

April 13, 2005

The Honorable Norm Coleman  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Coleman and Bingaman:

As representatives of higher education, science, and engineering organizations, we wish to thank you for introducing S. 455, the American Competitiveness Through International Openness Now (ACTION) Act, and to congratulate you on addressing a number of critical issues that our nation and our community still face.

Our organizations are strongly committed to dedicating our combined energies and expertise to enhancing homeland and national security. Our nation's colleges and universities and scientific and technical organizations are the engines of new knowledge, discoveries, technologies, and training that power the country's research enterprise and contribute greatly to economic and national security. Moreover, they are important hubs of international scientific and technical exchanges, and they play a vital role in facilitating educational and cultural exchanges that help to spread our nation's democratic values.

The policy changes you propose would help to remedy remaining problems in the U.S. visa system that are adversely affecting international students, scholars, scientists, and engineers traveling to and from the United States, and also help to counter the misperception that the United States is not a welcoming place to study and conduct research. We regard as especially important the provisions that would encourage the State Department to renegotiate visa reciprocity agreements with other countries and that would amend the Immigration and Naturalization Act to require consular officers to make visa issuance decisions based on whether a student visa applicant has sufficient financial means and a legitimate academic intent to complete a bona fide course of study in the United States.

As the United States is in a global competition for the world's best scientific and engineering talent, we greatly appreciate your legislation and subsequent efforts to build additional support for the bill.

Thank you again for your leadership in addressing this important issue to U.S. higher education and research and American economic competitiveness.

Sincerely,



Nils Hasselmo  
President  
Association of American Universities



Alan I. Leshner  
Chief Executive Officer  
American Association for the Advancement of Science

On behalf of:

AAUP – American Association of University Professors

ACT

American Council on Education

American Geophysical Union

American Physical Society

American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

American Society for Microbiology

Council of Graduate Schools

FASEB – Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology

IEEE – United States of America

NAFSA: Association of International Educators

National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges

Optical Society of America

SPIE – The International Society for Optical Engineering