International Students & Optional Practical Training (OPT) Program Talking Points

Why International Students are Important

- International students **contribute $41 billion annually to the US economy** through tuition, housing, domestic travel, food, and spending in local communities. This does not include the local, state, and federal taxes paid by international students.

- Higher education is **America’s 4th largest export** ahead of telecommunications and agricultural exports such as soybeans and behind only autos, planes, and pharmaceuticals.

- Given the current economic downturn, ensuring international students can come study in the US should be a **clear national and economic priority**.

- If international enrollment drops, then the US could see a significant decline in **graduate STEM enrollment** (the current financial crisis could cause some universities to have to cut academic programs)

- **International students subsidize** the costs of enrolling more domestic students, keep in-state tuition from increasing and help **public institutions** manage decreases in state appropriations

- US could see **further loss of market share** to competitor nations

Science and Innovation Talking Points:

- The United States remains a major producer of science and technology, but global competition is on the rise. Worldwide, research and development (R&D) is valued at nearly $2 trillion of which the U.S. share is **smaller today than it was in 2000**, reflecting more than 15 years of steady decline. **China is now the world’s largest producer of scientific articles** while the **European Union, as a bloc, outperforms the US in terms of citation impact**. While quantity of publications speaks for itself, citation impact is an objective indicator of a scientific paper’s quality and importance. Countries that produce more impactful research tend to have greater influence within global scientific communities and their universities perform better on certain global academic rankings and league tables, where citations carry substantial weight within the ranking methodology.

- Global mobility of students is among the **strongest factors** influencing the formation of future international scientific cooperation networks. In fact, scientific papers published with an international co-author are **more likely to appear in a top-tier academic journal** and have a higher citation impact than other articles in the same journal.
• International students are critical to supporting other measurements of research and innovation as well. According to the World Bank, a 10% increase in the number of international graduate students raises patent applications by 4.5% and university patent grants by 6.8%. A decline in international enrollment not only threatens innovation at higher education institutions, but also at companies engaged in innovation.

• International graduate students are not only critical to supporting university research, but also supporting undergraduate classroom and laboratory instruction.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) Talking Points

• OPT is a critical tool for recruiting students in all fields to come study in the United States, especially for those in the STEM fields due to the STEM OPT extension which allows for an additional 24 months of practical training for those who qualify. US recruitment efforts would be severely hampered if OPT was suspended or curtailed.
• Post completion OPT allows for 12 months of training experience in the student’s field of study. Students/graduates with a STEM degree are eligible for a 24-month extension.
  o Obtaining internships for work experience is one of the main hopes for international students. Eliminating or curtailing OPT will substantially lessen the desirability of coming to the US—especially for the best students who have other good options.
  o Because of the global competition for international students, competitor countries like the UK, Canada and Australia are making their immigration policies more generous to attract and retain students including cutting into the U.S. market share.
  o US universities depend on international STEM graduates—more than half of all postdocs in the University of California system, for example – are international, and many of them did their PhDs in the US.
  o The US is not the leader in all scientific fields. We benefit from the scientific links that are being created by international students coming to the US.
  o Many of the startups in Silicon Valley were started by international graduates of US universities; research shows that up to 20% of the startups in Silicon Valley were started by non-US nationals.

• The Business Roundtable put together key data on the cost to the US economy of suspending OPT. The report outlines:
  o A loss of 443,000 jobs over ten years
  o 0.5% decline in GDP due to skills gaps and loss of revenue from international student spending in the economy