

Statement on Signing the Visa Waiver Permanent Program Act *October 30, 2000*

Today I have signed into law H.R. 3767, the Visa Waiver Permanent Program Act. This Act will, among other things, make permanent a highly successful pilot program that for the past twelve years has permitted nationals of many countries to enter the United States for business and tourism without the necessity of first obtaining a U.S. visa, so long as U.S. citizens are granted similar privileges in their countries. By facilitating travel to the United States in this manner, the Visa Waiver Program is helping to generate billions of dollars in tourist and business revenues for U.S. companies. At the same time, it is fostering good will for the United States and an understanding of who we are as a people by giving to millions of citizens from participating countries an increased opportunity to visit our many natural wonders as well as the places that are vital to our national heritage.

The Visa Waiver Program is good for government, too. Because visitors from participating countries do not have to obtain visas, the Department of State is able to reallocate scarce resources from issuing routine visas in low-risk waiver countries to doing more for American citizens and combating fraud in high-risk countries. Further, the legislation contains a provision that removes a potential roadblock to continued participation in the program of many countries by recognizing, for purposes of reciprocity, common border areas composed of several states.

H.R. 3767 establishes new requirements that will strengthen the existing Visa Waiver Program. For example, it contains provisions to enhance our security by requiring that within specified time frames all foreign nationals entering the United States under the program have machine-readable passports. Those passports are less susceptible to fraud and can more readily assist the Immigration and Naturalization Service to track the entry and timely departure of foreign nationals. Further, H.R. 3767 requires the Attorney General, in consultation with the

Secretary of State, prior to admitting a new country into the Visa Waiver Program, to consider the effect of the country's admission on the law enforcement and security interests of the United States. It also will require continual monitoring of those considerations with respect to all countries in the program. Finally, H.R. 3767 provides an emergency procedure for termination of a country's participation. This occurs when the Attorney General, in consultation with the Secretary of State, determines that because of events in that country, such as a severe breakdown of law and order or economic collapse, the continued participation of that country would pose a threat to our law enforcement or security interests.

In addition to these provisions of the Visa Waiver Program, this Act also includes immigration-related provisions that will further the Administration's objective of promoting the rapid and pro-competitive privatization of the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT), a goal widely shared by INTELSAT member countries. By ensuring that the immigrant status of the current employees of this intergovernmental entity will not be adversely affected, the United States is affirming its commitment to a smooth privatization and expressing its desire to welcome a pro-competitively privatized INTELSAT as a valued U.S. corporate citizen.

In its pilot state, the Visa Waiver Program has been a great success. Now, as a result of this legislation, it not only will be a better program, but it will become a permanent part of our Nation's immigration system.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
October 30, 2000.

NOTE: H.R. 3767, approved October 30, was assigned Public Law No. 106-396.