



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

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February 7, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

We noted with great interest that you signed an Executive Order last month establishing visa and foreign-visitor processing goals and a task force on travel and competitiveness.

As you know, in June 2011, we launched our *Get Out West!* initiative focused on, among other things, growing tourism and outdoor recreation to support jobs and grow our economy. Through this initiative, Western Governors support efforts to increase nonimmigrant visa processing capacity in China and Brazil and to ensure that 80 percent of nonimmigrant visa applicants are interviewed within 3 weeks of receipt of application. We also support efforts to expand the Visa Waiver Program and travel by nationals of Visa Waiver Program participants. We support expansion of the program to China, Poland, Brazil and Chile.

In December 2011, Western Governors adopted the attached policy resolution. Through the resolution, we also support the U.S. Travel Association recommendations to:

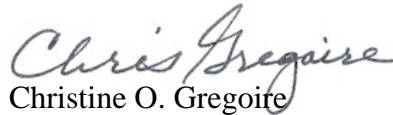
- Negotiate an agreement with the Chinese government to grant Chinese travelers visas that are valid for at least five years versus the current one-year visa.
- Pilot the use of videoconferencing technology by the State Department to conduct visa interviews in key markets, such as Brazil, China and India.

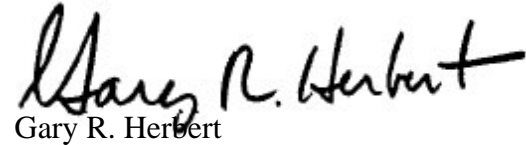
We encourage you to add these issues to the list of actions you have tasked the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to explore in developing the implementation plan.

Western Governors stand ready to assist with this important effort. Foreign business and leisure travel is a vital economic engine helping create jobs and income in the West. It cannot work well unless the federal visa process is tuned up and well oiled to facilitate travel to the United States by foreign visitors.

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Sincerely,


Christine O. Gregoire
Governor, State of Washington
Chair, Western Governors'
Association


Gary R. Herbert
Governor, State of Utah
Vice Chair, Western Governors'
Association

cc: The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary, Department of State
Jeffrey Zients, Acting Director, Office of Management & Budget
Roger J. Dow, President & CEO, U.S. Travel Association

Enclosure



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 11-6

Improving International Travel to the West

A. BACKGROUND

1. Tourism is a vital sector of the U.S. economy and is particularly important to many western states and territories.
2. Security provisions are an important component of ensuring that those entering and exiting the U.S. are traveling for legitimate purposes and U.S. visa rules and regulations are designed to accomplish that.
3. Despite a 40% increase in global tourism over the past decade, in 2010 the U.S. welcomed only 1% more overseas travelers than it did in 2000.
4. Tourists to the U.S. from overseas represent 44% of total U.S. international tourists, yet account for 78% of total international travelers' spending in the United States.. Overseas visitors to the United States spend an average of more than \$4,000 per visit.
5. To compete for foreign tourists the U.S. must ensure its visa policies and process are streamlined, responsive, timely and efficient.
6. The U.S. Travel Association (USTA) recently released a comprehensive report – Ready for Takeoff -- which included recommendations to address America's significant visa challenges in China, India, Brazil and other nations around the globe.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors support efforts to make it easier for foreign tourists to travel to the U.S.
2. Western Governors support recent efforts by the State department to improve and expedite the visa process while still balancing security concerns.
3. Western Governors support the types of visa reform advocated by USTA including:
 - Issuance of a Presidential Directive to recapture 17 percent share of worldwide overseas travel and match Western Europe's current share of the long-haul travel market in Brazil, China and India by 2015.
 - Setting a State Department visa processing standard of two weeks and using visa fees to hire enough State Department personnel to meet the standard while maintaining the same strict security standards.

- Expanding the Visa Waiver Program to new countries such as China, Poland, Brazil and Chile.
- Negotiating an agreement with the Chinese government to grant Chinese travelers visas that are valid for at least five years versus the current one-year visa.
- Piloting the use of videoconferencing technology by the State Department to conduct visa interviews in key markets, such as Brazil, China and India.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. This resolution shall be transmitted to the President of the United States and to the Secretary of the State Department.