



**Travel Industry Association**

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## ***Travel Community Praises Secretary Chertoff for Aggressive Visa Waiver Program Expansion***

### ***Inclusion of South Korea Likely to Drive Hundreds of Thousands of New Visitors to the United States Annually***

Washington, DC – The Travel Industry Association today praised Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff for his rapid expansion and strengthening of the Visa Waiver Program by signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The MOU is the first step toward enabling Korean citizens to travel to the United States securely without a visa. Including South Korea in the Visa Waiver Program is critical to strengthening the national security and economy of the United States, and improving America’s image abroad.

“The continued expansion of the Visa Waiver Program to include one of America’s closest allies and most important travel partners is an extremely positive step,” said Roger Dow, President and CEO of the Travel Industry Association. “Hundreds of thousands of additional Korean visitors will boost the American economy and help reverse the drastic decline in overseas travel to the United States.”

Korean citizens traveling to the United States will be required to use the U.S. Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), once operational, to submit biographical and other security-related information to U.S. authorities in advance of travel. The MOU commits Korea and the United States to conduct a joint outreach campaign to inform Korean citizens of their obligation to use the ESTA system. The United States currently lacks an effective communications strategy to carry out this aspect of the MOU.

The *Travel Promotion Act* (S. 1661 / H.R. 3232), currently pending before Congress and co-sponsored by 38 U.S. Senators and more than 175 members of the House of Representatives, would create a public-private campaign to effectively communicate changing U.S. security policies before they are implemented.

“The Department of Homeland Security’s plans for electronic travel authorization are a perfect example of why Congress needs to pass the *Travel Promotion Act*,” said Dow.

“Without an effective communications strategy, changing U.S. security requirements may sow confusion among potential visitors from Korea and elsewhere.”

In addition to South Korea, several other countries, including major travel markets such as Greece, Argentina and Brazil, may be eligible to join the 27 existing Visa Waiver Program countries. The travel community strongly urges the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to consider signing similar agreements this year with additional countries for inclusion in the program. The travel community also urges Congress to provide DHS with additional resources to conduct the necessary security reviews of countries that qualify for consideration, as well as the regular biennial reviews of current Visa Waiver Program countries.

Expansion of the Visa Waiver Program, signed into law by President Bush on August 3, 2007, was one of the reforms called for in the travel industry’s “Blueprint to Discover America” issued in January 2007. The Czech Republic was the first country in 2008 to sign an MOU with DHS, followed by Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Hungary and Malta. Visa Waiver expansion could come to a halt in 2009 if DHS does not build a biometric system for foreign visitors exiting the United States. TIA is a strong supporter of the exit requirement and is working with the entire travel community to develop support for a secure and efficient solution.

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*The Travel Industry Association is the national, non-profit organization representing all components of the \$740 billion travel industry. TIA’s mission is to promote and facilitate increased travel to and within the United States. TIA is proud to be a partner in travel with American Express. For more information, visit [www.tia.org](http://www.tia.org).*