

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2026

Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write with deep concern regarding the State Department's indefinite delay in onboarding Thomas R. Pickering and Charles B. Rangel fellows into the U.S. Foreign Service. This delay in onboarding mission-ready fellows undermines U.S. diplomatic readiness, wastes congressionally appropriated taxpayer dollars, and directly harms these outstanding Americans while simultaneously discouraging future talent from applying to the Foreign Service. We urge you to include all eligible Pickering and Rangel fellows in the remaining A-100 orientation classes of 2026, provide an explanation for this indefinite onboarding delay, and clarify the situation for future cohorts of public servants.

As you know, the Thomas R. Pickering and Charles B. Rangel fellowships are the State Department's "flagship initiatives for recruiting top-tier talent" for the U.S. Foreign Service.<sup>1</sup> The fellowships have an annual acceptance rate of under 5% and fellows are selected from all over the country, collectively representing the best and breadth of our nation. All Pickering and Rangel fellows obtain two-year graduate degrees funded by the State Department in a field of study that is relevant to a career in the U.S. Foreign Service, attend numerous professional development programs to enhance their understanding and skills for Foreign Service careers, and complete two internships – one abroad at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate and one domestic, at the State Department headquarters for Pickering Fellows and with a member of Congress for Rangel fellows. The U.S. government invests over \$100,000 on average per fellow to complete the fellowships and train to serve as U.S. diplomats.

As of 2022, these two merit- and need- based fellowships have increased the number of Foreign Service generalists from underrepresented groups by 33% and the number of women by 6%.<sup>2</sup> Pickering and Rangel fellows are uniquely qualified to serve in the U.S. Foreign Service as they have not only successfully met the standards required by the State Department of all Foreign Service Officers, but have also benefitted from the additional enrichment, mentorship, and support of these fellowship programs.

The Pickering and Rangel fellowships are among the diplomatic fellowship programs codified by Congress and were reauthorized in the FY 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, on a bipartisan basis. Despite the investments and bipartisan support for these fellowships, we have heard reports that onboarding invitations for fellows in the 2023 and deferred 2022 cohorts largely remain on hold. Only a small fraction of the eligible fellows have received orientation invitations while the majority have waited for months with little to no communication, explanation, or transparency from the State Department. These highly qualified and talented Americans have completed the rigorous academic,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Graduate Fellowship Program, U.S. Department of State <https://careers.state.gov/interns-fellows/foreign-service-fellowships/thomas-r-pickering-foreign-affairs-graduate-fellowship-program/>

<sup>2</sup> James, Kenya. "Diversity Milestones." *State Magazine*, U.S. Department of State, Nov. 2022, <https://statemag.state.gov/2022/11/1122feat01/>

professional, and skills requirements of these fellowships to embark on careers in the U.S. Foreign Service. They have also obtained and maintained the proper medical, security, and suitability requirements of Foreign Service Officers. The longer these ready-to-serve fellows are delayed in their onboarding the more we compromise our national security interests, diplomatic capacity, and leadership on the world stage.

We request that you include all remaining eligible Thomas R. Pickering and Charles B. Rangel fellows in the remaining A-100 orientation classes of 2026. There are 50+ fellows ready and waiting to serve the United States in the Foreign Service. Taxpayers have invested millions of dollars in these diplomats. Now, you must let the State Department reap the benefits. Furthermore, we request responses to the following questions by April 19, 2026.

1. How many Thomas R. Pickering and Charles B. Rangel fellows from the 2023 and deferred 2022 cohorts remain in the onboarding pipeline?
  - a. How many fellows have been onboarded from these cohorts at the time of response to this letter?
2. What is the reason for the delay in onboarding Pickering and Rangel fellows?
  - a. What criteria is being used to determine which fellows are selected for immediate onboarding?
3. Please outline the steps the State Department will take to better manage these fellowships to prevent delays for future cohorts.
4. Contractually, Pickering and Rangel Fellows may be subjected to a reimbursement obligation to the United States Government if they are unable to fulfill the obligations of the fellowships. Are fellows subjected to this reimbursement obligation if they are not able to complete the fellowship obligations due to State Department delays and through no fault of the fellows themselves?
  - a. How much in congressionally appropriated taxpayer dollars would be wasted if fellows are unable to complete the fellowship obligations due to State Department delays and through no fault of the fellows themselves?
5. How many Pickering and Rangel fellows have served and are currently serving in the U.S. Foreign Service?

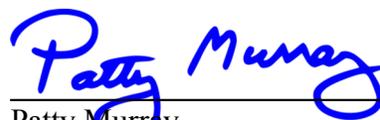
Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator



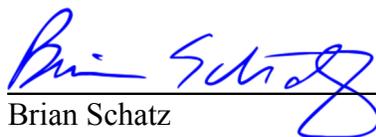
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Brian Schatz  
United States Senator



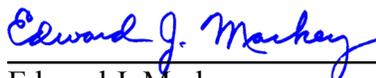
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



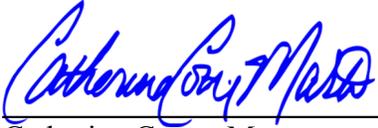
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



Andy Kim  
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks  
United States Senator