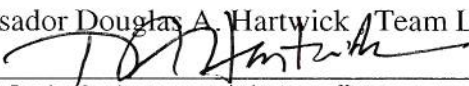


DEPARTMENT OF STATE		
FOREIGN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA INSPECTOR'S EVALUATION REPORT		
NAME OF RATED OFFICER (LAST, FIRST, MI) Nicole A. Avant	CURRENT GRADE FA-NC	PERIOD COVERED FROM October 14, 2009 TO Present
FUNCTIONAL TITLE Ambassador	POST/OFFICE Embassy Nassau	
DATE REPORT RECEIVED IN DGHR	DATE RELEASED TO FILE	
<p><i>Inspection team leaders prepare for each overseas mission or domestic inspection an inspector's evaluation report on all career and non-career chiefs of mission, permanent charges, deputy chiefs of mission, principal officers, Assistant Secretaries, and deputy assistant secretaries who have been in their position more than 120 days. The report is directly related to the rated officer's management or supervision of the unit or post being inspected and focuses on their skills and abilities in managing personnel, budgets, resources, and programs.</i></p>		
INSPECTOR'S COMMENTS		
<p>Ambassador Avant heads a mission comprised of five cabinet departments including State, with 137 American employees and 78 locally employed staff. The mission's top priority is to maintain longstanding and excellent law enforcement cooperation between the United States and The Bahamas by preserving close and productive relations with the Bahamian government. As an island nation only 50 miles from the Florida coast at its closest point and one of our three key contiguous neighbors, including Canada and Mexico, The Bahamas is the focus of critical U.S. border activities and law enforcement operations: drug interdiction, illegal immigration and anti-terrorism awareness. Non-State agencies (principally law enforcement and those that support law enforcement operations) dwarf State presence. Mission personnel are located in far flung parts of the Bahamian islands and at different locations in capital Nassau.</p> <p>Ambassador Avant has been at post two years. She has worked hard and successfully to strengthen relations with the Bahamian government and community leaders. One of her closest contacts and frequent social guests is the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. According to staff, she is well and favorably regarded by the Bahamian Police Commissioner – a critical supporter of close relations with U.S. law enforcement cooperation – and by key influential ministers, opposition leaders and the Bahamian business community. She has developed a relationship with Bahamian youth leadership organizations and other civic organizations.</p> <p>As country team leader, she has forged a close and effective relationship with her law enforcement agency heads, including the Drug Enforcement Administration, DHS's Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Coast Guard. She is informed about their overall mission and is given high marks for supporting their efforts to the Bahamian government. Committed to reaching out beyond the Nassau elite, she has traveled to most outlying parts of this island nation and acquainted herself with U.S. personnel and their respective missions off the capital island of New Providence. She has also been in regular contact with regional U.S. military and Coast Guard commanders with responsibility for The Bahamas.</p> <p>Coming from a distinguished background of civic and social engagement in the United States, Ambassador Avant has demonstrated an enthusiastic commitment to and talent for public diplomacy. The assignment of an able public affairs officer to post after an 18-year absence has turned this commitment into impressive outreach publicity for the United States. She has worked effectively and in the public eye to associate her embassy and her position as ambassador with activities of interest to the improving Bahamian civic community such as HIV/AIDS awareness, entrepreneurship, the arts, and attention to the underprivileged. She has drawn from her contacts in the United States from the sports, journalism and entertainment worlds to persuade them to visit the Bahamas and participate in Embassy-organized functions or seminars. She has used her own personal funds when Embassy funds were not available. These high profile events have generated excellent publicity for the embassy and the United States, demonstrating U.S. interest in Bahamian civil society.</p>		
INSPECTOR'S NAME AND SIGNATURE Ambassador Douglas A. Hartwick Team Leader 	PERIOD OF INSPECTION FROM 9/28/2011 TO 10/13/11	DATE OF THIS REPORT 10/12/11

Service Act of 1946, as amended.

NAME OF RATED OFFICER (LAST, FIRST, MI)

Nicole A. Avant

CURRENT
GRADE
FA-NC

PERIOD COVERED

FROM October 14, 2009 TO Present

INSPECTOR'S COMMENTS (CONTINUED)

This, in turn, has served to complement ongoing U.S. law enforcement cooperation in The Bahamas and underscored U.S. interest in all aspects of Bahamian society and culture.

As a result of this outreach effort, she appears to be a well-known and admired figure in The Bahamas and an effective communicator of U.S. policy and advocate for U.S.-Bahamian relations. Her public diplomacy activities require considerable preparation and staff work for this modest sized embassy, but her public affairs staff is enthusiastic and fully committed to the public diplomacy mission.

In the run up to the inspection, it was evident from personal questionnaires and interviews in Washington that the post suffered from low morale. It was still recovering from an incident – an email-based ongoing newsletter with disparaging comments about some mission personnel – involving front office staff and other mission elements. This and other incidents culminated in involuntary curtailments and other disciplinary steps. The email incident underscored a malaise within the embassy, suggesting a front office out of touch with mission elements. The Ambassador's preference to work from the residence and her frequent, at times long, absences from post to return to the United States on personal and business activities (with the Department's formal concurrence) exacerbated this widespread perception of her detachment from mission personnel. This further undermined mission morale, as confirmed by inspection interviews. Despite her own concerns that her former deputy might not be managing the embassy in a constructive manner consistent with her instruction or intentions, she failed to take adequate and timely corrective action to reverse the ebb in morale.

It also is evident that the Ambassador has had limited, infrequent contact with Washington principals or the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs front office. This lack of contact with Washington –and Washington's contact with her – contributed to her own sense of isolation and to a lack of direct policy level guidance and coordination. Interaction with the Department and other Washington agencies, mostly of the day-to-day variety, fell to her deputy and other mission staff. Together, this limited Washington feedback and restricted her ability to draw on the Department to shape Washington thinking regarding embassy effectiveness or draw on Department resources to benefit her management of the post. It is evident at the close of this inspection that her regular engagement with Washington has already begun to improve communication.

The dialogue and understanding that has taken place in the run up to and during this inspection, the advent of a new and talented DCM, and a turnover of regular mission personnel this summer bodes well for a recovery of morale and more effective leadership. To her credit, the Ambassador has drawn vital lessons from this internal mission challenge. She and her new DCM are working to institute a plan to enhance mission communication and morale building. She has also stepped up engagement with Washington agencies as the post prepares to host an important conference on regional security.

The rated officer may provide written comments within 10 days of receipt of this evaluation. Comments may be given to the inspector, or sent to Helen Bentz in OIG/ISP at bentzhl@state.gov. The comments will become part of the evaluation sent to the Director General of the Foreign Service to be placed in the rated officer's official performance file, or in the case of a noncareer employee, to the Director General to review and forward to the Deputy Secretary and White House Liaison Office to forward to the White House personnel office.

RATED OFFICER'S SIGNATURE

DATE

10/16/11