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Foreign Relations Committee
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Testimony of
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Biden, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about an issue that I believe is vitally important, not only to students and higher education but to our international relations, our nation and our national security.

Today nearly 600,000 international students are attending universities in the United States.

Purdue University enrolls nearly 5,000 of these students from 130 different nations. Purdue has the largest international student population among U.S. public universities. We have a history of international enrollment that dates back nearly 100 years and Purdue enjoys a particularly long and strong relationship with China, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and India.

As we meet this morning, there are more than 2,000 students from China, India and South Korea alone studying on our West Lafayette campus.

International students are good for our economy. In 2002/2003, international students contributed almost \$12.9 billion to the U.S. economy. In the state of Indiana alone, the amount is \$332,576,169.

But in a larger sense, I believe international education holds enormous promise in fulfilling our greatest hopes for the 21st century.

International educational exchange promotes understanding and friendships. When we provide an opportunity for the world's best and brightest to study in America, we give them a chance to understand our values and way of life. Students from other parts of the world who come to our campuses are

exposed to our nation and people. They come to understand our culture and society better.

Our international students are exceptional people, who will grow to become leaders in their home nations. U.S. relations around the world in the next 50 years are being nurtured at college campuses such as Purdue across our nation today.

American students, faculty and staff also benefit tremendously through interaction with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. International educational exchange programs open a door to the world for our students. It is a door of understanding.

In the years ahead, American young people will live and work in an increasingly globalized world where they will need to interact with a wide variety of people, cultures and customs.

International enrollment on our campuses prepares our students for their future. It also helps to break down stereotypes and misinformation that are the breeding grounds of intolerance.

Among many prominent Purdue graduates who were international students is Dr. Marwan Jamil Muasher. Dr. Muasher is the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

During a recent talk at Purdue, he mentioned that 50 percent of the Jordanian cabinet is U.S.-educated. This has promoted understanding and better relations between our two countries.

He has also expressed concern that the delays in the U.S. student visa application process are discouraging Jordanians from studying here. In fact, we have experienced a decline in students coming to Purdue from Jordan.

Another Purdue international graduate is Patrick Wang, of Hong Kong, CEO and chairman of Johnson Electric, a world leader in the manufacture of micro motors. Mr. Wang is among a group of international graduates who are helping us educate students today.

Yet another is Allen Chao, Chairman and CEO, Watson Pharmaceuticals Inc. in Corona, California.

Purdue graduate Anna Pao Sohmen is a business, political, education and cultural leader in Hong Kong.

Leaders from throughout the world have studied at U.S. universities.

A few who have been influenced by their international experiences are:

- United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, who studied at Macalester College in Minnesota and Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston;
- King Abdullah II of Jordan and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines, who studied at Georgetown University.

Since September 11, 2001, the growth of international students coming to the United States has slowed considerably.

Official national enrollment data for this fall is not yet available. But we believe that this year, international enrollment at U.S. universities will actually drop below the 2003 level.

This will be the first decline in about 30 years.

In data collected earlier this year for fall 2004, the 25 research universities that enroll the most international students reported significant declines in international graduate applications.

Nine indicated a decrease of 30 percent or more. Six reported a decrease of between 11 percent and 30 percent.

In September the Council of Graduate Schools reported a decline of 18 percent in offers of admissions for international graduate student from 2003 to 2004. The largest declines in admissions were from China, down 34 percent, India, down 19 percent, and Korea, down 12 percent.

The number of international students enrolled at Purdue this fall is 4,921. That is down from 5,094 one year earlier.

Although a drop of 173 students might not seem great, we are very concerned. This is, in fact, the first drop in international enrollment we have seen at Purdue in three decades.

We are concerned about what this means on our campus and what it means for our students. We are concerned about the national trend in declining enrollment. We are concerned about the impact this will have on education and our nation.

We believe there are several reasons for this decline.

First, the entire student visa process is causing students to look elsewhere for international education. In some cases the problems are real. In some cases they are only perceived. But the impact can be seen on our campuses today.

In a fall of 2003 survey, institutions responding indicated a 49 percent increase in the number of visa delays for new and continuing international undergraduate students.

These delays cause students to miss the start of classes and become hopelessly behind. In some cases continuing students fall so far behind that they have to drop their courses.

At Purdue, we have lost more than 100 prospective students since 2002 due to visa delays. On average, we are losing 20 students per spring and fall semester. The largest loss was in the fall of 2002.

We had one student from China who went home for a visit in the middle of his studies. It was more than a year before his application to return here was approved.

When another continuing student returned home to China, it was more than five months before his application to return was approved. By the time he was able to get back to West Lafayette, his wife had already delivered their child.

The picture is not entirely negative. Overall, the SEVIS system is technically functional and is improving. It is demonstrating how universities are doing their part to help with homeland security.

But issues with visa delays and security clearances remain the weakest link in our work.

Visa delays are not the only reason for declining international enrollment in the United States. It is a combination of factors, and visa delays deliver the final blow that persuades students to study elsewhere.

First — international enrollment in the United States is in decline today because there are more options available to these top students.

Asian countries are investing more than ever before in higher education, especially in graduate programs in science and technology.

The quality of those programs is rapidly improving, and experience tells us these nations' economies should improve in the years ahead as a result.

One of the top priorities for Taiwan is to allocate the equivalent of roughly \$1.6 billion U.S. dollars over five years to a selected group of universities.

This is being done as an incentive for them to reach — or draw closer to — the caliber of major American research institutions.

China, Hong Kong, and South Korea are developing similar strategies to keep their talent at home or attract it back from abroad.

Second, American universities are facing enormous competition for international students from institutions in Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

The number of Chinese and Indian students going to universities in Australia last fall was up by 25 percent. The number of students from India was up 31 percent. Great Britain saw a rise in Chinese and Indian students of 36 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

The European Union is creating a European Area of Higher Education featuring U.S.-style degrees offered in English. One of the express aims of this project is to compete with the U.S. for the world's best and brightest students.

When I received an invitation to speak at this hearing today, I met with a group of international student leaders from the Purdue campus. I asked them about the decline in international enrollment and what they and their friends and associates believe are the reasons.

This is what they told me:

- The new U.S. visa application process is long and complicated.
- It can cause delays and in some instances significant problems.

Before September 11, 2001, the visa was usually issued “on the spot” or in a matter of days. Now it is a matter of weeks, sometimes months, due to security and background checks.

We all know that security and background checks are needed. But some checks take an inordinate amount of time.

However, our students tell us the U.S. visa application process is not the only factor that is causing large numbers of students to reconsider study in the United States. Our students listed other core reasons for the decline in international enrollment.

Most frequently mentioned was the U.S. economy. The U.S. economy has struggled the past four years and many international students have trouble finding even internships during their studies.

Many American companies in the high-tech sector will not consider hiring international students as interns.

Other statements we heard included:

- governments that support the education of their students are concerned about visa problems interrupting studies and wasting their investment;
- the cost of living and studying in the United States is higher than in other nations; and
- a general decline in the U.S. image and prestige, especially among European and Middle East students.

Similar statements came from Purdue recruiters who have just returned from interviews with prospective undergraduate students and their high school counselors in Asia, South and Central America.

At Purdue we are responding to all of this.

We have worked to combat the visa delays by encouraging prospective students to apply for admission earlier; –

- by encouraging our departments to make admission decisions earlier;

- by encouraging prospective students to confirm attendance earlier.

If prospective students and departments act earlier, Purdue's Office of International Students and Scholars is able to issue the immigration document earlier.

We have also encouraged foreign governments and various agencies that financially sponsor students to make their student selections earlier so that there will be enough time for securing the visa.

For the long term, we are devising new recruitment strategies at both the undergraduate and graduate levels to attract international students to Purdue.

We are working on the perceptions held by many overseas families and prospective students, as well as many foreign government officials, that their students will not receive student visas in a timely fashion to commence studies.

On May 12, 2004, 24 representatives of American organizations of higher education, science and engineering drafted a series of problems and recommendations concerning the international student visa process.

Senator Lugar, I would like to ask that this document, "Statement and Recommendation on Visa Problems Harming America's Science, Economic and Security Interests," be entered into the committee official record.

I encourage this committee to consider seriously these recommendations concerning visa policy reform.

In closing, let me offer you some specific recommendations that have emerged from our experiences at Purdue:

1. Focus efforts on those who require special screening.
 - Give consulates discretion to grant waivers of personal appearance based on risk analysis, subject to State Department policy guidance and approval, as recommended by the State Department Inspector General in December 2002.
 - Refine controls on advanced science and technology.

- In consultation with the scientific community, define the advanced science and technology to which access must be controlled, and empower consular officers to exercise discretion on non-sensitive applications where neither the applicant nor the applicant's country present concerns.
- Avoid repetitive processing of those who temporarily leave the United States.
- Institute a presumption that a security clearance is valid for the duration of status or program, assuming no status violations. Any necessary reviews within this period should be fast-tracked.
- Avoid repetitive processing of frequent visitors.
- Establish a presumption of approval for those who have previously been granted U.S. visas and who have no status violations.
- Expedite processing and save consular resources by incorporating pre-screening or pre-certification of students and scholars. This could be accomplished in many ways. Options include: (a) The sending countries could agree to pre-screen applicants in order to facilitate their citizens' entry into the U.S.; (b) the sending universities could provide identity verification under agreements executed with consulates; and (c) the State Department could use its own overseas advising centers to ensure that all necessary documents are in order before applications are sent on to the consulates.

2. Create a timely, transparent and predictable visa process.

The White House should institute standard guidelines for inter-agency reviews of visa applications:

- Establish a 15-day standard for responses to the State Department from other agencies in the inter-agency clearance process.
- Implement a 30-day standard for the completion of the entire inter-agency review process, including the response to the consulate's security clearance request.

- Flag for expedited processing any application not completed within 30 days, and advise the consulate of the delay and the estimated processing time remaining.
- In the case of applications not completed within 30 days, the applicant, or the program to which the applicant seeks access, should be able to inquire about the application's status, and the estimated processing time remaining, via a call-in number or e-mail in box.
- Establish a special review process to resolve any cases not decided within 60 days.
- Make ground rules predictable by imposing them prospectively, not on those already in the application pipeline.

3. The validity of Visas Mantis security clearances should be extended for international students, scholars, and scientists from the current one-year time period to the duration of their course of study or academic appointment. This would prevent the need for repetitive security checks that cause visa issuance delays.

4. A timely process should be established by which exchange visitors holding F (student) and J (scholars/scientists) visas can revalidate their visas, or at least begin the visa renewal process, before they leave the United States to attend academic and scientific conferences, visit family, or attend to personal business.

5. Visa reciprocity agreements should be revised between the United States and key sending countries, such as China and Russia, to extend the duration of visas each country grants citizens of the other, thereby reducing the number of times that visiting international students, scholars, and scientists must renew their visas.

In this, we obviously need to work with the countries involved; it is not an issue that can be resolved entirely by the United States alone.

6. The Department of Homeland Security and the State Department should continue to move forward on a proposed pilot study in China and India in which the State Department would collect the SEVIS fee directly from international students and scholars in those countries. This is a method of payment strongly supported by the academic community.

7. Provide the necessary human and financial resources for security and background checks, and manage within them.

The decline in international students is first being felt most severely at American universities that do not have the same name recognition abroad as institutions such as Purdue.

But if the trend is not reversed, it will eventually grow to weaken all of our institutions, including Purdue.

While we appreciate and support the need for security in this process, the loss of outstanding international scholars not only will be a major economic blow to our country. I believe it also will work against our long-term efforts to promote national security and to improve international relations, friendships and understanding.

Furthermore, it will have a negative impact on the quality of education at U.S. universities. International enrollment not only improves our learning environment, these top students challenge our American students to stretch their own abilities. They contribute significantly to research.

Universities and our government must cooperate to meet the challenge of maintaining strong international exchanges for a better tomorrow while at the same time ensuring our national security today.

This is a challenging task.

But this country has never balked at an important issues just because they were challenging.

Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you today about this most important issue.