
House Foreign Affairs Committee Pushes Bill to Bolster Diplomacy and Development

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The House Foreign Affairs Committee approved comprehensive legislation to shore up U.S. foreign policy efforts, the *Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011* (H.R. 2410), in 2009.

For far too long, we have failed to provide the Department of State (DOS) with the resources it needs to fill critical overseas posts, provide adequate training, and ensure effective oversight of the programs that it manages, Committee Chairman Howard L. Berman (Democrat-California) said. With the expansion of U.S. diplomatic responsibilities in the 1990s and the more recent demands of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Foreign Service has been strained to the breaking point. We simply must supply the needed resources now.

Under this legislation, 1500 additional people could join the Foreign Service over the next two years. The bill also contains provisions on recruitment and training of officers to improve the Foreign Service's ability to respond to modern challenges. It requires the DOS to conduct a quadrennial review of its policies and programs that defines objectives, budget requirements, and how these programs fit into the President's national security strategy.

Among other significant measures in the bill are provisions that:

- Strengthen the arms control and nonproliferation capabilities of the DOS
- Reform the system of export controls for military technology and improve oversight of U.S. security assistance
- Ensure that the United States will meet its financial commitments to the United Nations (U.N.) and other international organizations
- Allow financing [of] the refurbishment of helicopters for U.N. peacekeeping missions in Darfur, the Republic of Congo, and Chad
- Establish the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation as a new executive branch corporation to expand dramatically the number and economic diversity of U.S. students studying overseas
- Substantially increase the budget of the Peace Corps to support President Obama's goal of doubling the number of Peace Corps volunteers and authorize a plan to use short-term volunteers to respond to humanitarian and development needs
- Broaden the Merida anti-drug trafficking initiative to include the Caribbean and improve monitoring and evaluation of Merida programs
- Increase resources and training for enforcement of intellectual property rights, especially in countries identified by the USG as lax in enforcing those rights

After learning that [the] Administration intends to end the practice of excluding the committed partners of Foreign Service officers from the benefits routinely provided to the spouses and children of officers serving abroad, a provision on this issue was removed from the bill.

I am deeply committed to ending the long-standing practice of treating the committed partners of gay and lesbian Foreign Service officers like second-class citizens, Berman said. I would not agree to strike a provision in my own bill if I did not feel confident that this would be taken care of by the Administration.