Direct from the D.G.

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DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE FOREIGN SERVICE

A Commitment to Taking Care of Our People

October is Work-Life Wellness month. During the past decade, there has been a growing recognition in the private sector that supporting employee wellness is good for employees and for business. The Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, released in May, likewise underscores the importance of work-life wellness. Indeed, the move from the term "work-life balance," with its implicit nod to the need to make trade-offs between work and life, to the more holistic concept of work-life wellness, shows an increasing understanding that work is as much a part of life as anything else - not something separate and distinct.

Still, it is not the only thing. We want employees to feel empowered and engaged at work and have the time and energy for themselves and their families. In short, we want our people to do well and be well.

Secretary of State Kerry is committed to incorporating wellness into State's culture. Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources Higginbottom leads the Department's efforts on this score through the Work-Life Wellness Leadership Council, which she created and chairs. People join the Department because of their passion for our mission and, in many cases, a desire to see the world and learn about other cultures. They stay because they recognize that, not only can they make a difference, they are also an integral part of a larger Department team that cares about our nation and the world, and those employees, in equal measure. That is why the Department consistently ranks among the best places to work in the federal government.

We have established a number of programs to support our employees' personal and family needs and responsibilities, including flexible work arrangements, job-sharing and part-time work schedules. There is also access to emergency back-up day care and a new voluntary leave bank. We are developing an extended leave without pay option so employees can take time for personal and professional enrichment or attend to health and family issues.

Our commitment to the well-being of our people is supported by a growing body of research that suggests overwork and long hours at the office seldom result in better output and can reduce productivity by increasing employees' vulnerability to illness. Healthy, motivated employees are much more likely to contribute to their organizations and add to the bottom line.

Winning the war for talent in today's competitive labor market requires flexibility, creativity and the recognition that our greatest resource is, in fact, our people. As Director General and Director of Human Resources, my job is to recruit, retain and sustain a talented and diverse workforce. This means caring about and cultivating human beings, empowering them to realize their potential. If we are to succeed in creating a diverse, talented 21th century workforce equipped to take on tomorrow's challenges, we must heed our credo—Mission First, People Always.

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