

U.S.-CHINA ECONOMIC & SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION

Statement on behalf of the State University of New York

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I am honored to appear before the Commission on behalf of the State University of New York.

The U.S.-China relationship is of importance to all Americans. It has many facets and dimensions. Interdependence is one important reality. Interdependence has not always meant smooth sailing.

My remarks will reflect the perspective of a large system of public higher education, a system that is intimately connected with the present and future well-being of New York State and whose ambitions on behalf of all New Yorkers recognize the realities of globalization and seek to take advantage of them.

I shall begin with a few general points about education and economic and social well-being in this country and then summarize the SUNY relationships with China and where they might lead in the future. In the discussion period, I should be happy to address such issues as changes in the visa system and other measures taken after 9/11.

First, it ought to be axiomatic that among the few essential functions of government, including the Federal government, none is more important – there may be some that are equally important – than support for education at all levels. An educated citizenry has been the backbone of American democracy and society for more than 200 years. One can only imagine what this country would look like without one. Public education has been at the core of that backbone.

A few New York statistics give an idea of one aspect of the impact of public higher education. The SUNY College at New Paltz is the third largest employer in Ulster County after the school district and the county government itself. The University at Buffalo is the second largest employer in Western New York after the Federal Government. Its economic impact is measured in billions of dollars and will only grow in the future. Aggregating SUNY's multiple western campuses makes the State University the largest employer in Western New York and probably in Central New York as well.

Second, American prosperity since World War II has owed much – many multiples of the investment itself – to the Federal Government's investment in research at American universities and the National Laboratories. These investments enabled the United States to sustain economic leadership long after the rest of the world had recovered from World War II. Without such investment, the United States would be a poorer and weaker place in every sense of those words.

Every region of the country wants its own Silicon Valley or Route 128 – visible economic benefits of investment in education and research. SUNY's centers of excellence, such as its nano-technology center in Albany, have involved partnerships between industry and university researchers with positive results in terms of employment and innovation. The model is replicated throughout SUNY, through incubators and other educational-industry partnerships, particular in life sciences and bioengineering. Financing for start-ups is the hardest form of financing to find. The present economic situation obviously does not help.

Third, the evolution of the global economy has made the U.S. economy an “intellectual-industrial complex” by force of necessity. To sustain it requires investment in education. Investment is not simply a question of money, although money certainly is important. It also

means investing in people: reaching out and drawing in to educational systems and opportunities those people who feel excluded or once included become turned off.

In short, the country cuts its nose off to spite its face if it doesn't invest in education and research.

Let me turn now to SUNY's China relationship. It has a number of dimensions. It developed from the ground up, spawned by campuses such as the University at Buffalo, which launched its partnerships with individual Chinese universities in 1980. Today, 15 SUNY campuses have exchange and other programs with individual Chinese institutions of higher learning.

The SUNY System relationship with China is of newer vintage. China sees SUNY as a whole and a large whole at that. It is up to the State University to take advantage of that fact for the benefit of students and faculty at 64 campuses by establishing and maintaining relationships with the central government.

The most recent SUNY initiative with China has led to broad and deep relations with the Chinese government in support of educational collaboration. In response to the massive earthquake in Sichuan in May 2008, SUNY's Trustees offered to help 150 affected Chinese college students continue their studies at SUNY for a year. Education is what we do, and we thought it was a real way we could help these young people whose lives had been turned upside down. We could help them not to lose a year and give them skills they could use in the recovery effort when they returned home. The SUNY China 150 initiative as it became known enjoyed the support of the highest levels of the Chinese and American governments and provincial and state and local governments here. Without that support, the initiative could not have been a success.

The 150 students arrived in New York in mid-August 2008 and returned to China at the end of May 2009. They were housed at 22 SUNY campuses, from Buffalo to Stony Brook, from Plattsburgh to Alfred. They majored in different fields – a lot in science and business. They all learned leadership skills. They lived, studied, and played among students from all over New York and from many other countries. And they made memorable contributions to their campuses and campus communities, introducing teachers, staff, friends, and students to a new culture and a new way of viewing the world. They also absorbed a lot about New York and America. And of course they had a front row seat as Americans picked a new President and made history. And they visibly grew in ways no one could have predicted. Shy and scared when they arrived, they departed confident young adults.

The benefits to the students were made clear to all who met them. They also enriched SUNY. All campuses reported that this initiative challenged their international programs to step up in new and unforeseen ways and that they all met the tests. All campuses reported that their students and faculty and community learned from their Chinese guests and came away from the experience with a new appreciation of the diverse world we inhabit. And all reported that our regular students developed and grew as a result of interacting with the Chinese students.

SUNY takes from that experience and from the many exchange programs with individual Chinese universities our campuses have developed over many years, as it has from being open to students from all over the world – Buffalo alone has students from 138 countries – that internationalizing our education system is a Good Thing. Not only does it flow logically from New York's own diversity and history as a gateway to America, but also it so visibly enriches the quality of the education we provide. And the research we do. The Chinese Government has

made available 10 scholarships a year for three years to SUNY students to study in China and has offered a study tour during next year's semester break to 200 SUNY students.

SUNY believes that there is only upside to internationalizing education, with China and with the world. It can only enrich us as a society.

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