



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
October 17, 2008

President Bush Discusses the Visa Waiver Program

Rose Garden

[Fact Sheet: Extending Travel Opportunities to Our Allies](#)

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[Presidential Remarks](#)

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11:13 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. (Applause.) Please be seated, thank you. Welcome to the White House. I'm pleased to stand with the representatives of seven countries -- the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and South Korea -- that have met the requirements to be admitted to the United States Visa Waiver Program. Soon the citizens of these nations will be able to travel to the United States for business or tourism without a visa. I congratulate these close friends and allies on this achievement, and I thank you for joining us here.

I also thank Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of the Homeland -- Department of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff for working hard to make sure this day has finally arrived. Appreciate other members of the administration here and members of the Diplomatic Corps.

All of the nations represented here today allow American citizens to travel to their countries visa-free. The United States has not accorded their citizens the same privilege. For years the leaders of these nations have explained to me how frustrating it is for their citizens to wait in lines and pay visa fees to take a vacation or make a business trip or visit their families here in the United States. These close friends of America told me that it was unfair that their people had to jump through bureaucratic hoops that other allies can walk around.



I told them I agree with them. I also told them that in the world after September 11th, we could only expand travel opportunities if we increased security measures at the same time. So nearly two years ago, my administration asked Congress to modernize our Visa Waiver Program in a way that accomplished both of these goals. I appreciate the bipartisan support this initiative has received on Capitol Hill. My administration worked with Congress to pass a law allowing us to admit new countries to the Visa Waiver Program. These countries agree to share information about threats to our people. They also agree that their citizens use a new system that requires travelers to register online ahead of their visits to the United States. These citizens will travel to the United States only if they have tamper-proof biometric passports. I'm grateful to the dedicated officers from the United States and our allies who worked hard to complete the agreements to meet these new requirements.

Because of this good work, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff has notified our Congress that the administration intends to use its new authority to admit seven countries into the Visa Waiver Program. In about a month, we will be proud to extend to citizens of these seven countries the privilege of visa-free travel.

Today's announcement signifies a new chapter in the relationship between the United States and your nations. It is a testament to the strong bonds of friendship that unite our people.

This is a significant achievement, but it is only the start. A number of America's other close friends are participating in a process called the "visa waiver road map" that is helping them qualify for the Visa Waiver Program. I welcome the ambassadors from these "road map" countries -- Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Poland, and Romania. We thank you for coming today. We thank you for your friendship. And we look forward to the day when your countries join the Visa Waiver Program.

I believe the best foreign policy for America is one that lets people from other countries get to know this country firsthand. Throughout our history, some of the strongest advocates of freedom have been those who came to America and saw the blessings of liberty with their own eyes. Extending this opportunity to some of our closest allies deepens our friendship and makes all our countries safer. I'm grateful to all the countries here for seeking to strengthen the ties between our citizens. I look forward to even stronger partnerships in the years ahead.

Thank you for coming. (Applause.)

END 11:17 A.M. EDT

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Fact Sheet: Extending Travel Opportunities to Our Allies

President Bush Announces Seven Countries Have Met The Requirements To Enter U.S. Visa Waiver Program Under 9/11 Commission Law

[President Bush Discusses the Visa Waiver Program](#) [White House News](#)

Today, President Bush hosted representatives from seven nations that have met the criteria for admission into the United States' Visa Waiver Program (VWP) and six nations on track to be admitted. In about a month, the citizens of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and South Korea will be able to travel to the United States for business or tourism for up to 90 days without a visa. So-called "roadmap" countries, which are on track to qualify for VWP admission, at today's event were Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Poland, and Romania.

- **The 13 countries represented at today's event are close friends and allies whose leaders told the President that their citizens believed it unfair that they had to wait in line and pay for visas to travel to the United States when other allies are allowed to travel visa-free.** The President agreed while pointing out that in the post-9/11 world, expanding visa-free travel would be possible only as travel security measures are strengthened.
- **Today's announcement represents a milestone in the long effort by the Administration to modernize the VWP.** During a November 2006 visit to Estonia, the President announced that he would work with Congress to expand opportunities for visa-free travel as we strengthen the security of the VWP. The President appreciates the bipartisan support this initiative received on Capitol Hill. As part of the "Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007," Congress acted to give the Administration greater flexibility to admit new countries into the VWP provided that they agree to a number of new security enhancements, notably to share information about threats to our people. The law also requires foreign citizens who want to travel under VWP to register through a new online program that screens for potential security threats.

Extending Travel Opportunities To Some Of Our Closest Allies Deepens Our Friendship And Makes All Our Countries Safer

- **The VWP currently allows the citizens of 27 countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business without obtaining a visa.** Nationals participating in the VWP must travel only for business, pleasure, or transit; stay in the United States for 90 days or less; and, if arriving by sea or air, hold a valid ticket for return or onward travel and enter the United States aboard an air or sea carrier designated as a participant in the VWP.
- **President Bush believes the best foreign policy for America is one that lets visitors get to know this great country firsthand.** Throughout history, some of the strongest advocates of freedom have been those who came to America and saw the blessings of liberty with their own eyes. The President is grateful to these 13 countries for seeking to strengthen ties between our citizens and looks forward to an even stronger partnership in the years ahead.

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