

States Institute on International Education in the Schools

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Remarks by David S. C. Chu

Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

### MEETING THE NEED FOR WORLD LANGUAGES

- Thank you, Dr. Desai, for your introduction and for chairing our panel. I also thank Governor Hunt for his invitation to discuss the foreign language skills and regional expertise needs of the Department of Defense with the Institute.
  
- Some consider the Department of Defense the largest consumer of foreign language skills in the world. With over a million military members assigned to locations on all seven continents, we have significant--and growing--demands for language skills across the Department. In recent years, our demands have intensified significantly. The reasons are well known.
  - Every American has been inundated with news coverage of the Taliban in Afghanistan; the war in Iraq; the tensions between Pakistan and India, North and South Korea, Palestinians and Israelis; the drug war in South America; Chechnyan rebel attacks in Russia; uprisings in Africa; hostages in the Philippines; and even our own recent diplomatic conflicts with long-term European allies. Of course, the 9/11 attacks on our homeland continue to send a potent message about culture and language literacy.

- This quick list of events makes three facts clear:
  - Changes in the international security environment and in the nature of threats to US national security have increased the range of potential conflict zones for our defense forces. Along with the changed threat comes the expansion of likely coalition partners with whom US forces will work.
  - Conflict against enemies speaking less commonly taught languages will not abate.
  - In this day of instantaneous communication, we must accept that adversaries will attempt to manipulate the media and leverage sympathetic elements of the population and “opposition” politicians to divide international coalitions. Video-streamed beheadings epitomize such manipulations.
- Clearly, our security forces must have strong foreign language and foreign area expertise to conduct multi-national missions, sustain coalitions, and pursue regional stability. This includes humanitarian and nation building operations.
  - Further, the entire Department of Defense workforce must understand the cultures of our enemies *and allies* to ensure national security.
- The Department is aggressively pursuing a dual-pronged approach to meet these challenges.

- Internally, we have proposed a roadmap to transform how foreign language and regional expertise are used and valued.
  - We want to create a foundation of language and cultural expertise within the force to strengthen our resident knowledge of other countries and cultures.
  - We need to create the capacity to surge language skills during crises; and establish a cadre of foreign language professionals possessing reading, listening, and speaking abilities at the “3/3/3” level.
  - We must track the management and upward mobility of language and foreign area professionals.
- This commitment requires a culture shift and provides a GREAT opportunity for our citizens with language skills.
- Embedded within the development of this DoD Transformation Roadmap is the realization that we cannot meet this national security challenge alone. We cannot build the level of language skills, across the broad range of world languages needed, with its special focus on less commonly taught languages, after young men and women enter the Department.
  - Language acquisition takes time that we don’t have.
    - The level of language skills that we need now (3/3/3) in less commonly taught languages takes even longer.
  - Reality also makes us consider the competition: these same skills are in increasing demand in EVERY sector of our society.

- Private industry wants cultural awareness and language skills to compete in the global market;
  - Other federal departments need these skills in their employees to oversee international commerce, build diplomatic relations, provide health care for our diverse citizens, ensure equal access to municipal services for varied populations; and ensure border and port security, not to mention gather intelligence.
    - In fact, by our count, 80 federal agencies depend in part on proficiency in more than 100 foreign languages.
- In addition to the federal demand, states and cities require these skills for their own community stability and well being. Consider languages and cultural expertise needed today by policemen, court workers, first responders, and hospital staff, not to mention ESL teachers and school staff.
  - One example: the city of San Francisco provides services to citizens who speak over 120 languages!
  - Another: The Deputy Executive Director of The International City and County Management Association asked me “What second language do you find in Beverly Hills?” She provided hints: 50% of the school children speak this language; there is no tradition of voting in this ethnic group and they seldom participate in public hearings; there is a low trust of government. Answer: The language is Farsi!
- The bottom line is that the core institutions of our country--defense, business, health care, law enforcement, etc., will be competing with each other for language skills that are in short supply. For our long-

term *national well-being*, the capacity must be increased to meet the demand of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- Thus the second prong to the DoD approach.
- With the Center for the Advanced Study of Language, DoD sponsored The National Language Conference: A Call for Action in June 2004. We convened over 300 leaders from Congress, the federal departments, universities and language associations, industry, state and city communities, as well as military representatives and international language experts. Our discussions were framed by information about current academic capacity compiled by the Center for the Advanced Study of Language. This information is provided in your conference packets and I offer these data as an answer to the first question posed to this panel: What is the current state of world languages capacity in the US?.
- Let me highlight some of this research:
  - According to the Modern Language Association, enrollment in modern foreign languages declined from 16% of college students in 1965 to 8% in 1974, rebounding to just 8.6% in 2002. Less Commonly Taught Languages account for 12% of all language enrollments. But this means about 1% of American college students are studying these critical languages—a disappointing number.
  - Table 5 (on page 19) gives figures for college/university enrollments in the DoD investment languages in 1998 and 2002. Figures 4 and 5

(on page 18) present this same data graphically for the LCTL and for those languages with over 4,000 students. While the increases in Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, and Pilipino are heartening, these enrollments are usually in introductory courses and resulting proficiency levels are unknown.

- Table 6 and Figure 6 (pages 19 and 20) provide trend data on the number of language programs in DoD investment languages in higher education.
  - Only a very small number of programs offer most of these languages, revealing a lack of instructional capacity.
- Table 7 (page 21) illustrates increasing enrollments in foreign languages in US high schools. However, many of these are introductory courses when what we need for language proficiency will require sustained courses of study throughout high school and college. Even better would be an earlier start.
- Finally, and therefore perhaps most important, Figure 7 (page 22) compares foreign language enrollments in US primary and secondary schools in 2000.
- The participants of the National Language Conference agreed these data showed significant shortfalls in:
  - programs offering instruction in the range of necessary languages;

- the number of students gaining foundational language skill upon which to build needed proficiency levels;
- focus on less commonly taught languages (which, by the way, could be addressed by tapping our heritage communities).
  - Even a cursory analysis tells us, if we stay this course, a large proportion of our American youth will not be prepared for the very different environment in which we find ourselves.
- At the end of the three days, the participants of the unprecedented National Language Conference agreed that our country needs a national strategy, plans, and policies that engage the American public. Their recommendations are captured in the conference white paper: [A Call to Action for National Foreign Language Capabilities](#). Among the recommendations are several items that I consider critical:
  - Of paramount importance, we all must recognize that language and cultural competency is a national need. These capabilities are determinants of future success in our nation's security, prosperity, and well-being. There is no escaping that fact.
  - Second, leadership on this mandate must be comprehensive. No one sector, private industry, the school system, or government has all the needs or the solutions. But, the government, academic and private sectors contribute to, and can mutually benefit from these new national capabilities.

- And leadership must spring forth at all levels to help the American people understand the urgency of this issue. Leadership ranges from Federal Department secretaries and Members of Congress advocating language skills to school counselors and teachers encouraging students to take 4 years of language in high school, even though it isn't "required"—yet!
- The white paper calls for a National Language Authority to develop and implement a national foreign language strategy and a National Foreign Language Coordination Council to coordinate implementation of a national foreign language strategy. Both are solid proposals.
- The National Language Authority would be responsible for:
  - Developing and overseeing the implementation of a national foreign language strategy across all sectors;
  - Establishing formal relationships among the major stakeholders in meeting the Nation's needs for improved capabilities to include Federal, state, and local government agencies, academia, industry, labor, and heritage communities; and
  - Leading a public information campaign that raises awareness of public and private sector careers requiring foreign language skills and cultural understanding.

- A National Foreign Language Coordination Council would, among other things, identify crucial priorities, increase public awareness of the need for foreign language skills, advocate maximum use of resources, and coordinate cross-sector efforts and allocate designated resources to promising programs and initiatives at any level (federal, state, and local).
  - As an immediate action, Federal Departments could assess their language and cultural expertise requirements in the immediate and long term. The Federal departments should then articulate these requirements to universities, high schools, and grade schools to build a training pipeline to meet those needs.
    - Unless educators, parents, and students know of the demand for job skills, the response *we need* will not surface.
    - I will be working with other Federal partners to initiate such an assessment in the coming months.
- The White Paper recommends over 20 actions that affect the education system through collaboration, research, shared technology, and standards. Some of these include:
  - Local, state, and Federal agencies and education administrators should coordinate foreign language requirements and resources through the educational system, from Kindergarten through advanced degrees.

- Basic foreign language and cultural understanding classes should be available and encouraged for all students, starting early in the educational process.
- Government-sponsored research and evaluation programs should be implemented to help identify and support innovative academic approaches to teaching, study abroad, immersion, and other traditional methods used to acquire language and culture skills.
- Procedures should be developed to identify existing best practices, flagship and immersion programs, and career opportunities and to apply and adapt these model programs and opportunities elsewhere.
- The maintenance and development of heritage language capabilities should be supported at the local and state level by offering assistance with teachers, teaching materials, and access to broadcasts from foreign media providing current and authentic materials for both teachers and students.
- The White Paper acknowledges, and I quote  

“The essential task of increasing our Nation’s foreign language skills and cultural understanding will be accomplished primarily at the state and local level”.

This national need is an opportunity for you, the states' and K-12 educators', to improve the national welfare in a new, direct and concrete fashion.

- I offer two points of advice:
- I recommend your initial efforts be based on collaboration with each other.
  - You have a ready-made opportunity by joining the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the Department of Education in the celebration of 2005 as The Year of Languages. I understand that Governor Hunt and Dr. Vivian Stewart will be providing information about this nationwide initiative.
- Second, your state and school efforts can have more impact if you find model language programs and duplicate what has worked in those programs to build capacity in investment languages and cultural expertise!
  - For instance, the first classes of early immersion students in Fairfax County Public Schools are graduating from college and these students have continued the study of languages in their higher education experience. It is a successful program and lends itself to being replicated. There are several such models.
    - I encourage the state superintendents, governors' education advisors, broad of education members, state legislators, and school

and university representatives to tap into what the Asia Society and ACTFL already know about successful efforts.

- From my perspective, creating a training pipeline, from K-12 schools to community colleges and state universities – all in one community – could hold tremendous potential for the students in that system and serve as a pilot for the country. I hope that thought gets some wheels turning!
- To recap, I've provided you a snapshot of the current state of world languages capacity in the US.
- The number of US students learning foreign languages, the number of languages covered and the focus on less commonly taught languages fall woefully short in meeting our nation's demand.
- I've discussed the critical needs for language from both a national perspective and the DoD-unique view. Nationally, we need language skills to remain secure, economically prosperous, and stable in our own communities. DoD needs officers, enlisted personnel and civilians with global cultural competency, language skills in our investment languages, and proficiency at higher levels. *Our country cannot retain its strong global role without these skills.*
- Last, I've provided the best guidance to states and K-12 educators to meet the language capacity need: collaborate with each other, join in and learn from the Celebration of 2005 The Year of Language, and duplicate model language programs to create communities of language learning.

- The research, recommendations, and identified needs are based upon the proceedings of The National Language Conference and the white paper that resulted from this conference – A Call for Action. The paper provides recommendations for a way ahead, with much room for creativity, re-shaping of old ideas and new approaches. I ask that you join us in this endeavor. It requires hard work, but is necessary.
- The Call for Action white paper ends with a quote from Dr. Robert Scott, President of Adelphi University, which puts this urgent issue into context. He prepares us for the rough road ahead as we take on the challenge we face.

*We have a critical national need to know other cultures and to be competent in communicating with other people. These are not new needs. We have heard many calls to action to address these needs... We have made so little progress and have prepared so many globally illiterate [citizens] because universities, states, businesses, and the federal government have been inconsistent in their priorities... So it is past time for a renewed focus on our role as members of the world community. Last call; it is time for action.*

*Dr. Robert A. Scott  
President, Adelphi University*