I come here today to speak not just as a UCSB student but as a Japanese person and as an American to comment on the international student Senator bill.

In my fourth year at UC Santa Barbara, I have dedicated my time in serving my constituents as the Internal Chair of the Global Gaucho Commission, an AS entity that exists to represent and defend the interests, voices, and needs of international students, a group that was grown from 1% of the undergraduate student body in 2008 to 12% 10 years later. The sad truth however is that there hasn’t been a proper adjustment and adaptation to that demographic change socially and institutionally. Mass social separation between international and domestic students continues to exist, increasingly on a larger scale, to the disadvantage of both groups, especially international students, who often become locked out of crucial campus-wide conversations we as UCSB students have on important issues. Meanwhile, there has never been an international student elected as an AS Senator or has even been a candidate, and while a common argument is that international students choose not to participate, a much more consequential truth is that the factions and interest groups responsible for conducting the overwhelming majority of election recruitment and electing the overwhelming majority of elected officials have failed to adequately reach out to international students and have unknowingly contributed to their unacceptable exclusion. Not to mention, many many international students are still not only unaware of AS in general but unaware of their right to participate in AS elections, even being under the false pretense that they do not have that right, which is also unacceptable.

Which is where I talk about why I am here, among many things, as an American. Because whether we want to admit it or not, all of these social and institutional problems are our fault. Because we have allowed social and cultural stereotypes of international students to permeate into our own circles largely unchecked, because we have ignored the fact that we as American at UCSB do somewhat enjoy a home turf advantage from a sociocultural and institutional standpoint in our daily dealings, and because we have not done enough to reach out to them, understand their experiences, and subsequently learn more about ourselves.

And I believe that making the international student Senator bill a ballot initiative, which as an idea by the way originated from the wishes of OISS’ International Student Advisory Board, is a necessary and important step in addressing those issues on the same grounds that a few years ago, the proposal of a transfer student Senator was made a ballot initiative. My hope is that this will contribute to expanded and inclusive opportunities for international students in AS, the breaking down of social barriers between internationals and domestics, and a path forward on addressing these previously overlooked but crucial issues.

I now ask all of you to make the right decision and help realize the potential aspirations of international students who wish to become more engaged within the student body and contribute something positive to this campus. Let our campus come closer to solving these issues, and let our campus be a shining blueprint on how we do that for the rest of the country.