

Testimony of
**Michael Petro, Vice President and Director of Business and Government Relations
and Chief of Staff**
Committee for Economic Development

Before the
**Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,
and the District of Columbia**
Of the
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
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Mr. Chairman, Senator Voinovich, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. I am speaking on behalf of the Committee for Economic Development (CED), a nonpartisan public policy organization comprised of over 200 business leaders and prominent university presidents throughout the country. CED has provided a business perspective on public policy issues for almost 65 years. CED formed in the 1940's when our business trustees participated in discussions on how to transition the country through a wartime economy to a peacetime economy. The Committee for Economic Development's first policy study became the blueprint for the Marshall Plan. Furthermore, CED's first chairman, Paul Hoffman, the CEO of Studebaker, became the first administrator of the Marshall Plan.

The Committee for Economic Development, long a business voice for education reform, has developed recommendations that call for reform of our nation's school system in order to prepare today's children to become tomorrow's educated workforce. In addition, CED's work on globalization calls for the enhancement of education and training of today's workers to maintain the United State's economic competitiveness.

Today I would like to highlight a Committee for Economic Development study released last year titled, *Education for Global Leadership: The Importance of International Studies and Foreign Language Education for U.S. Economic and National Security*.

As we begin the twenty-first century, technological, economic, political, and social forces have created a new era. Technological advancements and lower trade barriers have paved the way for the globalization of markets, bringing intense competition to the U.S. economy. Political systems and movements around the world are having a profound impact on our national security, as well as on our human security. The increasing diversity of our workplaces, schools, and communities is changing the face of our society. To confront these twenty-first century challenges to our economy and national security, our education system must be strengthened to increase the foreign language skills and cultural awareness of our students. America's continued global

leadership will depend on our students' abilities to interact with the world community both inside and outside our borders.

While globalization is pushing us to expand our students' knowledge, the education reform movement, though laudable in its objectives, has led many schools to narrow their curricula. Reforms like those outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) hold states accountable for student achievement in reading, science, and mathematics, thereby encouraging schools to devote more time to these subjects. While students certainly need to master reading, science and math, schools must move beyond these subjects if they are to prepare students for our global society. Many schools do not afford all children the opportunity to study foreign languages and learn about other countries and cultures.

Approximately one-third of seventh to twelfth grade students study a foreign language and fewer than one-in-ten college students enroll in a foreign language class. Introductory language courses continue to dominate enrollments. Spanish, the most commonly studied foreign language, accounts for nearly 70 percent of enrollments in secondary schools and just over 50 percent of enrollments in institutions of higher education. Few students study the less-commonly taught "critical languages" that are crucial to national security, such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Persian/Farsi, Russian, and Turkish. While Arabic is attracting an increasing number of students, it still accounts for just 0.8 percent of foreign-language enrollments in American postsecondary institutions.

State high school graduation requirements often include only minimal course work in international studies, such as world history, geography, political science, and area studies, and some states require none at all. As a result, many students only have rudimentary knowledge of the geography and culture of world regions. Approximately one percent of undergraduates study abroad, and teacher education requires few courses on international topics. We cannot afford to give our students a pass on developing the understanding of other cultures and world regions that will be vital to America's prosperity in the coming decades.

Outside of school, the American public gets most of its information on international trends and issues from the media. The media can play an important role in increasing Americans' knowledge of foreign affairs by devoting more time to coverage of world events in their local broadcasts. Our continued ignorance jeopardizes both American economic prosperity and national security.

To compete successfully in the global marketplace, U.S.-based multinationals as well as small businesses must market products to customers around the globe and work effectively with foreign employees and business partners. Our firms increasingly need employees with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures. For example, cultural competence and foreign language skills can prove invaluable when working on global business teams or negotiating with overseas clients.

The need for foreign language skills is even more acute for our national security. The FBI and other federal government agencies lack sufficient linguists to translate intelligence information in critical languages in a timely manner. Furthermore, our diplomatic efforts often have been hampered by a lack of cultural awareness. President George W. Bush has encouraged Americans to learn the languages and cultures of the Middle East, and in early 2006 introduced the National Security Language Initiative to increase the number of Americans with advanced proficiency in critical languages. This new initiative proposes increased funding for early language education in elementary schools, expanding the number of foreign language teachers, and strengthening immersion and study abroad programs.

It is increasingly important that America be better versed in the languages, cultures, and traditions of other world regions, particularly the Middle East, so we can build a more secure future for both our nation and the world. As citizens of the world, we must teach our students the importance of working well with other countries to advance our common goals of peace and prosperity.

In 1998, television interviewer Larry King asked former President Gerald Ford—then 85 years old—what he worried about most for our country. President Ford replied: “I worry about the possibility we might drift back into isolationism.” America must be engaged with the rest of the world: an isolated or insulated America is an America in jeopardy. When attacked by a terrorist movement from beyond our shores, as we were on September 11, 2001, we must resist the impulse to circle the wagons—to cut ourselves off from the rest of the world. In short, we must re-define, as each generation has done, what it means to be an educated American in a changing world. The educated American of the twenty-first century will need to be conversant with at least one language in addition to his or her native language, and knowledgeable about other countries, other cultures, and the international dimensions of issues critical to the lives of all Americans.

CED recommends that international content be taught across the curriculum and at all levels of learning, to expand American students’ knowledge of other countries and cultures. At the federal level, legislative incentives to design and create model schools with innovative approaches to teaching international content can help develop programs that can be replicated in all schools, and thereby provide a new generation of students with global learning opportunities. Increased professional development funding will assist teachers in incorporating international perspectives in their classes, so that international knowledge can be integrated into each state’s K-12 curriculum standards and assessments. Efforts now underway in high school reform should require high school graduates to demonstrate proficiency in at least one language in addition to English, and include in-depth knowledge of at least one global issue or the history, culture, and geography of at least one world region. Colleges and universities should internationalize their campuses, by, among other things, devoting more resources to expand study-abroad opportunities. The business community itself can play an important role in internationalizing American education by supporting programs that promote increased international knowledge throughout the education pipeline.

To improve our national security, CED recommends expanding the training pipeline at every level of education to address the paucity of Americans fluent in foreign languages, especially critical, less commonly taught languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Persian/Farsi, Russian, and Turkish. The federal government should expand its support for loan forgiveness and fellowships for students who pursue careers as language professionals in critical languages. Additionally, funding should be increased for federal programs supporting increased foreign language education in the elementary grades, as well as developing a pipeline for critical language learning. Business schools, in particular, should institute foreign-language requirements and include courses on world regions that are growing in economic and business importance. Governors should provide incentives for alternative teacher certification routes to encourage native speakers of critical languages to become foreign language teachers.

Finally, CED recommends that national leaders— political leaders, as well as the business and philanthropic communities, and the media—inform the public about the importance of improving education in foreign languages and international studies. Both national and state leaders should discuss ways to strengthen the international and language education of American students. Business leaders must champion the issues of international studies and foreign language education by articulating why globally literate employees are essential to their success in a global economy. Through partnerships with local schools and universities, business can support international education efforts, and even provide more international internships for American students. Private philanthropic foundations should support projects to increase international content in the curriculum, as well as innovative approaches to teaching and learning about other world regions. The media should increase their coverage of the important international trends and issues that affect Americans' economic and national security.

The time to act is now. Keeping America's economy competitive requires that we maintain our position as a leader in the global marketplace, obtain a foothold in important emerging markets, and compete successfully with countries that boast multilingual, multicultural, and highly skilled workforces. Keeping America safe requires that we strengthen our intelligence gathering and analysis, conduct international diplomacy and explain America's identity and values more effectively, increase our military's capabilities, and protect American soil from global threats. Keeping America's education system strong requires that we provide our students with the tools they need to communicate and work with their peers overseas and at home.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views with you and the Subcommittee.