



APR 02 2007

United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

MAR 23 2007

Dear Mr. Stupak:

Thank you for your letter of February 21 regarding your concerns over the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). We are very pleased to preface our response to the concerns you raise with a brief report on the successful implementation of the Air Phase of WHTI which took effect on January 23, 2007. Although compliance rates for American citizens were 94% and 96% for Canadians in the week leading up to implementation, compliance rates for both reached 99% by the second day of implementation, where they have since remained.

We believe we can attribute this success to three factors: 1) the Administration's aggressive outreach campaign with the private sector as a full partner to inform the traveling public; 2) the Department of State's ability to adjudicate record numbers of passports; and 3) the Department of Homeland Security's policy of flexible enforcement during the transition phase. The additional benefit to be gained from this successful implementation is the public confidence that this initiative will work. The positive results of the Air Phase reflect our commitment to success. The Zogby Poll, conducted January 5-8, in which 87 percent of the respondents were aware of the new passport rules and 76 percent expressed support is a clear indication of this. We understand that the air and land phases will be very different and the land phase will be certainly more challenging, but the three factors above can be applied equally to the next phase.

Your first question specifically asks about the status of the passport card and how the Department is meeting concerns about cost, privacy and potential delays as a result of WHTI. The Department of State, in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security, is developing the passport card. The public comment period on the Notice of Proposed Rule Making for the passport card closed on January 7, 2007. We have reviewed the comments and are in the process of drafting the final rule. Concurrently, we have developed a timeline that will put the passport card into production and distribution by April 2008.

The Honorable
Bart Stupak,
House of Representatives.

The initial step in the timeline is certification by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) of our Request for Proposal (RFP) for a vicinity-read passport card that is consistent with the standards and best practices for applying this technology to a personal identification document. We expect to give the proposal to NIST in April and receive the legislatively mandated certification in May. Following certification, the next steps would be issuance of the RFP, submission of proposals, an evaluation of proposals, government and independent testing of proposals, contract award, and integration of vicinity-read technology into our current passport production system. Assuming that there are no delays in meeting proposed deadlines and that no major issues arise during the testing phase, we estimate that we will be able to start production of a vicinity-read technology card for use on a passport card in approximately 12 months.

In the Notice of Proposed Rule Making on the passport card, the Department proposed a cost of \$25 for an adult, \$10 for children and an execution fee (currently \$30) for first-time applicants of \$25. We also proposed that the validity period of the card match the passport book: 10 years for an adult and 5 years for a child. This reflects our commitment to make the cost of the passport card as inexpensive as possible. The total cost for an adult over a 10 year period is 37.5 cents per month for a first-time applicant and 21 cents for a renewal. The Administration is also proposing to exempt children 15 and under from the passport requirement and children 16 to 18 traveling in groups under specific circumstances.

In regard to privacy concerns, it is important to note that the vicinity-read RFID chip will contain no personal information but only a unique identification number that will link the card to the bearer's file in a government-maintained database. Unlike the proximity-read passport RFID chip, there is no photo, no bio-data, and no passport information. The Department is also working closely with NIST during the development phase to ensure that privacy and security concerns are properly addressed.

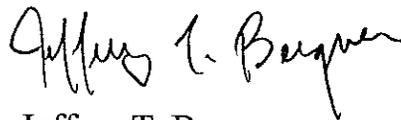
Concerning the potential for delays at the border, we firmly believe that WHTI will facilitate, not impede, cross border traffic. Currently, there are over 8,000 different types of documents that can be presented as proof of nationality and identity. Reducing that number to a handful of highly secure documents in which the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officers will have confidence and automating the process through RFID technology will greatly enhance the efficiency of port of entry processing. CBP estimates that standard and uniform documentation can shave 5-30 seconds off every interview at the port of entry.

Multiply that times the 300,000 American citizens who cross the border every day, as well as the thousands of Canadians, and the time savings is clearly evident.

The Department of Homeland Security will respond to the other two questions concerning level of resources for port of entry infrastructure and status of an economic impact analysis as they fall under their purview. We look forward to working with Congress, particularly the Congressional Northern Border Caucus, as we move closer to implementation of the land sea phase of WHTI. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mark Bysfield in our Legislative Management Office at 202-647-8729 or BysfieldMD@state.gov.

We hope this information is helpful in addressing your concerns. Please feel free to contact us further on this or any matter of concern to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey T. Bergner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Jeffrey T. Bergner
Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs