

Renewing America's Global Leadership

A POLICY STATEMENT BY NAFSA: ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATORS

NAFSA: Association of International Educators shares and pledges its support for President Obama's commitment to renew America's global leadership. Our country, and indeed the entire world, welcomes the path our new president has charted – one that seeks to return America to its core principles, to reaffirm our commitment to extending a hand of friendship and understanding to the global community, and to assert our shared humanity in the advancement of peace in our world.

In his inaugural address, President Obama made clear his administration's commitment to renewing America's engagement in the world, saying: "And so, to all other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more."

We believe that to restore America's international legitimacy, we must address the perception around the world that America's interests, as we have conceived of and pursued them in recent years, no longer reflect what the founders of our country referred to as a decent respect for the opinions of mankind.

We must return to the guiding principle that America's security lies in a world that is secure, a world in which people are free to pursue their aspirations for themselves and for their children. President Obama has committed his administration to these values, saying in his inaugural address that: "We reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals." He spoke of the importance of bridging old hatreds and said that "America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace."

OUR COMMITMENT

NAFSA is an association of individuals worldwide inspired by the conviction that international education – connecting students, scholars, educators, and citizens across borders – is a critical tool in achieving that new era of peace.

International education creates that most unique of possibilities, in which individuals of differing backgrounds, faiths, and life experiences can come face to face and discover ties of friendship and understanding. It is these person-to-person relationships that sustain diplomatic and political relationships, which is why generations of American foreign-policy leaders have pointed to educational exchanges as one of our most successful foreign policy tools, the most proven and effective way for the United States to build a foundation for dialogue and partnership with the rest of the world. We believe international education, by its nature, is fundamental to fostering peace, security, and well-being – for America and for the world.

We know that President Obama intuitively understands the power of international education. His administration is globally oriented to an unprecedented degree. No one has to convince him of the importance of welcoming international students to our country; he is the product of one, and he celebrates that fact as central to who he is.

No one has to convince him of the importance of study abroad; President Obama knows that international experiences not only enhance understanding and cross-cultural sensitivity but also give one a new perspective on one's own country. He has lived that reality—and he has recruited into the top levels of his administration others who have done the same. And as a senator, President Obama was an original cosponsor of the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act, a visionary effort to greatly expand opportunities for American college students to study abroad.

Inevitably, the administration's global orientation will be tested. It is a certainty that events will occur in the world that will empower those who argue that only the iron fist – not values – will protect us. But NAFSA is in the fight for the long haul. This new chapter of American leadership presents our country with an unprecedented opportunity to redefine U.S. national security as being served, not undermined, by international understanding and by adherence to our values.

We will work with partners who share the administration's commitment to a global agenda and who bring expertise to other parts of it—human rights and the rule of law, responsible use of the planet's resources, conflict resolution and peace building, a fair and balanced immigration system, and others. With them, we will be part of the grassroots movement that will sustain this approach through the difficult times to come.

OUR AGENDA: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

We believe that constructive U.S. global leadership is served by fostering an America that knows, understands, and is able to communicate with the world, and by strengthening the relationships through which the American people and the world's people can relate to, interact with, and understand each other. We believe that it is through international education that we can, as a country, grow our capacity to listen to, understand, and communicate with the rest of the world and be part of advancing a shared future of peace, security, and well-being.

We imagine an America in which, from the smallest communities to the largest cities, we are all connected to the global community in meaningful ways and benefit from a dialogue that includes a diversity of voices and experiences.

We imagine an America in which a strong capacity for international collaboration, discovery, and partnership underpins our efforts to pursue responsible stewardship of the planet's resources, the imperative of nonproliferation, the eradication of disease, the marginalization of extremism, and other great challenges of our time.

We imagine an America in which the mantle of global citizenship is a shared national compass that

guides us in reaching out in friendship and aid to those less fortunate around the world.

We imagine an America in which educating future generations for life and leadership in a global community is a national priority.

NAFSA dedicates itself to being part of creating this America, through our work to advance international education. Specifically, we believe that:

- Everyone who graduates from college in this country should have a basic understanding of the world beyond our shores and be proficient in a foreign language;
- At least one million American college students – four times the current number – should study abroad each year in high quality programs around the globe and for academic credit;
- International students and scholars who wish to pursue their academic objectives in our country should be able to do so, and we should ensure that they feel welcome in our midst;
- International exchange and volunteer-service programs should be significantly increased, and Americans should be challenged by renewed calls to international service for the sake of their country and the world, as President Kennedy did nearly 50 years ago.

This would be a revolutionized America, connected to the world as never before, competitive in the global economy, and prepared to exercise wise and constructive international leadership. Yet this America would not be difficult to achieve; it is attainable within ten years. Most if not all of the necessary policies are already known—indeed, some have long been known and need only to be rediscovered. The cost would be minuscule in comparison with the sums that are discussed in today's political debate.

We look forward to working with the Obama-Biden administration and with Congress to build this America. We pledge our robust support and that of our members at the grassroots.

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