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October 21, 2014

Secretary Arne Duncan
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan,

Since its inception after passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958 and its successor the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, Title VI has been the primary source of funding for foreign language and area studies for universities and colleges throughout the country. Reforms to the HEA were made with each reauthorization; however, I am concerned that further improvements to Title VI programs are not only necessary, but also urgent.

Among the 2008 reforms, Title VI was amended so that each applicant must include an explanation of how the activities funded by the grant will reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views and generate debate on world regions and international affairs. Unfortunately this effort has fallen short.

I was disturbed to read a joint statement from several education and advocacy organizations asserting the misuse of federal funds under Title VI of the HEA, specifically the "continued use of taxpayer funds to support biased, politicized, and imbalanced programs of Middle East Studies". The statement also illuminated many instances of one-sided programs where events and outreach activities exhibited an anti-Israel bias.

Title VI programs play an important role in advancing U.S. national security and foreign policy interests, but in order to do just that we must ensure funding for these programs is being used for its intended purpose. We must ensure further reforms are made to these programs and accountability measures are put into place. Additionally, I would like to know how the Department of Education has implemented the most recent Title VI reforms and if proper procedures have been put into place to confirm grants have been used to create fair and balanced programming.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to working with you to advance Title VI programs as Congress considers reauthorization of the HEA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Israel".

STEVE ISRAEL
Member of Congress