# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Department of state

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| **OVERVIEW** | |
| Senate Committee | Foreign Relations |
| Agency Mission | The Department of State is the lead institution for the conduct of American diplomacy, and the secretary is the president’s principal foreign policy advisor. |
| Position Overview | The assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs is responsible for managing and promoting U.S. interests in the region by supporting democracy, trade and sustainable economic development, and fostering cooperation on issues such as drug trafficking and crime, poverty reduction and environmental protection. |
| Compensation | Level IV $155,500 (5 U.S.C. § 5315)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | Undersecretary for Political Affairs[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** | |
| Management Scope | The Western Hemisphere Affairs fiscal 2015 actual budget was $143.365 million. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Serves as the principal advisor to the secretary of state and the deputy secretaries, and is responsible for the general conduct of U.S. foreign relations with countries and regional organizations in this geographical division, including countries from the Arctic to Patagonia, plus the Organization of American States * Deals with regional policy issues such as narcotics, migration, border security, civil liberties and human rights, social inclusion and justice, trade and investment, and anti-corruption * Testifies before congressional subcommittees, appears in the media, manages the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and provides guidance to U.S. diplomatic missions in the region * Provides instructions to ambassadors in the region, following up on diplomatic reporting and communicating with the Washington diplomatic corps * Coordinates closely with the department’s legal advisor, policy planning staff and assistant secretaries for international narcotics and law enforcement; democracy, human rights and labor; population, refugees and migration; and energy resources as well as with the assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense and Americas’ security affairs, the northern and southern combatant commands and other senior officials from other departments and agencies and nongovernmental organizations * Serves as a member of the board of directors of the Inter-American Foundation[[3]](#endnote-3) |
| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** | |
| Requirements | * Experience in the region and broad familiarity with regional leaders * Government experience * Strong relationships and stature with stakeholders on Capitol Hill and other parts of government |
| Competencies | * Ability to work well with counterparts in foreign policy positions * Excellent leadership skills * Ability to think strategically yet also accomplish the department’s operational priorities * Energy for frequent amount of travel * Strong communication and interpersonal skills * Ability to work under high pressure * Ability to handle sensitive matters * Excellent negotiation skills * Ability to work across partisan lines |
| **PAST APPOINTEES** | |
| Roberta S. Jacobson (2012 to 2016): Deputy Assistant Secretary and NAFTA Coordinator, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Department of State; Director, Office of Mexican Affairs, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Department of State; Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the United States, Peru, Department of State | |
| Arturo A. Valenzuela (2009 to 2011): Trustee, Board of Trustees, Drew University; Director, Board of Directors, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs; Professor of Government and Director, Center for Latin American Studies, The Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University | |
| Thomas A. Shannon, Jr. (2005 to 2009): Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director, Western Hemisphere Affairs, National Security Council, Executive Office of the President; Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Undersecretary for Political Affairs, Department of State; Director, Office of Andean Affairs, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Department of State[[4]](#endnote-4) | |

1. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (Public Law 115-31, May 5, 2017), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials at 2013 levels during calendar year 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/rls/dos/99484.htm [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. OPM [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Leadership Directories [↑](#endnote-ref-4)