

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce, Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Women’s Education: Promoting Development, Countering Radicalism”
April 3, 2014**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

This hearing will come to order.

Today we are privileged to hear from three scholars on the topic of women’s education, and how a failure to appreciate its importance can result in missed opportunities for development and counter-radicalism.

Following today’s hearing, the Committee will mark-up H.R. 3583, the “Malala Yousafzia Scholarship Act”. This important legislation requires USAID to award at least half of its scholarships in Pakistan to women. Of course, Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani, is the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize nominee who has been recognized for her courageous efforts to advance access to education for women and girls.

I also want to recognize the Pakistani-American community, which has worked to promote the education and safety of women and girls by establishing and supporting schools, orphanages, medical centers, and other key institutions in Pakistan.

Despite a general expansion of educational opportunities worldwide in the last thirty years, women in most developing countries, on average, still receive less schooling than men. In some countries like Pakistan, this difference is incredibly pronounced, with only about 40 percent of women over the age of 15 considered literate, compared to 70 percent of men. In Afghanistan as few as 13 percent of women are able to read and write.

As you will hear today, there is strong evidence that the education of women and girls promotes economic growth, increases life expectancy, and promotes childhood development. There is no doubt that educating women improves a country’s economy, as educated women are more likely to contribute to the labor force. The correlation between a rise in women’s education and per capita income has been proven.

An increase in a woman’s earning potential benefits her family. Studies have shown that women tend to invest more in their children than men, which is why increases in female income improve child survival rates some twenty times more than increases in male income. Women who can read also stand to benefit from the pamphlets distributed in public awareness campaigns, and have been shown to better understand radio broadcasts designed to keep them informed.

Pakistan is a particular concern. Unfortunately, extremist groups there are indoctrinating youth by the thousands. I’ve been to all-girls schools in Pakistan – only to learn later that they were

destroyed by the Taliban. That should tell us all we need to know – education is a key counter to this destructive ideology.

As we will hear today, women’s central role in families and communities makes them uniquely positioned to intervene and stop the radicalization of their children. Mothers are most likely to spot the signs that something is off. Simply put, if angry young men are to be stopped before they strap on a suicide vest, women will be key.

It is also worrisome that one witness will warn of the “soft radicalization of women,” pointing to the growing trend of women involved in terrorist attacks. Education has the potential to counter this too.

We look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how women’s education can play an important role in defusing the factors that contribute to extremism, and how educating women and girls is a catalyst for economic development. As one journalist has put it, girls’ schools are “just about the best long-term counterterrorism investment available.”

I now turn to the Ranking Member for any opening comments he may have.