

Durbin, Wicker introduce legislation to promote study abroad

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Senators Say Study Abroad Prepares U.S. College Graduates to Compete Globally

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Roger Wicker (R-MS) today introduced the bipartisan *Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act*, which creates a competitive grant program for institutions of higher education to expand study abroad opportunities for American college students. Study abroad is an important component of a well-rounded post-secondary education, giving students the opportunity to engage with other cultures, enhance foreign language skills, and expand international

knowledge through firsthand experience. Named after the late Illinois U.S. Senator Paul Simon – who preached the value of international education as vital to the United States’ economic and national security – this bill aims to increase the number of undergraduate students studying abroad annually to one million within ten years. Currently, less than two percent of all enrolled post-secondary students in the U.S. study abroad. It also seeks to increase the number of individuals studying abroad from traditionally underrepresented groups – including low-income, minority, non-traditional, and students with disabilities – and encourages expanding study abroad to non-traditional destinations including developing countries.

“Senator Paul Simon understood the importance of fostering global awareness and understanding in an increasingly complicated and interconnected world. The next generation of American leaders will have to navigate a globally competitive economy and work with people from vastly different cultural backgrounds to tackle the world’s problems,” said Durbin. **“By investing in study abroad programs and ensuring access for currently underrepresented groups, we can better prepare our youth and our country for the world of tomorrow. In a world where travel bans and anti-immigrant rhetoric could have a chilling effect on international students studying in the United States, it is more important than ever that American students have opportunities to study abroad.”**

“The study abroad experience allows young Americans to gain a better understanding of global issues and the global economy while spreading U.S. ideals overseas,” Wicker said. **“This sort of engagement is invaluable to increasing opportunities for future job growth. Working with people from different cultures builds international awareness and benefits students in ways that can make a lasting impact in today’s society.”**

The bill is co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Jack Reed (D-RI), Thad Cochran (R-MS), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Sherrod Brown (D-OH).

Durbin first introduced this legislation in 2006 as the *Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Act* based on the recommendations of the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program – of which Durbin was a member.

The bill is supported by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities; NAFSA: Association of International Educators; the Forum on Education Abroad; the American Council on Education; the Association of American Universities; the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities; Partners of the Americas; American Councils for International Education; the National Association for College Admission Counseling; and the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling.