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January 27, 2021

The Honorable Anthony Blinken U.S. Department of State Office of the Secretary Room 7226 Harry S. Truman Building 2201 C Street, NW Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of the American Council on Education (ACE) and the undersigned higher education associations, we write to congratulate you on your confirmation, as well as to bring to your attention major issues of importance for the higher education community. We believe there are several actions you can take as Secretary of State to help support our international students and restore the United States as a destination of choice for global students and scholars. Dr. Samantha Power, administrator-designate of the U.S. Agency for International Development, recently wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine that "one of the best ways to showcase the United States' ingenuity and know-how is to again make its universities the most attractive in the world to foreign talent."<sup>1</sup>

As you are aware, international students and their enrollment in U.S. institutions have an enormous economic impact on the overall U.S. economy. Unfortunately, recent surveys have shown a 43 percent decline in new international student enrollment at U.S. institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent study from NAFSA: Association of International Educators found that the overall economic impact generated by international students had had declined by \$1.8 billion during the 2019-2020 academic year, from \$40.5 billion in the prior year.<sup>2</sup> The declining enrollment numbers for 2020 will unfortunately contribute to the challenges our economy confronts as we rebuild from the global pandemic.

By taking action on these immediate issues, you can deliver a welcoming message to current and prospective international students, which can do much to restore the U.S. as a destination of choice, as well as supporting an important economic activity as the U.S. economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. In coordination with the Department of Homeland Security, ensure the timely and efficient processing of visa applications and work authorizations for international

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-11-20/samanth-power-can-do-power

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2</u>

students and scholars. As you may know, both agencies have current funding issues due to the extremely low number of applications processed in 2020 and the loss of those fees, as well as cuts made to the DHS and State workforce over the past four years. Both State and DHS need additional resources to ramp up the processing of visas and authorizations post COVID-19.

2. Restore the 2005 "Rice" cable,<sup>3</sup> and allow flexibility for consular officers in interpreting an international student's intent provision when adjudicating student visa applications. Ideally, the Administration could push Congress to enact legislation that would allow for "dual intent" when international students apply for a non-immigrant student visa. Dual intent is already allowed on some non-immigrant visas, such as H-1Bs. Expanding dual intent to include F visas, would streamline the visa process for international students and allow students the ability to express interest in remaining in the U.S. after their studies.

We have shared a similar letter with Secretary Mayorkas regarding actions the Department of Homeland Security can take to help support international students. One of those steps is to restore the Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council (HSAAC), established during the Obama Administration, which allowed for interagency discussions of issues impacting our institutions and students. The Department of State through Consular Affairs (CA) was an active member. We hope you will support efforts to restore this important Council.

We look forward to working with you and the Biden Administration on these important issues.

Sincerely,

Ted Mitchell President

On behalf of:

Achieving the Dream ACPA-College Student Educators International ACT American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers American Association of State Colleges and Universities American Association of University Professors American College Health Association American Council on Education American Dental Education Association APPA, "Leadership in Educational Facilities" Association of American Colleges and Universities Association of American Universities Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://www.nafsa.org/ /file/ /amresource/DOScable 20050928.htm

Association of Community College Trustees Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Association of Research Libraries College and University Professional Association for Human Resources Common App Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area Council for Advancement and Support of Education **Council for Christian Colleges & Universities Council for Higher Education Accreditation Council of Graduate Schools** Council of Independent Colleges **Council on Social Work Education EDUCAUSE** ETS **Higher Education Consultants Association Higher Learning Commission** Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Middle States Commission on Higher Education NAFSA: Association of International Educators NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education National Association for College Admission Counseling National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education National Association of Colleges and Employers National Association of College and University Business Officers National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators National Collegiate Athletic Association New England Commission of Higher Education Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities Phi Beta Kappa Society Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges State Higher Education Executive Officers Association UPCEA