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December 8, 2017

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-6225

Honorable Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,

We, the undersigned, served as Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources at the Department of State and all of us had previous service as ambassadors before assuming that position. Our service as Directors General spans over a quarter century.

We write today to urge you to vote against the nomination of Stephen Akard for the Director General position. In doing so, we are not questioning the right of the President to nominate a person of his choosing to this position nor do we question the legality of the nomination. We have no personal animus toward Mr. Akard and believe that Mr. Akard might well be suitable for other senior positions in the State Department. Rather, we write out of deep concern that he is not qualified for the enormous responsibilities of this position.

The Director General is at the apex of the Department's personnel system, responsible for maintaining the professionalism of employees to whom we entrust the security and well-being of the United States in the global environment. The DG provides oversight and guidance as Chair of the Board of the Foreign Service to the entire Foreign Affairs community. He or she must be conversant with the vast array of laws and procedures that serve as a basis for the personnel system. For that reason, the Foreign Service Act stipulated that the incumbent had to come from the professional Foreign Service.

While the nominee meets the definition of the law, Mr. Akard does not have the experience, hence the knowledge, required to perform in this position. We honor the nominee's eight years in the Foreign Service at the entry and lower midlevel ranks of the Service. However, service at that level gives the person no experience at the level of senior management where critical decisions are made. The Director General fulfills a position equivalent to a military Service Chief. This nomination would be like nominating a former, out of the army, captain to replace the four-star Chief of Staff of the Army.

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Service in senior positions and first-hand experience become critical when the Director General is called upon to advise ambassadors, undersecretaries and assistant secretaries on personnel matters. While staff can advise on the rules it is up to the Director General to advise on exceptions. This is precisely the kind of judgment for which the nominee lacks the relevant background.

In addition, personnel in the Department of State include Civil Service and locally employed staff as well as Foreign Service. Civil Service employees work under a different system than Foreign Service while performing critical functions in support of the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. Locally employed staff have yet different rules. The nominee has no relevant experience managing multiple personnel systems.

A significantly important attribute for successful service as Director General is the regard that employees have for the individual serving in the position. The Director General must be well respected, admired for his or her leadership and honesty and integrity. Employees, many of whom have or are serving in dangerous positions must have confidence that the incumbent understands their concerns, most likely has seen or experienced the same or similar situations as that of the employee, and thus will make fair and just decisions. He or she must deal daily with the many factors affecting recruitment including increasing the diversity of the Department, promotion, discipline, family issues, and retirement. The Director General must have the knowledge and experience to advise the Secretary of State and the Undersecretary for Management on the realities of the global personnel system. The nominee has no experience that would reassure State employees that he understands the personnel system or will stand for them when the inevitable crises occur.

The ability to counsel is central to an effective Director General. All of us devoted considerable care in mentoring employees. This mentoring occurs at all levels in the personnel system, from ambassadors facing issues in their embassy to entry level officers seeking guidance on their careers. The nominee may be gifted in interpersonal relationships, but that is undermined if the incumbent cannot relate to those seeking his advice.

In conclusion, we ask that you not advance this nomination. A strong professional personnel system is vital to the nation's security. It must be led by a person who has risen through the ranks to senior positions enabling the incumbent to make vital decisions both for the Department at large and the individuals as well.

Thank you for your serious consideration of our concern and your support for a strong professional and well-trained team at the State Department to carry out the vital mission of promoting and protecting America's interests around the world.

Sincerely yours,

Ruth A. Davis

Director General (2001-03)

U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Benin (1992-95)

Edward W. Gnehm, Jr.

Director General (1997-00)

U.S. Ambassador to Kuwait (1991-94), USUN (1994-97), Australia (2000-01), and Jordan (2001-04)

Marc Grossman

Director General (2000-01)

U.S. Ambassador to Turkey (1994-1997)

Genta Hawkins Holmes

Director General (1992-95)

U.S. Ambassador to Namibia (1990-92) and Australia (1997-00)

W. Robert Pearson

Director General (2003-06)

U.S. Ambassador to Turkey (2000-03)

Edward J. Perkins

Director General (1989-92)

U.S. Ambassador to Liberia (1985-86), South Africa (1986-89), United Nations (1992-93), and Australia (1993-96)

Nancy J. Powell

Director General (2009-11)

U.S. Ambassador to Uganda (1997-99), Ghana (2001-02), Pakistan (2002-04), Nepal (2007-09), and India (2012-14)

Anthony C.E. Quinton

Director General (1995-97)

U.S. Ambassador to Central African Republic (1976-79), Nicaragua (1982-84), Kuwait (1984-87) and Peru (1989-92)

George M. Staples

Director General (2006-07)

U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Rwanda (1998-01), and to the Republics of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea (2001-04)

Linda Thomas-Greenfield

Director General (2012-13)

U.S. Ambassador to Liberia (2008-12)