

Press Releases: Remarks Addressing State Department Student Programs and Fellowships Participants

Remarks

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SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, good morning, all. And regrettably, I'm going to open the session this morning with a little bit of not-so-great news. I want to acknowledge that we have now received word and confirmed the death of one American citizen in the terrorist attacks in Spain amongst those who have been killed. We are still confirming the injuries and deaths of others, but obviously we express our deepest sympathies to the loved ones of this individual, and obviously the others who have been – who have suffered loss of life. And we offer our thoughts and prayers to their families, as they're going to be dealing with a very, very tough few days ahead of them.

So let's return to the subject at hand. Again, one of the things I most enjoy about this job, and I've enjoyed in the past, is the opportunity to have a conversation with young adults and people that are on kind of the front end and front edges of their professional life and where they may be headed. And so this is a real special opportunity for me to have the chance to talk with you a bit this morning. I know each of you are wrapping up your time with your experience here at the State Department. I'm certain – hopefully, I'm certain that you found it to be very useful, a great learning experience for you, and to also help inform you as to some choices that you'll be making about your future – the career you want to choose, your future professional life, and the path you want to travel.

So first, I want to thank you for the time you spent with us here. Thank you for your contributions and your service while here. You worked hard, and we appreciate on behalf of the country your service while you were here at the State Department as well, and I know your colleagues deeply appreciate your contributions as well.

I think with the events of so many things that have been happening this past

week, I want to use this as an opportunity in particular, because we have so many of – a great representation of so many of young great Americans who are making these choices ahead of them. And I know it's a topic that's on everyone's mind, in particular, and I think that's the topic of our race relations and diversity in the workplace. And I think, first, it's simply important to say – although I think it is well understood and embraced by, I'm certain, everyone in this room – that we all know hate is not an American value.

Nowhere is it an American value. We do honor, protect, and defend freedom of speech, First Amendment rights. It's what sets us apart from every other government regime in the world, in allowing people a right to expression. These are good things. But we do not honor, nor do we promote or accept hate speech in any form. And those who embrace it poison our public discourse and they damage the very country that they claim to love. So we condemn racism, bigotry in all its forms. Racism is evil; it is antithetical to America's values. It's antithetical to the American idea.

George Washington said in an address to the synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, that his vision for our country was, I quote, "a government which to bigotry gives no sanction; to persecution, no assistance." In his second inaugural address in the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln called on Americans to "bind up the nation's wounds." What Lincoln knew, and that we are sadly reminded today, that painful racial tensions are part of our experience as a nation. We too today should seek to bind up the wounds. We must pursue reconciliation, understanding, and respect regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or religious, or political views.

One of America's defining characteristics is the promise of opportunity for advancement regardless of your skin color, how much money your parents make, or where you came from. It's why millions of Americans, millions of people have risked their lives and their fortunes to protect this country, to come to this country – because they know that America promises a chance to fulfill your aspirations no matter your background. You will succeed based upon your efforts.

As my good friend Condi Rice has said, the essence of America is that which really unites us. It is not ethnicity or nationality or religion, it is an idea that you can come from humble circumstances and do great things. That it doesn't matter where you came from but where you're going. As the arm of the U.S. Government representing America around the world, the U.S. State Department should be a clear display of America's values and our people, not just in our mission but in the composition of our workforce.

We have a great diversity gap in the State Department. We need the State – we need a State Department that reflects the American people, reflects who we are. The State Department must redouble our efforts to increase diversity at the highest ranks of the Department, including at the ambassador level. Only about 12 percent of our senior Foreign Service officers are non-white. That number is about the same for our senior executive service.

To better understand our talent pool, I have directed the relevant committees

to adopt a new procedure. Every time we have an opening for an ambassador position, at least one of the candidates must be a minority candidate. Now they may not be ready, but we will know where the talent pool is. A big part of developing our minority leadership is identifying qualified individuals five and 10 years before they are ready to become senior leaders and managing and developing their careers, as we do others, so that they're undergoing preparations for those senior roles over time. We need to be – we need a more deliberate process to cultivate the abundance of minority talent we already have in the State Department.

All of this is a leadership issue. It's the role of leadership from the Secretary of State to the assistant secretaries and directors of bureaus and everyone in between. We have to own this process. We have to manage this process and be held accountable for the results of this process.

We're also going to re-examine and expand where we recruit from. As some of you know better than most, America's best and brightest are not just from the Ivy League, but they're from a lot of other places in the country – Laredo, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; Roanoke, Virginia. They're kids sitting on the front row of their high school classes, they're veterans from our military who are coming out of service looking for the next part of their career, and many of them with a strong desire to continue to serve their country. And they're so gifted in many ways from many walks of life.

So we're going to build our recruiting team operations out in places that we haven't concentrated before. Now, that doesn't mean coming through town once a year and dropping some pamphlets off at the recruiting office. We're going to build and develop relationships with institutions around the country so that people can more easily find us, and more importantly, we can find them, not just to rely upon people seeking us out.

Qualified Americans of all backgrounds should know a State Department career at State is possible, and we need to work harder to find those individuals. Twenty-five percent of our Civil Service is African American. Only 9 percent of our Foreign Service specialists and 5 percent of our Foreign Service generalists are African American.

While our diplomats in residence at Howard, Spellman, Morehouse, and Florida A&M do an outstanding job ensuring that people understand the opportunities at the State Department, there are more than 100 historically black colleges and universities, and there's so much more we can do to raise awareness about the range of careers at State.

Only 7 percent of our Civil Service is Hispanic, in addition to 6 percent of our foreign generalists and 10 percent of our Foreign Service specialists. We're also recruiting at Hispanic-serving institutions, including Miami Dade College, Florida International University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of New Mexico. But we can do more to partner with Hispanic- and Latino-serving institutions and include more Hispanic and Latinos on our team.

We also want to expand our footprint at minority-focused job fairs, and we

can do more to recruit from one of the most diverse and proven talent pools, as I mentioned: our U.S. military, the men and women in uniform who are completing the service to their country and ready to move on to their civilian life. We already hire 29 percent of our Civil Service team, 29 percent of our Foreign Service generalists, and 16 percent of our Foreign Service specialists from the military, so we know this is a rich talent pool from which to fish.

Only about one-third of our senior Foreign Service officers are women, and we will work to close the gender gap as well.

Today is a fitting occasion to be sharing this with you because all of you in this room, through your participation in fellowships and internships here at the State Department, made an early declaration of your interest in public service. Some of you will even be working here soon. We will be keeping all of our fellowship and internship programs in place. The department-wide freeze we put on hiring programs early this year is only temporary, and it was a temporary measure so we could take a thorough accounting of the entire State Department in consideration of how to best strengthen it and to position ourselves to improve our diversity.

Our current fellowships and internships are valuable pipelines of talent for our organization and necessary to achieving our diversity objectives. You're our future leaders, whether here at the department or elsewhere in roles you may choose in the country. The seeds of greater diversity that we're planting today will have to be nurtured for years to come. Whether you find yourselves here or somewhere else, as future leaders, it will be your responsibility to run with that torch.

I think one of the things that it's important to appreciate is the value of diversity. It's not just to achieve a mix of population that looks like the rest of our country. I know from my long career in the private sector, my experience has been the value of diversity in the workplace is it enriches our work, it enriches our work product to have individuals who come with a different cultural perspective or they come with different life experiences. That's the value. They will see things in the world that I cannot see. I did not have that life experience.

And so whether it's African American, Latino, Hispanic, women, LGBT, come with experiences I do not know. This enriches the quality of our work. We know we are a stronger organization when we embrace, incorporate diverse points of view into our work product.

More importantly, I would say to you as individuals, if you are open, you will enrich your life. You will enrich your life by engaging with people of different backgrounds, different life experiences than you had as you were growing up, and you will find life to be a wonderful, wonderful mosaic. So I encourage you to do that. Now, before I close, I always – when I speak to young adults and people who are beginning the early parts of their career, I have a message I like to convey to all, and this is on the issue of integrity. Much of your future success and what defines you in your professional career or whether you fall short will be a function of how you

view your personal integrity and how you view to deploy your personal integrity or you choose to compromise your personal integrity.

So what does integrity mean? Well, I'm an engineer by training. I graduated from the University of Texas with a civil engineering degree. I was a practicing engineer for many years and worked at a very technical background. So when I think about integrity – and if you go to the dictionary and look it up, the second definition is “the state of being whole and complete.” Now, from an engineer, I think about this building – structural integrity. It's whole, it's complete; we don't worry about this building falling in on us because we know it is whole and complete structurally. It's sound. We just rely upon it.

Well, your personal integrity is much the same way. It's not something that can be trained. It's not something that can be taught. You're born with it. You're born with a clean slate, with your personal integrity. No one can take it from you. Only you can relinquish it. And you express that integrity every day in so many actions that you may not even think about. And most importantly, it's those things you do when no one's looking, that you do the right thing not only when people are watching but, more importantly, when they're not watching the choices you make. If you relinquish your personal integrity – you choose to take a shortcut, you choose to compromise a rule, you choose to move ahead at someone else's expense – you may have a short-term gain out of that. But once you relinquish any element of your personal integrity, it is very, very difficult to regain it. It puts you on a pathway that's very hard to reverse.

So I can't emphasize to you enough the value of that quality that exists in you. It's yours; you own it. It's yours alone to decide how you use it. If you choose to conduct yourself committed to a life of personal integrity, you will be whole and complete. I promise you. If you choose to compromise or give away your personal integrity, you will have a life that is neither whole nor complete. I know this because I have seen it happen to others.

So you're at this stage of your career where you get to choose how you want to conduct yourself. This is the most important quality you will take to the workplace with you. Yes, your skills and all that you've learned and all you've studied hard to do, and that will be a continuum – for the rest of your life you will be learning. But your integrity is just there. It defines how you will conduct yourself, how others will see you as well – as a trusted partner, a trusted colleague, or someone they have to keep an eye on. I know you'll choose the right path of integrity.

So, again, thank you for your service here this summer. I wish you all the best. Whatever decisions you may make about your future, I know the quality of this group of individuals. You're going to be extraordinary citizens to our country. You're going to be extraordinary leaders in our country whatever you choose to do. We're proud of you. We're proud you were with us for this time. And for those of you that come back to work for us, I look forward to seeing you around the building. God speed to all of you and God bless you. (Applause.)

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