|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/74/US-Senate-UnofficialAltGreatSeal.svg/2000px-US-Senate-UnofficialAltGreatSeal.svg.png

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** Neal Patel/Michawn Rich 202-224-6244 |
| September 29, 2015 |

**HELLER LEADS BIPARTISAN EFFORT TO BRING MORE TOURISTS TO NEVADA***Bipartisan JOLT (Jobs Originated Through Launching Travel) Act Would Expand Access to Visas for Tourism, Limit Delays in Obtaining Visas, and Help Bring More Tourism to Nevada***(Washington, DC)** – Today, U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV), Charles E. Schumer (D-NY), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Mike Lee (R-UT) introduced legislation that would streamline and improve the visa application system for foreign tourists seeking to visit the United States. Current visa procedures make it unnecessarily difficult for tourists from many countries to visit the United States. The bipartisan bill would reform and strengthen the Visa Waiver Program, shorten the waiting time for certain tourist visas, allow for certain tourists to stay in the U.S. for a longer period of time, and more.“In Nevada a strong travel industry means more jobs. Fortunately, Nevada ranks second to none when it comes to providing the best hospitality, trade shows, special events, outdoor recreation opportunities, and convention services. We have so much to offer, which is why I am proud to help lead the efforts on the JOLT Act.  The impact of tourism to Nevada cannot be understated, and I am confident this bipartisan legislation will help welcome even more international tourists to our state and the entire nation,” said **Senator Dean Heller**.  “The flaws in our visa system are preventing the U.S. from reaping the full benefits of international tourism, and it’s time we fix them,” said **Senator Charles E. Schumer**. “This bipartisan, commonsense bill would provide a jolt to our economy and grow tourism across the United States. Rather than perpetuating a system that ties our hands and hurts job growth, I hope Democrats and Republicans will come together to make these reforms to our badly broken visa system.”  “Tourism supports hundreds of thousands of jobs and generates over $13 billion a year in economic activity in Minnesota alone. There is huge, untapped potential to expand the international tourism market which will benefit local economies not only in Minnesota, but across the country,” **Senator Amy Klobuchar** said. “That’s why I’ve championed efforts to increase tourism to our country, including reauthorizing Brand USA through 2020. This bipartisan bill will extend that effort by cutting through the red tape to streamline, strengthen, and reform a process that’s been holding back international tourism to the United States.”   “International tourism plays a crucial role in the Utah economy,” **Senator Mike Lee** said. “People come from all over the world to ski at our resorts, hike in our parks, and visit our landmarks. We should be doing all we can to encourage people across the globe to come to Utah and the rest of the United States.” This legislation (1) reforms and strengthens the Visa Waiver Program (VWP); (2) streamlines visa processing by requiring new standards of efficiency; (3) encourages Canadian tourism to the U.S.; (4) creates a videoconferencing pilot program for visa processing; (5) requires coordination of Trusted Traveler applications; and (6) improves passport security by requiring every U.S. visitor entering through the reformed VWP to have electronic passports.  While the global travel market is expected to double over the next decade, the United States’ market share of this industry has declined by five percent since 2000. The JOLT Act is aimed at reversing that trend and recapturing the United States’ historic share of worldwide overseas travel, which could add nearly $100 billion to the economy over the next decade and create nearly 700,000 more American jobs. A full summary of the senators’ proposal to help boost lagging international travel to the United States appears below: **Summary of The Jobs Originated Through Launching Travel (“JOLT”) Act** **Reform and Strengthen the Secure Travel Partnership Program (STPP)**The JOLT Act renames the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) the Secure Travel Partnership Program (STPP) to more accurately reflect the purpose of the program, which is to partner with allies to improve secure travel programs. Currently, a number of close U.S. allies and partners are not members of the VWP (STPP). The VWP (STPP) enables citizens of participating countries to securely travel to the U.S. for short-term business or tourism purposes without having to go through the lengthy and complicated visa application process. The bill would strengthen the program to update eligibility criteria to require applicant countries to have both a visa overstay rate and visa refusal rate of not more than 3%; reinstate the Secretary of Homeland Security’s authority to waive the 3% visa refusal rate requirement, up to a maximum of 10%, if a country meets all other STPP requirements; and directs the Comptroller General to review the Secretary of Homeland Security’s methods for tracking aliens entering and exiting the United States and for detecting visa overstays.  The bill also requires that the Secretary of Homeland Security conduct an evaluation of the Electronic System Travel Authorization (ESTA), including assessment of any reforms necessary to improve the efficiency, accuracy and comprehensive vetting of travelers.  Additionally, the bill would require the Secretary of Homeland Security to report on and enforce the adherence to security-related factors including a program country’s airport security standards, cooperation with U.S. initiatives combatting terrorism and in information sharing. **Speed Up Visa Processing**The legislation sets standards for visa processing saying that 90 percent of visa interviews should be conducted within 10 days of requesting an appointment. With a statutory commitment to faster visa processing worldwide, a climate of certainty would be created for future personal and business travelers, thus ensuring increased and sustained demand for travel to the United States.   **Encourage Canadian tourism to the United States** Under current law, without a visa, Canadian citizens are not permitted to remain in the United States for longer than 180 days. Many Canadians would remain in the United States for a longer period of time if they had a legal ability to do so. In addition, Canadians who currently return to Canada after 180 days are unable to take day-trips across the border to northern-border-states in America. The bill allows Canadians who are: (1) over age 50; (2) can show that they own a residence in the United States or have purchased rental or hotel accommodations in the United States for the duration of their stay; and (3) are not otherwise inadmissible – to stay at least 240 days per year. **Create a Pilot Program for Visa Processing via Videoconferencing**Due to lack of access to a U.S. consulate in geographically-larger countries, the in-person interview requirement remains a major hurdle for many potential visitors in high-demand markets. In order to reduce deterrents for potential visitors, the U.S. should use technology to minimize the burden of traveling to obtain an in-person interview. This bill would amend the definition of an in-person interview and require the Department of State to complete at 2 year pilot program to conduct visa interviews via secure videoconferencing. **Coordinate Trusted Traveler Applications**U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Global Entry program is a voluntary expedited clearance program that allows pre-approved, low-risk international travelers the ability to bypass the traditional CBP inspection process and utilize automated kiosks upon entry. Taking “trusted travelers” out of the normal customs inspection lines reduces wait times and allows CBP to focus their limited resources on the unknown individuals. To encourage further progress and reduction or wait times, this bill encourages State and DHS to coordinate the visa and Global Entry application and interview process for eligible travelers. **Require Electronic Passports**This bill improves passport security by closing a loophole that allows citizens of the 27 countries participating in the STPP before 2008 to use non-electronic passports if they were issued before October 2006. Biometric or e-passports are the most secure travel documents available and should be utilized by every traveler visiting the U.S. from a STPP country.###http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_fb.png http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_tw.png http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_yt.png |