

**Senator Cornyn Questions for the Record
Questions for Jill Welch, NAFSA**

- 1. Ms. Welch, I have long been a proponent of increasing U.S. global competitiveness and have advocated for additional visas and changes to how we allocate permanent employment-based visas so that we can retain the students and researchers we have educated at our colleges and universities to benefit the United States.**
- a. Do you agree that we need to expand access to visas and permanent resident status for students and researchers who obtain STEM degrees from U.S. colleges and universities?**

NAFSA: Association of International Educators agrees that expanded access to visas and permanent resident status for students and researchers would greatly benefit the nation. We have consistently been on record supporting solutions that welcome international students and provide a path for them after graduation if they want to remain in the United States to work temporarily or build a life here. Congressional action is required to:

- remove the requirement in the Immigration and Nationality Act that, in order to secure a visa, students must prove that they have no intention of staying and contributing to our economy and local communities after they graduate;*
- create a direct path to green cards for those graduating from U.S. higher education institutions who have the education and skills needed in our economy and have employers willing to sponsor them;*
- allow spouses and children of foreign students and scholars to engage in study and work opportunities; and*
- increase the number of green cards available, ending the per-country limits and eliminating processing backlogs.*

However, NAFSA has also long held that we need to attract talent from all fields of study, not just those that obtain STEM degrees. Therefore, such a policy change should not be limited to a specific field or degree. Our economy benefits from contributions of individuals with a variety of backgrounds and specializations. Singling out individuals in certain disciplines while limiting access for individuals with non-STEM specializations severely restricts our ability to compete and innovate.

- b. Are there other changes we can make to improve the perception of the United States when it comes to welcoming foreign nationals to study and teach at our colleges and universities?**

Just as American students do, international students and scholars and their families consider how the student/faculty member will be treated on campus and in the broader community when making enrollment decisions. We already know international students are opting to study in other countries due to “feeling unwelcome in the United States.” In

fact, according to IIE's 2017 Enrollment Survey, 49.5 percent of institutions report that feeling unwelcome in the United States is a factor contributing to new international student declines.¹

There are a number of steps Congress could take to send a strong message that the United States is interested in maintaining its status as a top destination for international students and scholars.

- 1. Update immigration law. Immigration law must be updated to reflect current and future needs. Congress should vote to expand "dual intent" now available to certain high-skilled professionals to remove the requirement that in order to obtain a visa to study in the United States, students must prove that they have no intention of staying, working, and contributing to our economy and local communities after they graduate. Currently, this is offered to certain high-skilled professionals and should be expanded to all students studying in our higher education institutions. Additionally, Congress should create a direct path to green cards for those graduating from U.S. higher education institutions who have the education and skills needed in our economy and have employers willing to sponsor them; allow spouses and children of foreign students and scholars to engage in study and work opportunities; and increase the number of green cards available, ending the per-country limits and eliminating processing backlogs. Because our immigration system is our face to the world and signals whether we hold fast to our ideals, we must also create a path to citizenship for Dreamers, avoid overly harsh or punitive enforcement on people simply seeking a better life in America, and ensure that diversity is valued.*
- 2. Proactively recruit international students. Just as Canada, China, Australia, and other countries have launched cross-governmental international recruiting campaigns designed to draw international students and scholars to study in their countries, the United States should launch a proactive recruitment and marketing strategy for international students. While the United States is experiencing a decline in new international student enrollment, universities in Australia, Canada, China, New Zealand, Japan, and Spain are seeing double-digit increases². As international enrollment numbers continue to decline, we are losing out on the academic, cultural, and economic benefits these talented students contribute on our campuses. Establishing a national recruiting strategy would send a strong signal that the United States is open to international*

¹ Baer, Julie. "Fall 2017 International Student Enrollment Hot Topics Survey." Fall International Enrollments Snapshot Reports. November 2017. Accessed June 4, 2018. <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/OpenDoors/Data/Fall-International-Enrollments-Snapshot-Reports>.

² Wermund, Benjamin. "Trump blamed as U.S. colleges lure fewer foreign students." *Politico*. April 23, 2018. Accessed June 19, 2018. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/23/foreign-students-colleges-trump-544717>

students and increase our chances of attracting the best and brightest to our nation.

3. *Conduct agency oversight. A number of administration policies, including bans on travel to the United States; changes in policy regarding the accrual on unlawful presence for students and exchange visitors in F, J, and M nonimmigrant status³; and requirements for individuals applying for nonimmigrant visas to list all social media accounts used within a five-year period,⁴ send a message, intentional or not, that the United States does not want international students and scholars studying in this country. Of course, reversing course on each of these policies would improve the negative perception now associated with studying in the United States.*
4. *Publicly welcome international students. The world is watching and listening to what leaders in the United States are saying about immigrants. While the reputation of U.S. higher education is well-known, students and their families want to know that they will be safe and welcome in the United States. Government leaders have the ability to promulgate positive, welcoming messages to counter the negativity regarding international visitors that has become increasingly all-too-common. Members of Congress have a powerful platform and can use their voices to speak in support of international students and scholars. In April 2018, a bipartisan group of lawmakers, including Republican Representatives Steve Stivers (OH-15) and Rodney Davis (IL-13) and Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy (VT) and Representative David Cicilline (RI-01), submitted statements for the record reiterating their support for international students and scholars. Welcoming Week, an annual series of events in which communities bring together immigrants, native-born residents, and refugees to raise awareness of the benefits of welcoming everyone, takes place each September and presents another opportunity for Members of Congress to speak out about the value of international students and scholars. Higher education institutions can utilize these messages as part of their recruiting packages to demonstrate that the United States is open to international students and scholars. NAFSA encourages Members of Congress to publicly state on the record their commitment to welcoming international students and scholars.*
5. *Invest in a national strategy that attracts and retains talent. We must increase federal investment in scientific research, and as mentioned*

³ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. "USCIS Changing Policy on Accrued Unlawful Presence by Nonimmigrant Students and Exchange Visitors." May 2018. Accessed June 19, 2018. https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Outreach/Draft%20Memorandum%20for%20Comment/AccrualofUnlawfulPresenceFJMNonimmigrantsMEMO_v2.pdf.

⁴ Office of the Federal Register. "60-Day Notice of Proposed Information Collection: Application for Nonimmigrant Visa." Accessed on June 19, 2018. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/03/30/2018-06496/60-day-notice-of-proposed-information-collection-application-for-nonimmigrant-visa>

above, ensure our immigration system presents attractive and competitive options for the world's best talent (including domestic talent). Other nations, including Canada and China, have strategic agendas in place to invest in creating an academic, scientific, and immigration environment that attracts talent. If we want to avoid talented individuals being lured by other nations to compete against us, we need a strategic agenda that makes us competitive. This should include funding of foreign language and area studies, robust funding of scientific research, freedom of academic collaboration, and welcoming immigration policies.