

The State Department continues to experience significant delays in processing passport applications, with waiting periods exceeding 12 weeks. On June 8, 2007, under significant pressure from Congress, the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security temporarily waived a requirement that U.S. citizens re-entering the country from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda have passports as proof of identity.

Under the temporary waiver, which will end on September 30, 2007, U.S. citizens traveling to these destinations can re-enter the United States with a government-issued photo identification (such as a driver's license) and documentation from the U.S. State Department showing they have applied for a passport.

IMPORTANT NOTE: THIS ANNOUNCEMENT DOES NOT WAIVE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR ENTRY INTO FOREIGN COUNTRIES. YOUR DESTINATION COUNTRY MAY REQUIRE ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION FOR ENTRY THE STATE DEPARTMENT CAN ONLY WAIVE REQUIRMENTS FOR EXIT FROM AND ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES.

While this development will help facilitate the travel plans of individuals traveling to Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda, travelers to other foreign destinations may still face significant wait times for new passports. Therefore, passport applicants should plan accordingly by submitting applications at least four months in advance of anticipated travel dates. (For residents of the Fourth Congressional District whose departure date is within two weeks and who have applied for but not yet received a passport, please contact my staff in Raleigh, Durham or Chapel Hill. We may be able to help you through the State Department's congressional passport inquiry line. Please see my office contact information at the bottom of the page.)

The current delays are associated with a surge in passport applications related to the implementation of the first phase of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). WHTI, a Department of Homeland Security program, requires passports as proof of identity for anyone entering the United States from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda. The passport requirement was initiated for air travelers in early 2007, with a planned expansion to land and sea ports of entry in 2008 or 2009.

There is simply no excuse for the Department's failure to anticipate the increased demand for

passports stimulated by implementation of WHTI. [I have written to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) calling for major changes in the Department's passport application program to more efficiently handle the increased demand for passports.

As the Chairman of the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, I also recently included instructions in the Fiscal Year 2008 Homeland Security Appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security to closely coordinate with the Department of State to more adequately plan and prepare for the next phase of WHTI implementation to ensure that it does not create the kind of backlogs we are experiencing today. That bill is expected to reach the House floor next week.

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