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Expiration of Visa Waiver Program Expansion Jeopardizes U.S. Economic Recovery

Failure to Implement Immigration Security Measure Hinders Increased International Visitation

Washington, DC – The U.S. Travel Association expressed concern today about this week’s expiration of government authority to further expand the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to qualified countries.

“The U.S. Visa Waiver Program is an instrumental tool in welcoming hundreds of thousands of secure short-term visitors to America,” said Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association. “America should be expanding its efforts to attract overseas visitors at a time when international inbound travel is down, not putting up barriers.”

Overseas visitors to the United States provide a critical boost to the U.S. economy. VWP travelers spent more than \$51 billion in the U.S. in 2008, excluding international airfare. This spending generated 512,000 jobs, \$13 billion in payroll and \$7.8 billion in federal, state and local taxes.*

Late last year, the program was expanded to countries that met stringent new security requirements, including the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Republic of Korea (South Korea), Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia. Since travelers from VWP countries will no longer have to apply for visas for travel lasting 90 days or less, expansion of the program is expected to generate more than one million new visitors and billions in new spending over the next several years.**

Further VWP expansion will expire on June 30 because the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has not met a Congressional requirement to deploy a biometric exit tracking system at all U.S. international airports. America’s travel community has consistently supported the deployment of an exit system to build confidence in immigration policies and to identify individuals who violate the terms of their admission to the United States.

“While we recognize that DHS has recently conducted pilots of an exit system at selected airports in recent weeks, we are extremely disappointed that a permanent solution has not yet been found,” said Dow. “We urge DHS to finalize a friendly and

efficient biometric air exit program as quickly as possible or work with Congress to strengthen the existing biographic exit system as a legal alternative.”

The U.S. Department of Commerce projects international inbound travel to the United States will be down eight percent in 2009.

**U.S. Travel Association data.*

***Oxford Economics analysis included 2008 VWP expansion countries and additional countries on the list for consideration. The report estimated that with the new and expected additions to the program, more than 1.4 billion new visitors and \$5 billion in spending would occur over the next 3 years.*

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The U.S. Travel Association is the national, non-profit organization representing all components of the \$770 billion travel industry. U.S. Travel's mission is to increase travel to and within the United States. For more information, visit www.ustravel.org.