



**TESTIMONY OF**

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**BEFORE THE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT,  
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OF  
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**HEARING ON**

**THE IMPACT OF IMPLEMENTATION: A REVIEW OF THE REAL ID  
ACT AND THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE TRAVEL INITIATIVE**

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Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and other distinguished Members of the Committee: It is a privilege and honor to appear before you today on behalf of the Travel Industry Association (TIA) and our strategic partner the Travel Business Roundtable (TBR) to discuss the impact of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative or WHTI on travel to the U.S. Let me first thank you for your continued leadership in ensuring that our homeland security efforts are implemented in an efficient and effective manner. We believe that the actions taken by Congress to extend the WHTI deadline to ensure successful implementation should also be commended. The U.S. travel community is a willing partner with Congress, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State (State) in promoting travel security measures such as, WHTI that enhance U.S. border security and maintain an efficient flow of visitors and goods through our ports-of-entry.

TIA is a national organization representing 1,700 travel public and private entities across the country. Our members encompass every sector of the diverse, \$700 billion travel community and its more than 7 million direct employees. Our industry creates jobs and careers; we fulfill important social policy goals, such as moving people from welfare to work; we contribute more than \$99 billion in tax revenue for local, state and federal governments to drive our economy; we create a travel trade surplus to offset the nation's worsening balance of payments deficit; and we promote America's public diplomacy efforts. We are keenly aware of the need to ensure that our borders are protected from those intent on doing our country harm. As we saw on 9/11, one terrorist attack can and will cripple our entire industry.

However, as we have instituted increased security in our travel systems, we have neglected to ensure that travel facilitation is not hampered and that new security requirements are properly communicated to international visitors. As a result, overseas travelers are avoiding the U.S. due to concerns over the visa and entry experience and a global perception that visitors are not as welcome as they were prior to 9/11. Overseas travel to the U.S. in 2007 remains down 8 percent compared to 2000 (Dept. of Commerce) at a time when the global overseas travel market grew nearly 30 percent, amounting to 35 million new travelers.

In contrast, the U.S. has experienced an upswing in international visitation from Canada over the last four years in large part due to a dramatically stronger Canadian dollar, its proximity to the U.S., and continued ease of travel across land borders for Canadians. Canada is America's largest source of international visitation, with 40 million Canadian visitors spending \$13.5 billion here in 2006. At a time when the U.S. is attracting two million fewer "overseas" travelers today from other key markets in Europe, Latin America and Asia versus 2000, it is especially critical that the U.S. sustain this growth in Canadian travel and take action to promote this success. Even a five percent decline in Canadian travel to the U.S. would result in the loss of \$700 million to the U.S. economy.

With so much at stake, we believe that DHS and State should have begun to plan and implement a well-funded, well-executed public outreach campaign several years ago in order to preempt the confusion and anxiety of the traveling public about WHTI requirements. As we approach the final compliance deadlines next year, an effective communications plan is more necessary than ever. In May 2006, the GAO wrote to the House Homeland Security Committee warning that one of the main challenges to WHTI program implementation was the development of an awareness program for the public. Additionally, DHS received hundreds of comments during the rule making process about the confusion that continues to exist among travelers. Until this year however, DHS did not request or receive funding to move forward with a communications campaign.

Full implementation of WHTI at our land borders and sea ports is not simply a change in law, but a dramatic change in culture, practice and tradition with impacts on both sides of the border, especially in bi-national communities. In order to minimize the impact of these changes on millions of travelers moving in each direction to conduct business, vacation, shop and engage in sporting and cultural events, or for education and exchange purposes, a vigorous public awareness campaign must be executed both within and outside the United States.

Such a sustained communications campaign should explain not only what these changes are and how travelers must comply, but it should also explain why these changes are necessary from the standpoint of safety and security. Building “awareness” amongst cross-border travelers requires repeatedly telling visitors how the new requirements will work and what actions they need to take in advance of their trip. Gaining acceptance of these changes requires explaining to travelers why it is necessary to change decades of custom and practice. And by conducting a broad, sustained public outreach campaign that utilizes all available communications channels (print media, TV, radio, internet, direct mail, etc.), we can help spur travelers to take action and obtain the type of travel document that best suits their travel needs and complies with WHTI.

Is it too late to successfully communicate WHTI requirements? We hope not and we are prepared to work in partnership with DHS and the State Department to ensure that the public relations efforts they are planning succeed. In fact, DHS has invited TIA provide advice and consultation for the communications plan they recently began planning and hope to execute this summer. The DHS and State Department communications campaigns should assure our largest trading partners and neighbors to the north and south that we still welcome them across our border and that our special relationship will only improve as we *partner* to secure both our lands.

We urge you to view the public outreach effort for WHTI as a lesson learned and to look at alternative approaches for the future. For instance S. 1661, the “Travel Promotion Act of 2007”, supported by Chairman Akaka, the majority of this subcommittee and forty other Members of the U.S. Senate would establish a public-private partnership between the federal government and the U.S. travel community to create a sustained communications effort that would explain U.S. travel rules to prospective international travelers and also issue an explicit invitation for them to travel to the United States. While all the changes in law post-9/11 that are designed to enhance U.S. border security make sense individually and have served to create a layered approach to homeland security, those “layers” can become suffocating to some international travelers and send an unintended signal that the U.S. welcome mat has been pulled.

The Travel Promotion Act joins together the power and authority of the federal government with world-class promotion and communications expertise from the travel community. This dynamic partnership will enable us to better explain all of the U.S new and changing travel requirements while at the same time allow the U.S. to compete with other nations that invest upwards of \$100 million annually to attract international visitors. In fact, we are the only industrialized nation without a national promotion campaign, while Americans traveling to other countries help fund their promotion efforts; in effect, our own citizens are funding the competition while America remains silent.

This effort would aide our ability to successfully implement WHTI over the next several years, and in a sustained manner meet future challenges related to international travel facilitation. And importantly, these efforts would not be subject to the vagaries of the congressional appropriations process or rely in any other way on U.S. taxpayer dollars since the Travel

Promotion Act envisions a partnership funded by a nominal fee on Visa Waiver Program travelers that is matched by contributions from the private sector travel community. Finally, this approach would ensure a coordinated message among various Federal Departments. In contrast, DHS and State have each issued separate contracts to communicate WHTI entry rules and it is unclear how those messages will be coordinated.

The challenge for this nation, this Congress and this and future Administrations is that there are, and will continue to be, a need to inform travelers of new and changing travel requirements like WHTI, the Electronic System for Travel Authorization; Global Entry™; US-VISIT Entry and Exit; and Visa Waiver Program requirements. The Travel Promotion Act provides a concrete and long-term solution for communicating these changes to travelers.

In addition to the need for a robust and sustained strategic communications campaign for the successful implementation of WHTI, the travel community has also emphasized the need to: (1) set realistic deadlines for implementation; 2) ensure the infrastructure, staffing, and technology is in place at ports of entry; 3) provide low-cost options for secure travel documents; and 4) expand cooperation and communication efforts with neighboring countries.

We thank Congress for exercising vigorous oversight authority and taking action at appropriate times to extend deadlines for WHTI implementation. Extending the deadline for WHTI to June 2009, was not delay for the sake of delay, but a common sense extension necessary for DHS and State to properly prepare for the execution of WHTI requirements. Now that the deadline for implementation has been extended, we urge Congress and all its relevant committees of jurisdiction to provide DHS and State with the resources necessary to secure the appropriate technology, build the necessary infrastructure, and hire sufficient personnel to implement WHTI correctly. We hope that the RFID infrastructure being built for WHTI will make border crossings faster and more secure. Congress needs to be assured that the technology is working, not just in a lab, but in real-world conditions. CBP must be required to demonstrate progress towards deployment of RFID infrastructure and confirmation that the system is able to quickly review travelers without privacy concerns.

Sufficient staffing at all air, land and sea ports of entry is also critical to WHTI success. Your Committee is keenly aware of the significant shortages that exist in staffing levels at CBP. We are concerned that as this summer's travel season approaches that increased enforcement of the end of oral declarations at land borders will result in long delays for travelers. We urge the Committee to direct DHS to consider a two pronged approach to the staffing problems at our ports of entry. First, we urge Congress to lift the overtime cap for CBP officers beginning this summer through the beginning of Fiscal Year 2009 to ensure that staffing levels will accommodate a busy travel season as DHS ramps up the enforcement of the end of oral declarations and WHTI implementation. Secondly, we urge Congress to appropriate significant new funding to hire CBP officers for land, air and sea ports of entry so that new CBP officers can be hired and trained before the June 2009 WHTI implementation date. Continued oversight in all these areas will be necessary to determine if DHS and State are fully prepared by June 2009 to begin to implement WHTI.

We are greatly encouraged at the higher rates of passport ownership on both sides of the border, and we look forward to witnessing the distribution of the passport card by the Department of State this summer to help facilitate the transition to WHTI rules. We support efforts by various Northern Border Senators including Senator Collins and Senator Levin of the full Committee to ensure that the cost of the passport card is set low enough to promote its use by cross-border

residents. We are also pleased by the leadership of Senator Collins, Levin, and Coleman to promote mobile enrollment sites for the passport card that will facilitate the ease of access for this new document. The continued growth in development of Enhanced Driver's Licenses by states is also a welcome development, and we hope to see an acceleration of similar efforts in Canada in order to provide Canadian travelers a similar, low-cost WHTI compliant document.

Expanded cooperative efforts with our North American neighbors, Canada and Mexico, is critical in the larger context of border security and travel/trade facilitation, but is also crucial to the successful implementation of WHTI. And since this change in law, custom and practice falls most heavily on returning U.S. travelers and Canadian visitors (again, with little practical impact on Mexican visitors), U.S.-Canadian joint efforts are essential in order to ensure that "security" and "prosperity" continue to move forward in practice and not just in name.

Our message today is simple – the travel community wants DHS and State to successfully implement WHTI and other programs that protect U.S. citizens and visitors from those who would seek to do us harm. Let us work to protect America even as we project America abroad and welcome the world to visit here in the coming years.

Thank you, again, Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich and other Members of the subcommittee for holding this important hearing and for remaining engaged on the critical issue of whether or not government and travelers are prepared for implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.