



May 1, 2026

Welcome to spring! We are happy to share that after a 76-day shutdown, Congress has passed a bill to fund most of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In addition, we are excited to see Congressional support for nonimmigrant visa programs and to share CIEE's community engagement events that highlight our commitment to service and community.

Department of Homeland Security

Yesterday, the House approved the Senate's DHS funding measure which, once signed by the President, will fund all DHS agencies (except for Immigration and Citizenship Enforcement (ICE) and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol) through September 2026. This means that Transportation Security Administration (TSA) operations will go back to normal, which should ease any lingering pressure points at airports around the country. Funding for ICE and Border Patrol will continue to be debated by Congress as part of a separate funding package.

As a reminder, while the BridgeUSA program is managed by the U.S. Department of State, it relies on DHS staff for the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), U.S. port of entry and exit checks, visa/passport control, and visa enforcement. These services operated without disruption during the shutdown.

U.S. Department of State 2026-2027 (FY27) Budget

During the last two weeks of April, the House Appropriations Committee and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs approved FY27 funding for the Department of State. In contrast to the President's Budget Request, which recommended a FY27 cut of 30 percent to the Department of State's funding, the House Appropriations Committee approved a [FY27 Department of State Budget](#) that cuts the overall Department of State funding by 6 percent, to US\$47.3 billion, from FY26. The budget bill funds the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) programs, which include exchange visitor programs, at US\$647 million (an almost 1 percent increase from FY26). In comparison, the President's budget recommendation would have cut ECA funding by 66 percent. As part of the [House Appropriations Department of State Committee Report](#), which provides additional budget details, the Committee urges the Secretary of State to clarify and reaffirm that Au Pair Cultural Exchange Program policies are federally regulated by the U.S. Department of State.

Furthermore, the Committee Report supports improving the visa issuance process and increasing visa appointment capacity. In fact, “The Committee urges the Secretary [of State] to improve processing of nonimmigrant visa categories that allow employers in the United States to temporarily employ high-skilled talent in critical sectors... [and] urges the Secretary to ensure consular and embassy posts are equipped with the personnel and technological capacity required to prevent unnecessary backlogs and facilitate predictable, efficient visa issuance for United States employers and petitioners.”

Lastly, [thank you again](#) to everyone who submitted advocacy letters, as your actions prompted a number of Members of Congress to write [a March 19 letter](#), to Secretary of State Rubio, in support of BridgeUSA and international exchange programs. The letter emphasizes that BridgeUSA programs are essential to local economies, U.S. foreign policy, and the success of major events such as the FIFA World Cup, America’s 250th Anniversary, and the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Summer Games.

New Department of State Guidance to Consular Officers

This week, the [Secretary of State directed consular officers](#) to “request that a nonimmigrant visa applicant affirm that he or she does not fear harm or mistreatment in returning to his or her country...and document the response” as part of the visa interview process.

Applicants will be asked two new questions: Have you experienced harm or mistreatment in your country of nationality or last habitual residence? Do you fear harm or mistreatment in returning to your country of nationality? If a nonimmigrant visa applicant answers no to these questions, but then requests asylum once in the United States, the individual could be charged with fraud and be permanently barred from re-entry to the United States. In addition, if a number of individuals from a country falsely answer these two questions, there could be a negative impact on future visa issuance for that country. However, if a nonimmigrant visa applicant answers yes to these questions, the visa processing will stop immediately.

Celebrate America's 250th Anniversary!

Last month, [CIEE announced its supporting partnership with America250](#), the national nonpartisan organization charged by Congress to lead celebrations for the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Throughout 2026, CIEE will spotlight America250 events and projects that inspire national reflection and civic engagement.

CIEE is embracing the [America Gives](#) initiative, which challenges organizations to increase their level of community service and volunteerism. America Gives dovetails closely with CIEE’s recently launched [Community Impact Initiative](#), adding robust and locally grounded community service to all of CIEE’s international exchange and study abroad programs.

Community Engagement in Salt Lake City

For the first time, the Young Civic Leadership Summit (YCLS) held a [Winter Summit](#) in Salt Lake City. The Summit brought together 30 Fellows from six countries who worked with 25 U.S. host employers through the BridgeUSA Summer Work Travel program. The YCLS program has produced over 550 alumni leaders worldwide and, in 2025, began incorporating a community service project during each Summit.

As CIEE President and CEO Jim Pellow noted, “[The Young Civic Leadership Summit](#) is the essence of the CIEE mission. We were founded to build bridges between young people around the world...The Young Civic Leadership Fellowship program builds a network of global leaders who can bridge cultural and national differences. Fellows return home ready to advance peace and collaborate on solutions to global challenges.”

Relive this winter’s YCLS through the participants’ reflections in this [YCLS Recap](#).

BridgeUSA Best Practices and Community Connections

Learn more about BridgeUSA and connect with the worldwide BridgeUSA community by getting involved with Coalition for American Public Diplomacy and Leadership ([CAPDL](#))!

- Check out the April episode of “[The Truth with Rick Ruth](#)” podcast that examines how the BridgeUSA program advances national security, economic prosperity, public diplomacy, and national interests.
- Become a CAPDL member to take part in best practices webinars, support the [CAPDL Scholarship Fund](#), and join CAPDL members for the next in-person workshop in Wilmington, North Carolina.

As always, thank you for your support of the BridgeUSA program through placements, by creating connective on-site cultural programming, and with your outreach to Congressional members and U.S. embassy personnel. For 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