



## 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.