

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 2, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Chad Wolf
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

We write to request your help in ensuring our nation's ability to attract, educate, and engage with the best and brightest students and scholars from across the world. In furtherance of the goal, we ask your agencies adopt appropriately streamlined processes to ensure international students can enroll in the fall and preserve the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, which allows our country to globally compete for market share of international students.

International students and their families contributed approximately \$41 billion to our national economy in 2018-2019 alone. The endurance of this tremendous economic contribution requires our nation adopt and retain policies that keeps the United States competitive for new students and provides continuity of education for those students and faculty who have already been part of our higher education communities. While international students make up only 5.5 percent of overall U.S. college enrollments, they make significant contributions to our communities and help our students develop skills vital to their future success in the global economy. With the global closure of U.S. embassies and consulates, international students have been unable to schedule visa appointments. College and universities face a potential 25 percent decline in international student enrollment for the fall 2020 term.

Our higher education institutions and communities are preparing for the possible reopening of their campuses and are in need of clarity as they work to advise students and faculty, allocate critical resources, and maintain continuity of education and research. To that end, we urge your respective departments to communicate and share plans to address the expected increase in demand for visa services, including how U.S. consulates will be able to prioritize and process applications that include F-1 and J-1 visas. We believe several options are available to your agencies including the ability to waive certain interview requirements, prioritize the rescheduling of appointments that were canceled during COVID-19, and create a timely application and renewal process for professors, researchers, scientists, and those that are needed on U.S. campuses when instruction is expected to resume. We further request your agencies coordinate the admission of medical residents and fellows on J-1 and H-1B visas scheduled to begin their training program on July 1, many of whom will make vital contributions at university hospitals. Without these residents and fellows, patient care will be disrupted.

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Additionally, we urge the administration to publicly clarify that OPT will remain fully intact so we send the right messages abroad about the U.S. as an attractive destination for international students. As countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, China and Australia bolster immigration policies to attract and retain international students, the last thing our nation should do in this area is make ourselves less competitive by weakening OPT. The program is essential to the many international students who desire not just to study in the U.S. but also have a post completion training experience.

We are also aware that some nations may seek to exploit certain international student programs for their benefit, against our national interests, and against the spirit of research in American universities. We believe there are strategic and targeted approaches to combatting those practices without weakening or suspending in full our international student programs. We look forward to working with you on those solutions.

We stand ready to work with your offices to ensure U.S. visa and immigration policies function well for all who are looking to contribute to the excellence of the U.S. higher education and research system and respectfully request the administration make clear international students and scholars are encouraged to study and conduct research. These policies are critical to the national interest.

We look forward to your response and urge expediency as our nation begins to reopen and colleges and universities begin to plan for the upcoming academic year. Thank you for the consideration of this request.

Sincerely,




STEVE STIVERS
Member of Congress



BILL FLORES
Member of Congress



PETER KING
Member of Congress



RODNEY DAVIS
Member of Congress



ROB WOODALL
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JOHN KATKO
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