

*Statement and Recommendations on Visa Problems Harming
America's Scientific, Economic, and Security Interests*

June 10, 2009

As representatives of organizations of U.S. higher education, science, and engineering, we have been deeply concerned about the significant increase in delays experienced earlier this year by many international students, scholars, and scientists who have applied for visas to study, conduct research, or attend conferences in this country. Our nation's colleges and universities and scientific and technical organizations are the engines of the new knowledge, innovation, and advanced 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 interactions that help to spread our nation's values.

Lengthy and unnecessary delays frustrate and discourage many of the best and brightest international students, scholars, and scientists from studying and working in the United States, or attending academic and scientific conferences here and abroad. This compromises our ability to attract international scientific talent and maintain scientific and economic leadership. Given the current economic crisis, as delays continue, individuals are more likely to decide not to come to the United States.

Our nation needs a visa system that supports international exchange and cooperation. We are confident that it is possible to have a system that protects national security, and yet is still timely and transparent, provides for thorough reviews of applicants, and welcomes the finest talent. Scientific exchange and security are not mutually exclusive; to the contrary, they complement each other, and each is vital to the other.

We applaud this Administration's commitment to restoring America's image abroad. We understand that steps currently are being taken to increase personnel resources and improve and streamline the visa application review process to eliminate the current backlog of applications and significantly reduce wait times for prospective applicants undergoing Visas Mantis security review. The Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, and other partner agencies have worked closely with our community in recent years to make the visa process less cumbersome, and we are pleased that the Administration is taking these additional steps to address some of our concerns. It is, therefore, in the spirit of past and future cooperation that we offer the following recommendations:

- **Address the current backlog of visa applications as expeditiously as possible** by providing sufficient resources to the Department of State and its partner agencies to allow timely processing of visa applications. This action must be taken to prevent the world from again believing that the United States does not welcome international students, scholars, and scientists.
- **Streamline the visa process for credentialed short-term visitors in science and technology fields.** A non-immigrant visa applicant who is a legitimate graduate student, researcher, or professional in any field of science and technology, and whose application is

supported by a qualified university, scientific body, or corporation should receive a determination on his or her visa application within 30 days. Longer delays are very disruptive to scientific study, research and collaborations.

- **Reduce repetitive processing of visa applications for those well-known researchers and scholars who regularly visit the United States.** The Department of State and its partner agencies should reduce repetitive reviews of international researchers and scholars who regularly travel to the United States to attend academic conferences and conduct research. Longer duration clearances and visas are needed.
- **Establish protocols to make treatment of applicants more consistent.** Consular staff at posts abroad should receive regular training on protocols for initiating a Visas Mantis review so that this screening tool can be used appropriately and consistently. Additional training and guidance for consular staff can enhance security while simultaneously reducing the number of applications submitted for Visas Mantis reviews, thereby alleviating potential delays.
- **Provide more transparency in the visa system.** We recommend that the Department of State provide more transparency for visa applicants who experience delays, and establish a special review process to address applications pending for more than 30 days.
- **Review and streamline the Technology Alert List (TAL) to include only subject areas that clearly have explicit implications for national security.** The list identifies sensitive areas of science and technology in which exports of technology or information might be controlled. However, over the years, the TAL has been broadened, and it now restrains and inhibits legitimate areas of scientific research.
- **Continue and expand ongoing efforts to renegotiate visa reciprocity agreements between the United States and key sending countries, such as China, to extend the duration of visas each country grants students and scholars of the other and to permit multiple entries on a single visa.** We applaud the Department of State's efforts to date in this area and encourage continued efforts. Improved reciprocity and allowing multiple entries would reduce the number of visa renewals that must be processed.
- **Convene a high level interagency panel to review the full range of visa-related policies and procedures put into place after 9/11.** Many policies and procedures designed to enhance national security were put into place after 9/11. An evaluation of their cost-effectiveness is needed, and ineffective and unnecessary procedures should be revised or eliminated. Such a review would resolve these and other outstanding issues.

We appreciate the steps taken recently to improve the visa processing system. We reiterate our commitment to work with the federal government to address remaining issues and improve the visa system further. A system that maintains our nation's security while encouraging the entry of the brightest and most qualified international students, scholars, scientists, and engineers will bolster American scientific and economic competitiveness, as well as help restore America's image abroad. We believe that implementing the above recommendations will help make this goal a reality.



Robert M. Berdahl
President
Association of American Universities



Alan I. Leshner
President
American Association for the
Advancement of Science



Ralph J. Cicerone
President
National Academy of Sciences



Dr. Charles M. Vest
President
National Academy of Engineering



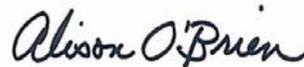
Harvey V. Fineberg
President
Institute of Medicine



Constantine W. Curris
President
American Association of State Colleges
and Universities



M. Peter McPherson
President
Association of Public and Land-grant
Universities (A·P·L·U)



Alison O'Brien, Ph.D.
President
American Society for Microbiology



Marlene M. Johnson
Executive Director and CEO
NAFSA: Association of International
Educators



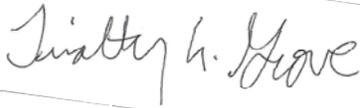
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President
American Physical Society



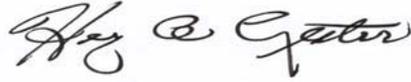
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President
Council of Graduate Schools



Dr. Thomas H. Lane
President
American Chemical Society



Timothy L. Grove
President
American Geophysical Union



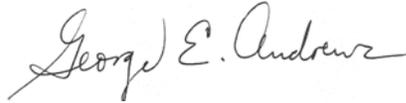
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Biophysical Society



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IEEE-USA



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Teachers



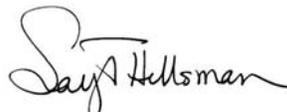
Richard B. Marchase, Ph.D.
President
Federation of American Societies for
Experimental Biology



Carol D. Lee
President
American Educational Research
Association



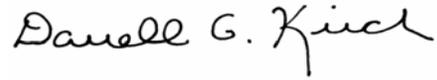
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President
American Astronomical Society



Sally T. Hillsman, Ph.D.
Executive Officer
American Sociological Association



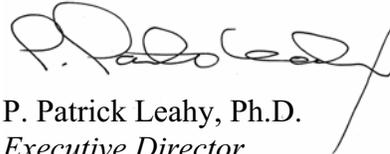
David Warren
President
National Association of Independent
Colleges and Universities



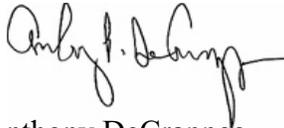
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President and CEO
Association of American Medical
Colleges



Keith L. Seitter
Executive Director
American Meteorological Society



P. Patrick Leahy, Ph.D.
Executive Director
American Geological Institute



Anthony DeCrappeo
President
Council on Governmental Relations



H. Frederick Dylla
Executive Director & CEO
American Institute of Physics

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