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TO: Assembly Committee on Ways and Means
FROM: Representative Scott Krug
RE: Testimony on Assembly Bill 519
DATE: November 30, 2021

Thank you Chairman Macco and committee members for hearing my testimony in support of Assembly Bill 519 (AB 519).

Assembly Bill 519 would rectify a significant financial inequity that is faced by retired members of the US Foreign Service (the diplomatic corps) when they retire, should they retire to Wisconsin.

Currently in Wisconsin we exempt from income taxation, pension payments made to retirees from City and County of Milwaukee retirement systems; the old Wisconsin State Teachers Retirement Fund; and retirees from federal service who were members of the Federal Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) prior to January 1, 1964.

In addition, the military pensions of retirees from the branches of the United States Military who live in Wisconsin, are also exempt from state income taxation.

AB 519 is requested by a constituent of mine who has served the federal government in several roles, including some time in the US Department of State's diplomatic staff – the US Foreign Service.

Members of our foreign service do important work. The work can be attractive, but it can also bring hardship including postings abroad. Actual in-country expertise is needed, hard work is involved, and there is sometime genuine risk to our embassy staffs.

I don't have to recount for you all the embassies of our country that have seen US Foreign Service staff intimidated, abducted, or otherwise harmed in the course of their duties. Certainly the US Embassies in Tehran and in Benghazi and in Kabul are well-known examples.

MORE

Foreign Service staff face other risks, some of which are only now becoming known. An ongoing issue is the possibility that our embassy staffs are being subject to microwaves and other potentially damaging technologies. If you haven't heard about "Havana Syndrome" I attach an article explaining it.

Given that certain tax exemptions on pensions are already granted to retired state teachers, federal civil servants, Milwaukee city and county officials, as well as veterans under current Wisconsin state law, it seems to me that including former Foreign Service members into an income tax exemption for their pension payments would be appropriate.

There is a fiscal note on AB 519. The Wisconsin Department of Revenue estimates that there may be 300 people in Wisconsin who would be affected by this bill; that figure, however, is likely to be high (as DOR explains in its note). DOR adds that it has been able to identify with certainty, only about 100 Wisconsin taxpayers who would gain an income tax break under AB 519.

Given that conclusion, DOR estimates that the fiscal effect of AB 519 might be around \$200,000 annually in GPR. The higher-end estimate is around \$600,000 but (as I noted above) DOR itself indicates that the lesser amount is the one their data can prove.

DOR also expects costs of around \$5,600 under AB 519 to update publications and make other administrative changes, and says that it cannot absorb that expense in its current budget.

I anticipate that others will be contacting the committee with information on the need for AB 519. I know that any information you desire on the subject can be obtained with a request to me, to the DOR, or to advocates for the bill who will be entered into the record of proceedings on this bill.

I sincerely hope that we can see our way towards putting in place this permanent and much-needed accommodation for former Foreign Service officials in Wisconsin.

Thank you for taking my testimony. Please join me in supporting Assembly Bill 519.

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NATIONAL SECURITY

Long before Havana Syndrome, the U.S. reported microwaves beamed at an embassy

October 21, 2021 · 5:04 AM ET
Heard on Morning Edition



GREG MYRE

7-Minute Listen

PLAYLIST Download
Transcript



Russian demonstrators hold anti-American posters outside the U.S. Embassy in 2015. From the 1960s through the 1980s, the U.S. said the Soviet Union beamed microwave signals at the U.S. Embassy in an attempt to collect intelligence. Alexander Zemlianichenko/AP

In 1996, Michael Beck and a colleague at the National Security Agency were sent to a "hostile country" on a brief assignment. After being detained at the airport for about

an hour, they were allowed to go, but they knew they were being closely watched.

A few days into the assignment, Beck woke up at his hotel feeling terrible.

"It was extreme fatigue and weakness. I was a bowl of jelly and couldn't get moving," said Beck. He was suspicious of the cause, but the symptoms went away.

A full decade later, Beck was diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's disease at age 46. At almost exactly the same time, his colleague from that trip, Chuck Gubete, received the very same diagnosis. Gubete, who died several years later, had a family history of Parkinson's, but Beck didn't.

Beck came to believe that his illness was caused while on that trip, and he filed a workers' compensation claim with the NSA. As part of the process, the NSA sent Beck a short but striking letter in 2014.

Article continues after sponsor message



NATIONAL SECURITY

CIA Director Says He Is Escalating Efforts To Solve 'Havana Syndrome' Mystery

"The National Security Agency confirms there is intelligence information from 2012 associating the hostile country to which Mr. Beck traveled in the late 1990s with a high

powered microwave system weapon that may have the ability to weaken, intimidate or kill an enemy over time and without leaving evidence," the letter said.

"This weapon is designed to target the living quarters in microwaves, causing numerous physical effects, including a damaged nervous system," the letter added.

Beck, now 61 and living in Maryland, is still battling to prove his claim. The country he traveled to remains classified. But his attorney Mark Zaid notes that the NSA letter was written in 2014 — two years before the first Havana Syndrome cases were reported.

"Here we have an unclassified document from a U.S. intelligence agency admitting it knows of this before Havana," Zaid said.



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FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-6000

October 16, 2014

(U//FOUO) The National Security Agency confirms that there is intelligence information from 2012 associating the hostile country to which Mr. Beck traveled in the late 1990s with a high-powered microwave system weapon that may have the ability to weaken, intimidate, or kill an enemy over time and without leaving evidence. The 2012 intelligence information indicated that this weapon is designed to bathe a target's living quarters in microwaves, causing numerous physical effects, including a damaged nervous system. The National Security Agency has no evidence that such a weapon, if it existed and if it was associated with the hostile country in the late 1990s, was or was not used against Mr. Beck.

A 2014 letter from the NSA to Michael Beck acknowledges that there's U.S. intelligence indicating an unnamed foreign country has a microwave weapon.

Mark Zaid

The U.S. government says it's still trying to figure out what's causing the mystery ailments known as Havana Syndrome, which began afflicting mostly U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers in the Cuban capital five years ago.

There are reportedly more than 200 cases in multiple countries, with many saying they've suffered debilitating migraines, dizziness and memory loss.



NATIONAL SECURITY

A CIA Officer Visits Moscow, Returns With Mysterious, Crippling Headaches

Russia's long history of embassy surveillance

While that investigation continues, the U.S. government has documented one country, and its intelligence services, going to extraordinary lengths to target a U.S. Embassy and personnel.

"The Russian services are very aggressive. They would use whatever means possible to collect [intelligence] against us," said John Sipher, a retired CIA officer. Sipher served in Moscow in the 1990s and in the early 2000s led the spy agency's Russia operations at CIA headquarters.

"I've stayed in touch with a lot of folks, and it is a general view that the Russians have probably taken actions that have impacted the health of American diplomats and intelligence officers," said Sipher.

Sipher acknowledges that his information is anecdotal, not scientific. He points to numerous former colleagues who came down with cancer at relatively young ages.

What has been firmly established is Moscow's long history of surveilling the U.S. Embassy — like the intricate, hand-carved wooden seal of the United States that Soviet schoolchildren presented as a gift to the American ambassador in 1945. That seal contained a listening device that eavesdropped on countless conversations of U.S. ambassadors before it was uncovered seven years later.

And in the 1970s, the Soviets intercepted IBM electric typewriters in transit from the U.S. to the embassy. The Soviets installed monitoring devices that picked up most

every keystroke for years.

The U.S. protests against Soviet microwaves

One of the longest-running Soviet operations, dating to the 1960s, was beaming microwaves at the embassy in an effort to collect intelligence.

Memos from the CIA, the State Department and presidential advisers routinely refer to this practice, especially in the 1970s and '80s.

"This would seem an appropriate opportunity to reiterate at a high level, our standing demand that microwave signals directed at Embassy be shut off forthwith," Jack Matlock, the embassy's No. 2 official at the time, wrote in a 1978 memo.

113. Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State¹

Moscow, May 26, 1978, 1445Z

11859. Subject: Technical Penetration. Ref: State 134109.²

1. Subject to Ambassador Toon's concurrence, Embassy recommends strongly that vigorous protest be lodged with Soviets regarding major physical penetration of Embassy premises, in total violation of all principles of extra-territoriality and international agreements guaranteeing it. Pertinent facts which might be mentioned include:

- A. Construction and maintenance of surreptitious access to Embassy property.
- B. Evidence of systematic and repeated violation of Embassy premises by Soviet personnel.
- C. Installation and operation of electronic devices on Embassy property.

2. Consideration might be given to delivering protest to Gromyko [Page 363] during weekend meetings, particularly if he weighs in heavily on Chernyayev and Enger arrest.³

3. This would seem appropriate opportunity to reiterate at high level our standing demand that microwave signals directed at Embassy be shut off forthwith. (Although final judgment must await full technical assessment, it is quite possible that the devices we discovered are associated with microwaves.)

Matlock

A 1978 telegram from Jack Matlock, the No. 2 official at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, calls on the U.S. to again demand that the Soviets stop beaming microwave signals at the embassy. There are many such memos from the 1970s.

U.S. State Department

Matlock, now age 92, told NPR that "we never had an impression that the object of this was to harm us physically."

The radiation level was relatively low and not considered harmful. But then the Soviets dialed it up and "it had reached a level that in some areas, it could have a health effect," Matlock said.



U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers at the U.S. Embassy in Cuba began reporting mystery ailments in 2016 that have become known as Havana Syndrome.

Pablo Martinez Monsivals/AP

The embassy responded by putting metal screens in the windows to help block the radiation. Matlock said he never heard of any health problems related to Soviet microwave activity.

Of course, the spying runs both ways, with the U.S. pursuing Russian secrets as well. But the Havana Syndrome cases, first reported in 2016, have generated so much attention because so many U.S. officials have reported falling ill. Cases have since been reported in multiple countries, including Russia, Germany, Austria, China and Colombia.

There is no definitive proof

Dr. James Giordano, a professor of neurology at Georgetown University, was asked by the State Department to start looking into the initial cases from Havana.

"It wasn't just accidental. Clearly, these individuals were getting hit with something which would have put them in the line of fire," said Giordano.

As more cases are reported, he says he's seeing strong similarities.

"I think what's important to understand, and this is an important term, is a constellation of effects, which is a generalized pattern of effects," he said. "If you're going to categorize them within a set of objective signs and subjective symptoms, they fall very squarely, and I would say rather neatly, within that definable set of characteristics."

At the request of the State Department, the National Academies of Sciences compiled a report last December.

"The mechanism that we found most plausible was a form of microwave radiation that occurs in a pulsed or intermittent form," David Relman, the Stanford professor who led the study, recently told NPR.

But Relman noted that the report was not definitive. Others have cast doubt on the microwave theory.

"We believe, although we can't show with direct evidence, that this [microwave] phenomenon could account for at least some of the clinical features," he added.

The Biden administration seeks answers

The Biden administration is making a push on multiple fronts. The CIA has ramped up its investigation. The Senate Intelligence Committee is getting regular briefings. President Biden signed a law this month providing compensation for those injured in Havana Syndrome cases.

When the first reports emerged five years ago, John Sipher and his former CIA colleagues immediately suspected Russia.

"The Russians have never hesitated to use technology that could hurt our health," he said. "But there was always a reason. It was always part of a process to break into our computers or to turn on listening devices. When this first happened, I thought this

must be some technology that has gone wrong."

Now he's questioning that assumption.

"This hurting people and it is hurting their families and their children," he said. "But it's continuing to happen. The Russians — if it is the Russians — would have to be pretty bold to continue to do so when they now realize that they're harming the health of Americans."

If the U.S. government decides it has enough evidence to attribute the Havana Syndrome cases to a specific cause — and a specific country — that immediately raises an explosive question: How will the U.S. respond?

Greg Myre is an NPR national security correspondent. Follow him @gregmyre1.

havana syndrome soviet union microwave russia cuba

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◆ WSJ NEWS EXCLUSIVE | NATIONAL SECURITY

Havana Syndrome Hits at Least Five U.S. Families Connected to Embassy in Colombia

Bogotá embassy is host to anti-narcotics operatives, spies, diplomats, aid workers



Bogotá has one of the largest American embassies in the world.

PHOTO: GUILLERMO LEGARIA/GETTY IMAGES

By [Vivian Salama](#) in Washington and [Juan Forero](#) in Bogotá, Colombia

Updated Oct. 12, 2021 7:41 pm ET

At least five American families connected to the bustling U.S. Embassy in Colombia have been afflicted with the mysterious neurological ailment known as Havana Syndrome, in the latest attack against American diplomatic installations, people familiar with the matter said.

In emails to embassy personnel, sent by Ambassador Philip Goldberg and others and reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, the State Department vowed to address the issue “seriously, with objectivity and with sensitivity,” as they work to determine the scope of the afflictions in one of the U.S.’s most important diplomatic outposts.

The sprawling embassy, one of the largest the U.S. operates in the world, is a target-rich installation of intelligence agents and anti-narcotics operatives, in addition to the usual complement of aid and development workers and diplomats.

The developments come days before Secretary of State Antony Blinken is expected to visit.

Embassy staff were initially alerted to “an unexplained health incident” via email in mid-September. A later email, dated Oct. 1, informed embassy personnel that the regional security office was investigating “additional Anomalous Health Incidents,” the U.S. government’s term for the illness.

WHAT'S NEWS



U.S. Vows to Address Havana Syndrome Attack



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The October email added that “there is no stigma to reporting any health-related incident in which the underlying causes are not known.”

Word that people in the embassy had been targeted has deeply concerned workers in the American compound, which is on a major thoroughfare not far from Bogotá’s airport.

Two cases had initially been reported when embassy officials were first made aware of potential incidents, but several more people are now believed to have been affected, several officials said. One U.S. official said that at least one family was flown out of the country for treatment, and concerns have grown more serious in recent days.

“There was definitely a family, including a minor hit,” said a person with knowledge of the situation in the embassy. “Adults sign up for what they sign up for and the risks that come with it.... Targeting or even incidentally hitting kids should be a hard red line.”

A former high-ranking U.S. diplomat who is familiar with the syndrome said that as in other cases around the world, some of those Americans who have

complained about the ailments in Colombia work in intelligence.

“Globally, this has been weighted toward the intelligence community,” said the former diplomat.

Asked how family members could also be suffering, he said, “These are technologies that are directed toward a place where people live. If it’s a microwave or some other kind of advanced technology, it would affect other people.”

Mr. Blinken’s expected trip to Bogotá next week would be part of a quick Latin America tour, several officials said. The U.S. Embassy in Bogotá declined to comment.

State Department spokesman Ned Price declined to comment on reports of Havana Syndrome cases in Bogotá, citing privacy. He said that the State Department is working to ensure that all individuals receive the “prompt care they need” when they believe they are experiencing symptoms, as well as taking broader steps, in terms of communication, care, detection and protection of its workforce.

If verified, the attacks would be the latest that coincide with overseas travel by senior U.S. officials. In August, Vice President Kamala Harris delayed her arrival in Vietnam [after reports of an incident targeting a U.S. official](#) there. Last month, an aide traveling in India with Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns reported symptoms and received medical attention, a U.S. official said.

The unexplained health incidents are known as Havana Syndrome because [they first surfaced](#) among U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers in Cuba in late 2016. The symptoms include dizziness, headache, fatigue, nausea, anxiety, cognitive difficulties, ringing in the head and memory loss.

“People experience different things. Some hear grinding sounds. Some hear vibrations in their head,” said the former high-ranking U.S. diplomat. “The whole situation is very bizarre.”

Since then, [attacks have also been reported in China](#), Austria, Germany and Serbia, where the CIA recently evacuated an intelligence officer who suffered

serious injuries consistent with Havana Syndrome. While about 200 U.S. government employees have been affected, officials caution that a precise count is difficult to determine because each case must be medically verified and some individuals’ symptoms end up having other explanations.

Five years after the first symptoms emerged, the U.S. government has yet to determine who is behind the attacks and what mechanism or mechanisms are being used.

Some of the afflicted families initially thought they had altitude sickness, since Bogotá is located more than 8,600 feet above sea level, a diplomat in Bogotá familiar with the matter said. Now, some of the families are living in hotels as the embassy runs tests on their apartments.

—*Warren P. Strobel and Kejal Vyas contributed to this article.*

HAVANA SYNDROME

More WSJ coverage of the mysterious neurological condition, selected by the editors.

[Havana Syndrome: What We Know](#) (Oct. 8)

[Havana Syndrome Victims to Receive Financial Support Under New Law](#) (Oct. 8)

[Havana Syndrome Attacks Widen With CIA Officer's Evacuation From Serbia](#) (Sept. 28)

[Kamala Harris Pushes Ahead With Vietnam Trip Despite Possible Havana Syndrome Incident](#) (Aug. 24)

[Havana Syndrome Task Force to Be Led by Veteran of Hunt for Bin Laden](#) (July 21)

Write to Vivian Salama at vivian.salama@wsj.com and Juan Forero at Juan.Forero@wsj.com

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November 29th, 2021

Representative John Macco
Ways and Means Committee Chair
Wisconsin State Assembly
Room 208 North, State Capitol
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Chairman Macco:

I am writing to express the American Foreign Service Association's (AFSA) strong support for Wisconsin State Assembly Bill 519. I understand that a hearing is taking place on the bill in the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means on November 30th, 2021. I ask that my statement of support below be included in the committee record on AB 519, and that AFSA be recorded as registered in support of AB 519 when the record for the hearing on this bill is finalized.

AFSA represents 16,800 members, including active-duty and retired Foreign Service officers and specialists at the Department of State, as well as members of the Foreign Service from the U.S. Agency for International Development, Foreign Agricultural Service, Foreign Commercial Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and U.S. Agency for Global Media. AFSA exists to support the U.S. Foreign Service, which deploys worldwide to protect and serve America's people, interests, and values.

Assembly Bill 519 would rectify one of the most significant financial burdens commonly cited by members of the Foreign Service upon retirement: taxation of their pensions. Given that certain tax exemptions on pensions are already granted to retired state teachers, federal civil servants, Milwaukee city and county officials, as well as veterans under current Wisconsin state law, the inclusion of former Foreign Service members will be an appropriate and welcome addition. This change is likely to attract more former members of the Foreign Service to retire in Wisconsin.

AB 519 will also rightfully enable retired members of the Foreign Service – diplomats, international development experts, and other patriotic professionals who protect the national security of the United States – to have parity with retired members of the Armed Forces on this front.

Thank you for holding a hearing on AB 519, and I hope this bill becomes state law as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric S. Rubin".

Eric S. Rubin
President, American Foreign Service Association