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Noel Irwin Hentschel

Chairman, CEO and co-founder, AmericanTours International

Loss of Two USC Students From China and Their American Dream

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It was a heart-wrenching experience witnessing the grieving parents of students Ying Wu and Ming Qu who were gunned down last week near USC campus. The mother of the strikingly beautiful, young woman Ying had to be held up from collapsing in her unceasing wailing at the loss of her only child. The families of the slain 23-year-old victims traveled all the way from China for the memorial service held at the Shrine Auditorium. Nearly 1000 mourners, including fellow students, faculty, religious ministers, community supporters and representatives from the Consulate General for the People's Republic of China in Los Angeles, were in attendance. Both USC students were remembered for their humility, charisma, work ethic and their special relationship. They hoped to find promising job opportunities when they returned home to China so they could take care of their parents, who sacrificed in order that they could have an American college education for a brighter future. Ying and Ming desired the American Dream.

Recently, our 20-year-old son Patrick pursued academic interests at the Beijing Normal University. Naturally when children are away from home, parents are concerned. We were grateful he was well cared for by Chinese host families in various parts of China until he returned home safely. Los Angeles parents share in the loss of these two students from China, just as we share in the dreams and aspirations of our children, hoping they will enjoy a better life beyond our own. Pastor Cecil Murray summed it up best at the memorial service benediction when he said, "We are all brothers and sisters."

This heinous crime was committed in a neighborhood near USC, referred to as South Los Angeles. Sadly, as an Angeleno who grew up in this part of town, a random violent act is of no surprise. The only surprise is how long it is taking for this struggling community to realize its potential. How many more senseless violent crimes will it take to realize that children in our inner cities are dying? Generations are being lost but it is preventable, if we demonstrate that we care and we take action! In 1998 I began going on "ride-alongs" with the LAPD and the LA sheriff's department to ascertain what action must be taken to make all neighborhoods of our city safe and prosperous. From my experiences, every response during a night watch is a wake-up call with domestic abuse, drug dealing and robberies as routine occurrences, often resulting in murder. One only has to listen to local law enforcement officers to understand the challenges they face on a daily basis attempting to protect and to serve the citizens of Los Angeles.

According to "Schools and the Prison Pipeline" research conducted by UCLA, there is a direct correlation between high school dropouts and incoming prison population. The statistics are

disturbing, costly both fiscally and socially. The faith-based community leaders and the initiatives emanating from local churches and charitable organizations are hard at work to improve the environment. The apathetic attitude of "it's not my neighborhood, it's not my problem" must change. It may be prudent to recall that this month marks the 20th anniversary of the 1992 civil unrest riots and the fearful citywide devastation which transpired, even in affluent neighborhoods. I would argue Los Angeles is one big neighborhood and USC is part of it, same as UCLA, LMU and Pepperdine. All are affected by this tragedy.

My advice is for a combined advisory group of successful alumni from these four Los Angeles-based universities be created to establish an "American Dream Alliance." This alliance should enter into a public-private partnership with the City of Los Angeles and our L.A. community colleges. Implement as a critical priority an economic development plan with vocational job training and higher education opportunities targeted toward recruiting and assisting students in the lower income and gang regions of Los Angeles. Job commitments need to be made from companies of the combined university alumni to L.A. university graduates and L.A. community college vocational trained students. Our universities in Los Angeles are renowned for their academic excellence, business acumen, endowment capabilities and coveted degrees, but the real test is putting what is learned in a classroom into practice. What better way to teach, with fewer words and greater actions! The combined effort of our accomplished university alumni can lead the way and be a model for success to other inner cities by making Los Angeles the best city to visit, to learn, to work and to live!

In memory of Ming Qu and Ying Wu demonstrate to their parents that we care and that their lives mattered. Deliver to all who seek it and work for it, the American Dream.