January 26, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

Dear Senator Reid:

On behalf of the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange and the Coalition for International Education, we urge you to reject Senator Tom Coburn’s amendment to H.J. Res. 45 that would rescind $120 billion in federal spending. As associations representing nongovernmental exchange organizations and institutions of higher education committed to increasing U.S. expertise and engagement with the world, we are concerned that this amendment would significantly diminish the reach and impact of our nation’s international efforts.

Senator Coburn’s amendment identifies various international education programs of the Departments of State, Education, Defense, and the National Science Foundation as ‘duplicative.’ In fact these programs are complementary. Different programs reach American citizens at different stages of their academic careers: important early exposure for undergraduates; deep expertise for graduate students through ongoing language, area studies, and research opportunities; and specialized intensive training to reach very high levels of fluency. These modestly funded and highly cost-effective programs, which represent less than 0.05 per cent of the combined budgets of their agencies, are largely concentrated in the most critical and least commonly taught languages; they foster and sustain badly needed national capacity that otherwise would not be developed. One need only look at any day’s headlines to appreciate our need to engage more broadly and effectively with China, India, Russia, and the Muslim world. Restricting or eliminating this carefully designed ‘program pipeline’ will reduce our nation’s capacity to do so, and have an adverse long-term impact on our national security.

In an increasingly interdependent world, our nation needs to strengthen language and international affairs expertise among Americans in virtually every field – government, business, academia, medicine, law, and scientific and technical disciplines – to support America’s continuing global leadership. The Coburn amendment would mandate just the opposite outcome.

We urge you and your colleagues to reject this amendment, and appreciate your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Michael McCarry  
Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange

Miriam A. Kazanjian  
Coalition for International Education
Submitted on behalf of the following organizations:

America-Mideast Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST)  
American Association of Community Colleges

American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS  
American Association of State Colleges and Universities

American Council on Education  
American Institute for Foreign Study, Inc.

American Political Science Association  
American University of Beirut

Association for Asian Studies  
Association for International Business Education and Research

Association for International Practical Training  
Association of International Education Administrators

Association of American Universities  
Association of Research Libraries

Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities  
Consortium of Social Science Associations

Concordia Language Villages  
Council of Directors of National Foreign Language Resource Centers

Council for Opportunity in Education  
Council of American Overseas Research Centers

Council of Directors of National Resource Centers  
Council on International Educational Exchange

Educational Testing Service  
Forum on Education Abroad

Institute of International Education  
IREX: International Research & Exchanges Board

Joint National Committee for Languages  
LASPAU: Academic and Professional Programs for the Americas

Latin American Studies Association  
Meridian International Center

Middle East Studies Association  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities  
United Negro College Fund Special Programs Corporation

The Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange is an association of 77 U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations with nearly 8000 staff and 1.25 million volunteers across the United States that conduct exchange programs of all types.

The Coalition for International Education is a group of over 30 national higher education organizations, which share an interest in U.S. Department of Education programs and initiatives that promote U.S. global competence.