What's Hiding Behind The Student Visa Scandal

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A funny thing happened on the way to Senator Dianne Feinstein's (D-CA) proposal to take a six-month time-out on issuing visas to foreign students in order to defend Americans from fraud and potential terrorists. She was backed into a corner by an unusual phalanx of well-dressed lobbyists on the warpath. From the highways and byways of America, the officials of private and public colleges and universities converged on Capitol Hill to kill this Feinstein proposal. They claimed that a moratorium on student visas would be "devastating" to universities and "wreak havoc on graduate schools."

Senator Feinstein's proposal for a time-out was eminently reasonable, but the universities had enough clout to get her to abandon it and substitute requiring development of an electronic database by October 26, 2003.

The U.S. State Department grants over a half million student visas a year even though student visas are known to be a tremendous source of fraud. Over the past decade, U.S. universities have enrolled 16,000 students from states that sponsor terrorism.

The U.S. has issued 4,000 student visas in Saudi Arabia alone, and 15 of the 19 hijackers on 9/11 held Saudi visas. A U.S. Commerce Department employee was just criminally charged with accepting bribes to grant visas to Saudi residents.

Do you feel safer now since the Democrats insisted on making all airport security guards federal employees?

One of the criminals convicted of the 1993 truck bombing of the World Trade Center was in the United States on an expired student visa. Wouldn't you think that, at least since 1993, it should have been a priority of law enforcement to tighten up on student visas?

In 1996, Congress called for the establishment of a government database to track foreign students, but it never became operative because of opposition from the universities. This issue didn't appear on our government's radar screen until after 9/11.

The suspected ringleader of the 9/11 hijackers, Mohamed Atta, came into the U.S. on a tourist visa, which he converted to a student trainee visa in July so he could attend flight training school. Hani Hanjour, the hijacker who is believed to have helped steer the plane into the Pentagon, was on a student visa but never reported to class.

One day in October, 14 Algerians landed at the Dallas airport and on another day in October, 14 Syrians arrived, and all were allowed to proceed to a private flight school for training. We'd like to know how and why visas are issued for flight training schools, which proved so deadly on 9/11.

Nobody swallowed the line that the university lobbyists were just seeking to spread democracy, promote knowledge, and forge ties with future leaders abroad. Let's do a reality check on their motives.

The universities are making so much money out of foreign students that they don't care what dangers they pose, what fraud is involved, or whether the students exit the U.S. when their visa expires. The

universities don't even want to be bothered with the nuisance of reporting to the government when the foreign students arrive and depart.

Has any student in your family had a hard time gaining admission to an elite U.S. college? How does it make you feel to know that 547,667 places in U.S. colleges were occupied by foreign students in the academic year just ended, and the number has been rising dramatically?

The universities want the foreign students because they usually pay the full tuition, while 84 percent of American students attending private universities receive some sort of financial aid.

In lobbying against Feinstein's original proposal, the universities argued that their graduate programs in the sciences, engineering and math would collapse without the foreign students because these courses can't be filled with enough qualified American students. American students rank poorly on international science, engineering and math competitions, and that is reflected in the smaller number who take those subjects in college.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress just reported the results of its 2000 tests. Only one in five high school seniors has a solid grasp of science, only half even know the basics, and 12th graders scored lower than those taking the test in 1996.

What a terrible reflection on the U.S. school system! High school graduates (including those who get A's because of grade inflation) are not qualified to take college courses in science, engineering and math.

The provost of Carnegie Mellon University said, "We have tremendous difficulty in getting American citizens to apply for, enroll and be qualified in many of our engineering and science areas." Carnegie Mellon granted 47 percent of its doctoral degrees in 1999 to foreign students.

The number of student visas should be drastically reduced and controls tightened, and none should be issued to states that sponsor terrorism. Student visas should also be conditioned on the applicant's ability to speak English and a sworn disavowal of terrorism.