

## ***WSTPC 2007 ISSUE PAPER***

### ***FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL: WHTI***

***BACKGROUND:*** The tourism industry is concerned over the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), which would require all travelers, including U.S. citizens, to and from the Americas, the Caribbean and Bermuda to have a passport or other accepted document that establishes identity and citizenship to enter or re-enter the U.S. Before the WHTI, driver's licenses and/or birth certificates were sufficient identification under the Western Hemisphere Exception (except for Mexico). Only 27 percent of U.S. citizens now have passports and only 40 percent of Canadian citizens. The passport requirement for all western hemisphere air travelers to and from the U.S. was implemented in January, 2007. The deadline for land and sea travelers is scheduled to be implemented in January, 2008. The tourism industry is concerned that the Federal government is making little substantive progress in implementing a 2006 pledge by Secretary of State Rice and Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff to develop a land border identification card that will satisfy the requirements of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

On March 13<sup>th</sup> the Senate passed S. 1, the 9/11 Commission Bill of 2007, to implement many of the commission's recommendations. The bill also included several provisions that promise to make the U.S. a more welcoming nation to international visitors. The bill would create "model ports" at the top 20 international inbound airports in the U.S. to focus on improving efficiencies when processing international travelers as they enter the country and authorizing the DHS Customs and Border Protection Service to hire 200 more officers at those airports.

In the House of Representatives, H.R. 1061, the Protecting American Commerce and Travel Act of 2007, introduced by Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY) would soften the WHTI land border ID requirement by allowing drivers licenses for identification and exempting U.S. and Canadian children under the age of 16. The bill would also require the DHS and State to implement a public information campaign regarding WHTI.

The DHS now says it will exempt youth 15 and under from the identification requirement and those aged 16, 17 and 18 would not be required to document identification if accompanied by an adult. Also, the DHS and the State of Washington on March 23<sup>rd</sup> signed a Memorandum of Understanding to launch a pilot program that will enhance the security of state driver's licenses and "potentially serve as an acceptable alternative document for crossing the United States' land and sea borders."

***ISSUE:*** Whether the U.S. will either delay the now scheduled January, 2008, deadline for sea and land travelers and/or accept a land border identification card that would be less costly and more convenient to obtain than passports.

***IMPORT:*** Many western states host large numbers of Canadian visitors, including seasonal, longer stay Canadian visitors to the western sunbelt states during the winter months, who may be discouraged from traveling to the U.S. because of WHTI identification requirements.

***STATUS & OUTLOOK:*** H.R. 106 and S. 1 are now before Congress and, with tourism industry support, has reasonable prospects for passage.

***WSTPC POSITION:*** The WSTPC supports S. 1 and H.R. 1061.