

BridgeUSA Coalition

June 25, 2024

The Honorable Michael Burgess
Chairman
House Committee on Rules
H-312, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James P. McGovern
Ranking Member
House Committee on Rules
H-312, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Opposition to Amendment 158, and Amendments 15, 83, and 184, to the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2025 (HR 8771)

Dear Chairman Burgess and Ranking Member McGovern:

The undersigned Department of State BridgeUSA exchange program implementing organizations and trade associations write to strongly oppose Amendment 158 (submitted by Representative Mast of Florida) that seeks to eliminate funding for the Educational and Cultural Exchange programs account in the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 2025 (HR 8771). We write to also oppose amendments 15, 83, and 184, introduced by Representative Gosar of Arizona, Representative Brecheen of Oklahoma, and Representative James of Michigan, respectively, that seek to reduce funding for Educational and Cultural Exchange programs. We urge the Rules Committee to oppose these amendments.

U.S. Department of State educational and cultural exchange programs are a proven and cost-effective way for the United States to remain internationally competitive, engage current and future international leaders, and promote American values worldwide. As established by the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (The Fulbright-Hays Act), exchanges are a key instrument in the U.S. foreign policy toolbox. These exchanges strengthening U.S. global leadership by helping build respect and partnerships based on shared interests and mutual ties around the world.

Eliminating or reducing funding for State Department exchange programs would negatively impact Americans and their communities across the country. These programs are a cost-effective investment that provides significant and immediate economic impact. **More than 90% of the Educational and Cultural Exchange programs budget is spent on Americans and in the United States**, with funds going to American organizations, businesses, and individuals who participate in exchange programs. Furthermore, international participants visiting the U.S. do business with American companies, airlines, hotels, and nongovernmental organizations in local communities, and their presence at our colleges and universities support academic institutions throughout the country.

We urge the Rules Committee to oppose Amendment 158, as well as Amendments 15, 83, and 184. Exchange programs are absolutely critical to the economic, national security, and public diplomacy interests of the United States, and are one of the best returns on investment across the entire federal budget.

BridgeUSA Coalition

Sincerely,

Alliance for International Exchange
American Hotel and Lodging Association
Cenet
FMI - The Food Industry Association
IAAPA, The Global Association for the Attractions Industry
InterExchange
National Ski Area Association
Pool and Hot Tub Alliance
Public Diplomacy Council of America
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
U.S. Travel Association