

AAFSW NEWS

Association of American Foreign Service Women

December 1985

OPEN FORUM MEETING A Review of Current Issues and Concerns to Members of the AAFSW

On Saturday, November 2, 1985, over sixty members of the AAFSW met at the Guy Mason Center to discuss various issues and concerns of the association. Joining in the discussion were the Director of the Overseas Briefing Center, Jean German, and three Family Liaison Office staff members, Lynn Gutensohn, Deputy Director, Pat Telkins, CLO Support Officer and Judy Livingston, Education Counselor.

FSA PROPOSAL

"It's not that if we (spouses) get something, other people lose."

During the first hour, the Forum focused upon a review of past concerns and projects which have dominated the association for the past several years. Susan Low, the First Vice-President of AAFSW and the Chair of the Foreign Service Associates Working Group gave the Forum an update of activities which surround the FSA Proposal. From the earliest stages of work on the FSA Proposal was the "concept that it was an idea whose time had come," she said. In reviewing the work accomplished by this group during the past twelve months, Sue related how in late 1984 the State Department sent a cable to all posts outlining the FSA Proposal. In this cable, posts were encouraged to disseminate the proposal widely, hold discussion groups and to respond with comments which addressed specific questions. Over three-quarters of the 260 posts responded to the proposal which then enabled the working group to bring the specific areas of concern into a sharper focus. In general, these areas narrowed down to the following: volunteer work done by spouses; the representational role of the senior spouse, and two sides of the employment picture—how the "Associate" could function within a mission, and in mission outreach programs. Spouses have the skills—how can these be utilized in our posts abroad?

As a result of a Washington Post Magazine article last April, Pat Schroeder (D. of

Colo.) started working on legislation which addressed these areas of concern. Senator Mac Mathias Jr. (R. of Maryland) introduced a proposal which directed the Secretary of State to develop a pilot project to test effective means for employment of Foreign Service spouses. This proposal was incorporated into the Department's authorization bill which was signed into law by President Reagan last August. The legislation called for a testing of the FSA Proposal and instructed the Secretary of State to construct the design phase now and to report back to the Congress by February 1, 1986.

As a result of this directive, the Department has named former Ambassador to Ecuador, Sam Hart, to head up a design group. In this capacity, Ambassador Hart has met with the AAFSW Working Group and has reviewed the specific areas of concern. A proposal has been sent to all posts with requests for comments and discussion at post concerning the pilot project in general and their participation in such a project. At this time, a number of posts have responded. These responses have indicated that thoughtful consideration of post employment needs combined with an enthusiastic review of the pilot project could result in implementation of the design phase.

Ambassador Hart's recent visit to nine posts gave him the opportunity to explain the FSA Proposal at first hand and further to receive direct feedback. Hart related that he had not been prepared for the level of anger and sense of frustration among the senior spouses. In response to this, the AAFSW Working Group noted that it isn't that we are too soon with this proposal, rather that we hope that we aren't too late in putting together a meaningful proposal.

To enable more direct feedback from Washington, there will be a day-long symposium on the FSA Proposal organized by the Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs at FSI. The symposium entitled, Foreign Service Associates: Concept and Controversy will be presented on November 19th

from 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. at FSI. During the morning session there will be an overview of the FSA Proposal and the afternoon session will focus upon various aspects of the proposal. Working groups will be formed to address the following issues: the Effect on the Career Service; the Scope of Job Opportunities; the Job Content, Selection, and Evaluation; the Training, Promotion and Career Development; the Compensation of ORE Spouses and finally Congressional and Public Perceptions.

Future Newsletters will update you on this symposium.

CRISIS GROUP

"Terrorism and the attendant stress are not going to go away."

In 1983 the AAFSW compiled a study entitled, "Foreign Service Families in Situations of International Crisis." A task force was formed within the Department to consider the nineteen recommendations of the study. The Department responded after one year with a summary of actions they were taking or planning to take. Certain bureaucratic constraints, while attempting to move the recommendations along, have, in fact, side-tracked some of the main points in the AAFSW study. To address

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