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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

September 24, 2026

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write with concern over the Department's planned closure of the Arctic Indigenous Exchange Program (AIEP) and TechWomen programs. On June 8, 2026, the Department of State provided a consult notice to Congress on the proposed closures of several programs, including the AIEP and the TechWomen program. These announced actions do not advance U.S. interests and would only put the U.S. at a competitive disadvantage.

The Arctic Indigenous Exchange Program provides a rare opportunity for the U.S. to participate in and shape cooperation across Arctic Indigenous spaces, which was made clear during our recent Congressional Delegation to the Arctic region in May. The program connects Indigenous business and civic leaders in Alaska, Canada and Greenland to support economic development, efficient local governance and community-driven growth. The participants in this exchange are central to the goal: kinship across Arctic Indigenous communities creates a natural bridge that unites our countries in addressing the region's challenges: developing and maintaining infrastructure in Arctic climates, ocean monitoring and management, scientific research, resilient subsistence and reliable energy grids. As the geopolitical importance of the Arctic increases, Indigenous knowledge and partnership also strengthens the United States' ability to find solutions to challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

If the Department of State were to repurpose this exchange by removing the Indigenous focus, as has been proposed, it would constrain the diplomatic potential of Alaska and the U.S. While we welcome the Department's continued commitment to strengthening exchanges among these three Arctic regions, broadening participation in this exchange would diminish the unique impact of this program. We encourage the Department to build upon the foundation of AIEP as it incorporates new priorities related to Arctic tourism development and critical-minerals supply-chain resilience.

Similarly, TechWomen has long provided a pathway for qualified women to bring their knowledge to a sector that is central to the U.S. national interest and which has suffered from their absence. Women remain significantly underrepresented in the technology industry in the United States and around the world. According to the National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT), women make up approximately 26 to 28 percent of the U.S. computing

workforce, even though they account for nearly half of the overall labor force.¹ Not only are women underrepresented in the technology sector, they are often underpaid, earning an average of \$15,000 less than their male counterparts.² As tech companies make up more of the U.S. and global economy, this discrepancy will only exacerbate the overall wage gap.

Women are also under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. Women make up only 35 percent of STEM graduates.³ This phenomenon amounts to an underrepresentation that carries over into the tech field, but it has remained largely unchanged for the last 10 years. To compete with China, we need our best players from every segment of society on the field which includes America's women.

Despite the clear evidence that more interventions need to be undertaken to boost women's representation in the technology sector, your department has proposed cutting the TechWomen program, which works to increase women's representation and leadership in the tech industry. This program leverages our available workforce to reach our country's maximum potential. In 2024, TechWomen connected U.S. women leaders in STEM careers with nearly 100 emerging women leaders from the Middle East, Africa and South and Central Asia. This mentorship was an elegant way to strengthen our own workforce while shaping agendas and partnerships worldwide. We strongly support the continuation of this important program that will help the United States lead the tech industry as we head into a new tech era.

During a briefing for Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff, Department of State briefers said that current beneficiaries of these programs could continue to participate in successor programs. However, this suggestion misses the point. The Department would be withdrawing support for programs that ensure these populations have a seat at the table. These programs were designed by Congress; the Department of State has a directive to implement them. Closing these exchanges and transforming these programs into new objectives would thwart Congress' intent and ignore the purpose of congressionally-appropriated funds.

We encourage you to retain these carefully crafted programs in their original form and we look forward to working with you to ensure their optimal impact.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

¹ National Center for Women & Information Technology. (2025). *By the Numbers*.

<https://ncwit.org/resource/bythenumbers/>

² WomenHack Editorial Team. (2026, February 15). *Women in Tech Salary Report 2026: Pay & gender gap data*. WomenHack. <https://womenhack.com/women-in-tech-salary-report/>

³ <https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education/stem>