

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

June 24, 2015

The Honorable Candice Miller
United States House of Representatives
320 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Miller:

On behalf of the eight million Americans whose livelihoods depend on safe international travel to the United States, I am writing in support of H.R. 158, the Visa Waiver Program Improvement Act of 2015. The travel industry's top priority is ensuring the safety of travelers and we agree that the reforms in H.R. 158 would significantly enhance aviation security.

The economic benefits of inbound international travel are well documented. Last year, direct travel spending in the United States totaled \$927 billion, generating \$2.1 trillion in economic output and \$141 billion in tax revenue. The most lucrative segment is "long-haul" travel to the U.S. and over 20 million (60 percent) overseas visitors traveled under the Visa Waiver Program last year. While here, they generated \$190 billion in economic output and supported nearly a million jobs. As a result of the VWP, travel is our nation's top services export, generating a current trade surplus of \$75.6 billion.

These figures are compelling – but tell only half the story. The protocols of the Visa Waiver Program are also critical to our national security. VWP was originally created to facilitate travel. But after reforms based on recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, VWP became one of our most important security programs. VWP partner nations are strong allies who must meet rigorous counter-terrorism, information-sharing and document security standards. National security experts across the political spectrum, including every Secretary of Homeland Security, agree that the VWP is an essential security tool.

While the VWP keeps us safer, we can find ways to make sensible improvements. In our view, any changes should 1) elevate security; 2) be based on fact, not hearsay; and 3) minimize disruption to legitimate travelers. By upgrading threat assessment and explicitly defining U.S. authority to suspend or revoke VWP status, H.R. 158 fulfills each of these criteria. By contrast, proposals to terminate or suspend the VWP would do incalculable harm to both national and economic security; cause mayhem in the visa process that would have to take up the slack; and result in reciprocal action against travel abroad by U.S. citizens. In fact, to improve security, we should expand the VWP, not curtail it – but only with the kind of new safeguards reforms proposed in H.R. 158.

For the U.S. Travel Association, the safety of our nation and travelers is of paramount importance. The VWP protects our homeland while facilitating trade and travel – and H.R. 158 would help perform these twin missions even better. Please count on our continued efforts to help enact this bill into law.

Sincerely,



Roger Dow
President and CEO