Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen, and Ranking Member Lowey:

We are former United States Ambassadors to countries across the globe. While we may differ in political ideology, we write today united with one voice to ask that the Senate and House Appropriations Committees support full funding in fiscal year 2018 for the Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The unprecedented 55 percent cut called for in the Administration’s full budget would jeopardize our nation’s public diplomacy efforts.

We have seen first-hand the critical role that international exchange programs play in our nation’s soft power diplomacy. Exchange programs enhance U.S. national security and prosperity by building productive partnerships, mutual understanding, and personal connections that help us address critical global issues including strengthening the world economy and combating terrorism. In the countries where we have served, we have seen exchange programs help draw emerging political leaders closer to the United States, provide international scholars with critical information and contacts they need in America, and strengthen the appreciation of our country by exposing hundreds of thousands of people to our culture. These are the soft-power results that complemented our direct diplomacy efforts in countries that are critical to our national security.

Additionally, exchange programs create a welcoming environment for over a million international students to study in the United States. These students add over $32 billion to our economy while supporting over 400,000 jobs here.

It is critical that we position Americans to be competitive and succeed in today’s globalized marketplace. This includes equipping them with foreign language skills and cultural awareness – 21st century skills many employers look for today when hiring. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’ budget provides highly successful exchange opportunities for young Americans who may otherwise not be able to travel or engage in these life-changing experiences.

Gutting exchange programs is not a win for the taxpayer or small government. To the contrary, the cost of these programs is considerably less than one percent of the federal
budget, and the return-on-investment is immense. Moreover, virtually all of the exchange program budget is spent in the U.S. or on Americans. Because of that investment, 1 in 3 world leaders today have been on a U.S. exchange program.

To be most effective, U.S. funding for exchange programs should be balanced and strategic by reaching a range of people from many different countries. Our country is very well served by supporting: academic exchanges; initiatives to engage emerging leaders; language and area studies programs that prepare U.S. citizens for the workforce; capacity development for women; youth engagement; exchanges of cultural and artistic expression; interactions with international athletes; and virtual exchanges that connect people who are unable to travel.

We are grateful that the power and reach of these programs is widely recognized and that Congress has consistently demonstrated a strong, bipartisan commitment to exchange programs. This spring, Congress passed the FY 2017 Omnibus bill, which secured a seven percent budget increase for educational and cultural exchange programs through the end of the year.

Notwithstanding this, the Administration continues to push for dramatic cuts and a reorganization of exchange programs that would significantly narrow the reach and range of these programs. This would be a grave mistake.

As Defense Secretary James Mattis has suggested, the way to reduce the possibility of war is to increase people-to-people diplomacy – which is at the heart of cultural and educational exchanges.

We are greatly appreciative of Congress’ robust support of educational and cultural exchange programs in the FY 2017 Omnibus bill. With deep respect, we urge you to continue protecting these critical programs by fully funding educational and cultural exchange programs in FY 2018.

cc: The Honorable Lindsey Graham
cc: The Honorable Harold Rogers
cc: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson

Signed,

**Amb. (ret.) Frank Almaguer** *Ambassador to the Republic of Honduras, 1999-2002*

**Amb. (ret.) Mark L. Asquino** *Ambassador to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, 2012-2015*

**Amb. (ret.) Elizabeth Frawley Bagley** *Ambassador to the Portuguese Republic, 1994-1997*


**Amb. (ret.) William M. Bellamy** *Ambassador to the Republic of Kenya, 2003-2006*
Amb. (ret.) Eric D. Benjaminson Ambassador to the Gabonese Republic and the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, 2010-2013
Amb. (ret.) Stuart Bernstein Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark, 2001-2005
Amb. (ret.) Donald Blinken Ambassador to Hungary, 1994-1998
Amb. (ret.) Donald T. Bliss Ambassador to the International Civil Aviation Organization, 2006-2009
Amb. (ret.) Barbara K. Bodine Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen, 1997-2001
Amb. (ret.) Robert A. Bradtke Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia, 2006-2009
Amb. (ret.) George Bruno Ambassador to Belize, 1994-1997
Amb. (ret.) Robert Callahan Ambassador to the Republic of Nicaragua, 2008-2011
Amb. (ret.) Brian E. Carlson Ambassador to the Republic of Latvia, 2001-2005
Amb. (ret.) Asif J. Chaudhry Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova, 2008-2011
Amb. (ret.) Peter R. Chaveas Ambassador to the Republic of Malawi, 1994-1997 and to the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2001-2004

Amb. (ret.) James F. Collins  *Ambassador to the Russian Federation, 1997-2001*


Amb. (ret.) Robert Dillon  *Ambassador to the Lebanese Republic, 1981-1983*

Amb. (ret.) John Dinger  *Ambassador to Mongolia, 2000-2003*

Amb. (ret.) Dr. Evans S. Dobelle  *US Chief of Protocol, 1977-1979*


Amb. (ret.) David Dunford  *Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, 1992-1995*

Amb. (ret.) William Eaton  *Ambassador to the Republic of Panama, 2005-2008*


Amb. (ret.) Luigi R. Einaudi  *Ambassador to the Organization of American States, 1989-1993*

Amb. (ret.) Harriet L. Elam-Thomas  *Ambassador to the Republic of Senegal, 2000-2002*

Amb. (ret.) Nancy H. Ely-Raphel  *Ambassador to the Republic of Slovenia, 1998-2001*


Amb. (ret.) Gregory W. Engle  *Ambassador to the Togolese Republic, 2003-2005*


Amb. (ret.) Kenneth Fairfax  *Ambassador to the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011-2013*

Amb. (ret.) Robert P. Finn  *Ambassador to the Republic of Tajikistan, 1998-2001 and to Afghanistan, 2002-2003*

Amb. (ret.) Robert Fitts  *Ambassador to the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Vanuatu, 2003-2006*

Senator Wyche Fowler  *U.S. Senator from Georgia, 1987-1992 and Ambassador (ret.) to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1996-2001*
Amb. (ret.) Chas W. Freeman, Jr. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1989-1992
Amb. (ret.) Laurie S. Fulton Ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark, 2009-2013
Amb. (ret.) Edward M. Gabriel Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco, 1997-2001
Amb. (ret.) Yousif B. Ghafari Ambassador to the Republic of Slovenia, 2008-2009
Amb. (ret.) Robert Gosende Special Envoy for the Federal Republic of Somalia with the personal rank of Ambassador, 1991-1992
Amb. (ret.) Gary Grappo Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, 2006-2009
Amb. (ret.) Gordon Gray Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia, 2009-2012
Amb. (ret.) Donald P. Gregg Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, 1989-1993
Amb. (ret.) Fay Hartog-Levin Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2009-2011
Amb. (ret.) Patricia McMahon Hawkins Ambassador to the Togolese Republic, 2008-2011
Amb. (ret.) Samuel D. Heins Ambassador to the Kingdom of Norway, 2016-2017
Amb. (ret.) Stuart W. Holliday Ambassador for Special Political Affairs at the United Nations, 2003-2005
Amb. (ret.) Franklin Huddle Ambassador to the Republic of Tajikistan, 2001-2003
Amb. (ret.) Marie T. Huhtala Ambassador to Malaysia, 2001-2004
Amb. (ret.) Ravic R. Huso Ambassador to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 2007-2010
Amb. (ret.) William H. Itoh Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand, 1995-1999
Amb. (ret.) David Jacobson Ambassador to Canada, 2009-2013
Amb. (ret.) Linda Jewell  Ambassador to the Republic of Ecuador, 2005-2008
Amb. (ret.) John F. Keane  Ambassador to the Republic of Paraguay, 2003-2005
Amb. (ret.) James Keith  Ambassador to Malaysia, 2007-2010
Amb. (ret.) Laura E. Kennedy  Ambassador to Turkmenistan, 2001-2003
Amb. (ret.) John M. Koenig  Ambassador to the Republic of Cyprus, 2012-2015
Amb. (ret.) Daniel C. Kurtzer  Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1997-2001 and to the State of Israel, 2001-2005
Amb. (ret.) David Lambertson  Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand, 1991-1995
Amb. (ret.) Richard LeBaron  Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, 2004-2007
Amb. (ret.) Carmen Lomellin  Permanent Representative and Ambassador to the Organization of American States, 2009-2014
Amb. (ret.) Elizabeth McKune  Ambassador to the State of Qatar, 1998-2001


Amb. (ret.) Thomas J. Miller  Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1999-2001 and to the Hellenic Republic, 2001-2004

Amb. (ret.) Mark C. Minton  Ambassador to Mongolia, 2006-2009

Amb. (ret.) William Monroe  Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2004-2007

Amb. (ret.) Patrick S. Moon  Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2010-2013


Amb. (ret.) Cameron Munter  Ambassador to the Republic of Serbia, 2007-2009 and to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 2010-2012


Amb. (ret.) Joseph M. Mussomeli  Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia, 2005-2008 and to the Republic of Slovenia, 2010-2015


Amb. (ret.) David Passage  Ambassador to the Republic of Botswana, 1990-1993


Amb. (ret.) June Carter Perry  Ambassador to the Kingdom of Lesotho, 2004-2007 and to the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2007-2010


Amb. (ret.) Robin L. Raphel Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia, 1997-2000

Amb. (ret.) Charles A. Ray Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia, 2002-2005 and to the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2009-2012


Amb. (ret.) Richard J. Schmierer Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, 2009-2012

Amb. (ret.) Stephen A. Seche Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen, 2007-2010

Amb. (ret.) Theodore Sedgwick Ambassador to the Slovak Republic, 2010-2015


Amb. (ret.) David B. Shear Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2011-2014


Amb. (ret.) Alan Solomont Ambassador to the Kingdom of Spain and the Principality of Andorra, 2009-2013


Amb. (ret.) Kathleen Stephens Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, 2008-2011


Amb. (ret.) Patrick N. Theros  Ambassador to the State of Qatar, 1995-1998
Amb. (ret.) Vinai Kumar Thummalapally  Ambassador to Belize, 2009-2013
Amb. (ret.) Marcelle M. Wahba  Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, 2001-2004
Amb. (ret.) Marc Wall  Ambassador to the Republic of Chad, 2004-2007
Amb. (ret.) James D. Walsh  Ambassador to the Argentine Republic, 2000-2003
Amb. (ret.) Larry Wohlers  Ambassador to the Central African Republic, 2010-2013
Amb. (ret.) Stephen M. Young  Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic, 2003-2005