

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 20, 2024

Dear Secretary Blinken, Deputy Secretary Verma, and Acting Under Secretary Satterfield,

We write to raise the importance of a robust sports diplomacy strategy that can leverage the United States' upcoming decade of sports to strengthen U.S. global leadership, deepen relationships with our foreign partners, and foster people-to-people ties. Over the next ten years, the United States will be at the center of the sporting world as the host of seven major international competitions: the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the 2028 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 2031 Men's and 2033 Women's Rugby World Cup, and the 2034 Winter Olympics and Paralympics. Los Angeles will hold the most games as a host city for five out of the seven competitions, but matches will take place across the country, including in Atlanta, Georgia; Dallas and Houston, Texas; San Francisco, California; Kansas City, Missouri; Miami, Florida; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Seattle, Washington; and Boston, Massachusetts. With all eyes on the United States, we have a monumental opportunity to reinvigorate U.S. soft power and diplomacy.

To realize the foreign policy benefits of hosting these mega-sporting events, we ask that the State Department's sports diplomacy efforts surrounding these competitions include partnering with diaspora communities, athletes, creatives, the sports industry, and local trade and tourism offices to showcase our national strengths and forge new diplomatic connections. We are excited to work with you to seize this opportunity to enhance U.S. global leadership.

Sports diplomacy is a valuable tool for strengthening international relationships and promoting development. It recognizes sports as a universal language capable of uniting people and creating new avenues of connection between countries and societies. For example, foreign-born athletes playing in the United States, like Shohei Ohtani with the LA Dodgers, and American athletes playing abroad, like Christian Pulisic with AC Milan, exemplify the role of sports in promoting cross-cultural exchange. In 2022, international students comprised 13% of all student-athletes in the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Division I sports. Wherever they are played, sports are a critical vehicle of people-to-people interaction. Sports also unlock economic opportunities for communities around the world, supporting a variety of development goals. Sports create jobs, enable young people to access education, attract tourism, deepen international integration, advance infrastructure development, and drive economic growth. For example, to prepare for hosting the 2024 African Cup of Nations, Cote d'Ivoire invested \$1 billion to construct stadiums, develop roads, enhance accommodation facilities, and improve transportation infrastructure.

Due to these multi-faceted benefits, sports diplomacy has also become an instrument of strategic competition. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has secured valuable soft power wins through stadium diplomacy, building sports facilities in countries where major infrastructure projects are challenging to fund. Between 1958 and 2016, state-owned PRC banks financed the construction of 140 sports facilities in 61 countries on every continent but Europe, with 90 facilities built in Africa. Indeed, a PRC firm won the contract to build Qatar's Lusail Stadium for the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Our competitors and partners recognize the strategic value of sports diplomacy—it's time we do as well.

The upcoming decade of sports provides the needed impetus to elevate sports diplomacy to the forefront of our diplomatic strategy. The LA28 Olympics and other major sporting events bring unparalleled international attention that magnifies the cultural power of the host nation for generations. This spotlight provides the United States a singular opportunity to show the world the values of freedom, democracy, and opportunity that should underpin American leadership on the world stage. The influx of foreign visitors and officials also presents a unique chance to forge new diplomatic ties and people-to-people connections. The foreign policy and economic benefits derived from these mega-sporting events are enormous.

To creatively forge new diplomatic connections and showcase our national strengths, the State Department should engage a diverse range of domestic stakeholders. We encourage you to:

- Work closely with host cities to identify new avenues for engagement with foreign entities.
- Engage local diaspora communities to deepen people-to-people connections with foreign visitors and officials.
- Partner with the U.S. sports industry, major sports leagues, and individual athletes to promote existing international sports partnerships and sports diplomacy programs.

In order to meaningfully pursue these lines of effort, sports diplomacy efforts must be integrated across the department. Currently, sports diplomacy is carried out by the Sports Diplomacy Division within the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, whose capacity is primarily devoted to managing several core programs: the International Sports Programming Initiative, Sports Envoys, Sports Visitors, and the Global Sports Mentoring Program. As the Coordinator for International Athletics, this office has essential expertise that should be utilized in formulating a comprehensive sports diplomacy strategy. In addition, we ask that:


- Public diplomacy officers leverage sporting events to reach new audiences that might not otherwise engage with our embassies abroad.
- The department prioritize the timely processing of visas, which can range from six months to several years, and closely assess refusal rates, which vary from under 10% to over 50%, in order to ensure vetted foreign visitors can seamlessly travel to the U.S. to experience these competitions regardless of their region of origin. This core function of

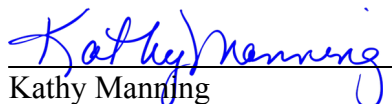
the State Department is integral to the success of a sports diplomacy strategy over the next decade.

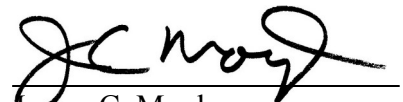
We are committed to supporting the State Department's sports diplomacy strategy with the necessary tools and resources. We respectfully request that your response includes the kinds of financial and personnel support the State Department needs to fully actualize the foreign policy benefits of the upcoming American decade of sports. The United States has an unparalleled opportunity to cement our soft power leadership on the world stage over the next ten years. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to working with you to ensure the success of U.S. sports diplomacy in the coming decade and beyond.

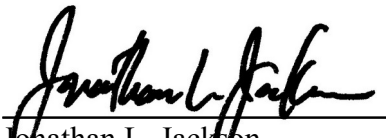
Sincerely,

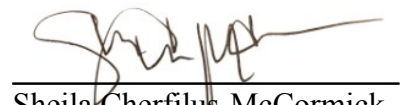

Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress

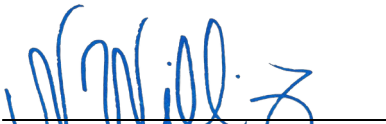

Michael T. McCaul
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House Foreign Affairs
Committee

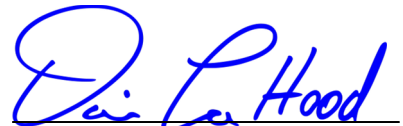

Kathy Manning
Member of Congress

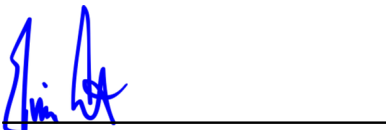

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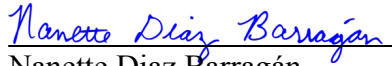

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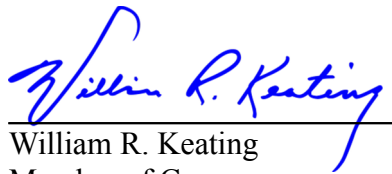
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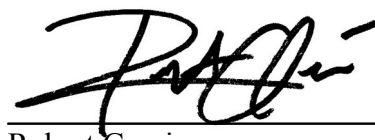
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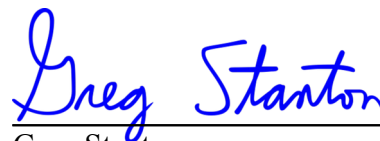
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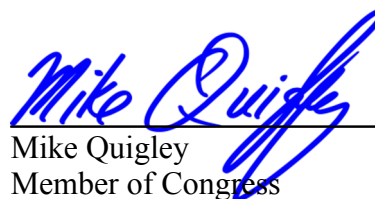
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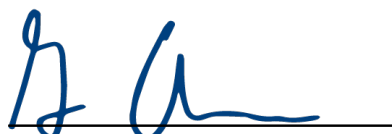
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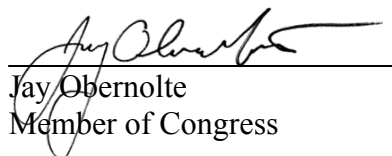
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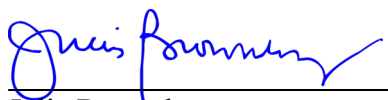
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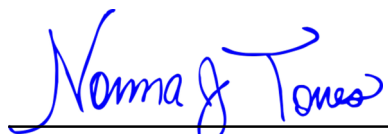
Jay Obernolte
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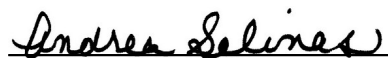
Maxine Waters
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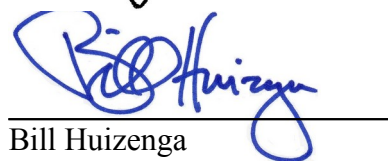
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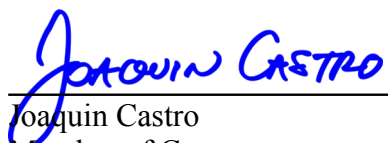
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Jasmine Crockett
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Bill Huizenga
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Joaquin Castro
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Kathy Castor
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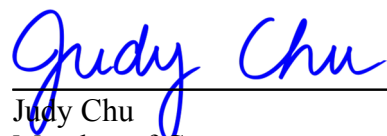
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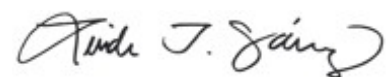
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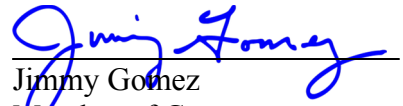
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