

## **Assistant Secretary for International and Foreign Language Education**

The House and Senate soon will convene a conference committee to iron out differences between their respective bills reauthorizing the Higher Education Act. **HR 4137, but not S. 1642, would establish in the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) an Office/Assistant Secretary for International and Foreign Language Education**, following a recommendation of the National Research Council 2007 report. It is supported by the Coalition for International Education, a group of over 30 national education organizations with interest in USDE's international education programs. **We strongly urge the Senate to recede to the House, and the conference committee to adopt this provision.**

### **Why an Office/Assistant Secretary for International and Foreign Language Education in the U.S. Department of Education is needed.**

**STRONGER DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LEADERSHIP NEEDED.** The NAS study found that USDE as the federal agency with clear responsibility for education issues should have a more visible presence and take stronger leadership in directing efforts aimed at international and foreign language education. "The Department of Education should consolidate oversight of its international education and foreign language programs under an executive-level person who would also provide strategic direction and consult and coordinate with other federal agencies. The position should be one that requires presidential appointment and Senate confirmation." *"International Education and Foreign Languages: Keys to Securing America's Future."* March 2007, page 6.

**COORDINATION WITHIN USDE, STRATEGIC VISION AND INTEGRATED APPROACH.** International and foreign language programs are scattered and fragmented throughout USDE. The largest programs in the federal government in this area, Title VI and Fulbright-Hays, are currently administered at the bottom of the bureaucratic chain within the Office of Postsecondary Education. As proposed in the House bill, the Office/Assistant Secretary would consolidate administration of all international education and foreign language programs under an executive-level person appointed by the President reporting to the Secretary. This would enable better coordination and strategic vision within the Department, as well as an integrated and articulated approach among multiple systems—including K-12, higher education, and business—to help address the nation's critical shortcomings.

**SIGNAL TO THE NATION.** The national needs for Americans with expertise and knowledge in foreign languages and world regions have expanded with globalization and national security demands, but the nation is dangerously behind. International and foreign language education historically have not been high priorities in the nation's schools, or in most institutions of higher education. Creating an Office/Assistant Secretary for International and Foreign Language Education in USDE will send a signal to the nation's school districts, education governing boards, universities, and State and local government leaders of the urgent need to make international and foreign language education a priority throughout the U.S. education system.

**IMPROVING U.S. IMAGE ABROAD.** More Americans with an understanding of other cultures and proficiency in foreign languages helps to improve the nation's tarnished image abroad. An Office/Assistant Secretary for International and Foreign Language Education will be responsible for USDE's international affairs. Such a high level office in USDE sends a message to our foreign counterparts that learning and understanding their languages and cultures is a priority.

**COORDINATION WITH OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES.** Several federal agencies have placed a high-level priority on international and foreign language programs. Under the National Security Language Initiative, for example, three federal agencies in addition to USDE are engaged in foreign language education in the U.S.—DOD, State, and the DNI, which have placed responsibility with a senior executive staff person. An Office/Assistant Secretary will better enable USDE to coordinate its currently fragmented programs with other federal agencies.