



**Statement of Marlene M. Johnson  
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Before the Committee on Foreign Relations  
United States Senate  
“Addressing the New Reality of Current Visa Policy  
on International Students and Researchers”  
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to testify on this topic, which is of paramount importance for success in the war on terror and for our country’s leadership role in the world.

NAFSA is the professional association of those who administer educational exchange programs at the postsecondary level. Our 9,000 members are employed at some 3,500 institutions, principally colleges and universities, in the United States and abroad. Our mission is to promote and advance international education and exchange, and we support public policies that expand international education and exchange programs between the United States and other nations.

I have three messages for the Committee today. First, in the global age—and even more in the age of global terror—international education and exchange are integral to the national security of the United States. Second, our immediate task is to create a timely, transparent, and predictable visa process in which efforts are focused on those who require special screening and are not wasted on repetitive and redundant reviews of legitimate visitors. Third, our long-range challenge is to re-establish the reputation of the United States as the destination of choice for students who wish to pursue their higher education outside their home countries—in business terms, to win back the loyalty of our customers.

My testimony focuses on visa issues, which are our greatest problem, rather than on SEVIS, where the remaining issues are largely technical. I will only say for the record that NAFSA and DHS have worked in very close partnership to surmount the daunting challenge of implementing SEVIS in a crisis mode. It is a pleasure to be able to acknowledge publicly the enormous efforts that our members have made to bring SEVIS where it is today.

## **International Education in an Age of Globalism and Terrorism**

It is a particular honor to testify before the Committee on Foreign Relations, the birthplace of our educational exchange programs. As I come before you today, I am struck by a sense that we are back in 1948 again. At that time, we confronted a new kind of war, the cold war, and we were just beginning a long process of learning how to fight it. In that year, Congress had the wisdom and foresight to create the Fulbright program, the first of several exchange programs which, during the course of the cold war, were fundamental to the ability of democratic values to prevail in that conflict.

Today, we are once again near the beginning of what promises to be a long process of learning how to wage effectively a new kind of war. That war, like the cold war, is fundamentally about competing ideas, competing values, and competing visions of society, governance, and human rights. As was the case with the cold war, we have the resources to win this new version of the war of ideas—and one of them, which is integral to success, is educational exchange. Today, as before, this Committee is called upon to lead. I know, Mr. Chairman, that under your leadership and that of Senator Biden—two true friends of international education—the Committee will again rise to the challenge.

Our policy paper, “Toward an International Education Policy for the United States,” which we co-authored with the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, elaborates on the importance of international education for our national security. It is in your packets. You, Mr. Chairman, joined Senator John Kerry in 2001 in introducing a sense of the Senate resolution based on this paper, for which we are very grateful. S. Con. Res. 7 was adopted by the Senate by unanimous consent.

I would also like to take this opportunity to compliment my colleague from Minnesota, Senator Coleman, for his leadership, and specifically for introducing the International Student and Scholar Access Act of 2004. This legislation speaks directly to the problems we face. It was our privilege to work with Senator Coleman in drafting that bill, and I would hope that a similar bill might be considered in the next Congress. We would be pleased to work with you on that, Mr. Chairman.

### **Promoting Secure Borders and Open Doors: A National-Interest-Based Visa Policy for Students and Scholars**

In this context, the ability of legitimate international students and scholars to gain access to the United States is paramount. The beginning of wisdom on this matter is to understand that security versus exchange is a false dichotomy. Exchange is part of security, and has been recognized as such by virtually every foreign policy leader in this country since World War II. The national security question is not: how do you balance exchange versus security? It is: How do you maximize national security, both by denying access to those who seek entry into our country in order to harm us, and by facilitating access for those whose access to our country serves the national interest?

I believe it is now recognized at the highest levels of government that America's strong interest in robust educational and scientific exchange is ill served by the visa system that is currently in place. As Secretary Powell has said, "We have put in place too many restrictions, and now we have to start backing off on them."

These controls were put in place piecemeal since 9/11, in all good faith, to better protect our security. But in their totality, they are now hindering international student and scholar access to the United States to an extent that itself threatens our security. Our current visa system maximizes neither our safety nor our long-term national interests in scientific exchange and in educating successive generations of world leaders—interests that the United States has recognized for more than half a century.

The trends are not good. In the academic year 2002-2003—the last year for which definitive data are available—international student enrollments in U.S. colleges and universities were essentially flat compared to the previous year, after many years of steady increases.

A spot survey that we and our colleague associations conducted last fall suggested that international student enrollments in 2003-2004 may have begun to decline; more responding schools reported a decline in enrollments than reported an increase.

Last February we surveyed international student applications to U.S. colleges and universities for this fall and found that, at the graduate level, they were down by an average of about 30 percent. This past summer, the Council of Graduate Schools found that admissions of international students to U.S. graduate schools were down, on the average, 18 percent compared to the year before. It is therefore predictable that our spot survey on international student enrollments for this fall, the results of which will be released next month, will be down, at least at the graduate level. Anecdotal evidence suggests that at some schools, the magnitude of the decline could be rather alarming.

More than a year ago, NAFSA issued recommendations for fixing this problem in a way that would not compromise security—indeed, we believe they would enhance security. We updated and re-issued our recommendations last April. Subsequently, we joined 33 colleague associations, principally scientific associations, in making similar recommendations.

NAFSA's recommendations, "Promoting Secure Borders and Open Doors," are in your packets. If you look at the bullets on the second page, you will see that we think four things need to be done.

First, State and DHS, who now share responsibility in this area, must get together on effective policy guidance for consular officials who make the day-to-day decisions. No such comprehensive visa policy guidance has been issued since 9/11. In a policy vacuum, every control looks like a good one—and therein lies the source of the problem.

Second, we must focus our efforts more effectively on those who require special screening. Today, far too many scarce human resources are wasted on routine reviews of low-risk visa applications. This particularly affects scientists, and people from Arab and Muslim countries; both of these populations are subjected indiscriminately to special reviews. Repetitive, redundant reviews, particularly of well known people, clog the system, frustrate applicants, and detract from our ability to focus our attention where it is really needed.

Third, for those tens of thousands of visa applications—vastly more than before 9/11—that are sent to Washington for special security reviews, the process lacks appropriate time guidelines and transparency. Lately, the State Department has been making progress on speeding up clearances for scientists—the so-called “MANTIS” clearances. I remain concerned, however, about the so-called “CONDOR” clearances that Arab and Muslim males must go through. This process is very opaque; we have no good data on the CONDOR process. But our friends in the region tell us constantly of their extreme concern that we are cutting off access to an American education for a whole generation of future Middle Eastern leadership. Few things could be more short-sighted.

Fourth, Congress must provide greater resources for the State Department to provide the increased scrutiny of visa applications that Congress demands.

Mr. Chairman, we have gotten the administration’s attention. Almost all of our recommendations are under consideration or being worked on at some level in our government. But the government moves slowly and with difficulty. It needs to hear from the Committee that these are priorities. It needs to be asked for progress reports. It needs to be asked, “When will this be done?” I urge the Committee to let the administration know it’s interested. It will make a huge difference.

### **In America’s Interest: Welcoming International Students**

Mr. Chairman, some years ago, the United States was unrivalled as the leading destination for international students. That is no longer the case. The last three years, in particular, have been tough on our image. I say that not to debate or complain about policy, but simply to state a fact that we have to deal with. Other countries, meanwhile, which were already implementing proactive international student recruitment strategies before 9/11 in an overt challenge to our leadership in international education, have had a field day recruiting since 9/11.

International student enrollments at universities in the UK increased 23 percent from 2002 to 2003. The British Council, which promotes British higher education abroad, predicts that the UK could triple its international student enrollments by 2020.

The number of international students at Canadian universities increased by more than 15 percent from 2002 to 2003. The number at Australian universities increased by more than 10 percent from 2003 to this year.

In addition, as you may know, under the Bologna Declaration, all EC university students now have seamless access to higher education anywhere in the community. To make this work, the common language of instruction tends to be English. You can now study for a university degree in English in virtually any country in Europe—an unthinkable concept just a few years ago. This creates yet another center of competition—and an increasingly vigorous one—for the English-speaking international student market.

All of that is fine. I'm delighted that international students are finding their way to high quality educations in these countries. But we need to be in the race. We, too, can attract international students to our country in significantly higher numbers. But to do that, we need to act decisively to restore our reputation as the destination of choice for international students. We have to win back the loyalty of our customers. It will take a national strategy to do this, and government, higher education, and the private sector will all have to do their part.

We set forth such a long-term national strategy in the report of our task force on international student access, whose honorary chair was former Secretary of Defense William Perry. The report, entitled "In America's Interest: Welcoming International Students," is in your packets. Time does not permit me to go into that, but I urge you to read the report, Mr. Chairman, and to consider holding a hearing in the next Congress on a long-term strategy to attract international students.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to responding to questions.