

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“Avoiding Duplication: An Examination of the State Department’s
Proposal to Construct a New Diplomatic Security Training Facility
Tuesday, July 28, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Good morning and welcome.

In today’s hearing, we will examine the decision to approve the State Department’s plan to construct the Foreign Affairs Security Training Center at Fort Pickett Army National Guard Base in Blackstone, Virginia. We would like to learn why this half-billion-dollar project was greenlighted even though a more cost-effective alternative was available by expanding the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) training complex in Glynco, Georgia.

Since 1993, the State Department has been attempting to consolidate 19 Bureau of Diplomatic Security training facilities to provide necessary soft and hard skills training to personnel assigned to high-threat, high-risk environments. In December 2012, State Department presented the Office of Management and Budget with a full master plan, which included construction costs for all services, at a proposed cost to the taxpayer of \$950 million. After consolidating several facilities in the plan, State reduced its proposal to \$907 million. At OMB’s request, FLETC presented a \$273 million full-service alternative that leveraged existing facilities used to train law enforcement personnel from over 90 federal agencies, including State’s own Diplomatic Security agents. Despite the significant price difference and congressional opposition, on April 17, 2014, OMB approved a pared down version of State’s plan: A \$461 million proposal that removed all classroom-based soft skills security training, the dormitory complex, and the cafeteria.

The need to provide appropriate training to State personnel is of utmost national importance. However, after examining OMB’s analysis, this committee discovered that OMB auditors recommended the administration construct State’s training center at FLETC in Glynco. According to OMB’s own cost analysis, the FLETC proposal represented an immediate savings of \$188 million and an estimated \$812 million savings over 10 years. Additionally, OMB concluded there were other benefits to the FLETC option over the State Department proposal, including timing of construction and foreign affairs counter threat training, and life support services. Ultimately, however, the director of OMB selected State’s plan, even though it is more expensive and has fewer capabilities.

In today’s budgetary environment, OMB’s fiscal carelessness demonstrates the need to conduct stringent oversight of the administration’s project decisions to ensure taxpayer money is not wasted in duplication. By constructing a facility only for hands-on security training, State failed to achieve its main objective: consolidation. Not only will State overspend hundreds of millions of dollars building, operating and maintaining a new facility at Fort Pickett, but it still will have to contract for and lease other facilities to provide soft skills training components.

In today's hearing, witnesses will shed light on OMB's approval process, attempt to explain why State needs its own training facility when taxpayers already pay to maintain similar facilities, and describe what efforts FLETC officials undertook to accommodate State requirements.

I thank the witnesses for joining us today and I look forward to their testimony.

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