

# State Department's top ranks need more career staff, senators say

By Eric Katz

June 7, 2024

A group of Democratic senators is striving to ensure a more merit-based system in the awarding of top diplomatic roles, introducing a new bill to boost the rate of career employees who serve in such positions.

The State Department Integrity and Transparency Act ([S. 4476](#)) would put new requirements on the composition of top appointments at the agency and create new qualifications for presidential nominees. Introduced by Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., and Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., the bill would place new transparency measures on ambassador nominees in an attempt to limit the number of campaign donors who take the jobs.

“It is imperative for United States national security that the Department of State is appropriately staffed by empowered, nonpartisan foreign policy professionals and thoroughly qualified and vetted political appointees,” the lawmakers wrote in their legislation.

Diplomatic veterans and supporters of the career Foreign Service have long lamented presidents' tendencies to reward campaign donors with ambassadorships and have fought to ensure more professionalized and qualified representatives abroad. Under President Trump, the rate of donors serving in ambassadorial roles spiked.

Under the bill, State assistant secretary and ambassadorial nominees must submit reports to Congress on their qualifications. That would include their knowledge of the language in the region they are covering or serving in, as well as their understanding of its history, culture and politics.

The measure would create a new requirement that at least 75% of State's assistant secretaries have served in the Senior Foreign Service or the Senior Executive Service. Sponsors of the bill noted that would bring State in line with the career staffing requirements at the Defense Department and CIA.