

# GLOBAL LINK

Association of American Foreign Service Women



## The View from the Barricades

By Patty Ryan, Legislative Liaison

A report on the advocacy efforts of AAFSW is overdue. As you may know, the Association has long worked on the Hill and within the Administration to advance the well-being of Foreign Service individuals, families and communities.

Over the past decade, there has been an inhospitable climate stemming from deep cuts in the financial resources allocated to all arenas of the Foreign Service, reflecting the diminished interest of the American people in events outside our borders since the collapse of the threat of Communism.

While we have had many effective friends in Congress and on the staff of relevant committees, the picture was transformed in 1994 when the control of Congress passed to the Republicans who, on the whole, have focused on a domestic legislative agenda. Many of the new cast of characters have little knowledge of or concern with foreign affairs issues.

The Executive, striving to balance the federal budget, has also starved the foreign affairs agencies of financial resources, despite valiant efforts by both the previous and the present Secretaries of State. OMB's budget requests to Congress for the "150 account"—the designation of the items that most affect us, including salaries and expenses for running operations at home and abroad—have long been inadequate. These are fundamental issues for the welfare of the foreign affairs community.

Therefore, AAFSW has concentrated on cooperating with efforts to build support for sufficient resources for the foreign affairs agencies to operate effectively as America confronts new complexities and growing dangers of the post-Cold War

(See "Advocacy," page 3)

## Web Site Adoption Recommended

The third Millennium Working Group meeting was held Sunday, February 21st at the AAFSW main office.

Terri Williams mentioned that she had heard concern from Maria Bauer and Mary Louise Weiss that their comments at the first Millennium session had been misrepresented in the minutes from that meeting. They both hastened to reply that they in no way had "lost touch" or "let go" of their special interest group, the Writers' Group. In fact, the reverse was more the case (see related article, page 3).

In addition, Terri reported that many other people had been in contact with the AAFSW office and Terri with ideas and "shoulds" that would be brought into the discussion when appropriate.

The primary purpose of this meeting was to discuss the possibility of establishing an AAFSW web site. To that end, Melissa Hess, founder and editor of the Foreign Service Lifelines web site, gave an excellent presentation demonstrating the advantages to the organization of getting a toehold in cyberspace. She then proposed that the AAFSW "adopt" Lifelines as its own web site, which would advance this process considerably.

The members present discussed the various advantages of operating a web site, which include increased visibility, credibility, and the potential for attracting new members, especially among younger and newer Foreign Service family members. Several members cited the speed of communication with far-flung overseas posts

(See "Web Site," page 3)

Coming next month: details on AAFSW's NEW web site!

## At a Premium: Life Insurance for Government Employees

Foreign Service families may be particularly vulnerable when tragedy strikes. Many depend on one (Foreign Service) income, live far from extended family, and lack a nearby network of long-time friends. Life insurance could provide crucial support—a good reason for families to review their coverage during the open enrollment period of the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) program, April 24 through June 30.

Legislation has changed some features and premiums of the FEGLI program. The advantage of FEGLI is that it covers all federal employees, regardless of age or health status—or country of residence. Young, healthy, non-smoking employees and family members may benefit from researching private term life insurance rather than paying FEGLI premiums, which are no bargain for the highly insurable.

Family members may not realize what they are paying for FEGLI coverage. When the next Earnings and Leave statement arrives home, take a look at something other than "Net Pay." Multiply the amount shown in the "Basic Life" and "Op Life" boxes (under Deductions) by 26 to get the yearly rate. Basic FEGLI provides the employee's annual salary rounded to the next higher thousand dollars, plus \$2,000. One Foreign Service employee found that he could get five times the coverage for the same price in the private sector.

Federal life insurance is a "term" life insurance product, meaning that pay-

(See "Insurance," page 8)

# Advocacy Efforts Explained

(Continued from page 1)

world. These efforts have centered on the Coalition for American Leadership Abroad (COLEAD), composed of 37 organizations including AFSA, groups of former ambassadors both career and non-career, educational exchange and aid related entities, as well as AAFSW. Continuing pressure both by lobbying Congress and the administration and through generating outside support in academic circles and in the media, has helped staunch the cuts. It should be clear to all that diplomacy is much cheaper than military intervention, albeit slower and less dramatic.

AAFSW continues to monitor proposals either in the Administration or in Congress that might have a negative effect on our community. FLO has not suffered too badly from the economic stringencies of the past decade. OEC has been more heavily affected, but now has been granted some increased resources.

The issue of childcare at the NFATC continues to be problematic. Young people with families expect that daycare should be available for spouses who are giving up the second income to donate their time to learning a language or to other training programs that will benefit the government as well as the individual. The State Department is always well behind the curve on discerning and responding to demographic changes in the general population. We hope to have some effect in this difficult and long-standing problem.

Also on the agenda is the question of the inequitable impact of the new tax treatment of the capital gains realized on the sale of a principal residence. The new tax law provides a very generous exclusion of up to \$500,000 on such a gain if the owners have lived in the home for two out of the five years preceding the sale. By the time this is published, we expect that a resolution will be introduced in Congress that would "stop the clock" on the five year window for military and foreign service personnel posted outside the United States on government orders.

AAFSW is also working to try to change regulations on the retirement system so that spouses who worked in

PIT positions could buy pension benefits. Until 1989, this was possible. The introduction in that year of the new FERS system made no provision for such an action. Since May, 1998, Foreign Service spouses can work under the new Family Member Appointment, which includes pension benefits. This has replaced most overseas PIT appointments, leaving a group who may have worked a fair portion of the intervening decade without gaining any pension rights for that service. Since Foreign Service spouses had few if any other employment opportunities overseas, we hope to differentiate our group from other PIT employees, as the government would be loathe to establish a precedent for such a provision for all government PIT employees because of the cost.

We hope that with the adoption of our new web site we will hear more from individuals or groups with problems that we may be able to help solve.

## Web Site Discussed

(Continued from page 1)

that would be possible with a website. Costs were also discussed, and the conclusion was reached that the web site would be an affordable means of attaining these ends. This portion of the meeting ended with a unanimous vote in favor of recommending the adoption of Foreign Service Lifelines to the Board.

Finally Terri Williams asked the group to write down their thoughts concerning the question of what makes AAFSW important and distinct from other, similar bodies, such as the Family Liaison Office or AFSA. These ideas were collected and will be discussed in the next meeting.

Kelly Midura

Millennium Initiative Group Member

**CORRECTION:** Two members of the Millennium Initiative Committee were incorrectly identified in last month's Global Link. Our apologies to Maria Bauer and Mary Louise Weiss, co-Chairs of the Writers' Group.

## WELCOME NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS!

Kathleen White Mitchell  
Susan Rockwell Johnson  
Sheila Switzer  
Pettit Flood  
Cory Jacobson Giacobbe  
Carolyn Holt  
Amy Condra-Peters

## The Write Approach

Lately there has been some misinformation about the AAFSW Writers' Group. The group was started by Elisabeth Sanders in the late 1960s and has met ever since. Over the years, there were few changes: some of the present members (Mavis Barrett, Maria Bauer, Mary Louise Weiss, Silvia Zimmermann) have been in the group since its inception. Others who were transferred overseas rejoined the group upon their return to Washington.

The members' support, enthusiasm and editorial help resulted in the publication of several books and articles. Our joint effort *A World of Difference: A Collection by American Foreign Service Women*, with a foreword by Mrs. George P. Shultz, was published in 1987 and sold out within two years.

We now have one vacancy, and any AAFSW member with writing experience interested in joining our group will be welcome to contact us.

Maria Bauer, Writers' Group

## Book Lovers Wanted

The AAFSW Bookroom needs more volunteers! Call Robin Jones at 202-223-5796 to offer your services. The Bookroom is located in the main State Department building beside the cafeteria. Some parking passes are available.

Get your friends together, stop in on your husband or wife, pick up some bargain books, find out what is going on—all while helping to support AAFSW's many projects.