jewish, and I know I would have to lie on my visa application and I won't do that”. And I didn't really have any desire to go to Riyadh. And I said, “I'm not too keen on Central America given what was going on in 1985”.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: And they said, “That's fine”. And there was a job in Moscow and I was really interested in that. And then Flag Day came in A-100 and it turns out the job in Russia went to someone who is our new ambassador right now to Bucharest, Kathy Kavalec [Kathleen Ann Kavalec] because her husband, Mark Taplin, was already in Moscow. In those days, they actually tried to help tandem couples. I wish they would do more of that now. So, I was okay with that but then Flag Day came, and I knew I wasn't going to Moscow but I didn't know where I was going, and then the flags came out. I found that I was going to Honduras in Central America.

Q: Wow, okay.

RUBIN: And, you know, to my credit, I was game for almost anything. I started to gulp hard again and said, “What the heck”. I learned Spanish at FSI [Foreign Service Institute] for six months. I already had French so it wasn't too tough. And I enjoyed that, and Spanish is an asset to have so I have been grateful for that ever since. Meanwhile, my then girlfriend was moving to Omaha, Nebraska to work for the newspaper there. And we realized that Omaha was a pretty easy commute, and it was actually in the same time zone even though at that point calls were, you know, \$1.10 to \$1.35 minute, right? I did

tell that to my kids now and they have no idea, and it took about two weeks for mail to arrive.

But in any event, off I went to war torn Central America in February 1986. Immediately thrust into the Contra war and everything that was going on. And, you know, I tell new members of the Foreign Service that I didn't really want to do that, and I didn't really think they were using my experience in languages. But it worked out really well, partly because it was a total hotspot in U.S. [United States] foreign policy at that point. I got tons of responsibility and work, first in the political section, doing internal politics and human rights. All of it, and that meant me spending a lot of time with our ambassadors. And then I moved to the consular section to do a year of consular and it was a great group of people and a great place to learn consular work.

And meanwhile, my wife and I could see each other practically every month, meeting in Miami, New Orleans, or Houston, which is where there were flights from Honduras and from Omaha. She came down then on a reporting trip with the Nebraska National Guard, which fortuitously had been paired with Honduras. And then, actually, she did that twice. And so, you know, it was really good in that sense but it was also a good experience because I didn't agree with much of our policy. And actually, in this profession, that was good training.

Q: I just want to interrupt with one quick thing. This entire story of meeting your future wife, making a career decision about the Foreign Service and then making it work when you lived in two different places is such a core foreign service issue for married couples, for eligible family members to work in the Foreign Service, to manage two careers, that already, just as you joined the Foreign Service, you are already experienced in this. And I imagine as time goes by and you become more active with AFSA, it is something that very easily comes to mind and also very easy to advocate for improvements just based on your own experience.

RUBIN: It is true. And also, fortuitously, my wife left journalism in the early '90s. Went to school in public health, became an epidemiologist. That turned out to be an extremely portable, good career to match with the Foreign Service, and so, for the past thirty years, we have been together physically after that first assignment, and she has always managed to find good work in every post that we've been at together. Some people would say I've had it easier. I have never done an unaccompanied assignment, while others like my colleague, Tom Yazdgerdi, our State vice president, he did three tours in Afghanistan and Iraq, and I can't claim to have done anything like that.

But still, yes, I am very sensitive to these issues that informed my work as a principal officer, DCM [deputy chief of mission], ambassador. And I did have some first-hand experience with things like the frustrations of getting security clearances for family members. In almost every post, my wife either had, you know, tremendous frustration waiting for a security clearance to start working, and that is an issue we are dealing with to this day. And then, the second issue was, when I was in senior positions, we had a heck of a struggle to get her an ethics clearance even when she wasn't working for the U.S.

government or in the embassy. And so, I am very sensitive to these issues because they affect so many people in the Foreign Service and you know, both they are morale and retention issues but they are also recruitment issues these days.

Q: Sure. Alright, so, Honduras in a way was a serendipitous opportunity because so much Washington attention and also exposure to the ambassador, pretty rare for an incoming officer. But also, while there, were you involved with access to post rep or any other connection with AFSA while you were there?

RUBIN: Not in my first tour. I joined my first day in the Foreign Service. That seemed to me a no brainer, partly because of my background but also, you know, AFSA to this day makes a good case over lunch for why you should join and how it is a good value. But I was sympathetic to the idea of a union as well as professional association. And I was a post rep later in my career, not in my first tour, but I have done that. I also served on the editorial board of the *Foreign Service Journal*, mid-career, when I was in Washington so I have done a good bit of AFSA stuff.

Q: Okay. So, your wife did not join you in Honduras but subsequently?

RUBIN: Correct.

Q: Okay. And from Honduras, how were you picturing at least the next steps in your career? You ended up in a Spanish speaking place, completely different from your background, what were you thinking about as a trajectory at least at that point?

RUBIN: Well, I was still very focused on Soviet affairs and Eastern Europe. Honduras was an interesting place to be because of the struggle in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and to a lesser extent, Honduras and Guatemala, which was still very much a Cold War struggle.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: And remember, Ronald Reagan was saying that Nicaragua was just a day's drive from Harlingen, Texas, which it isn't, but he said that. But then, I was very lucky because I was put in this position where as a _____, I didn't necessarily agree with a lot of our policies and didn't agree that the Sandinistas were bad. I was a liberal, cold warrior, you know, growing up in a liberal cold warrior house, so I didn't think too much of Soviet communism or its allies. But I did think the Contra war was problematic and a mistake. I was exposed to that actually having been control officer for a lot of CODELS [Congressional Delegations] but also for Oliver North when he came down from the NSC [National Security Council] my first year.

The good thing that happened to me is we had good leaders. Our first ambassador got fired along with the DCM by Elliott Abrams, who was then the assistant secretary for Latin America, for not being enthusiastic about the country policy and wanting to focus on democracy and human rights in Honduras. And Honduras was at that point a sort of

nascent electoral democracy with a human rights situation that was not great but not terrible. But my first ambassador was a great mentor. His name was John Ferch and his DCM was a guy named Shep Lowman [Shepard Lowman], who later retired but he had been the chief of the evacuation of Embassy Saigon in 1975, and was still very scarred by that experience having to leave behind so many FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals].

Both of them spent a lot of time with me as a first-year officer. After they both got fired, we had a great chargé for a while, Robert Pastorino, who later became ambassador. You may know him, you may have known him. And he was a great mentor and spent a lot of time with the junior officers. I mean, a lot. To be honest, it is probably why I am where I am today. And then finally, they sent down a real cold warrior, career FSO [foreign service officer] Ted Briggs, Everett Ellis Briggs, son of Ellis Briggs, who was the legendary ambassador to Cuba and six other places. And Ted Briggs was very much a Reagan conservative career officer and I think personally supported the policy, in addition to really having been hired to carry out the policy. But he was a totally, I would say, engaged guy in terms of policy arguments and the need for discussing things at every level. And he engaged with me and he also engaged with some of the anti-war NGOs [non-government organizations] in town and made some very good friends.

And he was also a mentor. When I recently communicated with him, he is in his late eighties now and had written a memoir, and I sent him a note saying I read your book. I said, "Do you remember me?". He said, "Oh yes, I do remember you, because you were obviously a newcomer and you were not afraid to tell me what you thought in your first tour?".

Q: Wow.

RUBIN: And I said to myself, you know, that is not common. This is, you know, he could have said, you were, you know, insubordinate and a pain in the ass. I did clash with our PAO [public affairs officer] at that time because he wanted to broadcast what I thought were one-sided, when they were starting out then with the first video conferences.

Q: Yeah.

RUBIN: WorldNet.

Q: Yes.

RUBIN: And I said, "We should have, you know, a variety of views on these programs for our local audiences here". And he didn't like that. But mostly, that was a good experience and then I got recommended by our ambassador for the operation center. And so, I headed back to Washington for my second tour and from there, got what I really wanted, which was a job on the Soviet desk.

Q: Okay. I'll just interrupt one second here with regard to the operation center because I overlapped with you there briefly. And although we were not on the same watch team,

you know, we often greet each other and so on. And of course, you know, it was brief, we all worked on different shifts and so on. But the one thing that stuck with me from working with you even in that brief time was we always had to brief the oncoming shift, and we had to brief them in a way that did not waste time and the briefer had to be careful and thoughtful about what was most action oriented. I remember all of your briefings, I almost didn't have to think because you put it all out for me in a way I—

RUBIN: I do remember you and I think when I saw your name, I said, “Well”. But I don't remember those briefings but that is a very nice, nice thing to say, well.

Q: Yeah, no, because it really stuck out in my mind. And then of course, you did go off the watch to a different place and you know, you lose track of people. But you were going to the Soviet desk right in time for everything going wrong.

RUBIN: Or right.

Q: Or right. Yeah, I mean everything falling apart and sort of being there at the foundation, being there at the start of everything. But once again, I want to ask you, even as you moved into that very active, you know, constantly changing office, was there anything else about AFSA that was getting your attention at that point?

RUBIN: There were a few things. There were a bunch of us on the Soviet desk. It was a very big office at that point, about thirty people, and I think at that point, it was probably the biggest office in the Department, country office, for good reason. There were a bunch of us who were very concerned about how antiquated the personnel system was and how hard it was to navigate it in two career couples. How unsupportive it was of people with kids. One of the people I spent a lot of time talking about these things with was Victoria Nuland, the current under secretary, who was on the Soviet desk with me, but a whole bunch of other people, many of whom have gone on to great foreign service careers and became lifelong friends.

It wasn't really an AFSA focus. It was more Foreign Service reform focused. At that point, the sort of 1950s generation was still in charge. It was literally ending but nonetheless, the people who joined the Foreign Service under Eisenhower at the height of the Cold War, and they really didn't—I mean, this was the group that had trouble with the women's suit, that had trouble with Alison Palmer, that had trouble with ending the wives' directive, had trouble with not making people resign when they got married. And you know, I remember there was some old school _____. I mean, I remember getting reprimanded in Honduras, at the ambassador's residence, at a dinner for a CODEL when I failed to stand for the ambassador's wife when she entered the room. That was very much a thing which when I tell people today, they look at me like, you know, I'm a dinosaur but I got reprimanded not by the ambassador, not by the ambassador's wife.

And you know, wives were definitely still wives even though I worked with quite a number of women officers there certainly were by that time, but the “two for the price of one” thing was still very much there. And anyway, we just had a dialogue. We were, you

know, young married people in Washington at a time of real change and it felt like the Foreign Service was stuck in the previous era. So, that was when some thoughts started to gel. There was also a sense of too much sort of scut work and, you know, not enough. We were lucky in the Soviet so much was going on that we got tons of work and responsibility right away. But it was still a time where we felt there needed to be change, and to some extent there was, to some extent there still hasn't been.

Q: Right. Just to echo what you are saying. I was in the Department at the same time. You were working in a different place and everything you are saying, I also experienced. I had a slightly different take on that, yes, a lot of the old hands were still there but I had the sense that they simply could not understand that a new generation was coming in with different expectations, and that they could not simply tell us what to do. They needed to consider what the downstream effects would be, both on, you know, morale, family. They simply weren't thinking about that and that was part of the old Foreign Service.

RUBIN: Yeah, very much so. And actually, Toria Nuland has told the story in public so I can repeat it. You know, she remembers being stopped in the halls of the Department, being reprimanded for not wearing pantyhose and for wearing in the middle of August, you know, what amounted to a sundress---not even pants---and a senior woman stopped her in the hall and basically said, "You can't dress that way. It's not acceptable". And she remembers that and talked about it publicly. But also, you know, there are things I remember in the ops center, and you will remember this too. Obviously, you'll remember we were still doing the press clips.

Q: Right, right.

RUBIN: And a bunch of us, you know, basically said---and we had great leaders, Joe Lake, David Johnson, I am just remembering who were there. And we said to them, "You know, this is ridiculous to have not only all college educated, mostly graduate educated, officers cutting out newspaper stories and pasting them"---and they were sympathetic. And they said, "You're totally right but it has always been done this way. We'll take it up the chain". And initially, what we got back down from what was then still called SS _____ was, "It's always been done this way and thus, it will always be. And if it was good enough for your predecessors, it is good enough for you". It wasn't more than I think three or four years later that they had the brilliant idea to have civil servants do this _____ and let the _____ officers do their real jobs.

But anyway, that is the kind of thing that was just very antiquated and yet, you know, thinking back, one of the things I do tell new officers and newer officers is, it was also much more of a first name service, you will remember that. No one ever used the term "sir" or "ma'am". I think that came after 9/11 [World Trade Center bombing] and Iraq. The ambassador was "Mr. Ambassador", "Madam Ambassador", unless you were the DCM, in which case in private the ambassador had a name and expected you to use it. But, you know, in the Department, I mean, when we would go brief the executive secretaries or the executive secretary, the deputy exec sec or whatever, first names only and that was just expected.

The head of the op center was ____Joe and if anyone had said anything else, it would have been bizarre but look at us now. And you know, I gave up trying to get people to stop calling me “sir” a long time ago. I used to say, if you grew up in the South or you grew up in the military, you served in the military, well, I won't try to change you but otherwise, would you please stop that? And the answer would be “Yes, sir”. So, I gave up. But you know, that is the kind of thing. So, in one way, it was more hierarchical and certainly antiquated but on the other hand, it was a more personal first-name service which I think probably has roots in the old boys’ club and the Eastern establishment and everybody going to prep school and college together. I'm guessing, you know, they were social equals even if they weren't equals at work. And I'm not making excuses for the battle days or the Eastern establishment or the boys club but that was something.

Q: No, and it is important to note that in the history of the last thirty years or so, because AFSA begins to take that on. You know, the change, the modernization, the greater sense of oh, we really need to work on maintaining morale for recruitment and retention, if nothing else. And that is, you know, an important aspect of workforce planning that AFSA will become ever more engaged with. But I digress, you were in the Soviet desk then for two years or did you extend?

RUBIN: I was there for two years from—a little more—I was there for two and a half years from February ‘89, when I left the op center, until July ‘91, right before the August coup in Moscow. And then, I got brought back the night of the August coup against Gorbachev so I actually came back that August to help work on that. And that was quite a night, I will never forget it, but I got to co-draft the sec press memo to the president on the coup and the plotters, and that was a very proud moment.

Q: Absolutely. But then, okay, if you came back, how did the personnel aspect of that work? Was there something unusual about that? Because obviously, AFSA also takes on questions of assignment, openness, transparency and so on.

RUBIN: I actually just came back for like two weeks and I just started on the Eastern Europe desk which was across the hall, and it was very much an informal, you know, we know Eric is moved over but can we borrow him back, because he was our internal politics lead and this is the biggest story in a generation.

Q: Yeah. No, and I don't mean to imply that there is this whole background of avoiding correct personnel activities because in emergencies, obviously, people are going to move around where they need to go but—

RUBIN: Yeah, yeah. Things were also more informal in those days, I would have to say.

Q: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, over time, the personnel system will get both more strict but also give you more options to lobby for jobs and so on. Okay. What then, you were in the Eastern European office and again, I am required to ask, were there any other—here it is not necessarily being part of the AFSA reps, but did you need to address AFSA with

complaints? Were there things that were going wrong for you as an officer that you needed help from AFSA?

RUBIN: Yeah, that was my first real exposure to AFSA. It was then the Office of Eastern European and Yugoslav Affairs, because you will recall we treated Yugoslavia separately. It also covered the Baltic states because we would not include them on the Soviet desk, in the Office of Soviet Union Affairs, for legal and political reasons. So, I very quickly became part of a large group that later became twelve or thirteen people who in our first year, were very troubled and upset by what was happening with the breakup of Yugoslavia, and felt that the outgoing Bush administration and at that point Secretary of State Eagleburger who was an old Belgrade hand, were not taking the need for U.S. engagement more seriously.

And when the administration changed and President Clinton came in, having promised to engage in ending the crisis in Yugoslavia and then very quickly, with Secretary Christopher, changed his mind and basically said, "There's nothing we can do and leave it to the Europeans", I became part of the Bosnia dissent group that later found our names on the front page of *The New York Times* in 1993, and had sent a confidential letter to Secretary Christopher, through backchannels not through the formal dissent channel, against the wishes of the assistant secretary at that time, Steve Oxman [Stephen A. Oxman], and ended up not only being on the front page of *The New York Times* because someone leaked it and it wasn't us. But then, you know, we were really in a situation where it wasn't perilous, only because the senior leadership ended up protecting us and that is to the credit of Secretary Christopher and the team, but that is when we got involved with getting help from AFSA and ended up getting the Rivkin Award for mid-level dissent as a group, a year later in '94.

So, that was when I first spent time with AFSA and you know, we were even talking to the lawyers at that point because there were people calling for our heads. At the end of the day, I guess I have been lucky. It turned out to be a positive experience. I have been invited to A-100 to tell the story. They still cite our group when they do the presentations on dissent in A-100. But it could have gone pretty badly in that moment when I saw my name on the front page of *The New York Times*, and you can google it. It was pretty scary and pretty shocking.

Q: Yeah. You know, in A-100, the orientation course, one of the things they tell you is say nothing in your official correspondence, in your official context, that you would not be comfortable seeing on the cover of The New York Times. It is, you know, something that sticks with you from your original orientation. Okay, so you used the channel that was not exactly according to the dissent channel, and of course, we will get into the dissent channel and the dissent awards at somewhat later date, but have you used the dissent channel, do you think it would have had as consequential an effect as it did?

RUBIN: Well, I am not sure we had a consequential effect. It is true, the policy changed in the direction we were advocating for but that was a year later, and that was when _____ came in, and that was when the U.S. was facing a real disaster on the continent

of Europe for the first time since World War II. So, I am careful not to say that we got policy changed. I think we decided that the dissent channel was too ponderous, that there was no chance, there was no guarantee that Secretary Christopher would see our dissent. We probably were naive and optimistic in the sense that we thought if we could only get to Secretary Christopher with our arguments, he would listen to us and change the policy. And I talk about this when I talk to new members of the Foreign Service about this question. And it was urgent, we just thought it was not the way to go.

It's true, the current secretary of state reads every dissent channel message and comments on them before they go to policy planning. But I don't know whether Secretary Christopher would have seen it but we had this idea that we had to get it too fast and our backchannel, and this has also been discussed publicly so I can say it in an ADST [Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training] interview, was Beth Jones [A. Elizabeth Jones], who was Secretary Christopher's executive assistant, currently our chargée in New Delhi, former assistant secretary and multiple time ambassador. And she knew many of us personally and because we were working on the crisis, had spent a lot of time with us.

And she said, "Get me something classified and I will put it on the secretary's desk". And she did. And then, the problem was he actually maybe was impressed by it, I would like to think so, but whatever, he put it on the washback and sent it to all the members of the principals committee. And the next thing we know it was in *The New York Times*, so we will never know and I'm not going to say in an interview that can be on the web who I think it was but it was not us. I am sure of that, and we were naively shocked and appalled and couldn't believe something like that could happen. Let's just say all of us are older and wiser about the ways of Washington, in sense. But at that point, I mean, it was shocking. So, in any event, that is what happened.

Q: Now, in those early discussions with AFSA when this whole thing broke, were you satisfied with what help AFSA could offer? Or thinking back, is that something that was changed or that you sought to change?

RUBIN: We were very satisfied, I think. I mean, the legal advice we got and support. I mean, we basically got a promise to help us if we needed it and we ended up not needing it but I was impressed. They took us very seriously. I think Tex Harris [Franklyn Harris] was the State vice president at that time and he was a former dissenter, famously. I saw the video about his dissent in Argentina in my A-100 class and had never forgotten it. I had mentioned it at his memorial service. So, it actually impressed me at that point and again, I was sympathetic to the notion that people need representation and support in navigating Washington, the bureaucracy. And that was my first time when I actually was a little scared and worried, and AFSA impressed me.

Q: Of course. AFSA was doing two things then and the labor advocacy side was growing, but it was also working on professionalization and improving professional---

RUBIN: Alright, thank you. Actually, if you don't mind, I think I need to go pay my---

Q: I'll just pause. Okay, so we were concluding that aspect of the interaction with AFSA during that period. Okay, let's go ahead then, unless there was anything else about your interaction with AFSA in that moment of dissent.

RUBIN: Right, so, it was just a positive interaction and you know, later being honored with the Rivkin Award for our group was, you know, made a positive impression on me and it was, I think, that year that I joined the editorial board of the journal.

Q: One quick thing here, the Rivkin Award is for dissent. And many of the AFSA awards have increased over the years as various individuals and foundations and so on, have provided money for creating the award. How did the Rivkin Award come about?

RUBIN: So, I think it was endowed by Ambassador Rivkin, who was a political appointee with, I'm trying to remember which administration, I think the Carter administration---but his son is Charlie Rivkin who later became an ambassador under President Obama. And the family endowed the award for mid-level constructive dissent and to this day, they endow it and sponsor it, and Ambassador Charlie Rivkin gives it at our annual award ceremony.

Q: Lovely. Yeah, I only wanted to highlight that because over time after, we will get more and more of these sponsored awards, and more and more demonstrating the value of various kinds of officers, specialists and office management specialists and so on. But go ahead, yeah, you move on from this dissent moment and where next?

RUBIN: So, where next, I was on the Eastern European desk. I worked on the breakup of Yugoslavia and also the breakup of Czechoslovakia. I was the regional security affairs officer for Eastern Europe and we had changed the office name to the Office of Eastern European Affairs because there was no more Yugoslavia. But still, we were working that and I mean, I did work also on the breakup of Czechoslovakia so I acquired a reputation as being someone who broke up countries.

But for good reason, in some cases at least. But then, I had a great opportunity when Yugoslavia broke up, we needed to establish relations with new countries, or in one case, provinces in former Yugoslavia. And I was offered the chance to be the part time new desk officer for either Slovenia or Kosovo, and I immediately grabbed Slovenia. And so, I had a wonderful experience establishing relations at a working level with Slovenia's government, helping open our embassy in Ljubljana and helping the Slovenes open their initially, intrasection, and then new embassy in Washington.

But meanwhile, I was still very focused on post-Soviet affairs and I believe I was recruited by the then deputy director of the Eastern European Affairs Office, Shaun Byrnes, who was going out to Kyiv as deputy chief of mission. And he asked me if I wanted to come, and my wife and I discussed it and it was an exciting time, Ukraine as a brand new country. The second largest in the former Soviet Union but also a place where both of us had family ties, my wife and I have family roots. I wouldn't say active ties. So,

I jumped at it and then spent nine months learning Ukrainian, which was not quite brand new at FSI but it was, I think, the second or third year of teaching Ukrainian.

That was a fascinating experience. Mostly one on one, and then I also did a Russian refresher because Russian was still important. And when you study other Slavic languages, it tends to ruin your previous Slavic language so I wanted to do that. So, I spent about a year doing Russian and Ukrainian at FSI. But not quite because the new embassy in Kyiv was very small and they were having elections. I actually went out in March of '94, before the formal start of my assignment on TDY [temporary duty] orders to help cover the elections in March '94 in Ukraine. I came back, finished language training and then went out with my wife in, I believe it was July '94, as deputy political counselor.

Q: Okay, just a side question. How difficult or how much difference is there between Ukrainian and Russian given the long period of time they were both in a common empire and a common sort of union?

RUBIN: Yeah. You know, that is a good question and I would say, you know, like a lot of related languages---they are very definitely different languages---some people compare it to the difference between Spanish and Portuguese. Ukrainian is actually closer to Polish and Slovak, which are, you know, not that far from Russian either. But I would say, you know, a little more than halfway between Russian and Polish, but more towards Polish in terms of vocabulary. Ukrainian is not intelligible to Russian speakers.

Q: Interesting.

RUBIN: You know, they can read it and figure out quite a bit but there is enough different vocabulary. At that point, almost everyone in Ukraine understood Russian because they have lived in the Soviet Union at least since World War II. But in some cases, you know, they were in the Russian Empire for hundreds of years. So, it was a one way thing where everybody could understand Russian but Russian speakers couldn't understand Ukrainian. But it was a time when Ukrainian was still stigmatized to some extent, by having been portrayed as a peasant language by both the czars and the Soviet government, except for a brief period in the '20s.

So, Kyiv was still in many respects very much a Russian speaking city and it was complicated because if you got in a taxi, you usually started the conversation---if you had both languages---in Russian, because the driver almost certainly understood and spoke Ukrainian, and in many cases, it might have been his or her first language but they could get insulted. It was almost like they felt, you know, "What do you think I am, a peasant? You are speaking to me in Ukrainian?"

And then, I was not in this group but we had a whole bunch of Ukrainian-Americans who came to help open the embassy and staffed it, who spoke Ukrainian from childhood, and they got a very mixed reception because the Soviet people, including Soviet Ukrainians, had been told that all those Ukrainian *émigrés* (political exiles) were fascists and had

supported the Nazis etc., which was a largely unfair characterization. I would say largely, you know, to the extent that every European country collaborated. There were certainly collaborators in Ukraine. But it was mostly Soviet propaganda, a thing that took root. For example, the ethnic minorities in Ukraine and there were a lot of them, well, first of all Russians but then Jews being the second largest group, but also Hungarians, Romanians, others, were pretty much Russian speaking. Not Ukrainian speaking because again, Russian was the language of the empire and Moscow, but also because they had been told that Ukrainian was the language of peasants and Nazi collaborators.

Q: Okay. You go for the TDY, you go back, and then you start the full tour in Ukraine.

RUBIN: Right.

Q: Now, okay, how did that tour—obviously, it was a new country, you were creating the embassy, creating the initial relations. Were there issues that would need to be addressed by AFSA as you begin to do this?

RUBIN: I would say not very many. The biggest issue which AFSA did get involved in as I recall, was the conditions were very rough. My first winter there, which was the winter of '94-'95 with my wife, the heat had been turned off because the Russians had embargoed oil and gas. There was usually no hot water. There was, I think, one washer-dryer pair at the embassy which already had about seventy-five Americans so, you know, we washed our clothes in the bathtub in cold water. We survived biting cold temperatures with electric space heaters. Thankfully, the power stayed on most of the time. People were very poor. This is before they created the new currencies so they were using what they called coupons. Inflation was insane and there was not a lot of food. It was very hard to get gas for your car. It was usually sold by the side of the road from people with little tanks rather than at a gas station.

And then, the embassy was an old Communist Party building that was way too small and an absolute wreck and didn't have much heat either. For a while, when they were renovating, we had to use basically a porta potty in the courtyard in, you know, minus ten weather, and people were literally sitting on top of each other. Not much healthcare, not much dentistry available. So, conditions were a little rough and we were underfunded because the Bush 41 [George H.W. Bush] administration and the Clinton administration were all into the peace dividend and not spending money more than was absolutely necessary, to open basically fourteen new embassies and a bunch of consulates.

And so, that was an issue and that is when I got involved in _____ things, in the question of unequal staffing because I actually was invited by Shaun Byrnes, who had left as DCM and had gone to Rome as political counselor, and he and his wife---she had been the consul general in Kyiv—have invited my wife and me to stay with them in Rome. I was shocked by the staffing at Embassy Rome. First of all, I think there were like, seven or eight, or maybe nine, senior State officers, OC [counselor] or above. Every section chief was an OC or an MC [minister counselor] and the sections were enormous. You know, the political section was like eleven officers and the public affairs section was like

thirteen officers. And you know, we were going bare bones in Kyiv which was, you know, a high priority country. We were negotiating denuclearization, all sorts of things.

And so, I recall that AFSA was involved and I did become the AFSA post rep, I think for a year I can't remember exactly, at Embassy Kyiv. And basically, our request was for, not matching the Western European embassies, but just to get us some more people, get us some more resources to do this job in very tough conditions. At that point, Kyiv was a twenty-five percent hardship post. It was for a long time. And there was also a lot of crime. People were very poor and very hungry. A lot of mugging, I got mugged on my apartment entryway.

So, _____, that is what I recall being the biggest issue. It was an exciting time. It was a hopeful time. I felt good about our policy. We were supporting the new independent country of Ukraine and our AID [United States Agency for International Development] mission grew exponentially. My wife ended up working for it on health reform and social service reform, and she was very excited by it all. So, you know, overall, it was a very positive time but conditions were tough, and there was not much in the way of money or resources.

Q: Yeah, this time that you were talking about, mid '90s until Colin Powell, was a very difficult time for all Foreign Affairs agencies because as you mentioned, the peace dividend was understood as something that would create a rift in USAID, and attrition in the Foreign Service that prevented it from growing at all during that decade, but not preventing the amount of work from increasing. Something that AFSA really began to get _____ into over those years in terms of strategic workforce planning.

RUBIN: Yeah, no, absolutely. And then, you know, the slogans at that point, "We are reinventing government", which tended to mean cutting the federal payroll by hiring freeze and then hiring a lot of expensive contractors, and that is something Vice President Gore was in charge of. And "Doing more with less", we all remember that. The hiring freeze was a real problem and so, I do remember, you know, things were not easy. I think if you look back at the *Foreign Service Journal* from that time, it was a big topic of discussion.

Q: Then, both you and your wife were happy at least in the professional parts of your work. Had you had children yet?

RUBIN: No, we had not. So, we were about too and we did pretty much the year we came back to Washington after Kyiv. But that was a time when we were basically---I am trying to remember, "dinks" was the expression back then---double income, no kids and it was a great adventure, and we both spoke the language and had tons of Ukrainian friends, some of whom we are close to, to this day. We had an amazing group of people at the embassy. People like Natalie Jaresko, who later went on to become economics minister of Ukraine as a dual citizen, head of the Puerto Rico Financial Control Board. I can go down the list but, just incredible.

And we had a very inspiring and good ambassador in William Green Miller. Bill Miller, who had left the Foreign Service with his friend Tony Lake [William Anthony Lake] over the bombing of Cambodia, in protest of our actions in Southeast Asia, had become very involved with George Kennan on U.S.-Soviet relations, but also was one of the leading experts on Iran and the U.S. government, having done his first tour in I think Isfahan, our Consulate. He was a Farsi speaker and he was supposed to be the U.S. Ambassador to Iran in 1979, in the Carter administration.

And when that didn't happen because we didn't have an embassy anymore, he became head of the Hostage Task Force for a while, and then remained active and was a known Democrat. So, when President Clinton came into office, he was offered Ukraine and took it and he and his wife, Suzanne, came out and ended up spending four years there. He was very involved in negotiating the Budapest Memorandum which was the denuclearization of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, which has reverberations to this day. He was another ambassador who spent a lot of time with entry level and mid level officers and really was a mentor-figure to a lot of us.

Q: Yeah. So, in Kyiv, how were you seeing, from your own point of view, the two big processes in the life of foreign service officers---bidding, moving on to your onward and evaluations?

RUBIN: In terms of how it related to evaluations or?

Q: Well, I guess, in terms of what was sensed as fairness.

RUBIN: So, you know, that was something else, right? I guess I began to acquire enough perspective on things because what I saw was that the whole system was fundamentally flawed.

Q: Just one quick---the reason I asked that is, that is what I started hearing the complaints about both systems. You know, I was also involved with the post-communist Europe in a different way, but this is when you started hearing all kinds of complaints, women feeling that they were not necessarily given all the opportunities of men and just all sorts of things, yeah.

RUBIN: Very much so, and this was, you know, the time after the Palmer decision and all of that.

Q: But anyway---

RUBIN: On EERs [Employee Evaluation Reports], you know, one of the things that I think I was very fortunate, but I claim credit for doing what I advise people to do which was taking this very flawed and, you know, I wouldn't use the word corrupt, I think that is too strong, but unfair system and process that you really have to make sure it turns out okay for you. I did hear about and got involved with some cases where, you know, you would have people who would decide to reform the system by themselves and say, I

know everybody else inflates EERs but I won't do it. So, you know, if you are a very good officer with a great future, that is what I am going to say but I am not going to embellish it or, you know.

And unfortunately, we all know what faint praise is in the Foreign Service. So, I was aware of that. It wasn't something I was personally involved in but it was something I saw affect people's careers. Sometimes, no matter what they did. And in some cases, because they didn't do enough to make the system work for them in a way that they could because they have had, frankly, moral objections to the whole thing which I understand, because the whole system to this day remains flawed and, in many respects, unfair.

Q: Yeah. And, of course, usually the two things that are the most difficult for---well, AFSA negotiates with the administration, with management on the evaluation system but it is very difficult over the many years AFSA has tried to get changes to the bidding and assignment system, and get transparency there. But we will get to that later. I just wanted to flag it for a moment as the issue began to become, you know, more visible and more and more officers began to speak up about it. But okay, at the end of Kyiv, what were you and your wife thinking about now, because obviously, you were a tandem in most ways and you were looking for something where you can both pursue your professional careers?

RUBIN: Right. So, first of all, that meant Washington, both because we wanted to start a family. And second of all, because she wanted to pursue her career more actively. And as a matter of fact, had been hired—before we went to Kyiv—by the Clinton health reform task force. She had been working at HHS [Department of Health and Human Services] and very much wanted to dive back in. And we didn't really want to deal with pregnancy overseas and we had been trying for a long time.

So, Washington was it. I had hosted several senior people visiting from Washington, including at that time, Assistant Secretary for EUR [European and Eurasian Affairs] Dick Holbrooke [Richard Holbrooke]. And Strobe Talbott [Nelson Talbott III], who was initially the coordinator for SNS before he became deputy secretary. And then John Kornblum, who succeeded Holbrooke as EUR assistant secretary, and John Kornblum and I clicked and he asked if I would come back to Washington as EUR special assistant. I did and had a very good nine months basically, mostly focused on former Yugoslavia and Holbrooke's negotiations and ending the war that culminated in Dayton and the implementation.

But Kosovo was starting up so it was very busy. But that was, you know, right after Dayton. And meanwhile, having actually enjoyed the experience a lot and working with the _____ front office, including people like Tony Wayne [Earl Anthony Wayne]. He did become a good friend. And a bunch of great DASes [deputy assistant secretaries] and office directors. I got a call one day from David Johnson, who had been the deputy director in ops [operation center] when I was there, and David said to me, "I think you know that I am going over to the NSC [National Security Council] to be NSC spokesman, and we were supposed to get a USIA [United States Information Agency] officer as one

of the two deputies and the NSC legal counsel has just ruled that USIA officers can't serve at the White House due to the Smith-Mundt Act, because they would be propagandizing the American people”.

Q: Interesting.

RUBIN: And he said, “And I remember that you were a journalist once upon a time”. I said, “Yeah, not very long but yes I was”. And he said, “What do you think about coming over with me to NSC?”. I had to go to John Kornblum and say, you know, “I haven't even done a year, I am not ready to move on but what do I do?”. And John said, “When you get an offer like that, you take it, and honestly, I will find somebody else”, which is basically what a boss should say.

Q: Yeah, oh no, absolutely.

RUBIN: That is what I would always strive to do in a similar situation if I were the boss, and I appreciated that. I do to this day. And so, I went over to NSC in literally, the first week of the second term of President Clinton's administration, with Sandy Berger [Samuel Richard Berger] starting his first week as the national security adviser, and Jim Steinberg [James Steinberg], his deputy national security adviser. I had a fantastic experience with some, I mean, it was a total exposure to the ways of Washington, and I got to travel with the president and briefed the president. But I saw some things and one of them—and you can google this too—we had a rotation in the White House Press Office where we had a simultaneous appointment. I was assistant press secretary for foreign affairs, and everybody, including the NSC press people, took rotations on White House press duty. I was the White House press duty officer that night the Monica Lewinsky story broke.

Q: Oh, my God.

RUBIN: So, you can google it. You'll find, you know, White House spokesman Eric Rubin said, “I refer you to the president's lawyers”, which is what I was told to say at two o'clock in the morning. I had gotten a call two o'clock in the morning from Helen Thomas, then of UPI [United Press International], which still existed, and it was two o'clock in the morning and I had to get up at five to go into the White House. And Helen said, “Eric, what is all this about Monica Lewinsky?” And I had known Monica Lewinsky as the Pentagon Press Office intern, working for Ken Bacon [Kenneth Bacon] who was the Pentagon spokesman. And she used to come over to the White House every few weeks to pick up White House press briefing transcripts for Ken, because they were only on paper. So, we got to know her.

But I reacted, I was very tired. We had a new baby at home and I reacted fairly negatively. And I said “Helen, I don't know what this is about but it is not funny and I gotta get up in three hours. Cut it out”. And she said, “You obviously know nothing”. Click. About ten minutes later, I get a call from Mike McCurry, the White House press secretary. I think it wasn't yet Joe Lockhart [Joseph Lockhart]. I think it was still Mike

McCurry, saying, “Here is what is going on here. Your instructions, have a nice, nice rest of the night”. And I was on the phone the next twenty-four hours. Well, not until the morning when my duty shift ended. But in any event, it was a fascinating experience and, you know, one that I am grateful for. I did it for almost two years, ended up working with P.J. Crowley [Philip J. Crowley] who later became State Department spokesman. He was the other deputy and became a good friend, and learned a lot. I have to say, you know, an amazing experience but it was exhausting. And those were the days of beepers and pagers, although we did get the first cell phones at that point.

Q: Were they Blackberrys?

RUBIN: They were coming in, right then. Mine was not. But they didn't use cell phones to reach out to people, they used the pager. And I just remember, I still have a phantom sensation of that thing vibrating on my hip. I said to my wife when I was finished, I was going to take the pager and throw it in the Potomac. And then I found out that it would cost me like two hundred dollars so I didn't. But anyway, I traveled with the president to Africa and Latin America. Did briefings at the White House podium. Really an amazing experience.

Q: Did anything there help prepare you for AFSA?

RUBIN: I would say, the only thing that did was something that continues to this day, which is you would think that having Foreign Service people serving on the NSC staff at the White House would be something that the Foreign Service and the State Department value heavily and consider a huge asset. Instead, the bureaucracy makes it very hard and they are constantly, you know, refusing extensions and making it difficult for people, and limiting the number of people who can come over. And to this day, that goes on. There is practically no limit on how many pol ads, political advisors, we can have in DOD and we have way too many in my opinion, post 9/11.

But somehow, working for the president isn't impressive to the Foreign Service and the State Department. So, I encountered a little bit of that. Other people I worked with encountered more. We had some great foreign service officers there at that time. Senior people including people like Sandy Vershbow [Alexander Vershbow] and Jim Dobbins [James Dobbins], just thinking of some of the people. At that point, the NSC senior staff was about half Foreign Service but, you know, navigating the bureaucracy and getting these detail assignments approved, it was infuriating. And it was the kind of thing that made me think that we really need help navigating this massive bureaucracy.

Q: And it is particularly sad from the State Department personnel management side, because officers who can go over to the NSC, given how larger it has gotten and how much more of a role it has in creating policy and even directing policy, you would think the State Department would welcome sending more officers over there. But I think it is a missed opportunity.

RUBIN: Yeah, it is. I mean, and they are still Foreign Service but fewer people than there used to be. And it is also not seen as promotable and promotion boards usually are not very impressed. So, that is also crazy but that's how it is. It is seen as staff work and staff work is not seen as very promotable.

Q: Yeah, okay. All right, you get back to the Department after the NSC? Or you know, a lot of officers can when they are in the NSC, work the system because you know so many people. You are engaged with so many people, including in the Department. You know, there is a connection between the Department and the NSC. How did that work out?

RUBIN: Well, it worked out very well. I was recruited to come back to ops as a SWO (senior watch officer) and accepted. And then one day, I think it was Sandy Vershbow who was the senior director for Europe, for whom I had worked for on the Soviet desk when he was director, in my first year and a half on the Soviet desk and had become a friend. He said, “You know, I hear that Tom Pickering [Thomas Pickering]”, who was the new under secretary for political affairs, “is looking for a special assistant for Europe, and I think that would be a better use of your time than going back to ops”.

And I said—I mean, I certainly knew who Tom Pickering was. He had been ambassador in Moscow when I was in Kyiv. But more importantly, everybody knew who Tom Pickering was and I said, “Well, you know, sure. I would be glad to interview or whatever”. And to make a long story short, I got called for an interview and got the job and broke the assignment as a SWO, and ended up doing—I am trying to remember, it was about a year and a half, as Tom’s special assistant, heavily working on Kosovo, the attack on our embassy in Macedonia. All sorts of stuff. It was a very busy time. But I also got to learn from the master, and Tom is a mentor and a friend to this day, and getting a chance to work for him is priceless.

Q: Yeah, it is a gold standard. No question. Everyone knows it is the gold standard.

RUBIN: I mean, it could be frustrating at times, like if you happen to be trying to go to an airport with Tom at ninety miles an hour. You know, he didn't mean to leave his staff behind. He just left his staff behind. But he is a genuinely lovely person and true patriot and certainly the gold standard in terms of our profession. That was a precious opportunity.

Q: Yeah, yeah. It is, you know, it is really, so far you are describing a really great career in terms of opportunities at least. Once again, since you are back in the Department, are there connections with AFSA?

RUBIN: So, I don't to be honest recall many in that job. I did get more involved---I went from that job, I got the Rusk fellowship at Georgetown ISD [Institute for the Study of Diplomacy] after that. And we had now two little kids, and I was ready for some kind of break. I could have done the War College but Georgetown was really appealing. I thought the chance to teach would be great and it was. But while I was at Georgetown, I think there were quite a number of joint events with AFSA and I got to get to know quite a

number of the board members. But there was nothing, you know, when you are on the seventh-floor staff, you do not really get into AFSA stuff very often. So, I can't recall anything specific there but then during the year at Georgetown, I did.

Q: Okay. And once again, the one-year detail, the Dean Rusk detail is to go to a university, teach but also—did you do a research activity as well?

RUBIN: I didn't. I did a bunch of conferences and I got very involved in school Foreign Service. I ended up being on orals, exam panels and I ran a few conferences. I took advantage of the chance to audit some courses. I ended up teaching for the first time. I later came back and taught two additional classes so I have taught three times at Georgetown. And I got involved in the work at ISD and in supporting the institute and their diplomatic studies series, which is also a gold standard in my opinion to this day.

But I didn't do any, it was not really a research fellowship. At that point, it was a couple's fellowship because it had been endowed by Dean and Virginia Rusk for couples in the Foreign Service. And they didn't have to be tandem couples, it was just that you needed to have a professional spouse with relevant experience. And my wife, who was a public health person at that point, ended up doing it with me and also teaching. She taught two courses. Since then, unfortunately, there has been a legal ruling that you can't favor couples so it is no longer a couples' fellowship, but that was a priceless opportunity for us to be together on campus for a year, with two little kids at home.

Q: Yeah. I know, absolutely. And the other value in teaching is that you have a little bit of _____ to coalesce your thinking, and it really helps in terms of being able to speak impromptu when you need to.

RUBIN: It did enormously. I mean, also being, you know, press spokesman at the NSC taught me a lot in that regard too. And those are skills, you know, I have to this day but yeah, it also gave me a boost which these sabbatical years are supposed to do, or not literally sabbatical but training years, because Georgetown is very big on, you know, what I would call the cult of the practitioner. And all of a sudden, I realized I am a practitioner. But I wasn't yet a senior practitioner, I was a mid-level practitioner but that was kind of cool. I was like, "Wow, I'm a practitioner of diplomacy and all these students want to hear what I have to say".

I did a course on the breakup of the Soviet Union, which at that point was still very fresh. I had, you know, I was able to tell all my stories and all that and I realized, you know, what we are doing in the Foreign Service is pretty cool and pretty important, and it sort of gave me a renewed boost. It wasn't quite midway in my career but it was getting there, to staying in the Foreign Service and you know, recommitting to the career.

Q: Did you also do, a lot of times, any foreign service officer who is out at one of these universities, does recruitment?

RUBIN: I did, very much. And that is something else I found frustrating. At that point, we got literally no help from the board of examiners or HR [human resources]. And their attitude was, we already get enough applicants from Georgetown and we are not interested in increasing that number so you know, if you want to do it on your own fund but we are not interested in helping you. That wasn't quite what they said but that was almost what they said. And so, I did a lot of informal recruiting and then we did like workshops for applicants on the Foreign Service exam. I wasn't alone. We had a couple of other State Department people there, and coached and prepped people for the exam.

We did brown bags about life in the Foreign Service very much. And actually, several people who—I can't remember if anybody from my class joined the Foreign Service but a whole bunch of students I worked with ended up in the Foreign Service and I hope I had something to do with it. There was always a fellow there who does recruiting for the agency, but they always get a lot more help. And I always thought it should not be zero-sum. We get a lot of people from Georgetown because it is a great school, with people who self-select, who are interested in foreign service. That is why it is called the School of Foreign Service. And there were a lot, you know, and also in terms of diversity, you know, there was a lot of diversity at that point in the School of Foreign Service and I thought it was a good opportunity to recruit for diversity as well and I did my best but the Department was not enthusiastic.

Q: You know, once again, some missed opportunities but okay. Now, at the end of the Rusk fellowship, even throughout the fellowship, you must have been thinking about where you are going next because it is a relatively short period of time.

RUBIN: Right. Actually, that was a frustrating time for me because, partly as I was out of the building and off State email, and not even able to use it. They had already started the online bidding stuff. I found it a difficult year to bid and I had to bid on jobs. I actually, at one point, you know, it was Christmas or January and I had nothing, which is not terrible but I was frustrated and a little concerned. And that was also, you know, a difficult time in many respects in the Foreign Service, once again, at the end of the Clinton administration. But, once again, I could say I got lucky. I actually had a very good friend who had been an intern on the Soviet desk, and had actually worked for me back in 1989. His name is George Kent, you may know the name. He is our ambassador to Estonia at the moment.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: And George and his wife had become very close friends, and our kids had become friends as toddlers. George was the Thailand desk officer and one day, I was having lunch with George in the cafeteria and he said, “You know, we don't have a candidate for principal officer in Chiang Mai because the current CG [consul general] applied to extend and thought he was going to extend but now the DCM committee has turned down the extension, and they want somebody else. He said, “We don't really have a candidate. It is a pretty cool place. Are you interested?”

Tom Pickering had told all of us that the best jobs in the Foreign Service are principal officer positions. He had been principal officer in Zanzibar and said it was his best assignment probably in his whole career. He really said that because he ran his own little shop and nobody paid any attention and he got to do lots of cool things. And you don't have to do all the scut work that embassies do when you are at a consulate, or at least not all of it. So, I said, let me talk to Nicole, my wife. And you know, we had never been to Asia. I never worked in Asia and I just said, "Sounds like an adventure". And it also sounds like a good place with little kids and it would be a chance to be a principal officer and get some leadership experience.

To make a long story short, partly because I was in the right place at the right time. And for whatever reason, it is insane looking back but I mean this sincerely, there was not a lot of competition. I think it was late in the bidding cycle and they didn't have a preferred candidate. I had George on my side, and I give him credit to this day. I got the job and then I went with my wife into a year of Thai language training at FSI, which was mind expanding, and a great group of people, including our incoming DCM, Robert _____ and a bunch of others. And then had an incredible three years with, you know, our young kids and my wife. We both did learn the language. She ended up teaching at Chiang Mai University and working on public health issues there for Johns Hopkins.

We had an incredible time there. It was an unbelievable adventure. It is not as totally wonderful as people think because there is dengue and the heat and the smoke and the dust are pretty terrible parts of the year but you know, that is where the negatives run out. I don't really have anything else negative to say. It was quite amazing and that just expanded my horizons to a large extent, including learning about Buddhism and a different way of thinking about the world.

Q: Sure. But as principal officer, can you be an AFSA rep? Because you are now essentially, you know, in a management position.

RUBIN: Right. I don't believe AFSA has a rule but you can certainly be an AFSA member. I mean, we have under secretaries and you know, ambassadors, who are AFSA members. But I think AFSA would not have somebody in a senior leadership position be an AFSA rep. I think that is a conflict of interest. The whole point is that people, if they are not happy with what management is doing to address their concerns, can go to AFSA, so, no.

Q: Did you have an AFSA rep though?

RUBIN: Yeah, we did. Yeah, we had several when I was there. And, you know, again, I don't think there were any particular issues. The housing was good. The work was fascinating, you know, Burmese refugees, Laos, drugs, China. The DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] had a big presence. It was a lot of interagency work---big DEA presence, legacy DOD presence, a fairly big and intelligence presence. So, I learned a lot about interagency work overseas.

Q: Yeah, fascinating. Chiang Mai is, I think, well, at least up until the mid-2010s an underestimated fantastic tour.

RUBIN: Yeah, no. And even to this day, you know, we were last back about ten years ago and everybody says, you know, well, “You should have been there back when”. But they said that to us in 2001 when we arrived and you know, the joke was then, you know, if you are going to say that to people—and it is true, it keeps growing and getting more urban but it is still Chiang Mai. I mean, the thing that stands out in my mind most of all was, we had arrived only a few weeks before 9/11. And actually, we were hosting our first big reception on 9/11 in 2001, in the garden of the embassy at the embassy residence.

I still remember this to this day, all of a sudden, because there was at that point an eleven-hour time difference, I think. So, it was like 8:00pm and all of a sudden, every guest cell phone went off basically at the same time. No one had smartphones but they had cell phones. And all of a sudden, they basically disappeared. We had like eighty guests and within ten minutes, they were gone. And I said to the staff, “What is going on?”. And they said, “We don't know but something is going on”. So, all of a sudden, one of our Thai staff came over and said, “Eric, you've got to turn on the TV”. And so, we ran inside the residence and watched the towers fall. We had our commercial attaché from Bangkok with us staying the night and we just sat there with her till four in the morning, and did not tell our little kids who were four and two at that time. I actually didn't tell them for a very long time.

And then I ended up spending the next year going to memorial services. I will never forget having Buddhist monks chanting, “World Trade, World Trade, World Trade” in a Buddhist chant, but also, you know, hosting all the exhibits that we all did around the world. The photo exhibits and the children's art exhibits. But it was also a time when the sleepy posts all of a sudden became security conscious and we had to close the streets around the consulate. There was a sniper threat against me and some incompetent would-be terrorist threw a Molotov cocktail over the wall but didn't really---you can't do it with a plastic soda bottle because it won't break and so won't explode. It just melts. But it was a scary time and there were threats to close the consulate and all that, and we held that off and did security upgrades. But it was kind of a wakeup call for a sleepy friendly place that all of a sudden, the world intruded on.

Q: Yeah, certainly. This is a post, of course when you do your full oral history, you will be able to go into far more detail.

RUBIN: Of course.

Q: I don't want to keep you in one post too terribly long.

RUBIN: Yeah.

Q: Because we are going to follow you into AFSA.

RUBIN: I will do another session because this is more detail than I expected, which is great but I realized we got to get to the past three and a half years also.

Q: Right. So, then from Chiang Mai, what do you and your wife and your family then, what is the thinking about what's next?

RUBIN: So, we wanted to go back to Washington, again, both because of my wife's career and also because of the kids. We wanted them to have time with their grandparents and their cousins. It is not uncommon. I actually was comfortable with the idea that you go overseas, you come back to Washington, you go overseas, you come back to Washington, which is what I have always done. I have never done a post to post transfer. There is nothing wrong with it. As a matter of fact, thank God for the people who do because we wouldn't have enough people overseas. But you know, because of our two-career situation and the fact that I liked Washington work and thought I was good at it, you know, I was challenged by that.

So, we had a visit from our new assistant secretary for INL, [Bureau of] International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, because we were such a big DEA and INL post, being in the heart of the Golden Triangle. I was actually the control officer because we didn't have a lot of officers, and spent some time with him. His name was Bobby Charles [Robert B. Charles]. He was a political appointee of Bush 43 [George W. Bush]. To make a long story short, he said, "What do you do next?". And I said, "I want to go back to Washington. I don't have plans". And he said, "We got a bunch of openings. Think about it".

And so, I called up an old friend from Eastern Europe days, Chris _____, who was the director of the policy office in INL, and said, "Your job is on the list. Should I be interested?". And he said, "Definitely. It's an incredible job and it is also a good job to have if you have small kids because INL hours are about the best in the building. And you'll work with budgets and that is really great for promotion. It is already _____ at that point and planning to open my window". So, I actually applied and ended up interviewing again with Bobby, and got the job. So, it has been two years doing drugs and thugs, including a year and a half as head of our Afghanistan Counter Narcotics Task Force, which is an eye-opening experience.

Q: Wow. That would be a longer discussion in your real—

RUBIN: It probably needs to be, you know. In Washington, not in Afghanistan, we had a series after Bobby left, of temporary acting assistant secretaries but they happened to be Nancy Powell and Anne Patterson. And you can't get two better acting assistant secretaries in the history of the Foreign Service than Nancy Powell and Anne Patterson.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: So, those were both our friends and mentors to this day. We also had a long-time civil service desk, Liz _____, who had been deputy legal adviser and had negotiated the Shanghai Communiqué. Just brilliant and lovely, and she became a dear friend and really helped and I learned a lot from her. She oversaw our multilateral work so I spent a lot of time in Vienna doing UN [United Nations] drugs and crime stuff, traveling back to Thailand for the annual UN crime commission meetings. So, _____ also a great experience.

Q: Now, you were 01. You were at the top of the mid-levels and you were teetering on the brink of becoming Senior Foreign Service. When did that happen?

RUBIN: So, before that happened, it was time to bid again. I didn't want to leave Washington. The kids and my wife were in a place where we've only been back two years. I was casting around and again, not having tremendous success and thinking I might do a second directorship in INL, because a lot of the office directorships there, the Foreign Service ones, are 01. I might have done that. And one day, I went down to the cafeteria and I ran into Nick Burns [Nicholas Burns] whom I had worked with when he was at the NSC and I was on the Soviet desk, and we had helped organize Bush-Gorbachev summits together. He was working at that time for Condi Rice [Condoleezza Rice], who was the senior director, and he was director. I was actually the coordinator in the Soviet desk of the two of the summits for EUR and we stayed in touch.

He had been Department spokesman when I was at the NSC press office. We knew each other pretty well. And he said to me, "So, what are you doing?". And I said, "Well, I want to stay in Washington. I don't have any plans yet". And he said, "Come talk to me tomorrow". I went to see him the next day on the seventh floor and he said, "My exec, my chief of staff is leaving and you would be great". And I said, "So, let me guess, we are talking, you know, fourteen-hour days". And he said, "Pretty much, yeah. That is what we are talking". And I said, "Yeah, I figured as much". But I have had a reasonable two years and now, with a lot of time to family, so I guess I can see that". And I said, "Yeah, I'm interested". And he said, "Well, here's just one question. I remember that you grew up in New York so there is just a very important question that I have to ask you". And I said, "Mets". And he said, "You're hired. Wonderful". And I have since asked him if I had said Yankees, because he is a Red Sox fanatic.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

RUBIN: And I said, "If I had said Yankees when you hired me?". And he said, "That is an interesting question. I am not going to answer that". So anyway, I then had a pretty intense two years working for Nick, who is a brilliant and incredible diplomat but got pretty intense at times, and high speed at times. But it was a really amazing time and also spent time with Secretary Rice who he was very close to. That first year that I was exec, _____ staff, I got promoted across the threshold to OC, and got toasted by Nick and that was very nice.

So, that set up the question, okay, it is time to go overseas now. It will be four years in Washington, I am pretty tired. At that point, you know, the question arises, if you are the exec and P, do you leverage where you are to try to get an assignment that is appealing? And I went to Nick and said, "What do you think about DCM in Moscow?". And he said, "I think it is a great idea". And I said, "Well, we want to do it if the DCM committee will have us". And it happened. That's how that happened. You know, I had the background.

Q: Sure, sure.

RUBIN: And I was ready. I was a new OC, and then went on to a pretty incredible time. But the one thing that happened at that point was, it wasn't just Nick who needed to decide but Bill Burns who was ambassador to Moscow. I also had known Bill but not as well, when he was NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] assistant secretary. And Nick said, "You know, we will have to run it by Bill. You know, bet the DCM committee agrees". Bill and I had a really great discussion and he endorsed it. And then, Secretary Rice called Bill back to replace Nick as under secretary for political affairs, at which point they said, well, there is going to be a new ambassador coming in and at least informally, we got to clear this with him. That new ambassador was going to be John Beyrle, whom I have also worked with when he was at NSC with Nick and Condi in '89-'90, but I didn't know all that well.

And basically, I needed to get him to bless it, which I have to say we clicked right away and it led to an amazing three years with me working as his deputy, and learning again, I would say, as I've had the opportunity to do many times in my career working for the master. He was an incredible ambassador. _____ more optimistic, hopeful time, even though my first month on the job, he went on vacation---a big vote of confidence, basically said don't break anything. And then the Russians invaded Georgia.

Q: Of course.

RUBIN: When he came back a few weeks later, I had to say, you know, "Dad, I broke the relationship. I totaled the relationship". But not true, and it was a vote of confidence. He actually asked me if he needed to come back and I said, "Gulp, no. I think I'm on it". And he said, "Yeah, I think you are". You know, I don't think a lot of ambassadors would have done that. So, that was an amazing three years for all of us. My wife worked in public health there. Our kids went to the Anglo-American school, had tons of friends. It was a little Mayberry R.F.--I mean, they call it R.F.D. although we used to joke it was Mayberry R.F.--the Russian Federation. But it was a pretty happy time and we had Russian and bicultural lives. It was incredible. I traveled all over the world's largest country and a staff of a thousand at the embassy plus about three hundred at the consulate, so, pretty big _____.

Q: I do have one question about this, because now that you are in the position of DCM, you have all of the management portfolio under you, including personnel, and listening to all the problems. So, I imagine it was also a good experience as you began to collect and think about all of the issues related to personnel, you know, recruitment, retention,

morale, resolving personnel problems, and on and on and on. How do you recall that as backgrounding and, you know, the beginning of your thinking as an AFSA president?

RUBIN: Right. So, there were special circumstances at AFSA---I'm sorry, in Embassy Moscow, that made the relationship with AFSA a little different. And one was, we had something called the "Moscow rules", which basically said that there is this extensive list of additional expectations and rules that everyone assigned to our mission in Russia has to adhere to, and failure to do so can be, at the ambassador's discretion, an automatic curtailment offense. The hardest part was, unfortunately, I think while I was there, we had to send home about nine Americans---not all of them were State. About half of them were State and some contractors. One of the contractors later killed himself.

It was painful but some of it, unfortunately, was people behaving badly in ways that in another post, they might have been reprimanded or put on notice. But in Moscow, it meant immediate curtailment and departure. The security angle was such that there was no real ability to reclama any of that. And that never happened. I mean, we did always have enough _____ post.

There were a couple of minor things. I do remember, we had somebody who said she had a service dog, and this is like 2009, and wanted to bring the service dog into the classified area of the chancery. And we said, "Your service dog has to be certified as a service dog. We can't read it _____ because access to the secure area is very strictly controlled, and there is nothing that says that pets are an exception". And, you know, she tried to litigate that but you know, we held firm and said, you know, "If you have an official service dog with training, then, you know, we'll work through the hurdles. But if not, no. You have to leave the dog at home. So, but I mean silly things like that. But we never really had any big issues. The more important thing is we had so many people who were suffering from harassment from the local services in really awful ways, in some cases, and supporting them. But I wouldn't call it AFSA related stuff.

Q: Sure, sure. All right, we are just about at four o'clock. What I would recommend is we break here and then resume, because from DCM on through ambassador and so on, I think we will be able to complete it in the next session.

RUBIN: Yeah, no, definitely. This is great and it is a great start for my thoughts also when I do the full interview, hopefully, maybe later this year. But I do want to be sure we have time to get to my time at AFSA in detail.

Q: For sure.

RUBIN: So, definitely, let's do another interview and Maria can help schedule.

Q: All right. So, I'll pause the recording here.

RUBIN: —in Colorado’s. It’s a different backdrop.

Q: Okay, today is March 21, 2023. We are resuming our interview with Eric Rubin for the 100th anniversary of AFSA. Eric, I think we left off with you at the end of your tour in Russia as DCM. How does it come about that you get the next tour?

RUBIN: So, one thing that was happening when I was in Moscow at that time is, we had a lot of official visits because we were working on the so-called “reset”. And one of the visitors was the new assistant secretary for Europe, Phil Gordon, whom I had met a few times before but didn’t really know very well. He had basically been an assistant secretary for about six months. And he said to me, “I’m looking for a deputy assistant secretary---actually several---and a bunch of people, including Nancy McEldowney who was then the principal DAS [deputy assistant secretary], suggested I talk to you when I was out here in Moscow. And I said, “Well, that is very flattering”. And he said, you know, “You want to go get coffee or something?”.

So, we actually went to the embassy cafeteria in Moscow and he said, you know, “Are you interested? I said, “Absolutely”. Because we wanted to come back to Washington. And he said, “Well, what do you want to work on?”. And I said, “Well, you know, to be honest, not Russia if I have a choice because I’m pretty burned out on that”. But I said, “You know, I have background on Eastern Europe and the Caucuses. Basically, I proposed doing Eastern Europe and the Caucuses and he said, “Well, we’ve got somebody covering that part of the account but actually what we need is someone to do the Aegean as well as the Caucasus”. So, we are talking about rejiggering the Bureau and it would be geographically contiguous---Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia---which had not been combined at that point, although I think it had in the past.

So, I said, “Sure”. I didn’t have much experience working with Greece, Turkey, Cyprus. I knew it was a lot. So, that ended up happening. I got an offer and was glad to accept and Nancy McEldowney moved on. I replaced Tina Kaidanow, who became the principal DAS that first year, and had a fascinating experience, both going back to the Caucuses where I hadn’t been in a long time. But then, diving into Greece, Turkey, Cyprus at a time when the Cyprus talks were restarting, and it was a total education. It was exhausting. I think, you know, I did a couple of hundred thousand miles a year in the air. The only time I have ever gotten top status on the United. I’ll never have that again but I did have it, 1k at least.

Ended up, you know, essentially coordinating the Cyprus peace process for Phil, and then coordinating all the various Caucuses talks. I was named the representative for the Georgia talks, which took place in Geneva four times a year, which I ended up attending fifteen times in four years. So, it was quite, and then dealing with Turkey on an official basis which I have never really done. I have spent time in Turkey but I have never been in direct negotiations and that is always an education to negotiate with Turkish officials. So,

in any event, it was a really good experience. And then, I did that really for two years with Phil. I traveled with him.

Q: I have to ask just one question. Did your experience in negotiating with Turkish officials help you in negotiations with the personnel management and general management of the U.S. State Department?

RUBIN: Since you asked that question, yes. Yes, I would say it prepared me for AFSA. And, you know, I would also say, it is possible that the Turks invented the phrase “deep State”. It is one of Erdogan’s favorite phrases. But as we like to say at AFSA, there is a deep State, it is just not the one that was meant by Erdogan or the one that was meant by Trump and Pompeo. But there is one.

Q: Yeah.

RUBIN: We deal with it all the time. It also, I mean there are elements of commonality in terms of dealing with Turkish officials and Russian officials. But it is also different because you can actually make progress with Turks, if you can actually get in the arena and hash things out. Actually, I found it a more positive experience than with Russians. And also, Turks tend to be a little more honest in your face, whereas the Russians tend to be less honest and more duplicitous. I found, you know, I have actually enjoyed the experience of working with Turkish colleagues. But it is not easy.

And so, anyway, I did that for two years and then Phil left. I heard that my old friend and colleague, Victoria Nuland, Tora Nuland, was going to be the nominee and so I waited until she was nominated. But then, as soon as she was nominated, I reached out to her. We had known each other since 1989 when we worked together on the Soviet desk. I basically said, “I’m here as DAS and frankly, I don’t want to go overseas yet. It has only been less than two years so I am interested in staying. Obviously up to you”. And she said, “I’d love to have you stay. I’m just not sure we are going to keep the portfolios the way they are”. I said, “Well, whatever”. I repeated that I wasn’t very---she asked me if I wanted to do Russia and I said, “No”. You know, I have done a lot of it and it was getting nastier and more difficult, although they had not yet invaded Ukraine again, or whatever.

So, she ended up making me an offer but saying we are going to have to rejigger portfolios. And I said, “That sounds just fine”. And what ended up happening is, I took on what we renamed Eastern Europe. We renamed the office, Eastern Europe, EUR/EE. It had been named the Office of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldovan Affairs, UBM or was it UMB. I’m sorry, it was Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. And I objected to that and said, you know most of the other offices have a geographical designator except for the Russia office. So, what we are saying here is we don’t know where these countries are. We don’t think they actually have a fixed location in the world. I said, no, this is---you know, we used to think Eastern Europe was Central Europe. It is not. Like don’t say that to the Central Europeans now. But this is Eastern Europe---Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova. And especially since the Russians were making clear they didn’t really want to be European. So, what is Eastern Europe? This is it.

So, we renamed that and she said, “Why don't you take that on? And we have a new deputy assistant secretary, Amanda _____, who was coming in, political but very talented academic, and she knows Greece and Turkey and all that so she will take that on”. And she said, “And why don't you transition Cyprus to her since you are in the talks and all that”. So, what ended up happening is I kept the Caucuses and took on Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, where I had experience. I had served in Ukraine. I worked on establishing relations with all three. And then I kept the Cyprus talks for a while and gradually transitioned them to Amanda. I thought this would be a very reasonable workload because not a lot was happening in most of the places.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: And so, that was, you know, basically, I am just trying to think exactly when that was but that was late, that was fall of 2013. I went out to Ukraine for my first visit as DAS, and saw all my old friends. The ambassador, then Jeff _____ had a reception for me at the residence there, which I had helped to set up when I was there in the '90s. Really nice. And then I was wandering around over the weekend, on the main drag in Kyiv which is called _____. I saw some people handing out literature and I went up to them and it was the youth movement from then President _____ party regions, and they were handing out leaflets in favor of the association agreement with the European Union.

That struck me as interesting so that night, I went to dinner with some Ukrainian friends at their house, who I had known for many years. And I said, “You know, I was on _____ today and _____ youth movement was handing out pro-EU [European Union] leaflets. And they said, “Well, don't believe it for a second. He is just using this as a bargaining chip”. But then, my friend said something which I remember to this day. She said, “If he double crosses us, the entire country is going to blow”. This is November 2013.

Q: Wow.

RUBIN: To shorten the timeline, the next month he double crossed the country and made a deal with Putin, under pressure from Putin to abandon the talks with the EU and to take an unfavorable multibillion dollar loan from Russia, and the country blew and it became the _____, and it became essentially civil war and then _____ fled, and the rest is history. So, I remember that day. But more importantly, thinking that this was a manageable, fairly stable, quiet portfolio, disappeared. And the next two years of my life, the second half of the four years I served as DAS were crazy, because Russia sent the little green men into Crimea, invaded the Donbas, you name it. And it was nonstop for the next two years working with Toria and the team on the seventh floor.

I was glad to be there. I managed the team supporting our efforts there, both at the embassy and also expanding our efforts in Washington. We created a crisis task force and then a special support group. And we brought in Ukrainian and Russian speakers from all over the Department. Anyway, it was exhausting but you know, I felt like I was doing

something important and still feels that way. So, that was the second two years as DAS and while I was in those second two years, the thought started to come up, what do I want to do next?

Q: Now, one quick question, you had passed the senior threshold previously but did you make MC [minister counselor] at this point? Minister counselor?

RUBIN: I did. So, I made MC right up, I think it was 2013.

Q: Okay.

RUBIN: I made OC in 2006. And so, it was about seven years later, I made MC so I knew I had the time.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: So then, you know, started talking to the leadership and you know, I felt like this is the moment. I am in a good place. So, I basically said, "You know, I am interested if you have any chief of mission jobs". And I was lucky, it was a year when there were quite a bunch in Europe for career people, which doesn't happen often because so many of the European chief of mission jobs are political, like seventy percent. But in this case, there were a bunch. And so, then the question came up, what was my shortlist? At that point, I think Warsaw was on the list. Bucharest was on, Sofia was on the list. It was clear Warsaw was going to go to somebody more senior, which it did. Ended up going to our then PDAS [principal deputy assistant secretary], Paul Jones, who had already been an ambassador.

So, I said, "You know, I've only been to Bulgaria a few times". I was there when I was on the Eastern Europe desk. I really liked it and I know it has some unique history. I have very mixed feelings about Romania, and there were some other countries that were on the list. But I said, you know---Cyprus I think was on the list but having spent three years working on the Cyprus talks, that was enough. Anybody who has worked on the Cyprus problem would understand. So, anyway, I said, "Yeah, Bulgaria sounds great". My wife and I are, you know, both Russian speakers. I also had Ukrainian and we knew that Bulgarian was not just a Slavic language, it's really the easiest of the Slavic languages, along with Macedonian. So, I thought that shouldn't be a problem.

And anyway, it happened. I got the nod and the White House approved it, and the rest is history. Luckily, it took long enough that I was able to do five months intensively, one on one studying Bulgarian with the head of the Bulgarian section, and managed to get Bulgarian, you know, above the 3-3 level, probably close to 4. It is amazing how good one on one full time instruction is, as compared to being in a class.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: I had a great teacher named Violetta, so. And then, in February 2016, my wife and I went to Sofia and it was a great three and a half years. Everything I had hoped for and more. It is a very special place. Small crises, no big crises. I arrived right in the middle of the migration crisis coming out of Syria and Afghanistan, and a few others, but it was more positive objectives like energy diversification and military modernization. And I am proud to say we made a lot of progress on both so by the time I left, the gas pipeline to Greece was mostly completed, and they had signed a deal to buy the first group of F-16s for cash.

Q: Interesting.

RUBIN: And so, felt good about it and it's a place, you know, we really sort of fell in love with, _____ sleepers. As a matter of fact, we hosted Rick Steves, the famous travel author, in Bulgaria when we were there. He later did a segment on Bulgaria for his TV show and then interviewed me for his radio show, and he said it is a total sleeper. He tells people, you know, if you want to go someplace in Europe you have never been, go to Bulgaria. You will be pleasantly surprised. It's really, really amazing, which is what I think. It helps that the climate is good and the food is good, and the wine is good.

The people are very friendly and don't have any of the imperial complex that the Russians have. It is the opposite. You know, they are a long-colonized people so they tend to be modest and approachable and friendly. And the language is the easiest Slavic language. It sort of ruined my Russian and Ukrainian but for a good cause. I came to really love the language as well. We hosted a good number of visitors and traveled all over the region. I had a really great staff and two good DCMs so really no complaints.

Q: Excellent. So that sort of brings us to the end in capsule form of your time as ambassador there. When do you begin thinking, or how do you begin to get motivated to think about running for AFSA president?

RUBIN: So, I was sort of an open slate. I was pretty sure I wasn't ready to retire, although, you know, I have been eligible for a long time. Pretty sure we wanted to come back to Washington for my wife's work and for our kids but I didn't know what I might want to do in Washington. I knew I didn't want to do a killer job at the White House, at the NSC. I had been a DAS for four years so the notion of doing more DAS work, which is very tiring and usually involves a lot of travel, wasn't that appealing. I thought I might, you know, try for a small assistant secretary job, but honestly, I didn't really have anything that I desperately wanted to do. And then, the truth of the matter is I got recruited.

Q: Okay, how did that happen?

RUBIN: So, I got a call one day in Bulgaria from Barbara Stephenson, who was president of AFSA in her fourth year, or third. I guess, the end of her third year. She had been talking to a mutual friend who had worked for both of us and she said, "So, I am going to be finishing my second tour and moving on, and I am looking for a worthy successor.

And several people have told me you might be it. That you worked on AFSA stuff before, you've been on the editorial board, you've done this. You know, you might be interested". And I said, you know, "Didn't think of that. I'm sure to be glad to talk about it". I happened to be coming back to Washington for some kind of consultation, I can't remember what it was. I said, "Why don't I come by and see you?". I did and I think this was like June. When would this have been, June 2018, I think?

So, I did. She gave me a bit of a hard sell. Because the more we talked, the more I realized that I was interested and that this might be a way to make a difference. And, you know, I have as we have discussed, long union roots and background, and I did have a real commitment to AFSA and the Foreign Service. And I did think things were pretty screwed up, this was during the Trump administration. Things were even more screwed up than usual. And she said, "Alright, let's keep in touch". And we did, back and forth. And then on my next trip to Washington, which I believe was for the chief of mission conference, the last one of the Trump administration, that's my memory, I went and saw her again. And she said, "So, you know, was it a yes?". And I said, you know, "If I have your support, you know, do you think there will be competition? She said, "There is no way to know". You never know until nominations are filed. But she said, "I think you would be a really strong candidate and if you are interested, I'd love to have you do it". And I said, "Yes". That's how it happened.

Q: All right. Now, once you decide, do you try to develop a vision slate? What do you do next?

RUBIN: So, the challenges were the following. First of all, you know, this is not anointing a successor. She was just recruiting candidates, partly because she wasn't aware of anybody wanting to run and she was concerned about that. Second, I was overseas in a busy job as ambassador. And then third, you know, it's hard to develop an agenda when you're not there and you're not---so I said, "Well, look, I have been impressed by what you have been doing, pushing back on the hiring freeze and the cuts and the purge of the Senior Foreign Service and other things that happened under Tillerson [Rex Tillerson]. And I said, "You know, I think I would like to continue that". And she said, "Well, we have a slate and if you want, you could just pick it up". It was called the Strong Diplomacy slate. I said, "Well, you know, I'm in Bulgaria and it sounds like a lot of people want to run again. So yeah, why don't I do that?". So, what I did is I just reached out to everybody who had expressed an interest to run again, and said, "You know, I'm going to be running. I don't know if I'm the only candidate but regardless, I want to run as head of the slate that Barbara headed".

Q: Now, here's just a quick question. When you say you called everybody, you mean like---

RUBIN: Email?

Q: Well, no, no. I mean, in terms of the individuals, these would be the vice presidents in charge of each of the---

RUBIN: Initially were the people already on the board. _____. I didn't know who the other candidates would be. And then we had to, you know, file our nominations or have someone nominate us, and wait for the list to come out. When the list came out, it turned out I was running unopposed.

Q: Okay.

RUBIN: As was Tom Yazdgerdi for State VP [vice-president]. Actually, as were most of the jobs. Not all, which actually I wasn't thrilled about because, you know, first of all, it leads to jokes about, you know, Brezhnev style elections and other things. But I actually think, you know, electoral competition is good. I would say one of the disappointments during my two terms at AFSA is that, frankly, I ran unopposed twice, which you could take as a compliment and an endorsement. I can but, you know, I prefer democracy. I don't like it when we have U.S. House races that are unopposed. I don't like it but people have to run.

Q: Now, do you think you ran unopposed, and many of the vice presidents and so on ran unopposed, because of the morale in the Department? And just sort of overall, everybody had their heads down during the Trump administration?

RUBIN: I think there was some of that. I think, taking on AFSA at that point was seen as taking on a potential conflicted role, that people maybe in their earlier stage of their career were leery of doing because Barbara had already gotten, you know, Barbara had been on the PBS NewsHour and other you know, basically denouncing what happened to the Senior Foreign Service and the hiring freeze and all of that. I was not dissuaded from that because actually, I was frustrated and thought I might be able to help make a difference. But I was also at a point in my career where I had been an ambassador, I had been a DAS. I actually, pretty much, was at the limits of my ambition. Not to say I was ready to retire. But that didn't deter me. It may have deterred others because I think there was a perception that this would not necessarily be career enhancing, which is an old story with AFSA, and probably any union. Even if formally, you know, no one can retaliate or things but when you are being in a conflicted role, which sometimes you have to be, and it turned out we were.

But then anyway, the names came out and then I reached out to the other candidates, and said, "Anybody who wants to join the slate, please do". We ended up with most of the people, not all. Some preferred to stay unaffiliated. And _____ it was time to say goodbye and move back and ship all our stuff, and right back in the middle of I think, it was the hottest summer, it was 2019, in D.C. [Washington District of Columbia] in years. It was like a hundred and two for two weeks in a row. It was delightful. But whatever, we got off to what I think was a good start. But we already had this difficult time that Barbara had navigated with the hiring freeze and the purging of Senior Foreign Service officers.

This was the first time in anyone's memory that any secretary had used a mechanism in the Foreign Service Act that says that ambassadors returning from overseas have to get a new assignment within three months or they have to retire. And no one could recall a single instance in which someone had not been able to find another assignment if they weren't ready to retire. In this case, the secretary of the Department affirmatively used that provision to push people out, and actually said to many people, I know firsthand from people who've had to say to them, "You know, really the only thing we have for you is classification, declassification work. If you want to work on reviewing Secretary Clinton's emails, you can, but otherwise, we really don't have a job for you".

Q: _____ said to ambassadors or top _____.

RUBIN: Yes. Returning from overseas. Senior Foreign Service. And some of them gave answers that are not repeatable in an ADST [Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training] transcript.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: But some of them, quite a number of them, said, "In that case, I'm out. No way". And of course, there was not a single career assistant secretary in that administration so there was no possibility of coming back to do that. And they didn't fill most of the DAS jobs. They had acting DASes. They didn't even offer people DAS jobs. So, if you were an ambassador coming back, what are you going to do? I mean, you can try to get something at, you know, U.S. Institute of Peace or Georgetown or FSI [Foreign Service Institute]. Yes, you can and some people did. But some people really felt pushed out because they were. We lost a lot of our senior talent.

So, that had already happened when I was coming in and so, we knew we were in a tough spot. We knew that there were some fights ahead. One of them was this question of so-called "Schedule F", which was the idea that pretty much all the senior jobs in the federal government would no longer be treated as career protected jobs, but instead would be made at will jobs subject to removal at will or whim of the political leadership. And there were a bunch of other things I knew coming in were waiting for us, but we didn't see coming was the impeachment so that turned out to be a large part of the next couple years.

Q: Sure. Then one last quick question. You have spoken to Barbara Stephenson about succeeding her, did she have any other advice for you once you decided to go in?

RUBIN: Yeah, so I mean---

Q: I don't mean to, you know, look for a confidential---

RUBIN: No, no. I mean, I think she pretty much said to me, "Look, this is a critical time and it is not going to be easy". And she said, "One of the reasons, you know, I was looking for someone like you is I want somebody who is senior enough and is willing to

fight and not worry about consequences”. And I really felt that I was in that position and as a matter of fact, you know, I had just been promoted to career minister right before the election. And it turns out, in what was then ninety-seven years, I was the first career minister to run for president. So, literally the most senior in terms of rank, not in terms of age.

But she said, “You know, I know you well enough. We had worked together about twenty-five, thirty years before, so we really knew each other. We both worked for Tom Pickering. I actually officially succeeded her on Pickering’s staff, on key staff, so we knew each other forever. And she said, “You know, I have a sense that you can stand up to bullies and you can do what is right and not worry about consequences”. And I said, “You know, that is actually appealing”, both because by that point, we are talking late 2018, everybody was pretty worried.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: Things were bad. And yes, the hiring freeze had started to be lifted by Pompeo, but there were other things going on. So, in any event, you know, I said yes and it happened. Her advice was to be prepared to go to the mat and also, you know, be prepared to go public. And that was something that I was comfortable with as well, in all my various work and roles. She had done quite a bit of that. She had done a lot of media and it was very effective. And so, I said, “Yeah, that would be great to actually do a little public stuff”. We don't get to do much of that in our careers and that did turn out to be one of the best parts of the job, is being able to say what I think, unlimited topics and certain topics, but nonetheless, without clearance.

Q: Now, similarly here, as you come in. You were coming in the summer of 2018. That is typically---

RUBIN: 2019.

Q: I'm sorry, 2019. Right, right, right. Then as you came in, and of course, it was still the Trump administration, what was your top focus? What were the things you were, the top issues that you were focusing on.

RUBIN: So, I would say, the first issue was just staffing, hiring, recruitment, all of which were in really bad shape. And even though the hiring freeze had been lifted, we had so many jobs that had not been filled overseas. We had a crisis of morale with eligible family members. At one point I think, like half of the community liaison officer jobs overseas were vacant because that is very frequently an EFM [eligible family member] job and they had been frozen. So, we didn't have CLOs [community liaison officers], which, you know, in terms of morale is just terrible. And then, in terms of hiring for the Foreign Service, it had been really slow and they had intentionally put a freeze on. And we know what happens when you stop hiring, it creates the famous pig in the python, and we pay for it for thirty years.

So, that was number one. Number two was morale and trying to get people to stay, despite all. And this was a time when there were all sorts of bad things going on. We had an Iranian American who was pushed out of the International Organizations Bureau being accused of disloyalty, because of her ethnic origin. We had really all sorts of nasty situations, family situation, in the policy planning staff, like there's a lot less _____ are public, and trying to say to people, you know, no one is saying this is easy or whatever, but our country needs us and America needs a professional diplomatic corps, Foreign Service. We got to be long term and we just got to somehow stick this out.

Some people didn't. I heard from people who said, I'm leaving and that is that, there were a few ambassadors who left. I mean, there were some of them. But most people did what they thought was right, and for most people that was to stick it out. So, that was critical, but also to be clear that we would go bat for people, and if people felt they were being treated unfairly---and really to sort of ramp up AFSA's role as a defender of our members, which has always been there. But it varies depending on what the leadership is and what the circumstances are.

Q: So, then, a quick question about process and just sort of the internal organization, did you need to or were there any major changes in the way you organized the work in AFSA?

RUBIN: Not a lot. There was a dispute which Harry Kopp was writing about in his book. That was not something affecting me except the result affected me, and that is that there were some disagreements on the previous board in Barbara's second term over the prerogatives and authority of the president. And the by-law revision committee, which meets every time before our every two-year election, proposed some revisions that effectively reduced the power of the president, at least potentially. One of the things that it said is the president will not always automatically chair the governing board. The governing board has to choose to have the president chair every six months, and the governing board could choose to name someone else to run the governing board meetings. That the president does not have to coterminously be the chair of the board.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: And it is true that in most foundations or in associations, those are two separate roles but at AFSA, it had always been thus, you know, that the president chaired the board. I think that there were some interpersonal things that I don't particularly want to get into because it wasn't my thing, but those by-law amendments were approved. And so, coming in, you know, I essentially had to make the case for why I should chair the board as previous presidents had. Honestly, I didn't find it a hard sell. And in my three and a half years, almost four years, no one has challenged it. But it is there in the by-laws now. So, that was there.

There were also, I think, some issues about governance and following the by-laws. There were some areas where it was felt that things have been too loose in terms of the by-laws. I have always, you know, been big on rule of law and you know, I was raised both to be a

bit of a rebel but also to follow the rules unless I had a good reason. That was my mother especially. So, you know, I was fine with that. And actually, through all these past four years, I've been pretty insistent that we do what the by-laws say. We try to get them changed but we don't cut corners. That became difficult through COVID but I can talk about that.

Q: And here, just one quick question about by-law changes, that has to also be approved by the membership? By an active membership?

RUBIN: Yes.

Q: Okay, so that gets sent out to all the AFSA members all over the world, and okay.

RUBIN: It does and in theory, it could be done separately from the regular elections but it costs a lot of money. Because our elections are federally supervised and we have to hire an election firm to do them properly, thousands of dollars. So, the basic approach has always been---I don't know if we have ever done a special by-law amendment election. Basically, we do it every two years and we do it with the regular elections. And if you want to change the by-laws, you have to wait till the next election because we just can't afford it. But it could be done in between but the voters have to approve, yes.

Q: Okay. But even, as you mentioned, even with the changes to the by-laws, the board still was satisfied with you being president of the board and president of AFSA?

RUBIN: Yes, to this day, and I have passed the last lap so, I think so.

Q: Okay. Since you were coming in towards the tail end of the Trump administration, and you were dealing with the attempted cuts, the attempt to cut in staff budget, the push out of personnel. Were you still working with Congress to change that? To reverse it? To try to get more budget?

RUBIN: Oh, absolutely. I mean, people forget but the Trump administration, all budgets that they proposed, proposed cuts varying between twenty-two and thirty percent of the budget for the Foreign Service agencies. For State at one point, I think there was a proposed thirty-three percent cut, which, you know, anybody who has worked in the bureaucracy knows, there is no difference between thirty-three percent and hundred percent.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: You know, that is capital punishment. It is not possible to cut thirty-three percent of the bureaucracy. And we ramped up our Hill [Capitol Hill] efforts, which were going really well. Barbara had hired a truly superb legislative director from the Hill who is with us to this day, and she had come from the Republican side. She was a Republican staffer.

Q: Interesting.

RUBIN: And we worked really hard to---and it wasn't just us. I'm not claiming credit just for us because I think the Trump budgets were dead on arrival before anybody said anything. No way Congress was going to cut the State Department thirty-three percent. Not going to happen. But we pushed really hard, on a bipartisan basis, to get Congress to at the very least not cut, and in some cases, even get some small plus ups. And every year, that happened, you know, until the end of the Trump administration. Some of that happened under Barbara. Some of that happened in my first term.

And again, I am not claiming AFSA got Congress to overrule the president. There were a lot of players and it was meaningless exercise when OMB [Office of Management and Budget] issued those budgets, because no one ever thought that was realistic. But it could have been worse. And one of the things we were pushing Congress for was to mandate hiring, so that we would not have this long period without any foreign service hiring, which is a disaster. Both because we were terribly understaffed to begin with, and then, second of all, as you know, if it is not reasonably even over the years, then the whole system gets messed up.

Q: Right, right. Yeah. As you were working with Congress, Barbara, before you, reached out to a number of sister organizations to assist in approaching Congress, lobbying for the Foreign Service. Were you doing that as well with both the ones Barbara had found, but also others?

RUBIN: Yeah, it was mostly with the ones Barbara was working with. We already had a very strong relationship with the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, USGLC, Liz Schroyer, which is the best bipartisan lobby in Washington for foreign affairs and foreign assistance spending. And that continued and I met with Liz very early on. We had an excellent relationship with the Cox Foundation which continues to this day. A very close relationship with the Academy of American Diplomacy, Ron Neumann and company. And that continued, and I would say even intensified somewhat.

We had our network of former presidents called “the formers”. I had met with them before the election. Essentially, even though I was running unopposed, I wanted their blessing and I think I got it. But, you know, I made a point of saying, you know, I want to meet with you every few months, get your ideas, because, you know, some of that is showing respect for your illustrious predecessors. Some of that is actually, they have a lot of experience and a lot of ideas that are worth listening to. Not always but sometimes, you know, people can be out of touch in retirement and all that. But I found it was generally very helpful.

One of them was Tex Harris, who sadly left us about a year into my tenure. But I did have a relationship with him going back to, I think, the late ‘80s. And I always said he was one of the major reasons that I ran for this job. They showed a sixty minutes clip of Tex fighting against the *junta* (military government) in Buenos Aires in 1977. They showed that to our A-100 class and that was my introduction---and I mentioned this at Tex’s memorial service that I spoke at. Then when I was on the editorial board, I stayed

in touch with Tex the whole time. And when I ran for president, he was basically an informal adviser and mentor, as one of the other former presidents, but Tex especially. And I can say I felt his loss very, very much,

Q: I think many did. And this is also just a very interesting and distinctive aspect of AFSA that crops up in Harry Kopp's book, the first book, how potentially influential the retired presidents are both within---

RUBIN: I would say, can be very. In some cases, they come back to serve on the board.

Q: You are right.

RUBIN: So, John Naland for example, we jokingly call him a board member for life, which he could be because the by-laws say you can only do a particular position on the board for four terms, which is eight years. But it doesn't say anything about all told how many jobs you can do. So, John has been president, State vice president, secretary and now, retiree vice president. And he is now running for his fourth term as retiree vice president, I believe. So, it means he will have to switch to another job in two years if he wants to _____ else. But he is a very helpful presence because he's been president and he's been around since the '90s.

We also had several other former---Tom Boyatt, the former president who was one of the founders, was on the board until the end of Barbara's time, and came back. And there were several other presidents who have done that. But even if they are not on the board, you know, if they want to be engaged and involved, we draw on their involvement. But not everybody does. We have a few who basically said, been there, done that, you know, good luck, hope it goes well. But most of them are interested so we still have these meetings. During COVID, it became virtual. But I try to meet with them every, you know, three to six months. And meanwhile, correspond a lot, you know. And there are people like the people we call "the founders", which included Tex, but also Tom Boyatt and Bill Harrop. Both of them have been enormously influential and who I rely on and frequently consult.

Q: Yeah.

RUBIN: You know, do I have to? No. But it would be stupid not to.

Q: Yeah. If this is good enough in terms of reviewing how you came in, how you were organizing it, should we go on to COVID now? Because that's a major effect on AFSA.

RUBIN: _____ it doesn't matter in terms of timeline. I think impeachment came before COVID.

Q: Okay, yeah. Go ahead, go right at it.

RUBIN: Not that the timeline has to be exact in the interview but it did, I'm pretty sure. I have to check the calendar but _____. So, you know, "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition!", to quote Monty Python. And so, yes, by the time I came in, people were talking about impeaching President Trump. But no one had on their radar, including me, that this could involve the Foreign Service.

Q: Right, sure.

RUBIN: It's _____, I'm sure we thought of it as you know, as Americans we had opinions and all that, and then all of a sudden one day, we found out that the major charge in the first impeachment process was Ukraine.

Q: Yeah.

RUBIN: And very quickly, we realized that we had a whole bunch of members and colleagues who were about to be subpoenaed. And it was a holy shit moment for them and for us. I remember having this discussion early with our executive committee of the board and people were really stunned. And then we said, "What are we going to do?". And I said, you know, "We go to battle stations. This is it". This is why we get paid the big bucks to be, you know, AFSA is it is, you know. And then somebody mentioned, it wasn't me, but somebody mentioned we didn't take care of the China Hands and we didn't take care of the people caught up in the "lavender scare", and so, we have that history which we have apologized for to some extent. But this time, and I said, you know, you are preaching to the converted. I don't know what this is going to be but we got to be there for our folks in the Foreign Service.

And so, there began about two years of intense effort and we made some decisions very early on. One was that we had to adhere to the by-laws that stated that we could only individually help members of AFSA who had been members for six months or more. And the only exception to that are new members. But that had been put in the by-laws about ten years before when it was realized that people were quitting and then as soon as they needed AFSA, they would rejoin and start paying dues again. And so, that is about a decade ago, the by-laws were changed to say six month waiting period unless you are brand new.

And we discussed it and did a quick check of the names we knew of people who were likely to be subpoenaed and realized some of them are not members and we just said, we have got to follow the by-laws. We are, you know, collectively we will defend the Foreign Service. We will defend the principle but individually, if we are going to help people, they have to be members. Because otherwise, why should somebody join? And anyway, this whole impeachment thing was about rule of law and we have to follow our own by-laws, full stop the discussion, so that came up. Then we had our wonderful AFSA legal team, Sharon Papp and her by then fairly large staff, scrub the rules and we realized that if our people got called up to the Hill, they were pretty much on their own because it seemed apparent that the Trump administration was not going to represent them when they were witnesses.

And according to Sharon, the federal ethics rules said that we couldn't raise money for their defense. We couldn't help them get pro bono legal defense because they were not allowed to take pro bono legal assistance. It was considered a gift of services by the Office of Government Ethics. And we couldn't really---we were allowed to represent them ourselves but our legal team did not have the bandwidth or the experience to accompany someone up to a congressional hearing on live TV. That is not what our lawyers do. So, a couple of people went out and got their own lawyers right away. And we counseled our people that you are not allowed to ask for or accept pro bono assistance, and that was a very difficult moment because people said, well, you know, "This could destroy me, financially". And we said, "We know, and that is why we are going to try to get this fixed".

So, we then, first of all, went public and said, you know, the U.S. government has to help our members if they are called to testify because they need legal representation. And then, we reached out to career colleagues in the Office of the Legal Adviser at State and the Office of Government Ethics, whom we actually knew from previous litigation of cases and said, "This is a terrible situation. We've got these people who are facing ruin because you won't let them take pro bono assistance, which we think in many cases we could get because this is a very high profile case. There will be lawyers who want to do this".

We also thought we could raise money for them. We had a legal defense fund. It was pretty small at that point and this is what it was for, but I said, "We could raise more money in this case but you say we can't do that". Then, the secretary of state said that State will not represent these people when they go up on the Hill. So, what are they supposed to do? And to the credit---I am not going to name names---but there were some very decent patriotic colleagues who said, you know, basically, "That is right. This is not right. And we shouldn't have ethics rules designed to make things better that actually destroy people". Which it could have because what we soon discovered is the kind of lawyers that they needed were mostly starting at about \$1,000 an hour. And most of those lawyers do not work alone, they bring associates with them at about \$400 an hour.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: So, it was not wrong to say you might be looking at \$2,000 an hour for prep, as well as hearings. And pretty soon we're talking real money. And then, we had this very difficult moment where people started coming back to us and saying, "You know, AFSA recommended we get professional liability insurance", and we did. And in some cases, they said to us, "We got it from the company you recommended many years ago". We had ceased recommending any company by then but it was true to say that once upon a time, we did. And they were refusing to cover us and they were saying that we were not the subjects of the investigation. We were not in any legal jeopardy. We were just witnesses and therefore, we don't need representation and they won't pay.

Q: Wow.

RUBIN: So, this was turning into a nightmare and meanwhile, we were up to about twelve members who were caught up in this. So, we basically wrapped it up, and I will say we claim credit because it really was us, but to the credit of the career people in OGE and State L [Legal], but it was mostly OGE [Office of Government Ethics] that got the rules changed, and what we said is we are their union, we represent them, we defend them, so can we raise money or can we accept pro bono assistance from lawyers and then, provide it to our members as a benefit of membership? And they came back and said, “Yes, you can”.

Q: That is a fascinating ruling.

RUBIN: And by the way, that ruling now applies to all federal employees going forward. It has to be through their union. Then, we got the legal adviser at State to go to the secretary and say, “Actually, according to the regs, we really should be helping with legal fees because these people were doing, what they were doing was their official duty”. This is not a personal case. They are not being charged with anything. They are having to testify because of being on official duty at the time. And I imagine it was reluctant on the part of the political leadership, but they came back, I think they consulted DOJ [Department of Justice] and DOJ said, “We'll pay up to the statutory cap”, which was something like \$350 or \$400 an hour government ____, which was by no means enough but it was better than a kick in the head. But it was also a very important principle that you don't hang people out to dry when they were doing their jobs for the American people.

So, within a few months, we made some real progress. And then we hit the road and put out an appeal and said, “We've got these patriotic public servants who need help”. And it's kind of, if you look back, there was quite a bit of media about it. It kind of caught on like wildfire and the short version is, within about three months, we had raised three quarters of a million dollars, cash.

Q: Very quick question. I mean, I don't mean to be flippant but did you check to see if GoFundMe or any of those things would have been able to be used?

RUBIN: Well, only by us. That was the key point. Individual federal employees were definitely prohibited from that so they carved out that we got, “could AFSA use GoFundMe?”. Yeah, we could have, I think as the union. But we had our own mechanisms and we heard from, you know, former secretaries of state, we heard from former members of the Senate and Congress. We heard from people all across the country who said, _____. Some of the notes that came with the checks were amazing. And there were a few people who said, “I lived through the McCarthy period and I never thought I would see that again and I want to be sure it doesn't happen again”.

So, within a few months, we had three quarters of a million dollars. And then, the board had to decide how do we handle this amount of money and do we keep it all in cash? Do we invest it? Lots of questions, but more importantly, what we said is now that we can

get *pro bono* representation, we are going to try to do that for our members. But in cases of people who have already incurred legal bills because they had to move fast, we will cover all their legal bills that they have incurred, if they are members. And then, we went public defending our members saying, you know, nobody wants to be in this position. Because what happened was, the next step was that the president of the United States, through the secretary of state, prohibited our members from testifying under subpoena. And then, the impeachment committee made very clear that that was not an option, that if you are subpoenaed and you fail to appear, that is actually a felony. And there were separate statutes saying that federal employees had a legal obligation to cooperate with congressional investigations and failure to do so carried criminal penalties.

So, we then had to give our members the painful advice that we think you have to disregard the instructions from your chain of command up to the president and comply with the legal subpoena, because there is no question it is legal. Because otherwise, you are putting yourself in jeopardy. Nobody knew if Congress would take it out on a federal employee and indict them or something. It might not have happened but nonetheless, it was pretty clear. But more importantly, a lot of the people felt themselves you know, but all they were asking me to do is tell the truth and that is something I want to do. That is something I have to do. It is an obligation of my oath. So then, we were in this situation and I did a lot of interviews and things, trying to explain to the public, you know, “Yes, the president and secretary of state told them not to cooperate, but actually, legally, they have to. And this is painful and nobody, none of them wanted to be in this position.

It was stressful. I mean, we had people who were really freaking out, frankly. Terrifying. And then the fact that it was all on live TV, terrifying. But everybody, you know, showed up. And then the best part of it, which we were still hearing, when I travel around the country, I still hear people saying, “Wow, I watched your colleagues in those hearings and they made me proud to be an American. That was so impressive”. And it was, frankly. It was one of the more inspiring moments of my career. And I happen to know a lot of them very, very well personally, but not all of them. But kind of blew me away too, but scary as heck.

Q: Yeah, yeah. I mean, as you say, unlike anything since the '50s.

RUBIN: And Alex Vindman was not Foreign Service, he was military. He was Army. When he gave the famous testimony where his Soviet foreign father said, “I am really worried for your safety”, and Alex said, “Dad, this is America. Nothing's going to happen to me”. Well, nothing horrific happened to him but it ended his career. He had to retire as a lieutenant colonel without making colonel, which is not like, you know, Stalin. I agree, I am not making that case. But nonetheless, he assuredly would have made for colonel if he stayed in the Army. It was clear that the White House would not forward his promotion to Congress.

So, things happened. Thankfully, in the Foreign Service, none of the people who testified have suffered any, I would say directly, relatable harm. As a matter of fact, George Kent is now the ambassador in Estonia and got through confirmation without significant

problems, even though his testimony was ____ about President Biden's son, and some very awkward situations. But some people retired who might not have---I don't know if Masha Yovanovitch [Marie Yovanovitch] would have stayed in the service if none of this had happened, but I think she might have. She had not reached her time in class but at that point, I think she just couldn't take any more. I won't speak for her, she speaks for herself a lot.

But, you know, there were consequences. But nonetheless, at the end of the day, this was a very tough moment. But I think, both for AFSA and for the Foreign Service, it ended up being a moment in history that I think we should remember. I do claim some credit for our team in AFSA but I give a lot of credit to all of the people who helped, including our career colleagues in the legal advisors office and OGE. You know, I really think without them, this would have been impossible. And then for our members themselves, who rose to the occasion despite the fact that most of them were scared to death and didn't want to do this.

Q: Sure. Absolutely. So anyway, that worked out well for a crisis that essentially happened as you come into office, but I did want to then go on to COVID because it affected the organization. You know, needing to now make huge changes in the way the workplace is and how you reach members, and everything really.

RUBIN: Yeah, so, speaking of the Spanish Inquisition, I mean, nobody saw COVID coming and unlike this impeachment situation, it was by no means unique to the Foreign Service. That's obvious. But, you know, we did have some unusual angles to this. One of them is, you know, there aren't many other parts of the U.S. government except military, and there aren't very many other organizations at all that have people scattered across the globe, in just about every country, usually with families. And also, you know, this came at the same time that we've had this hiring freeze and the budget crisis. And so, when COVID hit, there were a whole bunch of challenges. I mean, one was representing the Foreign Service and our members, trying to figure out how people were going to be able to keep working, get their jobs done, not die, which we forget. I think people have forgotten but at the time, that seemed like a realistic risk.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: And it was, and we lost some people actually. Thankfully, not many. Then there were the unique issues that, you know, immediately, air travel shut down worldwide. There were multiple questions there, first of all, evacuating dependents and non-essential employees from posts that didn't have adequate medical care. How do you do that when the airlines are shutting down and the airports are shutting down. So, we ended up pushing very hard, working with the State Department to get charter flights set up to bring people home with family members. A difficult situation because in just about every case, we left people behind who were essential to keep our embassies and consulates running, even if we had already declared there wasn't adequate medical care there.

So, there was a lot of stress going on. Then the question with the domestic workforce, you know, how are they going to make this happen? And while telework had existed and had been gradually growing and all that, it was still very limited. Unfortunately, there had been some big mistakes made. So, one of the big mistakes was that the Trump administration, I think under Tillerson, cut the budget line that was intended to enable passport adjudicators to adjudicate passports remotely. And, you know, with passports, there is always a physical piece that you have to do physically but most of that is done in Portsmouth, at the National Passport Center. The hard part, the steps are adjudication, most of which can be done online but only with special software and scanners and other things for security.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: And there had been a plan to make that possible remotely. They basically said, “Why would we need to adjudicate passports remotely”. And so, they cut it. And then, when COVID hit, there was no ability to adjudicate passports remotely and people mostly could not come in so, as we all know, what happened is passport production shut down for a very long time. It created a massive backlog. But even for everybody else, there was no readiness. And then we immediately got into the question, what about hiring? And the Trump administration's initial position, which I think represented the position of most of the career HR [human resource] people is, well, we are just going to have to wait this out because we can't bring people on board remotely. Never done that and there are things they have to do in person like swear an oath, and so forth. And there is training that really has to be done in person. So, we are just going to stop hiring until the pandemic is over.

And we said, “Who knows when this pandemic is going to be over?” Obviously, we all hoped maybe a maximum of six months but you don't know that, and if we don't hire now, and first of all, all these people we've made offers to are screwed. Many of them have turned down other jobs or graduate school, and now they can't join. Some of them have given up their leases and you know, they moved. In some cases, people have already moved to D.C. [District of Columbia] right before COVID started. And we said, second of all, if we don't hire, we are going to be in one of those situations again where we had nobody to do the entry level jobs. And Consular Affairs was very concerned about, you know, the entry level consulate positions.

So, we did research and reached out to OPM [Office of Personnel Management] and discovered actually that the federal government has the authority to hire remotely, that swearing people in remotely was completely legal. There was no impediment. So, we basically went back and said, “You can do this”. And the answer came back, “Well, we can't do it because we have never done it”. And we said, “Well, no, that is no reason you can't do it. That just means you have never done it”. You can't do it if it is illegal but if it is legal, you can do it.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: And that went back and forth, and I would say to the credit of the deputy secretary of state, Steve Biegun [Stephen Biegun], who was somebody I had known for a long time, he really went to bat on this and helped make it happen. And I give him credit for that because it was huge. And lo and behold, we started hiring, not just new generalist officers but specialists and DS [Diplomatic Security Service] classes and consular fellows, doing it all remotely. And truth be told, it was not great in the sense that it is not the same experience as orientation and training in person. There were things that couldn't be done remotely like consular training, the ConGen [basic consular course] course, so that was a crisis because until we could get people to FSI in person, we just couldn't send new consular officers overseas. But since we were shutting down most of our visa operations anyway, there was some time there. But more importantly, that managed to happen.

Then, the next thing that came up is people said, "You know, I hadn't arranged child care because my kids are in school and I knew what my working hours were, and now, school shut down. I am working from home. I couldn't get a babysitter if I wanted to because they are not available. In any way during COVID, nobody is going to come to my house. Daycare centers are shut. How am I supposed to do my job with a crying baby in the background?". And they said, "We need some help here". So, this happened in other agencies with other federal unions. This later became a real broad push. But this was something we went to the Department and said, people need some time to manage their lives. And, you know, they're giving you some time remotely that they would have spent on commuting anyway because that was a---but you got to give them some time. So, we said, "How about ten hours a week, twenty hours per pay period, admin leave if they can show a need for it".

And we got it and that was in effect throughout the pandemic. And truth be told, you know, most people didn't take the whole twenty hours per pay period and some people actually kind of worked during their admin leave. But it took some stress off and it gave them some flexibility. You know, people also had to learn to do meetings with babies on people's laps or with dogs and cats, you know, because---and that is not just the Foreign Service, that is how it was. And no, you couldn't say to somebody to get a babysitter. No, you couldn't. It was not an option. And not just babysitters but you know, elderly parents. I mean, all the different needs that people had. You know, sick relatives. So, that was something we felt really strongly about.

And then, the question was how do we manage remote work? And again, the Foreign Service is not totally unique but the fact that so many people do classified work became a real issue. So then, the question became how do we fairly work out duty rosters and you know, if it is a bureau that does a lot of classified work, can we rotate in the office and we don't have a lot of people there spreading germs, but at the same time, somebody is reading the classified and so on. And again, Deputy Secretary Biegun was a real hero in this regard and pushed very hard to come up with ways, along with then Director General Carol Perez. Because equity became an issue very quickly. People would say how come so and so gets to stay home all five days and I have to come in two days a week. And it was hard to come in, among other things.

You know, most of the services in the Department shut down. There was no food for a long time. Then there was this whole push for cleaning, but you know, people would say they promised me cleaning supplies but never got them. Masks. The Department was supposed to supply masks but masks were in short supply. This later became acute when the vaccine came along. And then the question was, how do we get the vaccine out to all our posts in the field and how do we do that equitably? And do we inoculate, do we vaccinate the local staff, family members? A line ended up being drawn. American family members and local staff but not local staff family because there were just too many people.

But then, you know, some posts got it earlier than others. You know, this is what happens in a crisis. Eventually, med rose to the occasion and got a vaccine to everybody but it was a difficult six months. Meanwhile back here then, people were saying, you know, "I want to get my vaccine at State because I can't get an appointment". And the answer basically was we are only doing essential personnel, you know. Get in line at CVS, but we had to help people navigate that. But meanwhile, the point you raised is also how AFSA functioned through all this. So, we immediately faced some real legal challenges.

One of them was our by-laws. So, the by-laws say that we have to have a board meeting every month, twelve times a year in person. And it says that only votes taken in person count, and it also says that no board member can miss four out of twelve board meetings without being potentially expelled by the rest of the board. Although I don't think that has ever happened. But nonetheless, we had a situation where we knew we couldn't meet in person. And early on that was a total _____. We didn't want people coming in. But we also had a situation where we couldn't take votes. So, this is where I would give some credit to Sharon Papp of our legal team, who basically did a lot of legal work to establish that our first legal obligation was to follow the emergency orders of the mayor of the District of Columbia, which said that meeting in person was illegal.

And that overrode our bylaws temporarily so that we could have board meetings on Zoom. However, they said, we will eventually have to re-ratify every single vote taken in person when we can meet again in person, that these are provisional interim votes but they don't have _____ character until, because that is what the bylaws say. So, that is what we did for about a year. We met remotely. And then when we finally started getting back together, we would do a long list of all the votes that had been taken previously and re-ratify them. Thankfully, no one said, I want to go over each one. You know, vote by vote, and we litigate it because that would have killed us. And we continued doing that really until the end of the official emergency in D.C. But we did start bringing people back.

One issue was member services. How we would manage to be responsive, and the thing that really hurt us was the collapse of the U.S. Postal Service, which many people in this country experienced. And I don't think we were the only country to have a postal service that collapsed but it definitely did. And it definitely did in D.C. So, initially, we said we will just come in once a week and pick up all the mail and we discovered that basically,

the mail wasn't there. And we were constantly hearing from people saying, "I sent a check to the Legal Defense Fund six weeks ago. I have never gotten confirmation". We didn't have the check. It was just missing, all the time. So, then we said, "Okay, we are going to get a post office box and we are going to have all the mail forwarded to the post office box. In theory, a great idea. But how good was the post office in forwarding the mail? I can tell you from personal experience during COVID, not. So, we probably lost a thousand pieces of mail, including a lot of checks during this time.

But we also had members saying, you know, how am I going to get answers to my emails, my phone calls? So, we had to set up a phone system with phone forwarding. We had to set up duty rosters to respond to member emails. And there were a lot of, you know, personal crises in terms of evacuations. And one thing that we are still dealing with is the whole question of pet shipment and that was totally hard during COVID. If it was hard to get people back to the U.S., imagine what it was like for people and in some cases, people did leave their pets behind when they evacuated. Thankfully, not too many.

And then, we had to work out with our staff how we were going to function and how we were going to oversee the work. And I am proud to say, overall, aside from the mail which didn't go well and was mostly not our fault but whatever, checks were lost, things like that. That was when we started saying to people, "Please, pay your membership by deduction from your pension or your salary. Please don't send us checks because we are losing them". And that did help. We've had many fewer people doing that now. We also had a crisis with our mailings, including the Foreign Service Journal, because we have pouch privileges, which is a critical thing for us so that we don't have to pay to ship the magazine to posts overseas. But the pouch room went to minimize during COVID because they had to reduce staffing and all the flights shut down, so they said to us, you know, "Honestly, no. We can't ship several, six thousand copies a month of the Foreign Service Journal. Sorry".

So, we ended up having to reach out to people and say it is available online and we are keeping track. And if you want your magazines, we are just going to save them for you. And we will send them all out when we can. And that is what we did. Gradually, there was an effort, which I understand from the admin bureau and State to say, maybe we should revisit your pouch privileges. And we said, "No. This is part of our labor management agreement. And for us to have to pay postage, which we do pay domestically, but to pay postage to send every magazine to every member overseas, whether to pay to send it to the pouch room or to send it to DPO [diplomatic post office], whatever, no, we can't afford that. And anyway, in writing, you have to do this".

And to their credit, once the crisis was over, they started sending our magazines again via pouch. But it wasn't just the magazines. It is our fundraising solicitations, it's all of that. And other organizations like _____. I mean, this was a crisis. Then we had to deal with people getting sick and we did have people getting sick, and a few people lost family members and you know. And again, this is not unique to AFSA or the Foreign Service, it was the whole world. But it was hard and I shut down most of my travel, initially all of my travel, which is a big part of the job. But we also, you know, went all virtual in

dealing with the Hill, which was a problem because we literally couldn't get as much done on Zoom. I mean, I did a lot of Zooms with members of Congress, senators, their staffs but just not the same. They were frequently in their districts and distracted and it is not the same as being in their office or going to their reception. So, that was something. And then, just then working through the return to work issues, which again I worked very closely with Deputy Secretary Biegun on and with our other agencies. Our vice president worked very closely with the other agencies, you know, basically on the issue of getting the job done, which honestly at the start of COVID, it wasn't getting done in many respects but that is because nobody's job was getting done. Dealing with the question of classified and the concerns which were legitimate, that there was too much classified work being done on unclassified systems because of COVID. But you know, it is a bonanza for hostile intelligence services.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: And then equity, which just always comes up. We can't get away from it. And so, trying to establish broad guidelines that would apply to everyone so that you didn't have bureaus being seen as really supportive and helpful and bureaus being seen as mean and unsupportive. And some of that happened. You know, there were initially a few supervisors who said, you know, the first moment everybody can be back, everybody's got to be back. And, you know, to the credit, even before the change of administration, even under the Trump administration, they said, "No, that is not right". You know, things have changed and we've got to figure out how to make this work, but we are not just going to go back to status quo ante without any discussion.

On the other hand, you know, there were some bureaus that said everybody can stay remote, long term, and the answer is no, they can't actually. And so, we are still hashing that out to this day and we are still hashing it out at AFSA because you know, there is no going back. You know, where we are at AFSA now is that most people come in at least three days a week. Truth be told, not necessarily for a full eight-hour day because most jobs in this country no longer have a full eight-hour day in person.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: You know, we don't keep track but most people are. Some people are coming in every day because they like it. Some people have special reasons and we are flexible if they are good reasons, but most people are back part of the time. But this is, going forward, it's going to be an issue.

Q: Sure. All of those, I mean, in every way, AFSA has had to adapt and adapt permanently to what happened as a result of COVID.

RUBIN: On COVID? So, I would say, yeah, one of the things, and we can talk about the transition. I know you want to talk about the transition to the new administration. I mean, there was a change in emphasis when the Biden administration came in, in the sense that they were, I would say, predisposed to be more flexible about remote work and flex time,

which was partly an ideological point of view, partly reflected relationship with federal unions and all of that. And sometimes, we found ourselves in the surprising and sometimes awkward position of advocating to have more people come back sooner, which really was our view, both for equity reasons but also because we need to get the job done. People are getting paid. But truth be told, you know, our official position which I think is borne out by experience, certainly at AFSA but I think in the federal government is actually most people have put in more hours during COVID than they did before. Certainly, most people have not taken their commute time and used it to go play golf.

In reality, I don't think there were very many people who didn't earn their salaries, or who aren't remotely. I think that is something in the economy we've all learned. That said, you know, there were feelings of unfairness in some cases, but also on issues like consulate work, on getting those visa appointments scheduled, on getting the passports issued. And we do have members in the passport office, although they are mostly civil service. But we just felt very strongly that, you know, in terms of support for the Foreign Service, we do have to be seen to be getting the job done for the American people and we do have national security interest. So, there were a couple of times when, you know, they were saying initially in the transition, you'll be pleased to know we are not in a rush to bring people back. And we were saying, "Well, we are not saying rush but you know, actually, a lot of people want to come back and we need to have people come back. Not status quo ante, not, you know, like nothing has changed. We get that but---so, that was an interesting moment.

Q: Yeah. So, now that we are on to the transition, again, what were the most important things that you began with the Biden administration in terms of professionalization, advocacy and so on?

RUBIN: Well, just to close out the Trump administration which segues into that, you know, by the end things had gotten very tense and unpleasant, with some exceptions. Partly because with all of the impeachment stuff, you know, despite the fact that we had won the victories on *pro bono* and raising money and all that, there was no question that the president and the White House and Secretary Pompeo and the political leadership essentially saw the people who testified as disloyal, and essentially saw the Foreign Service and the Civil Service as disloyal, is the deep state, as the enemy. And if you have any doubt about that, just read Secretary Pompeo, his book. It came out a few months ago, where he explicitly says we are disloyal, left wing, traders. I mean, he quite says that. He almost says that. Actually, it was pretty clear.

So, the mood had gotten bad and a number of people had been fired or quit in disgust. One of them was Ambassador Mike McKinley, who had been Pompeo's senior advisor, who ended up quitting over the impeachment stuff. So, it was tense. I will say there were some real exceptions. One of them, both deputy secretaries, John Sullivan under Tillerson and Pompeo. He later went on to be ambassador in Moscow. And then Steve Beigun, who were truly supportive and they just cared about doing the right thing for our country and treating our people well to enable them to defend our national interests. I want to give

them credit because both of them were so helpful in a very difficult time. But overall, the mood was very sour.

So, coming in when the election happens. And frankly, there was a lot of talk during the election that if President Trump were reelected, we were going to have an exodus. Partly because such a high percentage of the workforce was eligible to retire in a full pension, both Civil Service and Foreign Service. Partly because it was the end of the baby boom. And then second of all, because there were people who essentially said, "This is hard but I am going to hold out. But if you tell me it is going to be another four years of this". It is not to say they were Democrats or partisan at all, you know. Some of them were but a lot of them were not, and nobody that I knew acted in any partisan way. It was just that, you know, being treated like the enemy is not right. But it also is pretty dispiriting. And then, things, you know, if you cared about the U.S.' role in Europe, in NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], and all of the whole post-war structure that was being threatened, it was hard.

So, when Biden won, you know, I think there was---again, among you know, people who might have been Republicans their whole lives---but there was still among most career people, I think, a sigh of relief that things were going to change. And, you know, there were some cautionary voices saying don't expect this to disappear from memory. It happened and there are consequences. No, we are not going back to 2015. No, we're not. We can't. 2016. And we didn't. So, I will say, you know, what we knew coming in, because a lot of us knew the senior people who were being named, as it was generally a group of people we had worked with before in the Obama administration. In some cases, in the Clinton administration. That was basically, I mean, I first worked with Secretary Blinken in 1993 in the European Bureau front office. I was the special assistant, he was the speech writer. And I am not alone in that.

I mean, we really, you know, this team was well known. And of course, you know, people who don't think well of us or them will say, you know, this is _____ and it wasn't. But we knew these to be people who did not wish us ill and who were generally approachable and, you know, decent people to work with. Because we have experienced it. So, there were a lot of raised expectations and you know, what I would say, realistically, some of them were met and some of them were not. And that is always the case. So, you know, people have---you know, somebody just asked me today how many assistant secretaries of state now are career? And I said, "About half". And they said, "How many were in the previous administration?". And I said, "Zero".

Q: Right.

RUBIN: So then, if you ask the question, is half good enough? We used to have more than half, like if you go back to the Reagan administration, the first Bush administration. Even I think the first Clinton term. There were well over half, as close to two thirds of the assistant secretaries were career. So, was half good enough? Well, compared to what? Compared to zero? You know, it's progress. It is good. Is it as good as it could be or it used to be? No, but, you know, this is the reality that we're dealing with. So, there are a

lot of questions like that on ambassadorial nominations. We have the highest percentage of political nominees in modern history under Trump. We are now back to sort of historical norms. We think we'll hit two thirds career by the end of Biden's first term, this term. And historically, that's about what it's been.

So, what do we say about that? There are people who used to say, and we had some AFSA presidents who would say it should not be more than ten percent. And my attitude has always been, well, good luck with that. You know, from your lips to God's ears, the Yiddish expression goes. "Okay, I'm with you. Make it happen and I will give you an attaboy". That would be great. And then they say none of them should be donors because that is what the Foreign Service Act says. And my attitude is, well, it does say that and you know, if you want to go try to prove that anybody got a nomination because they gave money, good luck. And actually, you know, the members of Congress, you talk to them, they would be really sympathetic to that argument.

So, the thing we focused on, we did very much under Trump where it was more difficult but it is still an issue is, the Foreign Service Act also says that people nominated for senior positions have to be qualified. And of course, it doesn't say what qualified meets. And so, the answer has always been, it is in the eye of the beholder. It is like the Supreme Court obscenity standard. So, you know, I like to say, when somebody is really qualified, we know it. And when somebody is really not qualified, we know it. And that middle ground, you know, we'll go try to define it. In any way, this has been going on since at least FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt], for a fact.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: FDR had campaign donors who he appointed to the best _____. You know, you can look it up. So, you know, are we going to change that? No. So, we just focus on, you know, first of all qualifications. Are they qualified? And again, it is a loose standard but you can say when it is really not the case. And then, the second thing is how they do the job and treat our people. So, one push we made with this administration and I'm glad to say it is better as we had seen under Trump and some previous administrations, I _____ Obama to some extent, and Bush 43 [George W. Bush] political appointee ambassadors who really didn't spend much time at post. Some of them had their own private planes. And they basically wanted the title but they didn't want to do the work, and that is not okay. They got a job to do for the American people and our people need them to provide leadership.

So, there were some rules passed over previous administrations but under Trump, they were just not enforced. And one of them is you basically have to be present at post about eleven months a year. I think it is twenty-eight work days away so that is like six weeks away from post is allowed without special permission. Under the Trump administration, a lot of the ambassadors didn't even ask. They just violated it willfully knowing that nothing would happen. So, when this administration came in, we said, you can't hold our career people to a different standard. If you are going to impose this, we will literally go

public if we need to, as we did during COVID with a few ambassadors overseas who broke the rules themselves, and we went on TV.

And we said, we are going to call them out because they are getting paid by the American people. And frankly, even if they give their salary back to the Treasury because they don't need it, I don't care. They have a job and they got to do it. I would say that is much better, and there are a good number of currently serving ambassadors, political appointee ambassadors who do have their own jets. Quite a number. And so, they personally don't know what it is to deal with the Fly America Act and the pet shipment restrictions, and all the things that their staff has had to deal with and that career ambassadors have to deal with as well, because ambassadors generally don't get a break.

But, okay, we are not going to say they can't use their planes to fly, you know. There are just things we can do and there are things we can't do. So, that kind of thing came up but then more importantly, in the transition and this is really the meat of it, we had high hopes and they were raised by the administration themselves in terms of the things that the president and the vice president said during the campaign about the federal workforce and stopping Schedule F, which had been issued in an executive order by President Trump, although not applying to the Foreign Service. They kind of missed us.

Q: Interesting, okay.

RUBIN: And they promised not to miss us next time. There are several members on the Hill who have pointed that out and said if we are in power again, ____ the Foreign Services included. But nonetheless, they had also said, you know, we want to work cooperatively. It is true that some of the big federal unions supported Biden-Harris. We obviously did not because we don't endorse and we are apolitical, but AFGE [American Federation of Government Employees] did and NAFI [nonappropriated fund instrumentalities] did. So, you know, they had a constituency to be responsive to. And then, the vice president did this council on federal employment and they issued a charter and among other things the charter said, there should be advanced consultation on all major decisions. No *fait accompli* (a thing that already happened) presented to federal unions, regular structured dialogue, all stuff that's good. Some of which we have seen in previous Democratic administrations and even going back to the times of sanity in previous Republican administrations, but not under Trump certainly.

And I would say one of the ongoing challenges is, with this group of people who I think wish the federal workforce well and generally have been respectful, there has been very little of that kind of serious constructive engagement. And way too much, way too many *fait accompli*, way too many precooked decisions, which they promised not to do. And in some cases, they are violating our labor framework agreements, our agency agreements, whatever the various agencies have and we can actually take them to court. And we do sometimes and we file unfair labor practice. But we prefer not to do that, we prefer to hash it out. In some cases, you know, there are issues that they have the right to change. So, this came up in regard to the Foreign Service entry process. The State, in changes that we made to the written exam and the oral exam, that they say they meant to brief us on

before they rolled it out. And it was the contractor who failed to brief us. It is true that we have no negotiating rights over recruitment and admission because they are not our members until they are in the bargaining unit, which is when they get their first day at work. But nonetheless, that was sour.

And to be honest, I was in a position, again it is good to have someone like me in this position in the sense that I could throw a tantrum, and I did within reasonable limits. But I threw a tantrum. I went public, I went to the media. And I said, in principle, we might agree with all this but you know, not consulting us is really not right. And it is not what they promised. We got apologies, we got promises that it wouldn't happen again. Okay, that is all I could get. But again, somebody who wasn't as unconcerned about future consequences might not have thrown the public tantrum, which is something I also did over the lack of support for our local staff in Kyiv when we evacuated Embassy Kyiv a year ago. I ended up on CBS News and had a lot of people from the Department mad at me. And I said, you know, "We told you. We have this petition from all of our senior FSN [foreign service nationals], almost half the one thousand plus saying you're abandoning us". And we said, you know, "We know these people. They are totally loyal and dedicated, how could you not take care of them?"

And the answer was, well, the junior employees didn't sign it. They don't think we're abandoning them. Really? Are you trying to make that case? So, I went public because I could, so you know, occasionally, it is important to be able to throw tantrums. And it is actually, if you're polite and strategic and respectful, it can be very---you don't want to do it often---then you become a high maintenance pain in the ass. But occasionally, pick your moment and so, we did that over the entry process and we ended up mostly endorsing it.

And then, lastly on the subject I would say, you may have seen just yesterday, or it was Friday or yesterday, they rolled out the settlement agreement on disabled applicants to the Foreign Service at State. And that was something to their credit. They seem to have learned a lesson and they extensively consulted us and talked to us, and the lawyers briefed us every step of the way. And we are in a position to endorse it and to support it, and to say that our concerns on equity. And so, you know, sometimes you can make things better. But I will say, you know, if you ask people and you probably have these conversations. You know, how's morale? How are things going? And you know, if the answer is, "Well, compared to the previous administration, it is much better". You can't argue with that because it's just a simple fact. But the standard line everybody says is that cannot be the standard, and it can't. And if you are like me and you have been doing this for thirty-eight years, then you remember how things used to be different.

And so, in comparison, if you want to go backwards, don't just compare it to the previous administration. Let's go back several decades and morale was better. It was measured _____ . And so, you know, that I would say now in terms of our work, in terms of our surveys of our members, our advocacy, you know, it all relates to recruitment and retention. You know, is this work that people want to do? Yes. Then all the other stuff from COVID and you know, remote work, all that comes into it. So, it is very

complicated but I would say that's where we sort of ended up with this administration. And there has been some real progress, I wouldn't deny it. But there have also been some dashed expectations, partly because they were so high.

Q: Formally, there used to be a kind of tool to measure morale which was the yearly survey of satisfaction with your job within the different executive departments.

RUBIN: Yeah, they are still doing it.

Q: Do you recall where State Department is now?

RUBIN: Yeah, so, I mean, for years, we were one, two or three. And for the past five years or so, we've been near the bottom. I think we may be back up to like number eight this year. I think it has gone up, but we are not one, two or three anymore. And they know it and then State does its own surveys of employees. There is a federal employee satisfaction survey that OPM does but then State, the secretary has got his own. And then we do them and the employee organizations, including the _____ organizations, do their own and we share notes. And everybody knows that morale is not what it was. It's a complicated question. I mean, can you take COVID out? No. Can you take the experience of the Trump administration out? No.

You know, it is a sour moment in the country, in the world in a lot of respects. That is going to affect the Foreign Service you know. If you are a Russia-East European expert like I am or if you are an Israeli-Palestinian peace process expert like some of my friends, how are you going to feel about your work right now? You're not going to feel too good. Is that the fault of our leadership? No. But it is just reality, a tough time. And then you add COVID and so, you know, there are lots of reasons. But I do think the last piece of this, I would say, and this is why we are really pushing for a structured dialogue to start, finally after two and a half years, reforming what is wrong with the Foreign Service has barely begun. And that is the other _____.

Q: Right. I want to be respectful of your time and we can pause and take up the last portions at a subsequent time. Or we can finish now, whichever you prefer?

RUBIN: I probably have more than fifteen minutes to say, if you're willing to take more than fifteen minutes.

Q: Absolutely. No, I mean, because what I find in general is once someone begins to, you know, hit their stride in terms of recall and putting things in order, it is better to continue if it is possible. Okay.

RUBIN: So, let's just say I can do fifteen more minutes and then, I can do another session. _____ another hour, you know _____.

Q: Now, the next topic I wanted to explore was advocacy. But you've already talked about a lot of the issues of advocacy. Okay, let me then go down to, because you talked about

the problems of in person interviewing, consular officers, and all of that. Of course, one of the ways the Department has met the need for consular officers is through this Consular Fellows Program, which is a program where people are hired temporarily to do only consular work on contract, possibly have their contracts renewed, possibly not. In the past, AFSA has had a difficult time but eventually came around to accepting it. Where is AFSA now on that topic?

RUBIN: So, I would say based on real life experience, AFSA is now strongly supportive of the program for multiple reasons. One, it meets a very real need and brings skills to the table that we otherwise might not have, among them language ability at a high level together with overseas experience that entry level people don't always have or rarely have, especially if you are talking about native language capability. Second of all, we really have a shortage of people available to do consul work and we are not hiring enough to make up, and we have this massive backlog. Third, when people become consular associates, they become members of the Foreign Service temporarily and they have the option of becoming members of AFSA---consular fellows---and most of them do. We host them for lunch at AFSA when they start, along with every other new member of the Foreign Service.

And so, we've gotten to know the incoming classes, especially since we've gone back to in person lunches. They're deeply impressive and deeply committed to the work. And then, the last piece is that about forty percent of them have been becoming generalist FSOs [foreign service officers] via the exam after they finish their consular fellowship. They have been coming in through the regular process, which means we have evidence that they are not in any way less competitive than the broad group of applicants. And Consular Affairs loves the program and, you know.

So basically, we are very supportive and, you know, we are leery of getting into a situation at State like we have at USAID [United States Agency for International Development], where we have a lot of what are called Foreign Service limited appointments at AID that can be for up to ten years, but usually five. And we don't particularly want to see that expand, we'd rather see real Foreign Service hiring. But this program is a good one and it meets real issues. We've expressed support for helping people fast track into the career service if they do well in their two overseas posts and have good EERs [employee evaluation reports] and recommendations. We think they should get a leg up because they have already proven themselves in an embassy or consulate.

Q: Yeah. Similarly, civil servants taking Foreign Service jobs?

RUBIN: So, we have always supported the conversion programs that exist, and we've always supported the Mustang Program. And we've always supported the hard to fill program which enables the Department's civil servants to go overseas, and serve overseas in hard to fill jobs. We continue to support all of that. We have a real shortage overseas of supervisory jobs, a real shortage of jobs for economic cone officers so, we feel pretty

strongly that it needs to be only jobs that we have a hard time filling with career members of the Foreign Service. And that is the Hard-to-Fill Program.

And then, we also think people should be able to apply to convert if they want to, competitively, and we would support more of that because we want more people in the Foreign Service. And you know, successful civil servants already proven themselves, mostly, especially if they have done a tour overseas or two. But we always hold the line on filling foreign service jobs with non-foreign service people, and then we will continue to say no to that. Our famous, you know, blow up over that was twenty years ago over a DCMship in Lima. But we haven't had quite an explosion like that since but, you know, our position is if it is a designated Foreign Service, it has to be filled by Foreign Service unless there is no qualified applicant.

Q: Now, in advocacy, another issue with advocacy is there have always been communities of interest within the Foreign Service smaller than AFSA. The women's group, the African American group, LGBT and so on. Have relations with those communities of interest changed in any significant way in terms of the way you work with them and the way they represent themselves to management?

RUBIN: Yeah, I think we have changed to a more cooperative and I would say, mutually supportive approach. There was some history of AFSA saying, we are the union, we are the sole legal bargaining representative. Don't you poach on our territory. You can do your nice--and I'm being sarcastic here---but, you know, you can do your member events and whatever but don't try to negotiate with the Department. And of course, it is true, AFSA is the sole legal bargaining agent for all members of the Foreign Service and all five agencies and departments, fine. But the growth of employee organizations, and they're now called at State, employee organizations, at USAID they are still called the affinity groups, has been really positive.

I just went to the lunch on the eighth floor in the Franklin Room for the 50th anniversary of the Thursday Luncheon Group, which was the first of these groups established fifty years ago by African American members of the Foreign Service. Which paved the way for I think, we are up to over thirty groups now at State. But they do a lot of good work and for example, some of the progress that we've been pushing for has been really helped by the work that some of these groups have done. For example, on assignment restrictions, we are hoping soon for an announcement on dramatic reduction of assignment restrictions and liberalization of assignment restrictions. The [ethnic] employee organizations had a lot to do with making that happen because they were so concerned about discrimination.

On this disability settlement that we supported that was just rolled out, the disability action group at State had a lot to do with making that happen. So, and then, you know, we sometimes share polling so, you know, we don't want them to be treated as equivalent to us. We have the legal status and we can't have thirty groups talking all at once, but I think we've changed our approach and we now see them as force multipliers, and generally very good people. I mean, to take extra time to do that in addition to your regular work

means you are generally somebody who cares, and so it has mostly been very positive. Obviously, Glifaa, the gay and lesbian alliances have been behind a lot of the changes over the years. They are one of the original groups as well.

Q: One thing that has developed relatively recently in AFSA is the policy planning issues directorate. That is very interesting and I am curious to hear how it got started and what its job is?

RUBIN: Do you mean our policy unit, effectively?

Q: Yes.

RUBIN: Yeah. I mean, it is modestly, we always had somebody doing policy. Some of this is renaming, some of this is that we did hire a full time policy analyst who supports both Julie Nutter, our policy director, and Kim Greenplate, our advocacy and congressional affairs director. His name is Sean O’Gorman, he’s been terrific. So, we’ve gone from two to three positions, you know, in literal terms. But we have sort of, going back to the beginning of the first board that I headed, we have tried to take a more focused approach to policy changes, Foreign Service reform, with a heavy focus on the Hill because we do have a track record. I mean, during this board’s time, in the previous board’s time, we’ve won a whole series of victories on the Hill. Things like in-state college tuition for all members of the Foreign Service nationally. Things like being able to break leases and car loans and cell phone contracts, which the military had. All of what we call our “equity agenda”.

We are now working on getting access to the Governor’s high schools in Virginia, like TJ [Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology], which I think we are about to get for people coming back from overseas. We’ve worked to get equity, pet travel and transport with the military. We seem to have gotten that finally. A lot of this is based on the Hill because we haven’t had an administration that is really responsive. So, a lot of the focus has been on how we manage our efforts on the Hill and leverage them. And a lot of that meant _____ just the decision, we need to be more systematic. I would give Julie and Kim a lot of credit, and Sean now.

Q: Interesting.

RUBIN: Or, you know, basically doing that. We have also used our annual board retreats, our off-sites, to try to hash out priorities. And then, we’ve actually had our governing board formally approved, our list of priorities every year which changes. And there are some long shots. We are still fighting for overseas comparability pay, the last one third which we don’t have, and won’t get anytime soon I am afraid but we are going to keep fighting. On our agenda is to eliminate the cap on retired annuitants working for the government. People are in a pension. They should get their pension, full stop, no further discussion. And if they want to come back and work for the government, just like people in the military or law enforcement, God bless them.

In any way, it would save money because a lot of them come back as contractors with body shops and it costs the government twice as much. So, that's on our agenda, it is not going to happen this year. But anyway, this sort of systematically looking at policy priorities, and we do a lot of polling and Julie runs that and multiple polls a year of our members. Most of them get at least two thousand respondents, which is a lot. On the other hand, since we have almost seventeen thousand members, you could argue it is not a lot, whatever. But it is a lot to sift through and collate.

Q: This is the last of my formal questions. It is the changes in the evaluation form, the yearly evaluation form, which AFSA does negotiate with management at least to some extent. So, I am curious to know why it changed and now what it means in terms of evaluating officers yearly?

RUBIN: So, we are in the middle of this right now. And this is part of our effort to say, you know, we don't think there is a single element of the Foreign Service career, and any of our agencies, that is satisfactory. Now, you could argue that is because nothing in life is truly satisfactory. We always have to keep working on it but we knew the Foreign Service especially needs some modernization and attention, specifically as the Foreign Service, not just State Department modernization which Secretary Blinken talks about. The Foreign Service Act of 1980, you know, has been amended. It needs more amending but, you know, we don't want to reopen the whole Act. We just want to, you know, target.

So, one of the key pieces. I mean, all the pieces matter. Promotions matter. But evaluation is the key, based on which the promotion question is based. And no one, I don't need to tell you, after your life experience, no one currently living or previously living ever had much good to say about the ER process. And for good reason because it is really hard to find something good to say about it. What you can say about it is, you know, it is hard and how do we make it better without making it worse? And so, we are working on that right now. There are some tough questions, one that we are wrestling with is, can we find a way to incorporate input from colleagues and subordinates, not just supervisors and supervisors' supervisors?

Sounds like a no-brainer I tend to think, and a lot of my colleagues in the board tend to think it would be good. But when you read about experience in the military and elsewhere, it can be dangerous. It can go well but it can go badly. We think we need to look at that because this idea of kissing up and kicking down again---I mean, I don't need to tell you after your long career---is partly because you don't get evaluated in how you treat colleagues and subordinates, unless your supervisor rarely chooses to mention that. So, that is one piece.

The second is, you know, we've made it, we've agreed to make it shorter. We pushed for cutting it back because it was just too long, and it still is too long and too time consuming. The last piece which is we are dealing with some controversy now, is the question of what used to be known as the area for improvement, then it became known as the area for additional development. And that has now gone with our concurrence. And people are told if you want to make a constructive criticism, if you

want to say there is an area somebody needs to work on, just put it in the narrative of their ER. We are not going to have a separate box because you know well as everybody knows well, most of the time, that was a totally _____ effort and people tried very hard to find, you know, ways to not kill somebody's career. And you know, frequently it ended up saying “needs more training”, and you know, whatever.

It was almost corrupting to have it there so we agreed to eliminate it. It also shortens the form. Not everybody agrees. There has been some talk of going to numerical ratings like the military has, but I think that's not our culture. And, you know, in terms of bidding _____, people have mixed feelings about how that's gone with numerical ratings. So, it's a tough question. And then the last piece of this that's been discussed now, they took away the second review panels that looked at people for multifunctional work separately from their work in cone. And there is a feeling now that multifunctional work has been downgraded and deemphasized. So now, we are negotiating probably for next year, a way to change the precepts a little to say the boards need to look separately at interfunctional, multifunctional work. But only in one review, there is no chance of bringing back two separate boards for each employee. They just don't have the money or the people.

Q: Well then now, as you are approaching the end of your tenure, is there advice or recommendations you would make to AFSA on how to proceed? How to change an organization, any of those aspects?

RUBIN: Well, you know, there are a couple of things that COVID derailed us on. One is a membership push. We are in a good place in the sense that we have one of the highest percentage memberships in the federal government. You know, over eighty percent of active duty. Much less in terms of our retired members. We are making strides and our staff has done a lot but COVID sort of threw us off in terms of, you know, first of all, its money. Second of all, the greater percentage of people who are members, the more authoritative our voices. So, you know, I would push harder on that because there are people who say I'll never join a union or AFSA didn't support me when I needed it. But that is a handful of people.

Most people, if they are not members, they are just passively not members and we can reach out to them. I would also say, we need to do more on social media. We have expanded, we're doing better but it is just reality in this day and age that we need to do more and that is true for most organizations, and that's something we've looked at. We are also supporting some podcasts and other things. We are not going to do that ourselves, it's too hard. So, there's that. And then the last piece which I think, my advice, and some of this is just continuing, but we really got to try to get more hiring. And, you know, this year it looks like, having gotten a plus up in hiring in last year's budget which was a good thing, like eight percent, it looks like we are not going to have a budget this year. We are probably going to have another _____, which at least means we won't have cuts but we are still so far from being adequately staffed.

And overseas, I just talked to a U.S. senator who came back from a CODEL [congressional delegation] in Africa and he said, “Every single control officer I had was a

first-year officer. And almost all the section chiefs who briefed me were first or second tour. And the only people who had any experience were the ambassador and the DCM". You know, that is not okay. Who is training our people? And, you know, I like to say, if you put a first tour officer in charge of a consular section, you are asking for trouble. And it is not that person's fault at all. They need to learn. They need somebody to train them. Six weeks of ConGen in Arlington is not enough. So, I would say pushing on that front, getting our overseas footprint back to somewhere where it was---I mean, since Iraq and Afghanistan, it has been shrinking every year and we've not sent back overseas so many of those jobs that went to Iraq and Afghanistan.

So, you know, I would tackle that. And then the final piece, which we could talk more next time is just, you know, on the association side, not the union side, trying to recapture the spirit of the profession and the importance of diplomacy at a time when things look so grim in so much the world and we had the first war on the European continent. You know, large scale wars since 1945. And, you know, we've always done that and we always do it, and we travel and we speak and yet, you know, I think one of our problems when people say, "Why do you only get six thousand applicants a year for the State Department Foreign Service? And in 2010, you got twenty-one thousand? You know, part of the answer is people don't feel that diplomacy is possible and relevant the way it was. It has to be. We have to get back to that. So, these are just random thoughts.

Q: All right. What I would recommend then is we go ahead and _____ and consider offline what will sort of wrap everything up.

RUBIN: Sure. Yeah, let's do that. And then if you want to ask _____ for another hour, that would be great.

Q: Okay. Today is Thursday, April 4. I'm sorry, April 13, and we are concluding our interview with Eric Rubin for the 100th anniversary of AFSA. Eric, please go ahead.

RUBIN: Sure. So, in terms of the bylaw changes that happened in 2019 right before I took office as president, and our board took office, these were changes proposed by the previous board and it was basically a governance issue. In most associations, the president of the association is not also the chair of the board. However, at AFSA, that had traditionally been the structure and there were some issues under previous boards in which it was felt that the president, in the case before me, Barbara Stephenson, was playing two roles. Basically, playing the role of president, as essentially the CEO [chief executive officer] of the association, but also as the chair of the board. And there was a sense among some members of the board that there wasn't enough board input into how the board meetings were run, how the governing board functioned.

And so, a majority of the board the year before I came on proposed amendments to the bylaws to the members, which were adopted that said that every six months, the board would consider a nomination for someone to chair the board and that would be reviewed

every six months. It doesn't say it in the bylaws but the assumption was that that would be the president, but it doesn't have to be. I chose, when I was running for president, not to address the bylaw changes because they were approved by the previous board and presented to the membership. Not a *fait accompli* in the sense that the membership had the ability to approve or disapprove of them, but it seems to me likely that they would be approved. And in principle, as a governance matter, having had experience in other boards, I understood the point. And having been on other boards, it is unusual to have the board chaired by the president and CEO of the organization.

That I think had something to do with some of my predecessors in the way they ran the board, suffice it to say. That passed, that became part of the bylaws and for the past four years, every six months, I have been approved to chair the board without opposition. But I never objected to that mechanism, or the fact that that is now part of the bylaws that will continue going forward. No one is really going to challenge that. I think as a governance matter, it is fine. It makes sense. I have tried as both president and in my role as chairing the board to be inclusive.

I actually can say, I was just discussing this with some other board members. I'm coming up on four years without very many contested board votes, and never having lost a board vote that I supported as president in four years. No one has ever challenged having me chair the board so I don't really have a reason to oppose this. But as a governance issue, it's fine. There was some history that is not anything to do with me and you know, I just left it alone. So, you know, there's that. Then the other question you asked, going back on.

Q: Okay, so I had one more not on the board, but you had concluded the discussion last session on the changes in the evaluation. And one other long-term issue which is getting for foreign service officers the same right to being rehired without limitation, which is a thing that DOD [Department of Defense] gets and other executive agencies get. And AFSA has raised this but you thought it would be a long-term issue.

RUBIN: Yeah, and it remains that. I mean, there are a couple of pieces to this under the Foreign Service Act. And I think some other provisions of federal law when a member of the Foreign Service retires and takes retirement benefits including their annuity, their pension, they cannot come back and work full time for the federal government in any capacity as a direct hire employee and continue getting their pension. They are only allowed essentially to earn up to basically half their pension and continue getting their pension, which is roughly described as six months of work although it can be less because the highest rate that people get paid when they come back as retired annuitants is just 14 step, whatever, 15, whatever the top step of GS-14 [general schedule] is.

And many people retire as members of the senior foreign service or as FS-1s, which is the GS-15, which means when they come back, they are making less even on an hourly basis than they were when they retired. But the basic concept is you can only work half time as a retired annuitant and keep getting your pension, otherwise your pension is suspended while you are working for the government. This is not a provision that applies to the military or law enforcement, or many other parts of federal service. We think pretty

unanimously that it is not right, that people get their pensions as something that they earned for twenty years or more of difficult service. And if they want to keep serving their country, there should not be an issue. It is sometimes referred to as double dipping but we don't think that is a fair assessment.

And again, in the military, this is normal. If you go to the Pentagon or EUCOM [United States European Command] or PACOM [United States Indo-Pacific Command], or NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] headquarters, you are going to find a lot of DOD civilian employees who are retired military, who are getting their full DoD pensions as members of the military and also getting full salaries as civilian employees. The real issue in the Foreign Service is not so much the State Department Foreign Service but AID [United States Agency for International Development] where we do have a lot of people who retire when they are eligible, in part because if you reached the top of the Foreign Service in AID and let's say you've been a mission director multiple times, there are not a lot of options for you to stay in the Foreign Service.

You can keep trying to be a mission director overseas, you can compete for the few available deputy assistant administrator jobs, or in rare circumstances, assistant administrator jobs, sometimes. As in the Trump administration, there were no career assistant administrators. Under the current administration, there are two career FSOs [foreign service officers] serving as assistant administrators. But basically, there is not a lot of headroom if you're a senior foreign service officer in USAID. And so, what tends to happen is people retire earlier than they have to and then come right back to work for USAID as contractors, _____ what's known as a body shop via a contracting agency.

And they continue, they get their foreign service pensions and they get paid to work for AID as contractors, and the contracting agency takes a big cut and it costs the agency more. So, you know, AID is an area where if people could retire and then come back as civil service employees or even Foreign Service limited employees, it would save the government a lot of money and it would be fair that they continue to get their pension. That said, this would cost a lot of money and we don't see it happening anytime soon. It is on our wish list every time we talk to the Hill but I don't think it is anything that's going to happen anytime soon.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Is it, well, obviously, there is a lot of payment to senior officers and benefits and so on, but is there no understanding that when you retire, let's say in your mid-50s or late 50s after a very long career, that there is no value in having you, at least periodically, you know, consult with an organization that is changing relatively rapidly amidst the expertise, at least for a year or so after you retire?

RUBIN: Well, I mean, we think there should be and it is one of the reasons we are supporting the concept which has been advanced in the Foreign Service reform project that is being done now under the auspices of Arizona State University and the Cox Foundation, of creating---recreating, because there used to exist a Foreign Service reserve---and that idea would be to find a structured way to bring people back after they retired for specific reasons, for specific projects, for specific jobs. That would also

address the problem now that if you want to come back as a retired annuitant, what used to be known as WAE [reemployed annuitant] and is now known as REA, retired annuitant, all the hiring is done by the regional bureaus.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: There is no systematic approach to who gets hired. There is no concept of merit hiring, it is completely at the bureau's discretion. And there is a real feeling that they tend to hire their favorites, that certain people tend to get work over and over again, others are kind of locked out. There is a sense that if you displease the regional bureau, they won't offer you opportunities. And we think, as has been proposed before, there should be a global register for the entire Foreign Service, for retired employees to come back. The idea of a Foreign Service reserve corps where people would be certified, keep their clearances, and be available for work makes a lot of sense. It is being discussed on the Hill. It would require legislation. I don't think we'll see it this year but it is a concept that we support.

Q: That does bring me to a question I forgot, which is right now there are several proposals for various reforms or improvements in the Foreign Service---and you mentioned the one in Arizona---is there a particular one that you like and why would you like it?

RUBIN: Well, I mean, there are various bits and pieces that we support. We have generally been supportive of the project that started at the Kennedy School at Harvard, at the Belfer Center under the auspices of Nick Burns when he was at the Kennedy Center. He is now ambassador to China and has stepped back. That project has been transferred to Arizona State, with support from the Cox Foundation. It is being overseen by former undersecretary Marc Grossman, Ambassador Marcie Ries, Ambassador Charlie Ray, Ambassador Mike Polt, and they have come up with proposals that we think overall make a lot of sense.

The original report from the Belfer Center two years ago was very long and it had some things that we didn't really think made sense. Some of them seem silly to be honest. One of them was to change the name of the Foreign Service. They wanted to change it to the US Diplomatic Service and, you know, our attitude was what is wrong with the name Foreign Service? It is a ninety nine-year great tradition. It is the name of our association. Second of all, you know, we felt it was almost like Philip Morris becoming Altria or something, or SO [Standard Oil] becoming Exxon. I mean, why are you rebranding?

And then the idea that Americans have a better idea of what a diplomatic service is than a foreign service seems silly. In reality, they have no idea to begin with what diplomats do or who they are. They've dropped that, that is no longer part of it. The other thing that was in the original report was a large mid-level lateral entry program and the idea, as they put it, was to address skill gaps in the Foreign Service, in areas like IT [information technology], and ESTH [environment, science, technology and health], climate.

And also, to address the fact that we have shortages in some of our mid-level grades because of uneven hiring over the years, and we said, you know, very strongly speaking for the Foreign Service that, you know, the experience we've had with previous mid-level entry programs has mostly not been positive. That people coming in at the mid-levels don't get a chance to really learn the work from the ground up. There are real tensions. If you have somebody who doesn't have years of experience in the Foreign Service supervising people who do, they tend not to get promoted so their time in the Foreign Service is short. But there was a pilot program approved by Congress about four years ago for a small pilot program with mid-level lateral entry that was passed into law. And both the Trump administration and this administration have ignored that legislation and never implemented it.

We've said, you know, we are fine with a small pilot project. If you want to start and do twenty people next year and see how it goes, it's been done before. We have concerns but if it is small and if it is treated as a pilot, you know, whatever. There has been some suspicion which I am not necessarily endorsing, that members of Congress have supported this as a way that their staffs could end up joining the Foreign Service laterally without having to start at the bottom. And if that is the case, we are against it. We don't think that should be a congressional staffer employment program. We also think that specific skill deficits can be better addressed through specialist hiring, through Schedule B, which is designed to have up to four-year appointments for experts in various areas. And they have dropped that proposal too. It is not in their current shortlist of reforms.

But overall, I would recommend you take a look at the project. It is on their website, and overall, we are supportive. We think the whole career needs modernizing. You know, people say, are you going to reopen the Foreign Service Act of 1980? And the answer is, it is always open. It is legislation. It has been amended many times. We certainly don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We would not propose revisiting everything but now propose revisiting basic concepts like "up or out", like rank-in-person. You know, this legislation was written in the 1970s at a very different time. And we also have to adjust to a new generation of people who have different expectations, and if we are looking at, you know, attracting people and then keeping them, you know, we need to change the way we do business.

Q: Sure, sure. Along these lines, I have heard and I am not absolutely sure, the desire to change the name "foreign service officer" to just "foreign service generalist" in the idea that oh, well, civil servants can also fill in positions of Foreign Service, and anyway, you should all be generalists, not foreign service officers.

RUBIN: Yeah, so we have never accepted that. I mean, there have been a lot of changes in nomenclature over the past twenty, twenty-five years. You know, we have something that exists in law that is called Foreign Service Day and it is still called that in law. And we still call it that, it happens every May. It is when we bring back our retired people. It is when AFSA sponsors a memorial ceremony in the C Street lobby, at the memorial plaques that are actually owned and maintained and paid for by AFSA. And we don't like

_____, there used to be a Foreign Service lounge. Now, there is an employee service center.

So, you know, we admire and respect the civil service. We actually have no problem with the idea that we have political appointees, though we probably have too many of them in State Department and other agencies. But we think the Foreign Service is important, it is separate. It is distinct. It has a ninety-nine year history in its modern context. People in the Foreign Service have a whole different set of expectations and requirements and we don't think blurring the distinctions makes sense. We are for fewer distinctions between what traditionally were known as foreign service officers, which the Department wants to call generalists---we don't really like that term---and foreign service specialists.

We have been supportive for example of merging the orientation programs for new members of the Foreign Service so that there is no longer a separate A-100 class for officers, and a separate specialist orientation class. They are all together the first five or six weeks, and we support that. We feel very strongly that AFSA represents everybody in the Foreign Service and our membership is about forty percent specialist. So, you know, in no way do we want to be seen as just representing FSOs, you know, in the literal sense. On the other hand, we don't have a problem with people being FSOs. That's what the law says, people are, you know, presidentially commissioned officers, just like they are in the military and the public health service and the Coast Guard. And we don't think that should be blurred so we don't use that nomenclature.

Some of it goes back to Colin Powell when he was secretary and had the idea of pushing one team. And we believe in one team, we think it is a good thing. The same thing is true about reform. This administration has been very focused on what they call departmental modernization, modernizing the Department of State. We agree with that. We think it needs to happen in areas like IT where we are so woefully behind. But we insist that there is a role for separate foreign service reform to the Foreign Service, which is separate legally, separate organizationally, and you can do both. But you know, reforming the Department of State is not a substitute for reforming the Foreign Service. You need to do both, and then separately reforming the civil service, which we see a need for and we are certainly not against. It is just these are separate tracks.

Q: Does AFSA ever get into negotiations about work, workspace or conditions within the buildings?

RUBIN: Yeah, we were very active during COVID in negotiating rules about in-person work versus remote work. Versus, you know, return to the office and the measures that were taken to assess the need for people to be in the office, to make sure that there were consistent guidelines for everyone and not just office by office or bureau by bureau. We have pretty much been on the same page, both with the Trump administration and this administration in their approach to this. We have been supportive. But we have negotiating rights over conditions of work and this gets into questions like flex time, telework, all of which are, you know, now really an open set of issues after COVID. So, very much along those lines.

We also got involved on questions like COVID vaccination, making sure that everybody overseas had an equal opportunity to get it, no matter where they were. That their family members could, that our local staff would also be covered overseas since they are working in the same embassies and consulates, and that domestic employees had a clear way to get vaccinated, if not by the Department, although initially that happened. But yeah, we have been very involved in all of that. And then, there are other issues like, you know, the fact that non tenured officers and generalists have the right to be paid overtime for any overtime that they are required to work beyond their normal hours. That is different from saying, you know, if they can't get their work done and they stay late, that they should get overtime. That is not what the law says.

But if they are asked to work beyond their normal hours, that they are entitled to be paid overtime, and that tenured officers are entitled to file for special comp [compensatory] time, which is limited and not all that helpful sometimes. But nonetheless, people have a right to it and there has been a tradition over decades of people being told, you know, we don't do that in the Foreign Service. You suck it up and you work, and we have been very insistent that the rules have to be followed, the law has to be followed. And frankly, in this generation, people are more demanding and insistent on their rights being observed. Let me just get a glass of water if I could, for one second.

Q: Sure.

RUBIN: Right there.

Q: So, these are some of the workplace issues that you engaged management with but I didn't want to stop you, were there other things on your mind that---

RUBIN: Well, one of them is workplace culture and the fact that when we survey our membership, which we do several times a year, we consistently get concerns along two sets of issues. One is bullying, toxic workplace environment, bad leadership. And again, you know, our new employees are more sensitive to some of this. For example, we just received a group letter from dozens of members who are doing visa work overseas saying that they feel that under the current circumstances where there is not enough staff, where we are so far behind, that they feel that they are incurring moral injury in carrying out U.S. immigration law.

That, you know, it is a generational thing to be honest. That never would have occurred to me thirty-eight years ago, even though thirty-eight years ago I didn't particularly like how the Immigration and Nationality Act was written. But more importantly, there are real issues about bullying supervisors, toxic workplaces. And then the second set of issues is on racism, sexism, discrimination, you know. Basically, hostile work environments that are perceived as discriminatory.

So, we've been working very hard. That is part of our diversity agenda but it is also part of an effort to push for attention to the workplace culture. Some of it is like work-life

balance, which is important, but some of it is actually bullying and harassment. And we have been supporting an initiative the Department has taken to establish a new office on bullying and harassment that would include mandatory counseling and mediation, aside from the discipline process. Unfortunately, it has been held by Congress, which has questions about it so it has not been implemented. But we get involved in that kind of thing too because it directly relates to morale, retention, and attrition. And, you know, it is critical that we address issues that make people want to leave.

Q: Yeah. A question on a kind of outreach that I haven't asked you yet is the use of AFSA's awards as a means of publicizing the benefits that foreign service officers provide to the U.S. or U.S. citizens. How during your tenure, how has that worked? Or what view do you have on that?

RUBIN: Well, I mean, there are two pieces to it. One is, you know, job one for us is explaining who we are, what we do, why it matters. We refer to the Foreign Services as America's first line of defense. We do have several awards that have been specifically endowed in response to efforts to protect and defend American citizens overseas. And as a matter of fact, the Cox Foundation which funds many of our initiatives, funds this diplomatic reform initiative, funds the Academy of American Diplomacy [American Academy of Diplomacy], was established by an American heiress who, as the story goes, was arrested in the 1950s in India on some immigration charge, and as she put it, some heroic vice consul got her out of jail and rescued her and saved her.

In her will, she endowed a foundation to support the Foreign Service and our work. That is just one example. So, several of our works do specifically address efforts to support, defend, protect American citizens overseas. Then we also have the whole set of constructive dissent awards which is a key part of who we are and what we do as well. And we have been very passionate in defense of the value of constructive dissent to policymaking and to our special culture in the Foreign Service.

Q: Sure. In that regard, have there been during your tenure, particularly valuable or salient examples of a dissent that had a value, had a benefit?

RUBIN: There have been many. I mean, if you look at the AFSA awards page on our website, from last year, which was our first in person award ceremony in three years due to COVID, several of our constructive dissent awards have citations that actually explain how the centers service actually got changes to policy and actually affected U.S. policy through their dissents, which is both a credit to them and actually a credit to this administration in seeing constructive dissent not just as a means to allow different views and let people blow off steam, but also as a way to get better policies and better approaches to things.

I personally was involved. I think we discussed this earlier, in the '90s in dissenting on our Bosnia policy. And again, as I think I already said, we don't claim that our dissent changed the policy but it was part of a series of efforts that did lead to a big shift in our approach. You know, I won't say that by any means that every dissent has had an impact

or even should, because people have the right to dissent whether or not their ideas are particularly good, or not. And administrations don't have to listen even if the ideas are good. But, you know, the idea is we have this protected channel which I think right now is working quite well.

Q: And then, one other question also came to mind. When you mentioned Colin Powell, which is at least at that time, because we were entering into Iraq, there were plenty of DOD generals, DOD civilian office personnel who said, you know, it is much less costly to send a diplomat to try to resolve something first rather than send the military, which is both more expensive and more dangerous. And they tried to advise Congress and the administration that there ought to be a little bit more funding for diplomats to be able to do this, at least before there is a decision to use the military. Are you still hearing that from DOD? Because in essence, it is like a second champion within the administration promoting diplomacy as an initial alternative.

RUBIN: Yeah, we do still hear that and I think it is sincere. And I think, you know, most of the people I know, most of the military officers I know, certainly among the senior officers certainly would endorse that view. I think frequently when our military colleagues work together with the Foreign Service, they are stunned at how under-resourced and understaffed and underfunded we are. We always talk about, joke about what we call the “fifty colonel syndrome”, which is whenever there is an interagency project, the military always has an extra fifty colonels or navy captains to throw at it, and we're lucky if we can find one person to spare to do it.

You know, I won't say it is just lip service. I mean, previous secretaries like Secretary of Defense Gates [Robert Gates] and others have talked about this. I think Secretary Powell did. And we have had some surges of, you know, we have the diplomatic readiness initiative. In the past twenty-five years, there have been a couple of periods. In the early 2000s, we did get about a thousand additional positions. But overall, it hasn't happened recently. I mean, we did get a small plus up but we are looking at maybe a hundred additional positions for this year. And we are probably not going to get any plus up this year. And overall, we still have the basic number which is, in real dollar terms, the amount we are spending on diplomacy and development assistance is about fifty percent of what we spent in 1991 in real dollar terms. We have cut it in half. And when you cut things in half, you cut things in half.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

RUBIN: So yes, there have been some surges but then there have been, you know, the hiring freeze under Trump. It evens out to just not be adequate at all. We were so desperately understaffed and underfunded around the world, and I think I have already mentioned we are at our lowest overseas footprint as a percentage of the Foreign Service in ninety-nine years, the biggest percentage of the Foreign Service serving domestically. A lot of the growth has been domestic, in DS [diplomatic security] and IT and other areas. And in certain parts of the world, Africa being the biggest, we are desperately understaffed and have something like one third of our overseas positions unfilled.

Q: Yeah, yeah. A question about communities of interest within AFSA. Obviously, there are several, there is Asian and women and LGBT [lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans]. In talking with other AFSA presidents, most of them are satisfied with the interaction that AFSA has with them. One thing I am curious about that I haven't asked before is, are they helpful in attracting recruitment?

RUBIN: Yeah. I mean, I will say first of all, the proliferation of what are now called employee organizations at State---they are still called affinity groups at USAID [United States Agency for International Development]---is a very positive thing. I think we are up to like twenty-five of them at State and they are really sort of civil society, you know, internally within the Foreign Service in a very positive way. And the work that is done is all volunteer work, people trying to help contribute to making things better. You know, each group has its own agenda and its own constituency but overall, you know, we have made an effort over the past four years to work much more closely with them, to be in constant contact with them, and we have a regular series of meetings with all the groups that want to meet with us, which is pretty much all of them.

We coordinate on surveying employees, on lobbying for reforms so, you know, I would say overall, it is a success story in that sense and also in the sense that this administration does actually pay them serious attention. In terms of recruiting, I don't know of the specific role there, you know. And part of the problem with recruiting is there are always enough good people, even though our numbers are way down from where they were ten or fifteen years ago. We still get plenty of good applicants, we get really good people coming in. And the current intake is pretty satisfactorily diverse. It is not quite where it should be but it is fairly representative of America, in part because of the fellowship programs which make up a significant part of State and USAID hiring. In part because they really have made an effort to reach out and get diversity in terms of applications. That doesn't translate into retention and into diversity into the mid-levels and the senior levels, and that is one of the big challenges.

The other thing is recruitment is still very old fashioned. We still have diplomats and residents who have official recruiting responsibilities, pretty much in the same places they've been for decades. And the kind of thing that AFSA has been working on for example, is to try to do outreach to community colleges which President Biden has identified as a priority for his administration. The first lady is a community college professor and we think there is a lot of untapped talent there so we make an effort to do outreach in that area, which really hasn't been done very much before.

But also, it is a different pool. We are not really looking for undergraduates the way we might have been in the past. We are looking for people, I think the average age at the State Department, Foreign Service coming in is about thirty-one or thirty-two. So, almost everybody has a graduate degree, almost everybody is in at least a second career which is good. Which means we are getting people with more life and work experience, more overseas experience, people who are more mature. But that means recruiting is different.

You know, you can't just go to college campuses which was really the traditional approach.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Alright, yeah. I certainly understand that. All right. That takes me to the end of my formal questions but I imagine there are a few things I have missed that you'd like to address?

RUBIN: Yeah, so I think a couple of things in the way AFSA has changed, and you know, some of this is claiming credit for this board and the previous board that I headed, our previous board led as well. One of the things we have been trying to do is make AFSA more representative and this is a long-term goal. Previous boards have certainly worked in this area. We have pushed very hard for a bylaw amendment to create an additional full time State Department representative position, which has been approved on a pilot basis by the Department and has been presented to the voters to approve in the current election that has just started.

This means in addition to having a full time State Department vice president, active duty on detail to AFSA, there will be an additional full time board rep active duty on detail to AFSA, with a focus on specialists. On the needs and concerns of specialists who do make up forty percent of our membership. And that is happening and we have two candidates for the job so we are definitely going to fill it.

Q: Very interesting.

RUBIN: And we have been working on that. We really have tried over the years to make the AFSA board and AFSA as a whole less State Department centric. You know, even though the president has always been State Department and our largest cohort of members are from State, and our largest group of retirees are from State. AID has a very large group of people, and then the other agencies are smaller but matter. We love all our children equally. And there was a perception, not only that AFSA was basically run by State Department people for State Department people, but also that it was run by foreign service officers for foreign service officers.

And so, that is one of the reasons we are pushing so hard to focus more on the needs of our specialist members. And then, you know, working on diversity on the board which is hard because our board is filled by elections. People have to voluntarily choose to run for office. We can't make them.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: We do recruiting. We do try to get people to run. We have also proposed to liberalize. The voters are considering that now but we are hopeful they will approve it, to allow a few of our board members to serve from overseas. Because we think in the modern age, having hybrid meetings makes sense but also that it was really limiting to say you can only be on the AFSA board if you're assigned to Washington. And by definition, that means that people overseas are not getting the same kind of representation

we would like them to have. So, we are starting slowly. The key officer positions _____ on the executive committee will not be able to serve from overseas, they have to be in Washington. But some of the rep positions, some of the other agency positions can be now if the voters approve these changes.

We are investing in hybrid meeting equipment. You know, one issue we've had which deters people from running is that we have twelve in person board meetings a year that you are required to attend. And the bylaws say if you miss four out of twelve, you can be suspended from the board although I don't think that has ever happened. But there are a lot of old-fashioned things. We have shortened the election period this year and pretty much gone to a completely electronic election, although by law everyone has the right to a paper ballot by mail if they want one. We think about a hundred people will insist on that and we will make sure they get them. But, you know, we are not in the steamship age anymore and people should be able to vote online through email and it just shortens the whole period. Speeds it up.

But you know, it is still a heavy lift. And since we are a union as well as a professional organization, everything we do in terms of these elections has to be certified by the Department of Labor, by the federal labor standards agency. We are required basically to hire election consultants to run our elections, to make sure they are done properly. That is a whole industry. So, you know, there are challenges but we've managed to figure it out. I will say on diversity though, you know, this is unfinished business. It is something that I've worked very hard, not just in terms of AFSA's diversity but really the more important question, working with Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley and her team, the Department's chief diversity and inclusion officer, to try to change things.

We supported adding standalone diversity precepts to the EERs. We actually had a sort of mixed feeling about whether that was the right way to go but we agreed to support it, in part because there was a real groundswell of support for it. And there are a bunch of other areas where we are working to try to address this whole question of, not just diversity but also, you know, perceptions of inclusion or exclusion. And it is true that when we have done surveys of our members in recent years, with some of the employee organizations like the Thursday luncheon group, which is the African American organization, the Hispanic group, the Asian American group---their members say that they perceive very serious problems with discrimination, racism, sexism. The Thursday luncheon group survey I think had upwards of ninety percent either had experienced discrimination or knew someone who had.

So, we take this very seriously and it is something that, you know, is a work in progress and it is not satisfactory but---and AFSA has a mixed history on these issues as well. So, I think we have a special need. I mean, we also have the whole history of the Lavender Scare and AFSA's failure to defend our gay and lesbian colleagues when they were under attack in the '50s and '60s, and actually, AFSA's lack of enthusiasm for getting into the whole issue of security clearances for gay employees until the 1990s. So, that is a piece of the agenda as well and we work very closely with Glifaa, the gay and lesbian employee organization on these issues as well.

Q: Speaking of improving the inreach to overseas and allowing overseas reps to be on the board in some capacity, are you satisfied with the number of overseas AFSA reps at missions?

RUBIN: We are doing pretty well. We reinvigorated our post rep program and when we don't have a post rep that post, we recruit. And sometimes it is interesting because you know, we are fairly unique as a federal union and have members at all levels so, you know, we have lots of ambassadors and DCMs [deputy chief of missions] and principal officers who are AFSA members, which does not happen in the civil service. And sometimes, we'll get, you know, a career ambassador or DCM saying, you know, "I noticed there is no AFSA rep at our post. I think we should have one". The first thing we say is, "Thank you for flagging that. Now you can step out of this loop because we really _____ coming from the front office. But thanks for flagging it and yes, we are going to try to make sure we have someone".

And I just did a conference call with post reps on Zoom so we are trying to reinvigorate. I mean, some people say the role of post representatives is less important than it used to be because of Zoom, because of email, because of instant communication. And to some extent that is true. Any member overseas can just, you know, send me or our staff a note with a question and they get an answer by the next day. They don't have to go to a post rep. But post reps are important in terms of morale, in terms of alerting us to problems at particular posts and, you know, we do think it is an important program.

Q: When I was in the Foreign Service and you know, various posts where it was sometimes difficult to find a rep, one of the reasons I always declined was I never felt I knew the regulations or the legal aspects to be able to advise anyone. So, is training for an overseas rep important?

RUBIN: Yeah, we do a little of it. We don't do enough. You know, there are some parallels for example to the CLO [Community Liaison Office] program, although CLOs actually do have formal training. Although that stopped during COVID, I think they are bringing it back where they bring people to Washington. But as with, you know, people who take jobs as CLOs or whatever, or post reps, you know, get a small amount of training upfront but then, you know, there is an open door in terms of saying "Just ask us anything you want. If you get a question, we can help answer it". But, you know, it is a resource issue and we don't want to deter people from taking on the role because it is too much time. Because most people overseas are pretty overworked to begin with.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Understood. Okay, back to you. So, you have mentioned a number of things but I have the sense there are one or two more that you haven't gotten through.

RUBIN: I'm just trying to think what else. You know, I think there has been a change in the culture as far as the question of unionization. When the federal government unionized fifty, fifty-one years ago, there was a considerable part of the Foreign Service that was anti-union and really resisted the idea of AFSA becoming a union. They felt that, you

know, diplomats don't do union and that the Foreign Service was special. Some of that may have been a holdover from the old boys' club, the Eastern establishment prep school, _____ ran the Foreign Service a long time ago. There was a big debate over whether the Foreign Service should be represented by AFSA or by one of the big federal unions. That was settled in elections in the early '70s. I think history has proven that that was a wise choice by the membership because we are much more agile and focused and nonpartisan.

But the other thing I would say that has changed is, I in my almost four years now have encountered almost no hostility to AFSA's role as a union. I've encountered almost no one who says I don't think we should be unionized. You know, we do get specific complaints. We occasionally talk to someone and say, you know, "I quit AFSA because I was so mad at the case you brought against the Department on this. You were wrong". Whatever. And I just like to say, you know, judge us in what we do. We can't turn back the clock and relitigate things that are long past.

But I think that, you know, partly because people have been through so much with multiple government shutdowns, with everything that has happened in the past twenty years, I think there is more of an understanding of why it is important to have a union. I think one reason why we are at almost eighty-five percent of voluntary membership, which we think is the highest in the federal government. Can't prove that but I think so. So, that is a positive change. And, you know, the idea of "we don't need a union, we are professionals", like, I just don't hear that.

But you know, it does also depend on how effective we can be. Depends on, you know, each administration so I think what we are dealing with now is the tyranny of good intentions, where this administration has said all the right things and in principle has done the things that we've asked. But in reality, when we really want to get traction, we don't necessarily get it. So, compared to the previous administration, things are certainly better and easier but sometimes, you know, disappointed expectations are more painful than someone who's saying, you know, "I hate you and I am not going to work with you". As opposed to someone saying, "We love you. We are going to do great things together", and then things don't happen.

Q: Right.

RUBIN: That is kind of where we are now, pushing. There has been a lot of progress, I have to say. So, you know, the glass is half full as far as I'm concerned but. Then the last piece I wanted to say is, you know, we went through the difficult period we discussed, with impeachment and supporting our members who were subpoenaed. And, you know, people are asking, "Is this going to happen again? What is going to happen with the hearings on Afghanistan?". We are going to have several of our members subpoenaed to testify we think in the house hearings. We are expecting to have to support their legal representation which we do for our members. We either do it ourselves or we try to get *pro bono* representation or we pay their legal bills.

But, you know, then people are saying what is going to happen in the next election? And what is the Foreign Service facing? And of course, we don't know. But keeping the powder dry, you know, one of the things I feel good about finishing my tenure is we have not only kept a significant nest egg, emergency fund, whatever you want to call it. Battle fund. But we raised three quarters a million dollars additionally for the legal defense fund and we still have about half of that additional money. And then we came to COVID in the black, partly because we had dues checked off and the money kept coming in. So, unlike so many organizations during COVID, we came through pretty okay.

But we don't know what the future holds. And so, the importance of AFSA is also, you know, as that first line of defense for the Foreign Service and for the institutions of American diplomacy. And as you said, our military colleagues always talked about how important diplomacy is to avoid war but you got to fund it, you got to resource it, you got to staff it. We are not even close to where we need to be so there is a lot of unfinished business. But at the same time, I feel like we are in pretty good shape heading into the next board term. And the next board is going to almost certainly have to tackle some crises but I think they should be in pretty good shape to handle them.

Q: And of course, once you retire, you will be one of the former presidents and you will be able to advise them I'm sure with great sagacity, born of four years of being in the AFSA---

RUBIN: We do have an informal former presidents group meet several times a year. I have enjoyed meeting with them. You know, we went virtual during COVID but we are back to meeting in person periodically. And yeah, I will do that and I am going to be an active retiree member.

Q: Cool. All right. So, at this point then, I will end the interview. And I'll just quickly tell you where we go from there.

End of interview