

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 1, 2011

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on State, Foreign Operations
S-128, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on State, Foreign Operations
S-128, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on State, Foreign Operations
HT-2, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on State, Foreign Operations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairs Leahy and Granger and Ranking Members Graham and Lowey,

As you finalize the Fiscal Year 2012 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill, we urge you to include provisions recommended by the Senate Committee on Appropriations that would implement two pilot programs designed to bolster our nation's visa services for business and leisure travelers to the United States. These provisions have generated strong bipartisan support in Congress, and they have the backing of a broad coalition of private, public and non-profit sector groups that understand the economic and national security value of modernizing our visa systems.

Inbound international travel, as you may know, supports 1.8 million jobs in the United States and generates \$134 billion in direct travel spending—making it the country's top industry export sector. These impressive numbers mask a worrying trend, however. In the last decade, the U.S. has seen its historic share of the overseas travel market decline relative to other countries. Had the U.S. maintained its 17 percent share of the global travel market, our country would have welcomed 78 million more travelers between 2000 and 2010, and those travelers would have added \$606 million to the nation's economy, supporting more than 467,000 U.S. jobs annually.

At a time of stubbornly high unemployment rates, job creation is a national priority, and empowering our travel sector offers one of the most immediate and meaningful means to boosting our economy. Unfortunately, U.S. visa procedures too often constitute a self-imposed barrier limiting the growth in inbound international travel. Insufficient resources and inadequate management practices have created a confusing and cumbersome U.S. visa system that dissuades potential visitors who choose to vacation and to conduct business elsewhere in order to avoid overly bureaucratic and slow visa processes.

Section 7079 of the Senate's Fiscal Year 2012 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill includes language that would help the United States regain its share of the global travel market, and most importantly, create jobs and improve our economy, two issues of major priority for Members of the 112th Congress. While much more needs to be done to improve our nation's visa services for business and leisure travelers to the United States, the provisions contained in this legislation signify critical steps towards reforming these policies and procedures. Most notably, it requires the Secretary of State to hire a sufficient number of consular officers in the People's Republic of China, Brazil, and India to meet the State Department's standard of interviewing all tourist visa applicants within 30 days. It also requires the Secretary to forecast visa demand in these countries over the next five years, and to conduct a risk and benefit analysis regarding the extension of the expiration period for leisure and

business visas for Chinese citizens. Finally, it allows the Secretary of State to develop and conduct a pilot program for processing visas using secure remote videoconferencing technology.

These provisions in no way compromise U.S. national security and do not require new appropriated dollars, but they do promise to stimulate our nation's economy almost immediately. We wholeheartedly support their inclusion in a final appropriations package. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

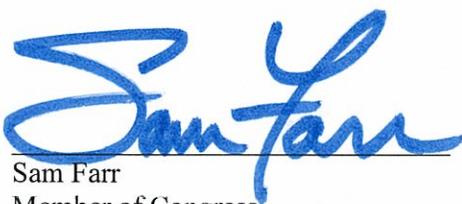
Sincerely,



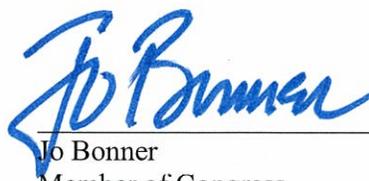
Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



Joe Heck, D.O.
Member of Congress



Sam Farr
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Congressional Travel & Tourism Caucus



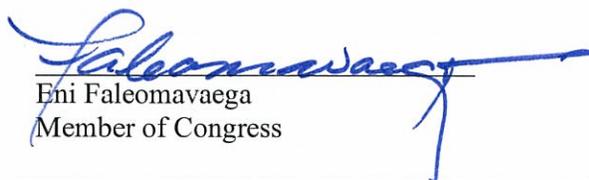
Jo Bonner
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Congressional Travel & Tourism Caucus



Madeleine Bordallo
Member of Congress



James Moran
Member of Congress



Eni Faleomavaega
Member of Congress



Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress



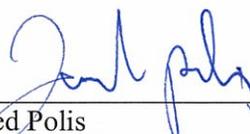
Mazie Hirono
Member of Congress



William Keating
Member of Congress



Steven Palazzo
Member of Congress



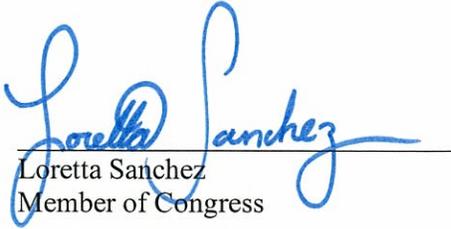
Jared Polis
Member of Congress



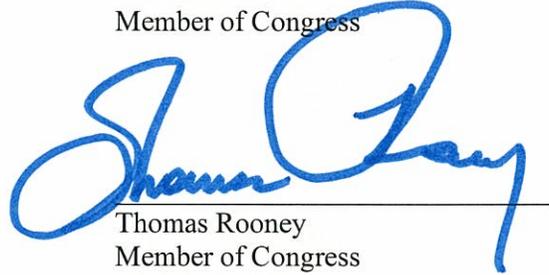
Mark Amodei
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Corrine Brown
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Loretta Sanchez
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Thomas Rooney
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Pete Sessions
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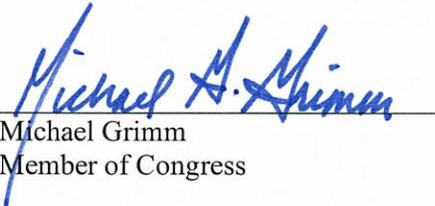
Allen West
Member of Congress



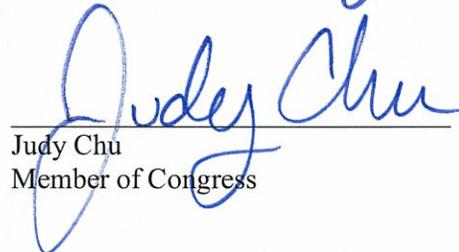
Joe Wilson
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Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress



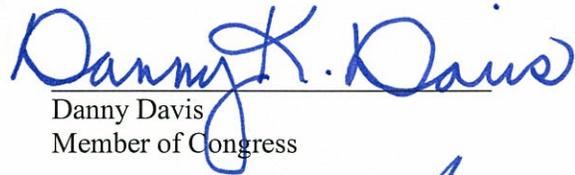
Michael Grimm
Member of Congress



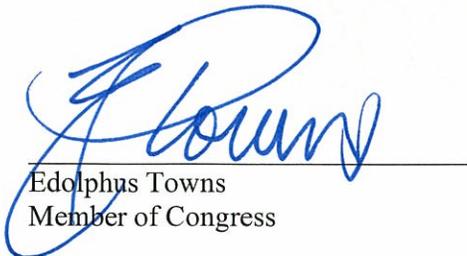
Judy Chu
Member of Congress



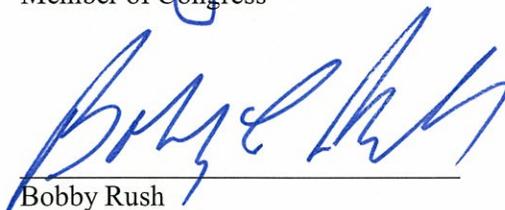
Shelley Berkley
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