



In this update, you will find a summary of remarks from the Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy, Sarah B. Rogers, additional updates about visa appointment availability, and information about the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s operations.

Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Sarah B. Rogers

On March 5, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Sarah Rogers testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs. The committee meeting focused on “Advancing National Security through Public Diplomacy.”

During the meeting, Rogers shared that she “[sees] public diplomacy as deploying two essential tools. The first is long-term relationships. Through the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, we maintain a global network of exchange, English language initiatives, and cultural partnerships that connect us to millions of emerging leaders each year. Former participants in these programs have gone on to become key foreign officials, [who bring] profoundly positive experiences to the negotiation table...”

To watch the full Committee video use this [link](#) and to read Under Secretary Rogers’ written testimony go [here](#).

Consular Service Reductions at U.S. Embassies

Given the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, we understand that returning and new participants may have concerns. We want to reassure you that travel to the United States is safe. At the same time, some embassies have suspended or are reducing routine consular services which does impact J-1 visa appointment availability.

Please continue to monitor travel advisories and consular services information as shared by local embassies for the best and latest details in your city and country.

We remain confident in the safety and security of welcoming BridgeUSA participants. Participant well-being is extremely important to CIEE, and we continue to monitor official guidance closely. Please let us know if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Advocacy Letters - J-1 Visa Appointment Reductions

Considering the varying headwinds that are affecting BridgeUSA participant recruitment and J-1

visa approval, CIEE and the international exchange industry continue to plan for BridgeUSA participation throughout the summer months in the U.S.

We appreciate everyone who sent advocacy letters to their respective Congressional leaders in support of maintaining necessary embassy staffing, where safe, and preserving visa appointments for J-1 visa applicants available, where possible. CIEE is confident that your outreach helps. Thank you for keeping the BridgeUSA program and other international exchange programs at top of mind for decisionmakers.

If you did not have an opportunity to send a letter to your Congressional members and would like to get involved, reach out to your assigned CIEE team member to participate in the advocacy campaign.

Travel Delays

The continued Department of Homeland Security (DHS) operational slowdowns have increased travel delays throughout the United States. As a result, BridgeUSA program participants will likely experience delayed flights, longer wait times at airports, and/or other DHS service delays.

Although many departments within DHS are operating with essential personnel, the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), port of entry and exit officers, and visa enforcement officers are functioning with limited disruptions.

Premium Processing Fee Increases for Extension or Change of Status

As a reminder on March 1, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services [increased premium processing fees](#). This fee increase affects applications using [Form I-539](#) to extend or change a nonimmigrant status. The application processing fee has increased from \$1,965 to \$2,075.

CIEE thanks you for your ongoing support and advocacy. For any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to your CIEE point of contact.

Questions? Contact [Asenith Dixon Bell](#).

Mrs. Asenith Dixon Bell

Vice President, Government Affairs and Advocacy, CIEE

adixon@ciee.org | +1.404.337.3979