

Rex Tillerson's First Speech: 'Hi, I'm the New Guy'

On his first day on the job, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson addressed the employees at Foggy Bottom, quickly addressing the rather large elephant in the room.

"Hi, I'm the new guy."

The statement, while humorous, addressed the most widely held concern about the former Exxon-Mobil CEO: he's not a trained diplomat and doesn't have any formal diplomatic experience. Or does he?

If you ask his wife, Renda, you might get a different answer.

"Before President Trump called me, I thought I would be entering retirement this spring after four decades of business experience," he said. "Renda and I were ready to head off to the ranch and enjoy our grandchildren.

"But when I came back from my first meeting with President Trump and he asked me to do this, Renda said, 'You didn't know it, but you've been in a 41-year training program for this job.' So despite our own dreams, she said, 'You're supposed to do this.'"

Tillerson, however, said he would be depending on the "expertise of this institution" and its more than 75,000 Foreign and Civil Service employees. Noting that the average experience level is 11 years of service in the department—and he had just 25 minutes—he said it would be vital for him to draw upon it.

"You have accumulated knowledge and experience that cannot be replicated anywhere else," he said. "Your wisdom, your work ethic and patriotism, is as important as ever. And as your

secretary, I will be proud to draw upon all these qualities in my decision-making.”

Tillerson pledged to meet as many State Department employees as he can, face-to-face, in the months ahead. According to a department spokesman, the remainder of his first day was spent making introductory calls to “key allies and partners.”

Among those he spoke with:

- Germany’s Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel,
- Mexican Foreign Secretary Luis Videgaray,
- Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland and
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“In all of his conversations, Secretary Tillerson stressed America’s steadfast commitment to its key allies and partners as it works to protect the interests and safety of the American people,” the spokesman said. {eo}