

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
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“Working Together to Reverse the Decline in Intercountry Adoptions”

Committee Staff Present:

Allison Hollabaugh, Counsel, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Participants:

Suzanne Lawrence, Special Advisor for Children’s Issues, U.S. Department of State;

John Carver, Father of Six Children Adopted from the OSCE Region;

Ron Stoddart, President, Save Adoptions;

Kathleen Strottman, Former Legislative Director, Senator Mary Landrieu

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HOLLABAUGH: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here today to join us in a discussion on working together to reverse the decline in intercountry adoptions.

The U.S. has a long and proud history of intercountry adoptions, both sending American children abroad for adoption as well as welcoming children from around the world here. Last year, the U.S. worked with 19 OSCE participating states and five partner states to find forever homes in the U.S. for more than 1,000 children. But this number is a shadow of previous years.

Overall, intercountry adoptions have been on the decline in the United States since 2004 when Americans adopted almost 23,000 children worldwide. In 2016, only 5,370 intercountry adoptions were completed. While this decline may reflect an increase in economic stability and domestic adoptions in some children's home countries, it may also reflect a need for change in the U.S. adoption process and international aid priorities. This issue is complex, and it has seen rises and falls over the last 15 years.

Here to help us understand the trends and the way forward, I'm very happy to welcome Suzanne Lawrence who is the brand new special adviser for children's issues at the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. She joins us with 28 years of experience in international diplomacy and took over this position in the Office of Children's Issues in September of this year.

Ms. Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: Good morning, everyone. It's my pleasure to be here with you, Allison, and my fellow co-panelists and many of the people in the room who I have had the opportunity to meet in these short three months that I've been in this position.

As Allison said, I am new to the role, but not new to the issues. I've been in the Foreign Service for nearly 28 years. I don't know how that got to be 28 years, but it did. And I've worked within the Bureau of Consular Affairs on adoptions and other consular matters both in Washington and overseas. And my most recent experience – in fact, we hosted a delegation from the Helsinki Commission in Athens. I was the deputy chief of mission at our embassy there. So it's very nice to be with all of you this morning.

And in my opening remarks, I just wanted to say a few things about the status of intercountry adoption. Allison had a few statistics and I'd like to expand a little bit on that to talk a little bit about strengthening the accrediting entities and oversight of adoption service providers and, of course, most importantly, what we do each and every day at the Department of State and in the Office of Children's Issues and in our embassies and consulates around the world, working to keep international adoption a viable option for American families and the children overseas who need homes.

So first, let me talk a little bit about the current state. As Allison discussed, the numbers for 2016 were at a little over 5,300 and we know that that is a decline from the high in 2004.

And as she pointed out, it is a complex issue and there are numerous factors for that decline. The decrease is a worldwide decrease, so it's not something just affecting the United States.

We have all read many of the reasons why people explain that there has been this decline. We know from our experience – and there are many people in the room who've worked with these countries – that in some instances there's been a unilateral closing of programs related to intercountry adoption. And we know that's a fact in Russia and Guatemala. Those would be two examples of countries that have decided not to participate.

We also know that there are countries that have made a concerted effort to place children within their own borders, within their own countries, and those would be countries like China and India.

And then we also know that there are some countries that have made a decision, because they are concerned of what happens to the children from their countries once they are placed outside of their country, and that has a lot to do with post-adoption reports which I know a lot of us have spoken about in various meetings.

But there also are countries who face concerns about their ability to provide oversight and to prevent corrupt practices. And we've seen a little bit of that most recently in the case of Ethiopia. And we had some calls yesterday on that, events in Ethiopia related to international adoption.

But it is International Adoption Month and I do think we should at least celebrate the fact that over the last five years 33,000 children have been brought to the United States to join homes in this country. And of that we are really proud.

We've talked a lot about it in numerous meetings and with consultations with Allison and other colleagues on the Hill, and in our discussions with countries around the world, whether they're here visiting, whether we are talking to their embassies here in Washington, whether it's our embassies, our ambassadors or other personnel in our missions overseas talking to their foreign counterparts. They raise issues repeatedly. And we've kind of aggregated those issues into three groups.

I already spoke about the post-adoption reports. That is really an issue that countries raise with us consistently. And it's something that we know we count on adoption service providers and are grateful for your help in getting families to complete those reports because that is a barrier, as countries see it, to maintaining that relationship with us.

Second, as I also mentioned in the case – well, Ethiopia was one example, but another barrier is illegal or corrupt practices. And again, that's a concern because in every country around the world, those leaders and those people who enter into agreements with us have to be able to defend their own countries, why they're involved in international adoption and why their citizens are being adopted by people outside of their country.

And then there's unregulated custody transfer. That is one of the other barriers that is repeatedly raised with us.

So what our work is and what we try to do is to identify these barriers, address them, see if there are other barriers that may exist because every country is unique, and then we try through our bilateral engagement, through consultation, through work with our colleagues on the Hill, through our work with our colleagues in our embassies and consulates around the world to address those barriers, see if there are ways that we can remove those barriers, see if there are questions that we can answer, fears that we can allay, ways that we can, again, keep this a viable option.

We also work, as you all know, with accrediting entities to monitor adoption service providers and ensure that they are compliant with accreditation standards that exist under U.S. law.

So one of the things I did want to close with is really to talk a little bit about what we do because, of course, we're here today talking about this, but – and I have this very nice title, special adviser for children's issues, but I try to make the point that I am not the only person at the Department of State working on international adoption. And I know a number of people in this room have met my colleagues who work every day, who are country officers who specialize in the practices in different countries, who have contacts with other central authorities, who build a rapport with people within ministries in those foreign countries who work hand in hand with their colleagues at our embassies and consulates so that we have the best possible information and can pass that along to those who need it and also work to more effectively address the barriers that I spoke about, but also to look at new opportunities that might exist because of some of that information that we're able to develop.

So I did want to lastly say that one thing we have done with regard to the post-adoption reports is, where we've seen that – complying with report requirements and being able to respond to the concerns that some countries have brought to us about post-adoption reports, we've undertaken to go out and try and get those post-adoption reports turned in. And that has made a difference.

One example is Peru where that was something that they raised with us repeatedly. And as a result, they have lifted a suspension on intercountry adoption. Another that you are probably familiar with is Kazakhstan. And we made a huge push, put people on the phones, got in touch with adoptive parents to get these reports turned in. And now they are considering reopening intercountry adoption. And again, I do thank the adoption service providers for their help with that, because working together we can actually make some headway and try and reverse this trend.

So again, I'm happy to be here with you all today. I'm happy to be part of a constructive and hopefully balanced discussion of all the things that we can do together to work cooperatively and make this really, truly a viable option for so many families.

Thank you, Allison.

HOLLABAUGH: Thank you, Ms. Lawrence. It's wonderful to hear of the progress in Peru and Kazakhstan. And hopefully the lessons learned there can be applied going forward to several other countries.

Next, joining us is John Carver. He's the father of six children adopted from the OSCE region. He's been a pastor of Faith Outreach Chapel in Baltimore, Maryland since 1994. After trying to have children for nine years, John and his wife, Tammy, decided to adopt internationally. Working with Nightlight Christian Adoptions, they adopted four children from Russia and two children from Belarus in the late 1990s.

John.

CARVER: Good morning. Thanks for being here today. Thank you.

Beginning in 1998, we were adopting children and we were going to adopt two. And obviously, that didn't happen, so we ended up with six between 1998 and 2004. The adoption structure was very, very organized for us. We completed an application for adoption, we did the home studies, we did the background checks, and the agency took us step by step with each child through the entire adoption system, structure.

So I can remember the adoption agency called us – called me one day and said, John, we're overnighting a tape – back then it was a videotape, talking 1800s – and it's going to have some of the kids, two kids on it that you might want to adopt. Well, I got that call and I raced home from my office and in front of me was a police officer. Well, I didn't really care if it was a police officer, so I raced around the police officer and then the police officer followed me home. And I jumped out of the car and explained why I'm so hyper – and obviously, you don't know I'm hyper right now – but I was so hyper, I wanted to open up that box to see our future children. So that was the very first story, if you will, of us meeting and falling in love with children that we never even met.

When our kids were little, they would [pretend-play] adoption paperwork because, between 1998 and 2004, we seemed to be adopting a kid every year. So our younger ones would, in their playtime, would adopt kids. Hence, our family back then.

Back then, the average expense to – or investment is a better word – to adopt children, which included travel and hotel and all that, was about \$18,000 to \$20,000. The visa fees over the years kept going up, so it made it a little more tough for us to adopt because we're not rich by any stretch of anybody's imagination. But it – for us, it was a huge investment. And there were times when some of the forms took a lot longer to go through, so I'd call the adoption agency and harass them it seemed like every hour on the hour. It wasn't that bad, but it got crazy. We financed the adoptions through home equity loans. We cashed in all our retirement accounts and some friends also helped us with our sixth child.

Our last adoption, when we adopted in 2004, it seemed to go a lot smoother because we got some stuff in the mail automatically, so it didn't take forever, we didn't have to apply for certain things to arrive, it did arrive.

The moment we received snapshots of the kids or video clips of the kids – at least in our case, and we know dozens of families who have adopted kids – you fall in love with these kids, like, immediately. You can't even speak the same language, but you just immediately melt with these kids. And I would pretend to talk to the kids, looking at the snapshot and wondering if they're going to like me, wondering if they're going to bond. So when you adopt, you really don't know if they're going to bond. All six of our kids did very, very well.

The entire adoption process lasted for us seven to nine months, maybe 10 months on the high side. The officials overseas were very kind. The orphanages were very clean. The people who took care of the kids loved the kids. I mean, they were crying when we took the kids out. I can remember when we were adopting our older girl, we're standing in the orphanage and we're getting ready to leave and eight to 10 kids were pulling on my coat hollering "papa, papa, papa!" If that doesn't change your life, you're not breathing. I mean, that literally did me in, I was, like, no good.

After we returned home, we had some reports to do for the country, which we did one time, every time.

When we – every year when the adoption agency – on the adoption anniversary of our kids, we would have a cake for them, like a birthday cake, so we'd sing "happy adoption day to you." And this is going to sound cheap, but with six kids and not a lot of income, they got a dollar for every year that they were adopted up to age 18. We cut it off at age 18. (Laughter.) So we would have parties for them, so they'd have a birthday party with cake and adoption day cake. So they really looked forward to that because they got cash, so that was a big deal.

Our kids lived in orphanages. They shared bedrooms with, depending on the room, eight to 12 kids. So it was very, very tight. I documented all that. I'll get to that at the end.

Our children are our life. I mean, we have six kids and they give us the breath in our lungs. I mean, they give us a reason to get up in the daytime. Most of our kids adjusted really well. Our smallest boy, he likes to be in charge. And when he was adopted he was 2 1/2 and he thought he was 21 1/2, so you can imagine how that was interesting.

Now, in 2006 – I'm talking fast because I know we're short on time – in 2006, we – our current house started shrinking. We adopted our sixth child and the house literally shrunk. So we decided, long story short, to build a seven-bedroom house so each of the kids could have their own room because they came from an orphanage that they lived, six or seven, with other kids.

So in February of '07, our youngest daughter, Juliana, got cancer. She was 5 years old at the time, and it was really rough. She went through treatment, but it didn't stop, the disease kept coming back.

(Tearing up.) I told myself I wouldn't do that. Yeah.

It came back seven more times through the last year. But she is a fighter, was a fighter. I asked her one day a couple of years ago, I said, why don't you complain and, you know, are upset about getting sick all the time? She said, daddy, whining is for babies. (Laughter.)

That's Juliana. It was taken a few years ago.

Juliana received over 240 transfusions during her treatment. About a year-and-a-half ago, two years ago we found out that Juliana may qualify for a bone marrow transplant. But we're adoptive parents, so we knew that it was not going to be a match. And Juliana is from Minsk, Belarus and then after, like, a few years after we adopted our sixth child, they stopped the adoptions of Belarus. So long story short, I had to find her birthmother. So I sent emails with documentation to the State Department and the consulates and the embassies and begged them. I said here's why, here's proof, here's the documentation of the adoption translations and all that stuff.

Within a few weeks, I got an email from overseas from Minsk and they found Irina, which is the birthmother of Juliana and Kristina. That's another story, we don't have time to get into that. Longer story short, we were able to come to an agreement that Irina would fly to the United States and go through the painful procedure of a transplant.

So a week or less than a week before Irina was to fly into the United States, we found out that our daughter got the big C again, which meant they then couldn't do the transplant. So thankfully, the hospital froze the marrow and they were able to transplant her in May of last year.

In September of last year, we found out that she was sick again for the eighth time and it was pretty bad. We've developed a great relationship with Irina and she is our family now. I mean, she's us, we're her.

So in early October of last year, Juliana got an infection in her lungs. We had to rush her back to the hospital and they intubated her. Her heart stopped and they brought her back. She was in ICU for two weeks. And we were told that she was going to have treatment on the 26th of October of last year. And Juliana passed away on October 24th of last year.

And to describe the emptiness that we have in our family without Juliana, Juliana is the cheerleader of our family. In fact, I have her card. We have plenty of cards, so you can have one. Juliana is the cheerleader of our family. She got everybody having fun. She was a leader, she loved to cook, she wanted to be a chef. She met Chief Irvine, he communicated with her with Facetime several times. He promised he would and he did. Juliana is known in over 200 parts of the world. I documented her story on YouTube and the world loves Juliana. I mean, if you don't know us, just type in her name.

So recently, we started a website, www.angelsforjuliana.com – write it down, write it down, write it down – angelsforjuliana.com, and it shows more detail of our adoption journey and also Juliana.

As I wrap up, the world cares about children. Eight million people have watched her story on YouTube – 8 million. That speaks volumes to me about what the world thinks about children that are not only sick, but adopted children.

Our oldest son, Matthew, he's the one who was 2 1/2, but thought he was 21 1/2, he's a college grad, doing very well.

Our youngest son, Tim, he wants to be a magician. He's been studying for magic for, I don't know, six years, got a few side jobs.

Lindsay is the actress. She's very sanguine, very outgoing. She walked at eight months, so I was, like, oh, we're in trouble for sure.

Rebecca, our oldest, loves helping people.

And Kristina is very quiet. She misses Juliana in a big way.

There's thousands of kids overseas who have no hopes and no dreams and, very candidly, no family to tuck them in at night. They would love to have a forever family, they really, really would.

All I want to do every day is to trade places with Juliana. That's all I really want to do because, when you lose a child, it's your heart and your heart's gone. We love our kids so much. I mean, Juliana was not done impacting the world. If you knew her and, again, if you watch her online, she's just a fireball of energy. I mean, folks – she did speeches in front of 600 people. I mean, this kid was on her way to impacting the world, not only about adoption, but also kids who were sick.

So, again, as I close – I do this in church, “as I close, as I close, as I close” – no child should be at risk for being stuck in an orphanage their whole life. There are thousands of families – thousands of families – that would welcome these kids into their homes and love them as their own because they would be their own.

One thing that stood out to me when we were dealing with flying Irina from Minsk, the diplomat from Belarus, I was thanking him – and I'm an emotional guy, a crybaby – I was thanking him, “Thank you, thank you, thank you, Minister, thank you for doing this.” He says, John, Juliana is our child, too. So when you think about it, that's exactly correct. These kids are not just the new American kids, but these kids are the world's kids. So if there's any way possible for us to get our hearts and our heads together and help thousands of more children find forever homes, I think that's a good thing.

Again, Juliana's cards up here, please take one. Again, thank you for the honor, appreciate it.

Oh, almost forgot. Here's the rest of the kids. Silly me, making you hold that thing all the time. That's the rest of our kids, taken a little over a year ago. I love every one of them. (Laughter.) Appreciate it, guys. Thank you.

HOLLABAUGH: Thank you, Mr. Carver, for a beautiful tribute to Juliana as well as a testament to how adoption can truly bring people together across borders. Thank you.

We will hear next from Ron Stoddart. He's the president of Save Adoptions, a nonprofit corporation dedicated to promoting adoptions. He's also a partner in a law firm, Schmiesing, Blied, Stoddart & Mackey.

STODDART: That's right.

HOLLABAUGH: From 1995 to 2013, he was the executive director of Nightlight Christian Adoptions where he developed Nightlight's international adoptions programs in Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kurdistan, Uganda, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Taiwan.

STODDART: Thank you, Allison.

It's hard to speak after John, as you can imagine. And I had the privilege of knowing Juliana. What a gal.

The topic for our meeting today is "Working Together to Reverse the Decline in Intercountry Adoptions." The adoption community is willing and anxious to work with the Department of State to reverse the decline in intercountry adoptions. But two elements for working together are necessary. First, there must be a basic agreement on the human rights of a child. Make no mistake, there are opposing views by people who both claim the human rights mantle. There are those who believe that a child is better served growing up in an orphanage in their own country. On the other side, the views supported by the Hague Convention that a child deserves to grow up in a permanent, safe and loving family.

I adhere to that view and quote Elizabeth Bartholet, who is the Morris Wasserstein Public Interest Professor of Law at Harvard University and the faculty director of their child advocacy program. And I quote: "Those who care about children should act now to preserve and promote international adoption. It represents the best option for existing unparented children." Does your view on the human rights of a child matter? Absolutely. Your outlook will determine the outcome.

The second element is trust. Remember Charlie Brown and Lucy of "Peanuts" fame? Every time Charlie Brown went to kick the football, Lucy would pull the ball away. Once trust is lost, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to regain. Unfortunately, there is currently a lack of trust between the adoption community and the Department of State and specifically the Office of Children's Issues.

Let me give you a couple of reasons why that is so. In the fall of 2015, the Office of Children's Issues, OCI for short, sponsored an adoption symposium entitled "A Collaborative

Future for Adoption.” Over a hundred adoption agencies came to Washington, D.C. to share their views and hear about a promised new era in adoption and collaboration. In fact, the Intercountry Adoption Act already mandated that the Department of State collaborate with the adoption community in developing regulations.

But less than a year later, the State Department published revised regulations with zero collaboration. They pulled the football away. Those proposed regulations were widely opposed and they were eventually withdrawn.

Last July in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the regulations, the Department of State published a notice that they were looking for another accrediting entity to evaluate and accredit adoption service providers. The Council on Accreditation, the current accrediting entity, had publicly opposed many of the provisions in the proposed regulations, as had the majority of the adoption community.

It made us wonder if their opposition to the regulations was a factor in OCI looking for another accrediting entity. Regardless of the motivation, OCI designated a newly formed organization that did not meet the requirements of the Intercountry Adoption Act or the implementing regulations as an accrediting entity. The adoption community once again saw the football being pulled away. The message to us seemed to be that the rules applied only to the adoption service providers and not to the regulators. When you own the football, you make the rules.

So what is the problem? It could be as simple as a difference in the outlook of the rights of a child. The OCI stated, “We believe intercountry adoption can provide children the opportunity to grow up in a loving, protective and permanent family environment when they cannot be cared for in their country of birth.” Not when they cannot be adopted in their country of birth, but when they cannot be cared for in their country of birth. Well, I’m sure you all know that you can certainly care for a child in an orphanage. Again, your outlook is going to determine the outcome.

Everyone may be entitled to their own view of the human rights of a child, but if you don’t believe that a child has the right to grow up in a permanent family, either in their own country or abroad, then you shouldn’t be in charge of regulating intercountry adoption.

If you want to know what someone values, look at what they promote as their successes. When you celebrate the shutting down of an unethical agency as the ultimate success while ignoring the thousands of children who have now been adopted into permanent, loving families and the adoption agencies who successfully navigated the changing regulations and interpretation of the regulations to attain reaccreditation, you indicate what your values are.

And I would like to thank Suzanne Lawrence for her recognition of the thousands of children over the last few years who have found a permanent family here in the United States.

Are there problems with intercountry adoptions? Of course there are. We’re talking about a very emotional process between different cultures with different laws. But these

problems can be solved without throwing out the babies with the bathwater. If you believe a child has the right to grow up in a permanent, loving family, you will look for solutions that enable that to happen in an honest, ethical and transparent manner, and continue to promote intercountry adoption as the best option for children without parents. Your outlook will determine the outcome.

Just a couple of side notes in terms of what we have seen happening in intercountry adoption and what has changed over the years. When we first started doing intercountry adoptions, agencies developed very strong relationships with the orphanages. I remember traveling to orphanages three or four times a year and getting the airline to approve me taking three or four extra bags with me of clothes for the kids.

In addition to the kids in the orphanage, we also took clothes for the caretakers' children. So the children of the caretakers were treated as well as the kids in the orphanages, so resentment didn't develop.

Over the last eight or nine years since the Hague was implemented, we've seen a real change in the mix of children that were adopted. In 2008, there were 17,449 children adopted. Of that number, 34 percent were children under a year of age. Now, that's important and that's good because we know that a child left without parents in an institution is going to have lifelong problems in their development. So we like to see children put in a permanent family, again either in their own country or adopted internationally, as early as possible.

In 2012, four years later, there were 8,667 adoptions done, about half. Of that number, 10 percent were children under one year of age. Fast forward another four years to 2016 and, as Suzanne said, there were 5,370 children brought into permanent, loving homes that year. There were no children under one year of age – zero.

So even though my heart had always been with placing older children, probably because of my age, I understood that finding homes for babies, where you really didn't know what their development potential was going to be, it was critical to their success. So the emphasis to older children was caused by a variety of factors, we understand that, but zero is a pretty low number.

We're also looking for a better way forward. The adoption community has a vision for that better way forward. There is new leadership in the Department of State, and we welcome Assistant Secretary Carl Risch and Special Adviser to the Secretary Suzanne Lawrence. We're excited about them being there.

Can we successfully work together to find a better way forward? Common goals and trust – we understand that making changes in government is a daunting task, but how hard are we willing to work and to fight for the children who could have a permanent family instead of aging out of their orphanage and being at risk of a life with no safety net and a prime target for trafficking?

Now, you need to ask yourself a question. What is your outlook? And what can you do to impact the millions of orphaned children around the world? If you were the child in an

orphanage in some developing country who hadn't seen a parent or family member in a year, two years, three years, would you start dreaming of a permanent family?

Most people resist change, even when it is good and necessary. When we label a child in some countries as abandoned and because there's not going to be what we would consider adequate paperwork, we have given that child a life sentence. For the next 16 years, that sentence is served in an orphanage. For the rest of their life, it's served without parents.

The easiest course of action, of course, is to allow the status quo to continue and hope the voices calling out for the children will grow quieter. There are thousands of families just like John and Tammy who are not going to let that happen.

HOLLABAUGH: Thank you, Ron. We appreciate your openness regarding the challenges and concerns of the adoption community and the search for solutions as we all move forward with finding homes for these very important children around the world.

I'm very happy to welcome Kathleen Strotzman who was here the last time – times – Congress got involved in this issue to try and work out some of the snags. Kathleen was involved with the Intercountry Adoption Universal Accreditation Act of 2012 in the U.S. Senate and can shed some light on congressional participation and intent in regulating this important area.

Kathleen.

STROTTMAN: Thank you so much.

So as was said, for the few people in the room who I don't already know, I thought I'd start with who am I and why am I here. I had the good fortune in 1998 to join the staff of Senator Mary Landrieu, who many of you know has not only been a longtime advocate for most children's issues, but particularly on the issues of adoption. For 15 years, she served as the Senate Democratic co-chair of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption until she retired from Congress a few years ago.

Little did I know when I joined her staff that one of the first pieces of legislation that I would work on was the Intercountry Adoption Act, which is what preceded the need to do the legislation in 2012. And it's something that she and I have joked quite a bit about how we both kind of got our start working with Jesse Helms on an international treaty.

So I thought what I'd also do is talk a little bit about the history of intercountry adoption because I think it also is very important to understand what we found ourselves in in the late '90s.

First of all, one of the things to note was that, relatively speaking, the history of intercountry adoption is short in that some of the first children who were adopted to the United States were adopted as a result of the Korean War, oftentimes because their fate became known to U.S. service members or their families and, similarly, a similar phenomenon post-Vietnam.

And so in the '70s and the '80s, a lot of what you saw was missionary-driven, philanthropic work to try and connect these children who really had no place to go outside of even orphanages in their own societies. And then that grew a trend and you saw more and more activities happening and it began to go beyond Asia.

And in the late 1980s, around '88, you started to see these discussions happening at the U.N. because you saw more countries who were having intercountry adoptions, you saw more people becoming engaged in the practice of intercountry adoption, you saw growing trends and practices. And a lot of the discussions early on were kind of like this: Do you have a system? No, not really. Do you? Can we learn a little bit from each other? And the conversations were what prompted the Hague Convention on cooperation in intercountry adoption.

You had a lot of countries who were saying they had very nascent systems. They often didn't have ministries or agencies within their own countries. They didn't have practices. This obviously required cooperation between countries. It wasn't something that a single country could do alone. And so it was decided that there was so much need for conversation that inviting countries to come to a place like The Hague and discuss how that could be done in a cooperative and collaborative way was in fact what was needed.

And that's what happened in 1993. Sixty-six countries attended that convention, that conference, and they discussed what were the needs of (what were at the time called) sending countries and receiving countries, and what were some of the concerns that the countries had, and needs to be able to better regulate adoptions. And that is where this whole process started.

The U.S. was one of those countries. We participated. We signed the treaty and then we did what was required, which was to begin the process of naming a central authority in the United States and to put forward implementing legislation. So that's where I came in.

I thought a little bit of history on the actual piece of legislation, that might help with three things. One is, it took us two years from the minute that it was thought to be necessary to when we actually got the legislation signed. There were several public hearings and hundreds upon hundreds of hours with constituency groups to get a sense of what was the middle ground we needed to walk.

It was the first time ever, obviously, that child welfare had been done at the federal level, so a lot of the conversations from members of Congress were concerned about just that. Why in the world was the federal government going to have such a strong role in child welfare?

There was a central debate between whether or not the central authority should be the Department of Health and Human Services or the Department of State. And ultimately, it was decided the Department of State because the diplomatic and the foreign affairs aspect was deemed more important and it would be possible, both through collaboration with other agencies in the United States government as well as internally to address the need for specific content.

And then the one final thing is that I've had a lot of people ask me why there was only six or so minimum standards that were handed over to the Department of State. And there were two reasons for that, quite frankly. One is that we were in a situation where people were very fearful of any level of regulation and we wanted to make sure that we didn't err on the side of overregulating what was a very positive practice at the time. But at the same point, we also wanted to make sure that whoever was the central authority had the ability to use the rulemaking process to continually adapt those regulations and minimum standards because we knew that we were in the beginning of what might be, hopefully, a multiple-generation practice and we didn't want to lock in and have to do a piece of legislation every single time we changed the law.

So what prompted some of the pieces of those minimum standards and what were the concerns that were raised to members of Congress? One was, as I talked about, it had become more a fee-based system. So you had people who were collecting fees anywhere from, at that time, \$10,000 to \$12,000 for an adoption. You had people who were becoming adoption service providers and there was a lot of questions as to, what should be the fee, what should be the allowed uses of said fees, how much can a CEO of a nonprofit adoption agency make? These were the kinds of conversations that came up.

The other concern that was – there was a great variability in the level of services that families were getting from those agencies. And it is not fair to say that the larger agencies did a better service or the smaller agencies did poor service. It was just there was a lot of variability in the services. And that was not only pre-adoption, it also was in the post-adoption phase and it depended greatly on the type of experience that the agency had with placement. So if they were very experienced, for instance, in placing younger children, they might have very good services that related to that, but not so much so when it came to an older child or a child with special needs.

And then the other main concern – and we heard this not only from people who were a part of the adoption triad process or the adoption triad, excuse me, but also we heard it from many of the countries themselves – and it was the behavior of U.S. citizens while on foreign soil. And this kind of fell into two categories. This was either people who were working directly for the adoption agencies or families who found themselves in compromising situations unintentionally.

Some of it was driven by the systems. Many of you might know, the very state-prompted system in Romania and how agencies were given a certain number of points based on how many acts of service they did for Romanian children, and those points were then used to figure out how many children were given to that agency for adoption (the mere presence of there being interest in children who had previously been of no interest to anyone in the world). And I think we're seeing that even still in places like Cambodia where there's no international adoption, but there's still a thriving orphan tourism business. People who are looking for bad things to do in countries will find them.

So what prompted the Universal Accreditation Act of 2012 was what we didn't anticipate in 2000, and that was that we were setting up a dual system. Because it was the treaty that prompted it and it was the treaty that gave rise to the implementing legislation, and so it was

interpreted that the adoption service providers who were covered under it only were those working in Hague countries. And this gave two problems to us. One was that you had countries like Russia and China who, for political reasons in their own countries, had not yet fully ratified and so were not considered Hague countries, but who were raising concerns to myself and at the time Senator Landrieu saying, well, what is it, Russian children are second-class citizens in your country and they're less protected by your laws and they are somehow not going to be treated with the same respect once they got here; or China showing us some problems with some of the submitted home studies and how there was information in them that was not correct and not having the tools to do anything about that; to countries like Ethiopia and Nepal where you had recognized systems in those countries that were very weak and might be overrun by the number of adoptions and by the number of agencies that were needing regulation in their country.

And so the question was, if we were actually trying to regulate U.S. citizens' and U.S.-based agencies' behavior in the adoption services, why wouldn't it be all adoptions involving adoption service providers from the United States and not just those in Hague countries? And so that's what led to this (the Universal Accreditation Act of 2012).

Just wrapping up, is it working as intended? I think we had two basic ideas. One was that there would be a regulatory aspect of being the central authority. And you've heard a lot of the concerns about that today. But the other aspect that we thought was important – and why it was intended to be the State Department -- is we wanted the central authority to also be one that showed leadership in the world and to try and work with governments as they continued to build their own systems to learn not only from the best practices and the failures in the United States, but also to be able to learn from one another and recognize that the U.S. government has played that role in many other types of international affairs. And we felt the State Department could do that well.

I think one of the things that has to be looked at is there's no funding. I mean, I have just come out of three years working with a lot of projects in USAID and I've learned more than I ever care to know about the competitive process on that side. But the fact that you have an organization like the Council on Accreditation that is asked to do this simply because they care about children, they are entirely dependent on a fee-based structure – as is the Office of Children's Issues, quite frankly, because there's no funding that they have to do a lot of this good work. You put those partners in, in my view, a very compromising situation. And I think that looking at that and whether or not there can be more funding directed, not new funding perhaps, but funding that could be directed to those efforts and to support those partners is something that should be looked at.

Also, I think we should be looking at better support from other parts of the U.S. government. I don't know that the level of support that was anticipated from the Department of Health and Human Services, who is dealing with these very same issues on a daily basis here in the United States, is as much a partner to the U.S. State Department as they could in fact be.

So very finally, I think, how do we reverse the decline? I think we have to look at the systems that are being built in these countries as a positive step forward and figure out how we can better support them.

Real quickly, I wanted to give an example. I was recently with the head of child protection in Colombia. And she was asking me all kinds of questions about best practices in the United States. And what she was most consumed by was the fact that the entirety of their system is dependent on a publicly funded “defensora”, so they’re attorneys, and they do all of the legal work. And it’s a big unit, it’s 80 people, which is huge in comparison to others that I’ve seen. But because it’s publicly funded, it’s a very slow process. So her question was to me, what do you do about this in the United States because I know yours is also a publicly funded project? And it was my pleasure to talk to her about programs like the national Children’s Law Center here, which makes use of pro bono attorney hours. It was my pleasure to talk to her about the Court Appointed Special Advocate program which uses volunteers in the community to do a lot of the nonlegal work. These are the kinds of conversations that I think we could be doing more and more of every day.

I think we also need to change the perceptions on all sides, questions like, who is in need of intercountry adoption? When is a child’s right to be parented more important than a child’s parent’s right to parent? And when is it OK for a mother who could parent a child to voluntarily place a child for adoption? That doesn’t happen as often internationally as it does here in the United States.

And then I think what we need to do is build a system that respects and fulfills all of that because right now the system doesn’t do that and it doesn’t help countries who are trying to build similar systems. And I think if we do that, we’ll not only reverse the decline, but we’ll get to my perfect number which is the number zero and that is the number of children in the world who don’t know the love of a family.

HOLLABAUGH: Thank you, Kathleen, for that extremely valuable historical perspective on Congress’ role in this area. It’s the ideas on ways to move forward.

I’d like to open by asking a question in particular about one of your ideas regarding funding, additional funding in this area, and the burdens placed on COA as far as overseeing the accreditation process.

Mr. Stoddart, do you have any thoughts on that? How large is the oversight task? And would it be helped significantly if it were better funded?

STODDART: Well, you have two issues, I guess. One is you can require the accrediting entity to spend more time and more resources on the accreditation function, which would require greater funding. The problem with that is, as you – the funding that comes to them is from the adoption agencies. And as you raise the cost of the accreditation process, you reduce the number of agencies that can afford it or the number of agencies who will choose to involve themselves in the process.

Some of the recent changes in the application of the regulations has caused the evaluators that go out to the agencies to spend more time making sure that an increasing number of factors have been physically checked off. Well, I worked for three years for Peat Marwick Mitchell, a

pretty good-sized CPA consulting firm. And in doing an audit, we had a concept called sampling. So you determined what was the best method in order to keep the costs down. Now, if you look at other sources of funding, of course you could always fold it into the new tax reform bill. There is a never-ending desire for funding for all kinds of organizations.

I'm not sure, although I know that the – as part of the Universal Accreditation Act, the regulations were changed or the law was changed to allow the federal government to pay the accrediting entity for some portion of their work. So perhaps that is part of the problem or part of the solution if we need more funding for services.

HOLLABAUGH: So if I understand correctly, the permission to pay the accrediting agency that oversees the other adoption service providers in the U.S., the permission already exists, it just hasn't been used yet.

STODDART: That's my understanding. I don't believe that the federal government has paid, but it's now part – it came in as part of the Universal Accreditation Act that the federal government, who was restricted from doing that, prevented from doing it under the Intercountry Adoption Act, has now been authorized to do it. But to my understanding, they've never done it.

HOLLABAUGH: Thank you.

Before I move to the next question, are there any responses on this?

LAWRENCE: Thank you. I just wanted to thank Kathleen for the historical journey. And again, even though I was not in this particular role, many of these issues are familiar to me over the years.

But I think you touched on two things that I think are central to a lot of what we've talked about here, and that is that there is a regulatory aspect that people were seeking. And I go back to where I started, which is that by strengthening the accreditation and approval procedures and enforcing those that were already in place, because the regulations that people are talking about have been in place since 2008, we are again addressing one of those principal barriers that everybody tells us is a cause for concern and often a cause for shutting down adoption in a particular country. People are not following the rules or the regulations and there is some question about the practices and procedures. Then that is an almost surefire recipe for adoption not being a viable option in that country. And I think Ron and I have had conversations about that.

So I think we want, all of us, I think we all are on the same page in making sure that those concerns about illegal or unethical practices are addressed because that's not going to get us where we all want to be if we don't do that.

The other aspect, I think, that was interesting about what Kathleen said is the leadership aspect and the bilateral relationship aspect. And on that, my portfolio covers international parental child abduction as well as international adoption. And in both instances, the Department of State is the central authority. In both instances, we attend meetings at The Hague and work

with other countries to be sure that central authorities are speaking to each other and that we are modeling the best possible behavior, again, because that breeds confidence in what we're doing and encourages people to work with us. That's what we want to do.

And we just attended the special commission on international parental child abduction, but I'm sure that my predecessors here today who attended the last special commission on international adoption and its convention would say the same thing. People look to us. They look to us for leadership on this issue and they watch everything that we do. Other countries watch, central authorities watch, the community watches what we do. And we have a responsibility, not just because of this issue, but, again, because we are a leader in the international community and we have that ability to interact around the world on a bilateral basis and multilateral basis because we are the foreign policy agency for the United States government. So I'm glad that Kathleen brought up those two issues.

The other thing that I would say – and again, Ron and Tom and others who came to meet with me, we spent a morning together – trust is an extraordinarily important thing. We've heard all aspect of this from trust between a parent and a child to the trust between an accrediting entity and the adoption service providers, trust between foreign governments and central authorities. And I am – I have no doubt that anytime anyone from the Department of State sits down with anyone within the community, and it's a big community and we have many, many, many people we have worked very productively with on this issue, that we come with a sense of trust and a sense of acting in good faith.

So if there are – and I've made this commitment before and I'll keep making it. Whenever and wherever there is a problem in that respect or with some sort of disagreement or lack of clarity on any particular aspect of this, we're committed to sitting down and working through that because, again, working in isolation isn't going to solve the problem. This is complex and complicated and not that long in its history really, so we all continue to learn and grow and change. Believe me, change is the name of the game at the Department of State because we react to everything that's happening in the world every single day. There's nothing static about any of it.

So, again, I repeat that commitment to anyone here and that we are open to working with everyone to make this a viable option, so thank you.

HOLLABAUGH: Thank you, Ms. Lawrence.

And following up on those thoughts, we've seen change recently with Ethiopia and with Rwanda. Ethiopia recently closed down its intercountry adoptions; Rwanda recently reopened its intercountry adoptions after a hiatus of four years. I wonder if you could speak to some of the factors involved there.

LAWRENCE: Ethiopia is obviously the topic of the day. Yesterday there were two fairly extensive phone calls. I think there were a number of people in this room who probably participated in those calls. And so, it is a perfect example of, as I said at the beginning, of a country sort of taking internal decisions that we can try to influence through our engagement

with the government there. And the ambassador, the current ambassador who's new to his position, came in and had very extensive consultations with our offices before he went out to take up his responsibilities. And he has really just jumped right in and engaged at the highest levels.

I know we've enjoyed on this issue, again, great cooperation from our Hill colleagues. And we do believe that the letter that was sent by numerous members to the Ethiopian government back in the spring was very instrumental in them continuing to talk to us and have conversations with us.

We don't control everything that the Ethiopian government does internally. And clearly, there are reasons they have for wanting to pass new laws and try to create a system, much like what Kathleen discussed before, to care for children within Ethiopia. But we have tried to impress upon them to allow the maximum possible number of adoptions that are in process to go forward.

Again, we're trying to clarify what "in process" has meant to them. For those in this room who have many years of experience working in countries where countries were moving toward closure, this is a very difficult time because you don't want to take an action that will be detrimental to people who are expecting to bring home these children, yet you want to keep advocating. And it's a delicate balance, it is.

But I will just say that we are in constant communication with our embassy. We are trying to get the latest. We have heard from National Council for Adoption that they were getting different reports from families of experiences there. We asked them to send us those examples, anything that we have that gives us a broader picture of what people are being told. Because again, from experience we all know, sometimes what we're being told is not exactly the same thing that perhaps an adoption service provider or a family is being told. But when we get all of that information and we can synthesize that, we can go back to the embassy and say this is what they're telling us, this is what they're telling us, this is what the minister told you, can we get some clarity here? Can we try and pin them down on what they meant when they said this to that family? So that's where we are right now on Ethiopia.

On Rwanda, I think that they are – they are – they are in the process – you know, they joined the Hague, they entered into force in July of 2012. The suspension has remained in place. I think some of what we see is that sometimes countries enter into the treaty, but aren't quite prepared as more developed countries might be to set up the proper mechanisms to have a fully functioning central authority. And so we are in constant communication with the embassy there who works with the people on the ground to establish that fully functional convention process. And we have great hope that over time that will happen.

HOLLABAUGH: Any thoughts on that question from this side of the table?

STROTTMAN: I guess it's kind of related. I mean, one of the things that I think could be looked at is how to embrace more partnerships in countries like Ethiopia because what I've seen, and it's maybe part of the comment I made on perceptions, is that when you're trying to

build systems now in countries, they're weighted almost too much for family reunification and reintegration because the partners that are on the ground are good at that – the UNICEFs and the Save the Childrens and a lot of the organizations that are there. And when organizations whose background might be more in the permanency aspect and alternative care, especially if they're like a Bethany or a Buckner who have had anything to do with adoption, they'll be considered as having some sort of ulterior motive in trying to help build these systems or that allowing them to participate in that gives some sort of undue access. And I can appreciate that, but I would argue that, if that's the thing that's thought, so are the organizations that are doing reunification. And they're doing it because it's what they're good at.

And so what you then sometimes see is that the countries don't have the partners who can help them think through developing a system that tries to reunify a child for a certain amount of time and then looks to other processes. And a lot of this, there are partners in the world. And the faith-based community is another great example where maybe their background could be helping – a really good example would be that up until 1970 in the United States we prevented foster parents from becoming adoptive parents because we thought it was not a good idea for them to love them too quick. And then we got smart and we changed that, and then 70 percent of the kids that are adopted are adopted by their foster parents. And we're seeing the same thing if you get church communities involved.

And these are things that don't just happen. They need to be supported when other countries are doing it. And there's a lot of people who are in the adoption side of things that could be doing that, but right now they're prevented because there's this distrust of them, in my opinion.

HOLLABAUGH: Thank you, Kathleen.

I wanted to follow up, too, with a question on U.S. programs assisting strong child welfare systems, especially in countries like Ethiopia, Rwanda, other countries where they're on the cusp or are shutting down.

LAWRENCE: Well, as we mentioned before and the experience of having a more robust interagency response perhaps when some of these pieces of legislation were passed, you face the same issue in a foreign country because these types of things really are not within the purview, let's say, of the consular section of an embassy. They're not involved in AID work, they're not specifically there for AID work.

But again, I think it's an interesting topic where at some point with some countries, and maybe Ethiopia is an example, where you sit down and you have other parties that are part of the embassy community to talk about the work they're doing and see where there might be apertures for more cross-fertilization. But again you're getting into lanes of other people who have funds and expertise for institution building of a society, human rights. All of these things that we've mentioned are not within the purview solely of a consular section in an embassy, and so it really is a whole-of-government approach, I think, that would help you perhaps find a path for more of what we've just talked about.

HOLLABAUGH: Thank you.

STODDART: This is – it really touches on exactly the conflict sometimes between the perception of people when they look at the human rights of a child. So when you're developing a child welfare system within a country and your goal is to keep the child in the country, even if the child is in foster care or in an orphanage, then that's what's going to happen. If you start out with the outlook that a child deserves a permanent family as early in their life as possible, then you're going to develop a child welfare system that allows for temporary care of a child until that child can have a permanent family, whether that permanent family is their family of birth, whether it's a family within the country or whether it's a family outside the country.

And in my opinion, the emphasis ought to be in moving swiftly and smoothly through those steps for the benefit of the child. And I know there's always a balancing act between the rights of the parent and the rights of the child. And all other things being equal, a child would rather be with their birth parents. And we've seen in so many cases they would rather be with them even if it's an abusive family. So it's important that the welfare system that we support that we at least acknowledge ahead of time what our perspective is. And if it's to keep the child in their own country, then we ought to say that. If it's for the child to have a permanent family, then we ought to say that and what we do should support it.

HOLLABAUGH: In Congress we like to think that all departments of government are always talking to each other and working together, but sometimes that doesn't necessarily happen. I'm wondering if the adoption community has reached out to USAID with concerns about child welfare systems and the perspective that you just expressed of building systems that help children stay in temporary care as little as possible.

STODDART: You know, most of that has been done by individual agencies working within a country. For instance, one situation that I'm aware of is in Uganda where there's an organization in Uganda that has pressed very hard for keeping the children in their own country to the point where they were able to lobby through laws that required adopting parents to spend a year in the country to adopt the child. Well, that's like banning the adoption. Unless the child had special needs – oh, well, there's a way to get around it. So how much does it cost to make sure that we have a report saying that the child has special needs?

So, so many times the laws and regulations and working with these competing interests in the country evolve into an unethical and sometimes corrupt system. Whereas if that hadn't happened, then there wouldn't be a market for documents showing that a child had special needs.

I'm not aware of any direct initiatives that we've had with USAID from the adoption community. I know that most of our interactions with UNICEF have not necessarily been on the same page. So does that answer that?

HOLLABAUGH: Yes. I know UNICEF has an international birth registration project that seems like it could mesh fairly easily with developing paperwork needed so that you know who the birth parents are, who to ask and how to get the child through temporary care as quickly

as possible. But again, that would require different organizations working together, which is why we're here today.

You brought up Uganda, and Uganda was in the news quite a bit recently with a foreign service provider that was involved in some practices that would be considered fraudulent under the Hague Convention. And I'm wondering if you can speak to the adoption community's perspective on what happened in Uganda?

STODDART: I'm sorry, I'm not aware of the specifics of that case or cases. I'm not sure what they were. But I can say that one of the things that the adoption community is trying to better understand and better educate on is the different cultural perspectives of parents to the purpose of their child. There are a number of countries that believe that the purpose of a child is to eventually support their parents. So if you put a child in an orphanage, you want them to stay there until they're able to earn enough money to come out of the orphanage and support you. So the understanding of the role of a parent is different in different cultures.

So sometimes we're shocked that a parent has left their child and hasn't seen them for five, or 10 years and then all of a sudden says, well, of course it's my child and of course I want them when they're able to work. So there is a clash of cultures and we need to – I'm not saying that we need to hammer them with our culture, but we certainly need to understand where they're coming from. Another example of that, besides Uganda, is Nepal. My understanding is Nepal has a law that says the birthfather has 12 years to come back to claim parental rights of that child. That's not so good for the child, but that's the law, so that's what they will follow.

So I think that it's – and the same thing on the whole abandonment issue. In the United States, we have a system in many states where a birthmother can drop a child off at a fire station or some other safe place so that the child can be adopted. In some countries, if you're unmarried and give birth to a child, that could mean death, so you may not want to be contacted if you abandon your child.

I think there needs to be a better understanding of the laws in the other countries and perhaps a suggestion to some of those countries that it may be better for a child to free them from the rights of a parent who hasn't been around for a year or two or three. And the project of UNICEF or the United Nations, if they have a way to get everybody's DNA in a massive database and figure out who belongs to who, maybe that would be helpful. In the interim, we have ancestry.com.

STROTTMAN: Can I just jump in?

HOLLABAUGH: Yes.

STROTTMAN: I mean, one example to actually point to on some of Ron's points on rule of law is what we've done in trafficking because I think it's very similar and it challenges some of the same concerns, things that we would outright think are trafficking in other countries bump into cultural aspects. And so there's work not only done to identify those opportunities to

improve the rule of law in some of those countries, but to work with their own legislators and their own legal entities to understand why those laws are in need of improvement perhaps.

So I think there are examples. I think we do similar legal work when we do drug enforcement, and more on the enforcement side than on the actual laws. But I think rule of law is a great example of where cooperation is needed beyond just the placement of children.

The one thing, though, that I do want to make sure, I think the cultural issues are incredibly, incredibly important to look at. But I do think we would be remiss in this particular building at not looking at places where our own behavior is putting other governments at major strain.

And I can speak most directly to Cambodia. You know, from research that's been funded by USAID and looked at, there are 267 registered orphanages. Ninety-eight percent of the orphanages – this is the other data – 98 percent of the orphanages in Cambodia are foreign run and operated, so they're not run by Cambodian citizens. Two hundred and sixty-seven of them are registered with the Cambodian government, but there are 627 orphanages. So that means about 400 non-Cambodian citizens are violating Cambodian law every single day and there's very little the Cambodian government can do about it. And so they've reached out many, many times to say to mostly the Australian embassy, the U.S. embassy, a lot of the European embassies, we don't have a book that we can show you, but we're 100 percent sure these are citizens coming from your countries, how can you help us because we can't start emptying these orphanages or even getting files on these children so we can do this great work unless we can get these people to listen to us. And right there is the project I want to start tomorrow in cooperation because I think that's an easy one.

CARVER: May I add one more thing?

HOLLABAUGH: Please.

CARVER: I think it's really important to remember, as a dad of six kids, that when you sit behind a desk or when you have a title or when you're not in the trenches with these kids that you see it on paper, but you haven't lived it. I know I don't pay your salaries, but it would do you very well to visit some orphanages. Take one of your weeks you get off, it will change your life. It'll put an image in your face that these are little kids that are desperate, desperate for a mom and a dad. They're not just names on a paper or the word "orphanages" or the word "orphan." These kids are hungry. Our first couple of kids, their stomachs were bloated because they didn't have enough food, and they would hide food in their bedrooms because they were hungry and they didn't think that they could have enough.

The point I'm trying to get across is these are real human beings. We can kind of get lost in the details of all this, but these are real kids who would love to have a mom and a papa.

HOLLABAUGH: Now, John, you had a very successful experience with the adoption system, six children successfully adopted, and you were doing the post-placement reports. How onerous were those reports? And did you run into any difficulties with the reports? Because I

know from Ms. Lawrence's presentation that these are extremely important to many countries, Peru being one example.

CARVER: It was very easy. Now, the individual who helped us do all those, she would call us up and say, John, it's time to come over. And she'd come over and hang out with the kids and ask us questions and check the house out and make sure that the kids are well fed, et cetera. But it was very structured. There was no delay, there was no, oh, we've got to do this again. None of that stuff because we knew it was our responsibility as parents to the host part of the world that they trusted us with, their kids. I mean, that's the least we can do is follow up on that post-placement stuff.

Is it your understanding that this is a state process? It sounds like there was local government, your state and local government was involved with the process. Or was this a person from the adoption service provider that you worked through?

CARVER: We had a local individual from our county that was –

HOLLABAUGH: County, OK.

CARVER: – I don't know who is above her and how the hierarchy went, but she was a local person who had degrees in doing this work.

HOLLABAUGH: Ms. Lawrence, is this a common occurrence? Or do some states do better at this than others?

LAWRENCE: I think that we have found that sometimes it is onerous. I mean, sometimes things needed to be translated. Some countries will require numerous reports. And again, on that aspect of it we, again, try to advocate, if you want to get these reports, sometimes you've got to meet halfway here and make it something that adoptive parents can fulfill – a requirement that can be fulfilled. So that's one thing also that we do work on.

And I would just say to John's comment – when he was talking about them going to orphanages and experiencing what he spoke of, I had a flashback to my very first assignment in the Foreign Service in Venezuela. And I went to visit an orphanage there and had the same experience of children coming up to me. And there weren't many adoptions from there, it was – there were some control issues that allowed children to remain in orphanages for a while. But we identified a woman who worked for the government there who wanted to be helpful to us. And we sent her on an International Visitor Program to come here to the United States to learn more about what kind of systems they could put in place.

So, many of us in the Foreign Service who serve in the Bureau of Consular Affairs are out there in the field, do know the conditions in the country, have seen what a difference the opportunity to be welcomed by a family can be for a child. And that's what motivates people each and every day to do the work that they do.

And so I – some days I'd like to sit behind my desk – (laughs) – but I think everyone here on the panel has pointed out that, you know, there are cultural differences. There are – countries are sovereign entities, they have the right to do what they want to do within their borders. It's our job as diplomats to help them see another way and try and figure out a common path that helps all of us. But we have to be mindful that we are in someone else's country when we're asking these things. And again, we don't want to act in a way that would reverse the outcome that we're all seeking.

HOLLABAUGH: We are coming up to our time limit. Ms. Lawrence has kindly offered to stay after for a few minutes to answer any questions from the audience. Before I close things, I'd like to ask my panelists if they have any closing thoughts.

STROTTMAN: I feel like I shouldn't be the first, but I just think this – I just want to say thank you. This is the kind of conversation that, when it happens, I think it's such a positive thing because there's a lot more that people agree on than disagree. So thank you very much for inviting me and for hosting this.

STODDART: And, of course, I have some closing thoughts. (Laughs.) Cost, as was alluded to earlier, is a big factor for agencies staying open and agencies providing the kinds of services that are necessary. One of the things that the adoption community is very concerned about is the requirement for liability insurance that was part of the Intercountry Adoption Act. And I know that at the time that the act was passed, there was a lot of discussion about the cost of the insurance, whether that insurance would be available and whether it would be cost prohibitive.

Initially it was available and it was – the cost was affordable, I mean, if anybody likes spending money on insurance. But over the last few years, and particularly as there's been a greater emphasis on covering the activities of foreign citizens working in the foreign countries that may be involved tangentially in facilitating the transportation of families or documents or whatnot, what we have found is that there are basically two companies here in the United States and one abroad, Lloyd's of London abroad – and they are cost prohibitive. The two local are domestic agencies, the costs have been going up dramatically. And the indications that we're receiving is that it is extremely likely that they will withdraw from that market, which means that there won't be any liability insurance, which means that the agency will not qualify for accreditation, which means that the number of adoption agencies to provide adoption services will decrease, which shouldn't surprise us that the number of adoptions will continue to decrease.

And then my final point is, as Suzanne said, the countries that we work in are sovereign countries. One of the things that made it easier for adoptions back in the '90s and early 2000s was that it seemed to us that the USCIS that were providing the immigrant visas for the children were accepting the laws and the court orders of the sending countries, that the child was in fact an orphan and was available for adoption. However, it seems now that the scrutiny of the documents are such that those documents have to meet our requirements and that country has to have a child welfare system that comports to our idea of what they should have before we will accept the documents. A number of cases where there was a suspicion that the fraud – that there

was fraud in the documentation. But once all of the documents were processed and investigated over a course of a couple of years, there was found to be no fraud.

And a comment I heard – and I have no idea who said it or whether it was even said or whether it’s an urban myth – was that although we did not find any evidence of fraud, we did not find any evidence that there was no fraud. That’s a high bar.

HOLLABAUGH: John is next.

CARVER: If you want to follow our story, and our story continues, angelsforjuliana.com – has one N in it, Juliana – angelsforjuliana.com. And if I can answer any questions either online, here, whatever, our family is an open book, so I’m here to serve. Thank you for the opportunity.

LAWRENCE: Thank you, Allison, for the opportunity to come today. I think, as described to us, it was an opportunity to provide a forum for a balanced discussion about what was happening now in the field of international adoption and to give congressional staffers a more complete picture of all the aspects of international adoption. So I hope that we’ve been able to help fill in some of the blanks for all of you and your colleagues.

Again, each and every day I am joined by numbers of people, both here in Washington, not just in the Office of Children’s Issues, but our colleagues who work in the individual country desks and in the geographic bureaus, and all of our colleagues all over the world who are working to remove those barriers to make sure that people have full confidence in this system, because that is really what will sustain it. And we pledge to do that each and every day, so thank you for this chance to talk.

HOLLABAUGH: I hope that you all join me in thanking our panelists for their expertise and passion in this area. (Applause.)

Again, they’ll remain for about 10 – you have 10 minutes before your next appointment?

LAWRENCE: Fifteen minutes.

HOLLABAUGH: Fifteen minutes for one-on-one questions. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:34 a.m., the briefing ended.]