

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

November 19, 2018

The Honorable Marie Royce
Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Assistant Secretary Royce,

I write to express concern regarding a troubling new report showing that the number of international students entering U.S. colleges and universities has fallen for the second straight year. According to the Institute of International Education¹, in a State Department-funded report, the number of new enrollments for the 2017-2018 school year declined by 6.6 percent compared to the 2016-2017 academic year, which itself had seen a 3.3 percent decrease from the year before.

While the State Department has noted that the nearly 1.1 million international students enrolled in American colleges and universities is a record, the data indicates a declining trend of international students *choosing* to study in the United States. Analysts and anecdotes indicate that new visa restrictions, harsh immigration policies, and perceived antipathy in the United States' towards foreigners has contributed to this decline. Unfortunately, this tracks with a series of recent international polls which indicate that across the world people have increasingly negative views of the United States. It stands to reason that the President's repeated disparaging claims about Latin Americans and Latin American countries have contributed to decreased applications from the region.

New Jersey proudly welcomes almost 23,000 international students to higher education institutions across the state. These students not only contribute to meaningful public diplomacy, they also contribute around \$820 million to the local and state economy. Across the entire United States, that number goes up to \$42.4 billion.

However, I worry that the Administration's aggressive anti-immigration posture and xenophobic orientation - including restricting the issuance of skilled-worker visas, permanent residencies, and seeking to establish a maximum stay period for international students - deters many potential students who have dreams of studying at one of America's great educational institutions.

¹ (IIE), I. o (2018). *Open Doors 2018*. Washington, D.C.: Institute of International Education and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

As you well know, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' work is critical to promoting and strengthening U.S. global leadership. Your programs, which include higher education and exchange programs, are proven and cost-effective ways for the United States to remain internationally competitive, develop American leaders, engage current and future international leaders, build a network of partnerships rooted in shared values, and promote American interests. Results repeatedly show that when international students visiting the United States return to their home countries, they have a better impression of our country, the American people, and our values. Similarly, U.S. students and communities benefit immensely from international exchange students who offer personal windows to the world.

While the President has repeatedly sought to significantly reduce the funding for educational and cultural exchange programs, I was proud to lead a letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee urging them to fully fund these initiatives.

Given the importance of these programs, I ask that you outline initiatives your office and the Department more broadly are taking to increase the number of international students coming to the United States, how you plan to counter the increasingly negative perceptions of the U.S., and how you plan to eliminate any unnecessary barriers to studying at our institutions. These programs are critical to sustaining the United States' global leadership and as a fixture of education, freedom, and openness for the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Menendez
Ranking Member