

H.R. 3039, The Welcoming Business Travelers and Tourists to America Act of 2011

Section by Section Summary

Current Cosponsors: Rep. Amodei (R-NV), Rep. Berkley (D-NV), Rep. Mack (R-CA), Rep. Posey (R-FL), Rep. Wilson (R-SC)

Section 1. Short Title

Section 2. Findings

As an industry sector, travel and tourism creates one of America's only balance-of-trade surpluses, valued at \$31.7 billion in 2010. While global long-haul travel grew by 40 percent between 2000 and 2010, the number of those travelers coming to the United States dropped from 17 percent to 12 percent. By regaining 17 percent of the long-haul travel market by 2015 and sustaining it through 2020, the United States can attract 98 million more visitors, creating 1.3 million American jobs and generating \$859 billion by 2020.

Section 3. Visa Processing

The State Department's goal is to interview all short-term leisure and business visa applicants within 30 days of submitting an application. However, this standard is too long to keep the U.S. competitive with other countries that process visas within two weeks. Furthermore, the State Department has reported wait times of more than 100 days in some key U.S. consular offices. This provision requires the Secretary of State to hire the necessary number of Foreign Service officers and limited non-career appointment officers required to achieve and maintain a maximum 12 day visa processing standard.

Section 4. Visa Video-Conferencing

Significant barriers prevent tourist visa applicants from accessing a U.S. consular office, where visa interviews are conducted. This provision directs the Secretary of State to conduct a two-year pilot program for processing non-immigrant visas via video conferencing, and to submit a report to Congress on the pilot program's feasibility for wide-spread implementation.

Section 5. Data on Visa Interview Wait Times

Posting historical data about visa interview wait times can help applicants better plan their travel to the United States. This provision brings more transparency to State Department's visa processing by directing the Secretary of State to post historical data on non-immigrant visa wait times.

The State Department must significantly improve its planning, performance measurement and reporting on the processing of visa applications. This provision requires the Secretary of State to submit a report to Congress on the demand projections for non-immigrant visas, specifically from China, India, and Brazil and on its short and long term plans to meet forecast demand. Additionally, it requires that the State Department's non-immigrant visa demand projections and the Commerce Department's yearly visitor arrival projections be compared and aligned.

Section 7. Visa Validity Period

The United States' non-immigrant visa validity period agreements with other nations vary between one year with a single entry and ten years with multiple entries. Shorter visa validity periods discourage continued travel to the United States. Under certain conditions, this provision allows the Secretary of State to modify agreements with countries to allow an increased visa validity period.