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October 30, 2017

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The Honorable Bob Corker
SD - 425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510 - 4205

The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin
SH - 509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510 - 2002

Dear Chairman Corker and Ranking Member Cardin,

The American Academy of Diplomacy requests that you oppose the nomination of Stephen Akard to serve as Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources at the State Department. We have concluded that voicing our concerns with Mr. Akard's nomination is required if the Academy is to meet its most important mission: to promote and protect America's interests in a dangerous world by supporting an effective American diplomacy based on a strong Foreign Service and a strong Civil Service.

We regret we have not been able to meet Mr. Akard as we requested. We hold no personal animus toward him. Indeed, there may be other positions at the State Department for which Mr. Akard might be better qualified. However, we have concluded that Mr. Akard lacks the necessary professional background to be the Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources at the State Department. His confirmation would be contrary to Congress's long standing intent and desire to create a professional American diplomatic service based on merit.

Foreign Service career professionals take an oath to the Constitution and commit to worldwide availability. The Director General of the Foreign Service, the only position specifically created by the law that established the modern Foreign Service (*The Foreign Service Act of 1980*, as amended), is in some ways the equivalent of a military Service Chief, such as the Chief of Staff of the Army. While Mr. Akard has experience as a Foreign Service Officer, which we honor, it was at lower levels. He does not have the experience necessary to advise the Secretary on the Department's most senior appointments or the management of the 75,000 Foreign Service, Civil Service, and Locally Engaged Staff employed by the State Department.

The Act states: "The President shall appoint, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, a Director General of the Foreign Service, who shall be a current or former career member of the Foreign Service. The Director General should assist the Secretary of State in the management of the Service..." While Mr. Akard is technically eligible for the position, to confirm someone who had less than a decade in the Foreign Service would be like making a former Army Captain the Chief of Staff of the Army, the equivalent of a four-star general. No matter how talented the nominee, he does not have the experience required to lead the entire

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State Department workforce. That is why the Senate has always confirmed a former ambassador, often a very senior one, as Director General, who holds the rank of Assistant Secretary.

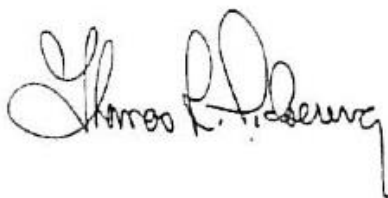
It is important to emphasize again that the Academy is a non-governmental, non-partisan organization whose members, career and non-career, have served presidents of both parties. In fact, our position on what kind of person should be the Director General was formally established in 2015 in the Academy's report *American Diplomacy at Risk* ([available here](#)). In that report, issued during the Obama administration, we said:

“Recommendation 2b: Consistent with the Act, select for the position of Director General (DG) of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources of the State Department a highly respected senior Foreign Service Officer who has held at least two senior appointments, one as Chief of Mission. The objective is to have the most experienced senior officer available managing the Foreign Service and personnel issues for the Department, and other Foreign Affairs agencies as chair of the Board of the Foreign Service. The Act elevated the position of Director General of the Foreign Service to a Senate-confirmed position reserved for “a current or former career member of the Foreign Service, stating that ‘the Director General should assist the Secretary of State in the management of the Service and shall perform such functions as the Secretary may prescribe’” (the Act, Sec. 208). The Act recognizes that the DG wears two hats: he or she has both the responsibility for the oversight and management of the Department’s Civil Service component, and also primary responsibility for the professional integrity, quality, and discipline of the Foreign Service. As the number of principals and other senior appointments has proliferated and the complexities of managing a rapidly changing work force grow, maintaining the role of DG at the level of increased importance suggested by the Act’s language requires the most senior and broadly experienced performers. The DG must enjoy the respect necessary to speak the truth to serving officers as well as State’s leadership. Therefore, DGs should be selected from the most experienced members of the senior Foreign Service, preferably those not seeking subsequent assignments, and should, as a general rule, serve for at least three years.”

We stand today by the main conclusion of *American Diplomacy at Risk*: our great country needs to recruit, foster and retain a strong, professional, diverse State Department workforce whose sole objective is to act in the interests of the American people. We believe that, as good and decent a person as Mr. Akard may be, his confirmation as the Director General would be another step to further weaken the State Department, whose Foreign Service and Civil Service employees loyally serve the President, the Secretary of State, and the United States of America.

We ask that you decline to advance Mr. Akard’s nomination to serve as Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources at the State Department.

Sincerely,



Thomas R. Pickering
Chairman



Ronald E. Neumann
President