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INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL EXCHANGE ACT OF 2010

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Mr. KERRY, from the Committee on Foreign Relations,
submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 3688]

The Committee on Foreign Relations, having had under consideration the bill S. 3688, to establish an international professional exchange program, and for other purposes, reports favorably thereon and recommends that the bill do pass.

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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the International Professional Exchange Act of 2010 is to establish a two-way professional exchange program between the United States and select Muslim-majority countries to promote career development and cross-cultural understanding for young to mid-career professionals. In so doing, this bill seeks to address some of the long-term challenges facing the global economy by sharing professional expertise and building civil society capacity in the United States and in Muslim-majority countries, including minority populations in those countries. This legislation also promotes international cooperation and peace by improving mutual understanding, changing perceptions and strengthening people-to-people ties between Americans and people in Muslim-majority countries.

II. COMMITTEE ACTION

Senator Kerry introduced S. 3688 on August 2, 2010. By voice vote on December 14, 2010, the committee ordered that S. 3688 be reported favorably without amendment.

III. DISCUSSION

Numerous studies have cited the important role of language skills and cultural awareness in building a nation's security and its ability to compete in the global marketplace. International exchange programs are a proven way of promoting these skills and building bridges between societies. Existing U.S. Government-funded programs, such as the Fulbright Program, have helped thousands of Americans study around the world, and have helped thousands of foreigners study and learn in the United States. Today, over 300,000 people call themselves "Fulbrighters," including 40 Nobel Prize winners and 20 heads of state. This legislation builds upon the success of these academic exchanges and creates an exchange program for young professionals.

Outreach and engagement with Muslim communities globally has arguably never been more important. President Obama spoke in Cairo in June 2009 of a "new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world" and, in 2010, he emphasized the importance of "deepen[ing] ties between business leaders, foundations, and entrepreneurs in the United States and Muslim communities around the world."

Demographic shifts and growing populations are creating economic strains with profound consequences for the world. This legislation seeks to address some of these challenges by building capacity in the work force, strengthening civil society, and improving ties between the United States and Muslim-majority countries through a two-way exchange of professional fellows.

Specifically, this act authorizes the Secretary of State to establish a three-year pilot program to help build professional capacity and contribute skills and know-how to local communities through a reciprocal exchange of fellows. The act establishes a pilot program to see how best to design a successful two-way exchange of young professionals with the intent that these best practices can then be applied in future legislation to authorize a professional exchange program. Though the program is designed for exchanges between the United States and select Muslim-majority countries, the program does not exclude non-Muslims from participating in the exchange.

Fellowships will last between three and six months, including time for relevant orientation, training, community service, and cultural and professional immersion. It is expected that the majority of a fellow's time will be spent in a position that complements a fellow's professional background and builds relevant professional skill sets. Community service is also a key component of this fellowship in order to expose participants to issues important to the local community, highlight the role of civic engagement, and in some cases, provide an opportunity to learn about different faiths. This legislation intends for the Americans going abroad as fellows to be placed in a professional capacity with local companies, local governments, and civil society organizations to the extent possible

to best learn about the local culture and be immersed as fully as possible in that new society.

All fellows will be between 21 and 40 years of age and will be selected from a variety of professional backgrounds with a preference for individuals who work in the public sector, including teachers, urban/city planners, public health workers, and public administrators; or civil society, including journalists, faith-based leaders, interfaith leaders, and employees of nonprofit organizations. By targeting these professionals, it is the intent of this legislation to help bolster the workforce around the world and contribute to economic growth.

The Secretary of State will select between 4 and 7 Muslim-majority countries from which the initial group of inbound fellows will be selected, and these countries will be chosen based on geographic criteria so that the program includes a diverse set of participants and countries. All participants in the two-way exchange should have demonstrated leadership in their communities, have relevant professional and language qualifications, and should be prepared for cultural immersion. For the recruitment of fellows from Muslim-majority countries, the Secretary should build upon existing programs to engage Muslim communities, and also reach out to graduates of English learning programs and request the assistance of both the private and public sector in identifying a diverse pool of candidates.

The fellowship program will begin with an orientation for each class of fellows to include appropriate cultural and professional training, but this fellowship is not intended to teach fellows professional competency in the working language of the country in which fellows are placed. Fellows should have a working-level knowledge of the language necessary for the job before the placement is made. If necessary, the program can provide refresher language training.

Graduates of the fellowship will receive a certificate from the Department of State upon completion of the program, and are encouraged to meet and build relationships with former fellows and remain linked with the program through an active alumni network that the Department of State will help support through communications technology and other networking opportunities.

This legislation strongly encourages the Secretary of State to form public-private partnerships to support program costs and goals. This support can take the form of in-kind contributions, financial assistance for travel and administrative costs, job placement and recruitment assistance from the private sector, private foundations, foreign governments and other interested parties.

The Secretary of State is required to submit a report at regular intervals (15 months, 27 months, and 39 months after enactment) during the course of this three-year pilot program to describe the administration and outcomes of the program. These reports will be used by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to judge the success and progress of this program and consider its continuation after the three-year pilot period.

This legislation authorizes such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2011–2014.

IV. COST ESTIMATE

Rule XXVI, paragraph 11(a) of the Standing Rules of the Senate requires that committee reports on bills or joint resolutions contain a cost estimate for such legislation. In the interest of filing the report prior to the close of the 111th Congress, the committee notes that it has yet to receive the Congressional Budget Office estimate.

V. EVALUATION OF REGULATORY IMPACT

Pursuant to Rule XXVI, paragraph 11(b) of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the committee has determined that there is no regulatory impact as a result of this legislation.

VI. CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with Rule XXVI, paragraph 12 of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the committee has determined that there are no changes to existing legislation as a result of this legislation.

