



Discover America Partnership®

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Ridge Cites Security Benefits of Increase in Overseas Visitors

New Study Details How Welcoming More Travelers Could Provide Additional Resources for Security, Strengthen Economy and Enhance Public Diplomacy

Washington, DC – Citing the results of a new economic study, Governor Tom Ridge, the first Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, today detailed how welcoming more overseas travelers to the United States could provide more resources for needed security enhancements. Ridge emphasized that overseas visitors are critical to America's economy and public diplomacy and that America must strike the right balance between security and travel.

“Securing our nation's borders and facilitating travel are not mutually exclusive,” said Ridge. “Our borders are the intersection of security and prosperity. We must have the will to eliminate inefficiencies and build the most secure and traveler-friendly entry process possible.”

Ridge released the results of a new study prepared in conjunction with Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics Company, for the Discover America Partnership. The study, *An Economic Analysis of New Visitor Entry Policies for the United States*, details how a modest visa waiver fee could reverse a steep decline in overseas travel to the United States by providing funding for security enhancements and a significant, nationally-coordinated communications program to attract travelers to the U.S.

Based on an economic model developed by Oxford Economics, expanding the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (as recently passed by the U.S. Senate) and launching new security and promotional efforts funded by a \$10.00 Visa Waiver transaction fee would (within three years of implementation):

- Increase overseas travel to the United States by nearly 1.6 million new visitors per year, yielding \$8 billion in new visitor spending and \$850 million in new federal tax revenue;
- Generate an average of \$200 million in fee revenue per year, including \$100 million per year to fund improvements, such as:
 - Additional Customs and Border Patrol officers at America's ports of entry;
 - Introduction of customer service techniques;
 - An exit tracking system to enable the government to identify wanted persons if they attempt to flee the country and flag foreign visitors who overstay their visas;

- Enhanced electronic information sharing with other governments regarding lost, stolen or fraudulent travel documents;
- Deployment of 10-finger-scan readers at U.S. consulates and ports of entry to facilitate more accurate and efficient security screening; and
- Deployment, on a pilot basis, of biometric technology to screen passengers departing for the United States from overseas travel hubs.

Overseas travel to the United States has declined at a time when worldwide travel is expanding -- falling 17 percent since 2000. The cumulative cost of the decline to the U.S. economy exceeds \$100 billion in lost visitor spending, almost 200,000 jobs and \$16 billion in lost tax receipts.

To remedy a growing problem, the Discover America Partnership advocates a combination of reforms to the visa process, entry experience and promotion of the U.S. Other developed nations spend tens of millions of dollars annually to promote their country and accurately communicate their travel policies.

“The U.S. has no choice but to revisit how it competes for travelers in the post-9/11 environment,” said Geoff Freeman, Executive Director of the Discover America Partnership. “Security is America’s number one priority. Given the barriers that increased security requires, however, we must ensure that our process is as efficient as possible and, once and for all, begin to tell travelers that we want their business.”

To download a copy of *An Economic Analysis of New Visitor Entry Policies for the United States* visit www.poweroftravel.org.

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The *Discover America Partnership* – launched in September 2006 by some of America’s foremost business leaders, as well as hundreds of travel industry leaders – is an aggressive, Washington, D.C.-based, advocacy campaign designed to educate policymakers on the power of travel; highlight the unnecessary obstacles to welcoming more visitors; and, through extensive research, determine how the US can better compete for international visitors. More information on the Partnership can be found at www.poweroftravel.org.

