# POSITION DESCRIPTION

**Legal adviser, 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 of State is the president’s principal foreign policy advisor. |
| Position Overview | The Office of the Legal Adviser furnishes advice on all legal issues, domestic and international, arising in the course of the department work. This includes assisting department principals and policy officers in formulating and implementing the foreign policies of the United States, and promoting the development of international law and its institutions as a fundamental element of those policies. |
| Compensation | Level IV $155,500(5 U.S.C. § 5315)[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Position Reports to | Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Department of State |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** |
| Management Scope | In fiscal 2015, the Department of State had $26,498 million in outlays, and in fiscal 2014 it had 10,068 total employment. The Legal Advisor’s Office is composed of approximately 175 permanent attorneys and 100 support staff, including paralegal specialists, treaty analysts and general administrative personnel. Although the majority of staff are stationed in Washington, D.C., attorneys from the office also fill the legal counsel and deputy attorney positions at U.S. missions in Geneva and The Hague, and the legal counsel positions at U.S. missions to the European Union in Brussels and the United Nations in New York. On occasion, the office provides attorneys for other overseas posts. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Serves as the department’s general counsel
* Furnishes advice on all legal issues, domestic and international, arising in the course of the department's work
* Assists department principals and policy officers in formulating and implementing U.S. foreign policy and promoting adherence to, and development of, international law
* Works with department officials on legislative initiatives and drafts, and interpret domestic statutes, departmental regulations, executive orders and other legal documents
* Oversees the Office of the Legal Adviser and the work of attorneys who negotiate, draft and interpret international agreements and who represent or assist in representing the United States before international tribunals, domestic courts, the Foreign Service Grievance Board, the Merit Systems Protection Board, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission and the Board of Contract Appeals
* Works closely with department principals, congressional and White House staff members, and senior officials at other departments and agencies
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| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration]  |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** |
| Requirements | * Distinguished legal career of at least a decade
* Leadership and management experience
* Substantive expertise in domestic and international law
* Effective public relations and speaking abilities
* Proven negotiating skills
* High level of energy for extensive foreign travel and interactions
* Ability to work under high pressure
* Ability to handle sensitive matters
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| Competencies | * Strategic Orientation*:* demonstrates complex thinking abilities, incorporating both analytical and conceptual abilities to manage and develop legal plans and strategies
* Results Orientation: demonstrated ability to be proactive, exercise independent judgment and manage multiple projects simultaneously; strong work ethic and a track record of producing high-quality work under deadline pressures
* Team Leadership: experience effectively managing large staff of legal and administrative support professionals
* Collaboration & Influencing*:* proven track record of creating and managing relationships with peer executives inside the organization, outside counsel, and third parties and institutions.
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| **PAST APPOINTEES** |
| Brian Egan (2016 – 2017) Legal Adviser to the National Security Council and Deputy Assistant to the President; Assistant General Counsel for Enforcement and Intelligence at the Department of the Treasury; Deputy Legal Adviser to the National Security Staff |
| Mary McLeod (Acting) (2013 – 2016) Legal Adviser to the U.S. Mission at the United Nations; Assistant Legal Adviser for Political-Military Affairs; Assistant Legal Adviser for Eastern Asia and Pacific Affairs |
| Harold Hongju Koh (2009 – 2013) 15th Dean of Yale Law School; Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor; Professor of Law at Yale Law School |

# Endnotes

This position description was created with the help of Egon Zehnder, a global executive search firm.

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)