



November 21, 2024
The Honorable Marco Rubio
284 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Rubio,

On behalf of the Alliance for International Exchange, an association representing the U.S. international educational and cultural exchange community, I extend my sincere congratulations on your nomination to be Secretary of State in the incoming Trump Administration. You have been a strong advocate for Department of State international exchange programs throughout your time in the Senate, particularly through your membership on the Senate State-Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and we are grateful for this support. Throughout your Senate tenure, there has been a steady and necessary increase in funding for Department of State educational and cultural exchange programs, and the entire Alliance membership thanks you for your leadership in these efforts.

We greatly appreciate your emphasis of the critical role of soft power in U.S. diplomacy, including the use of public diplomacy tools like exchange programs. You have long recognized that exchange programs help to build relationships with other countries based on mutual interest, and to counteract malign influence efforts by nations like China and Russia, particularly in Latin America and Africa. We know you see these efforts as crucial in promoting U.S. values and interests while addressing geopolitical challenges. We agree with your view that diplomatic and public diplomacy strategies should align with U.S. national interests while fostering international alliances and countering authoritarian regimes. International exchange programs contribute to these goals in substantial ways.

In your new role as Secretary of State, we look forward to engaging with you to sustain, protect, and grow international exchange programs. As you know, the Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) facilitates an array of exchange programs for more than 350,000 American and international students, professionals, and other participants every year. ECA funded exchange programs reach more than 50,000 participants every year across academic, professional, youth, music, sports, and other cultural programs. ECA BridgeUSA private sector exchange programs bring more than 300,000 international students and professionals to the U.S. every year at no cost to the U.S. taxpayer.

Department of State exchange programs have a direct and significant impact on our economy, our communities, and our people, making ECA the most domestically focused of all Department of State bureaus. Indeed, exchange programs are international in nature, but distinctly American in impact. They are an economic and diplomatic engine for our country.

An investment in international exchange programs is an investment in the U.S. economy.

International university students contributed ***\$43.8 billion*** to the U.S. economy and created ***378,175 jobs*** in 2023-24. Approximately ***90%***, or ***\$660 million***, of the Department of State exchange program budget is spent on Americans traveling abroad or by international participants while in America. This is one of the best returns on investment in the entire federal government.

International exchanges create political and business networks around the world – networks that cement diplomatic relationships and strengthen national security. Exchange programs have immeasurable national defense and security benefits, provide unique value for our nation, and advance American interests around the world. International exchanges are one of our oldest forms of diplomacy and are a key instrument of U.S. foreign policy, essential to strengthening U.S. global leadership and keeping us safe. Exchanges help us promote American values worldwide and build international partnerships based on shared interests that ultimately save lives and build nations.

International exchanges create future American leaders, providing them the skills to be successful on the world stage. More than 31 million job openings require skills in communication, leadership, and problem-solving – all skill sets shaped through international exchange experiences. Studying and traveling abroad helps to build careers – 9 out of 10 youth surveyed say they believe travel experiences increase employability.

International exchanges help tell America’s story, showing the world what America is really like, building familiarity, kinship, and trust. 4 out of 5 Americans feel international exchange programs enhance the image of their community as a good place to live. 94 percent of exchange students from Muslim-majority countries reported that they have a deeper, more favorable view of American culture after their year in the United States. 79 percent of Fellows who participated in the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders agreed that the Fellowship helped build lasting and productive relationships, both personal and institutional, between the United States and African countries.

I’m sure you would agree that it is important for ECA to have strong leadership in place to guide and grow the Department’s exchange programs to achieve maximum economic and foreign policy impact. I urge you and President Trump to quickly appoint an Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs who is committed to the importance of international exchange programs.

Again, congratulations on your nomination as Secretary of State and thank you for your ongoing and strong support of international exchange programs. We look forward to engaging with you and your staff during this transition and in the new Administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Overmann', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Overmann
Executive Director
Alliance for International Exchange