

**Testimony of Philip O. Geier, Ph.D.**  
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**to**  
**Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight**  
**and**  
**Committee on Education and Labor**  
**Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness**  
**on**  
**June 19, 2008**

Introduction

Thank you for this opportunity to once again speak to Congress about mobilizing America's institutions of higher education in service to our country's long term strategic interests with regard to the developing world.

A View from the Private Sector

I have had the privilege of designing and launching what has become, quickly and quietly, the world's largest privately funded international scholarship program. The Davis United World College Scholars Program, funded exclusively by philanthropist Shelby M.C. Davis, now supports over 1,500 scholars annually from over 130 countries and is still growing. To illustrate the exponential growth of this program, it began in the year 2000 with approximately 40 entering freshman scholars at five pilot schools and this year (2008) we anticipate over 600 entering freshman scholars at 88 American colleges and universities.

Our program is about realizing the potential of private philanthropy to promote international understanding through the education of exceptional and motivated young people from all over the world at selected American institutions of higher learning. We are providing high potential individual students from many very different ethnic, national, cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and racial backgrounds with the opportunity to take advantage of and benefit from an American undergraduate education.

As much as we are committed to these international scholars and their potential, we are also committed to having a transformative impact on the American undergraduate experience – transforming it to a globally engaged experience, to bringing the world to the campus. Our program seeks to build clusters, or critical masses, of international scholars on the campuses of our now 88 partner schools across America. We believe that the presence of such clusters of internationally diverse students on American campuses

will be beneficial to the large majority of American students -- through their personal interaction and shared experiences with one another. This experiential interaction promises to make America's future decision-makers more globally competent, culturally sensitive and ultimately more effective competitors in the global marketplace.

We are leveraging the power of private philanthropy through partnerships with American colleges and universities which have sought us out in their quest to reshape their campuses to become more reflective of the real world around us. We share a common belief that the world's future depends on succeeding generations of the world's leaders sharing a commitment to and the skills necessary for realizing international understanding and mutual respect in spite of tremendous diversity.

Building this commitment, we have discovered, is effectively fostered through shared and meaningful experiences as undergraduates together. For a detailed explanation of our program, I invite you to read our annual report, *To Move the World*.

#### America's Leadership Role, Today and Tomorrow

Much has been written about America's role and reputation in today's post Cold War and post 9/11 context. Much of that literature is ideological, lacking both balance in perspective and a constructive long term strategic view of America's special place in the world. While an exhaustive discussion of this literature is beyond the scope of this hearing, this does seem an appropriate place to suggest a few ways to achieve greater balance and a greater focus on long term approaches to America's positive engagement with the rest of the world.

We would be well served to find a greater balance between our "hard power" and our "soft power." We would be equally well served to find ways to build in-depth, personal relationships between the most promising future leaders in our country and their counterparts from elsewhere in the world.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates articulated these objectives clearly in a speech given on November 26, 2007. He said, "...based on my experience serving seven presidents, as a former director of C.I.A. and now as secretary of defense, I am here to make the case for strengthening our capacity to use 'soft power' and for better integrating it with 'hard power....' We are miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about policies and goals.... We can expect that asymmetric warfare will be the mainstay of the contemporary battlefield for some time. These conflicts will be fundamentally political in nature and require the application of all elements of national power. Success will be less a matter of imposing one's will and more a function of shaping behavior of friends, adversaries and, most importantly, the people in between."

Secretary Gates was drawing from the work of Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics (2004) which contends that effective public diplomacy includes "building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies." Nye maintains we need to develop "lasting relationships with key individuals...."

Similarly, in January 2008, we were presented with the report of the Secure Borders and Open Doors Advisory Committee constituted jointly by the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State. Its co-chairs' message stated: "Our long term success requires not only that we deter and detect determined adversaries, but also that we persuade millions of people around the globe of our ideals – democratic freedom, private enterprise, human rights, intellectual pursuit, technological achievement."

One of the key recommendations of the Secure Borders and Open Doors report was that "the U.S. should articulate a comprehensive policy for attracting international students...."

In my view, we are approaching an opportune time for some reformulation of our foreign policy. While we must continue to take all necessary measures to ensure our security, we should also become more pro-active in promoting our nation's values and opportunities to others so that they can truly understand and benefit from our way of life. In this context, we can leverage one of our country's most unique strengths, its institutions of higher learning. While worldwide opinion polls would suggest that America has lost its allure, there is no question that America's colleges and universities remain the envy of the world and that an opportunity to gain a degree in the U.S. is without compare.

#### Commentary on Draft Legislation

An initiative such as this is a great opportunity to become pro-active and positive in our overseas, on-the-ground deployment of our diplomatic resources. This legislation is far more important than simply trying to improve America's image overseas. It has the potential, if embraced fully by all parties, to genuinely alter the way we interact with the developing world, especially with those referred to by Secretary Gates as "the people in between."

This legislation gives tangible form to sharing America's sense of possibility and opportunity with others. It affirms our country's most basic values. It provides a mechanism to build relationships with key future leaders. At the same time, it invests in our own people and institutions. It has both immediate and long term promise. It would be a great mistake to see this as simply providing scholarships to foreigners.

One might reasonably ask why spend all this time and money for a full four year undergraduate degree for foreign students. Short-term alternatives would indeed be far less expensive. Our experience with the Davis United World College Scholars Program may be instructive. America's approach to undergraduate education is rather unique in

the world. It is not just a time of intellectual development and pre-professional preparation, it is a time of building character and lifelong friends. It sets a tone and forms a group of relationships which are not just episodic but central to much of what follows, professionally and personally, throughout the rest of one's life.

Imagine sharing this special American experience with tens of thousands of motivated young and impressionable people now "in between" in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Imagine the relationships fostered here in America between Americans and non-Americans and the potential of those relationships in the future.

This initiative can fortify, reinvigorate and motivate our own diplomatic corps. Picture this as a sort of reverse Peace Corps concept.

This initiative can strengthen our own institutions of higher learning by investing in them and using their great resources for greater purposes.

This initiative provides a pro-active way to attract and nurture the most promising and motivated young men and women in developing countries who are otherwise unable to even think about seizing on the opportunities of coming to the U.S. for an educational degree and a future they can only dream about.

This legislation fills an unoccupied niche in how the U.S. government invests in international education. It targets an age range that is critical and does so in long term and strategic ways. It calls for the best in our own educational institutions, to step up in capacity and commitment to global engagement and cross-cultural communication. It complements existing programs, such as Fulbright; it borrows the best management practices for effective oversight while empowering our country's fine educational institutions by delegating much of the responsibility for "deliverables."

#### The Davis United World College Scholars Program Perspective

The experiences and rapid growth of the Davis United World College Scholars Program has taught us some relevant lessons:

- there is a tremendous desire "out there", in spite of what opinion polls might suggest to the contrary, to come to the U.S. for an undergraduate education and the implicit opportunities that come with it;
- there is an equally enthusiastic desire among our partner schools throughout America to make their campuses better and more "real" through international diversity;
- the use of leverage – shared costs and responsibilities – works, and works better than a more traditional top-down approach;

-it is essential to have a fully accountable “point person” on each campus, someone who believes deeply in the mission of the program, is student-centered, and has the ear of the school’s president.

Because the Davis United World College Scholars Program is a private philanthropic initiative and because our scholarship opportunities are limited to graduates of the worldwide United World College (secondary) schools, our experience does not overlap with some aspects of the proposed legislation. Nonetheless, our program’s larger purposes as well as the many lessons I’ve learned throughout my career in international education suggest that this legislation would be hugely favorable to our overseas diplomatic deployment, to our country’s institutions of higher learning, and to our global aspirations vis a vis peoples around the world.

I look forward to the hearing on June 19 at which time we can discuss these issues further and possibly delve into the proposed program’s operational details and possible consequences as they may be of interest to Congress. Thank you.