

November 18, 2025

Dear Senator Kapenga and Senator Jacque,

I believe your committee is considering SB 653, a bill to address foreign influence in the University of Wisconsin System. As a former U.S. Secretary of Education, I have a keen interest in this issue, which deserves vigilance.

I recently agreed to serve as an education advisor to the State of Qatar. Qatar is an important American ally, but uniquely, it also is home to campuses of six prominent U.S. universities offering their degree programs to Qatari women and men, and others who wish to study there. This is a remarkable commitment to education in that region, which we should celebrate.

SB 653 identifies Qatar as a “foreign adversary,” along with states like Russia, China, and Iran. This is a mistake. It is inconsistent with United States policy, but also strangely hostile to a country that has chosen to embrace the excellence and value of American higher education.

I hope you will reconsider this approach. Qatar is not a foreign adversary.

I share your concern with malign foreign influence in our universities. We should closely monitor and deal with this risk. I have urged Congress to aggressively investigate sources of foreign influence - for example, in my recent letter to the Chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee (copy attached). Qatar supports this scrutiny because it has been falsely accused, and is confident the facts confirm that its university partnerships are solely focused on educating students in Qatar.

Sincerely,

William J. Bennett