

October 2, 2020

The Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jim Jordan
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

The undersigned organizations write today in support of two key provisions related to the global race for talent in the House-passed Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), H.R. 6395. We urge the House and Senate Armed Services conferees to include Section 1763 and Section 281 of H.R. 6395 in the final NDAA conference agreement and request that the Committees on the Judiciary support their inclusion.

Sec. 281 of H.R. 6395 House bill would provide a new, narrow pathway for top international scientists and technologists to contribute their education and talents to the benefit of the National Security Innovation Base. Consistent with the recommendations of the Reagan Institute Task Force, Sec. 281 would create a mechanism for the Secretary of Defense to attract and retain qualified individuals with essential skills and expertise in areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum information sciences, biology, robotics, and hypersonics. It is an example of a smart and modernized approach to talent acquisition and is acutely germane and integral to the United States' national defense strategy. At a time when other nations are increasing their own research investments and employing strategies to attract leading technical experts, we must recommit to winning the global race for talent. While our nation's premier higher education system and research enterprise draw top international talent from around the world, our outdated policies too often require these top minds to return home. Ceding many of these brilliant minds to competitor nations is self-defeating.

Now more than ever, it is critical that the United States reimagine our own talent recruitment efforts and bring to bear innovative solutions to fortify our national security.

Many of the colleges and universities that attract these brilliant students and scholars are now employing virtual or hybrid-education models in response to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency declared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Sec. 1763 of the House-passed bill provides much-needed clarity and assurances to guarantee that international students can be in the same time zone and have a safe environment for learning with full access to lectures and materials in order to make progress towards academic completion. The global pandemic has caused a multitude of challenges, but this key provision ensures that all students can continue to study at their U.S. institution of higher education no matter their learning modality for the duration of the public health emergency. This provision is critical to support newly enrolled and continuing international students who are essential to teaching and research.

Higher education serves as America's 5th largest export with one million international students contributing \$41 billion annually to the U.S. economy through tuition, housing, domestic travel, food, and spending in local communities. Given the recent economic downturn, ensuring international students can come to study in the U.S. should be a clear national and economic priority. Section 1763 is vital to safeguarding the health of our nation's economy and also unequivocally germane to the Defense Department's workforce development capabilities to draw on a pipeline of top talent for employment or further training.

We are deeply appreciative of your efforts to continue to engage the higher education, scientific, business and research communities in the protection of our national security and thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Aerospace Industries Association
American Association for Anatomy
American Association of Physics Teachers
American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)
American Astronomical Society
American Council on Education
American Geophysical Union
American Mathematical Society
American Physical Society
American Society for Cell Biology
American Society of Agronomy
Association of American Universities
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Biophysical Society
BSA | The Software Alliance
Compete America
Computing Research Association
Council of Graduate Schools
Crop Science Society of America
Information Technology Industry Council (ITI)
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA)
New American Economy
Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA)
Soil Science Society of America
TechNet