

United States Senate

December 17, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

We write in support of certifying Israel as an eligible country for participation in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), which permits citizens from participating countries to travel to the U.S. for business or tourism for stays of up to 90 days without first obtaining a visa from a U.S. Department of State (DOS) officer at a consulate abroad. We believe that adding Israel to the list of eligible countries would achieve the two explicit missions of the VWP program: to enhance national security and to boost the U.S. travel and tourism sector.

Israel – our closest ally in the Middle East – is a perfect candidate for the Visa Waiver program. Under the VWP, countries must issue electronic passports, report information on all lost and stolen passports to the U.S. through the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), and share information on travelers who may pose a terrorist or criminal threat¹. Were Israel to enter the VWP, these measures would improve law enforcement cooperation and counterterrorism collaboration between the U.S. and Israel, which would deepen our relationship with a key ally and trading partner. Israel is also an economically prosperous country that is a major U.S. security partner, presenting a high-volume, low-risk opportunity to add to the program.

Adding Israel to the VWP will also directly support tourism to the United States. One of the most significant security criteria recently added to the VWP was the requirement of preclearance through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), which is administered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). ESTA checks the traveler's information against relevant law enforcement and security databases and determines eligibility for travel under the VWP. Also, travelers who use ESTA must pay a fee, which is used to directly support travel and tourism to the U.S. ESTA fees, collected from every VWP traveler, are the primary source of funding for Brand USA, the nation's public-private partnership dedicated to increasing international visitation to the U.S. through international travel promotion. As such, increasing the number of applications through ESTA by adding Israel to the VWP will directly support tourism and travel to the U.S, which is our nation's number one service export, generating a trade surplus of \$59 billion in 2019.² Moreover, new Israeli travelers to the U.S. will invest in our local businesses – from hotels and restaurants to live events and attractions.

Travel and tourism related industries drive job creation and economic growth in states across America, from Nevada to Florida and everywhere in between, where these industries and the

¹ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32221>

² https://wwwustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/VWP-Qualified-Countries_final.pdf

workers they employ are absolutely essential to states' prosperity. In fiscal year 2019, 22.9 million nonimmigrant visitors, arriving through the VWP, constituted nearly one-third of all visitor admissions to the U.S.³ According to U.S. Travel Association, adding Israel to the VWP could add over 450,000 visitors from Israel to the U.S. over a three-year period, which is estimated to generate \$3.6 billion in economic output and support approximately 6,000 American jobs.⁴

The COVID-19 global pandemic severely impacted the American travel and tourism industry and its workforce, as travel restrictions prevented overseas visitors from coming to the U.S. The U.S. Travel Association estimates that for every 35 overseas travelers who decide to visit the U.S., an additional American job is created.⁵ The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) reports that 19.4 million international travelers visited the United States in 2020, down 75% from 79.4 million nonimmigrant visitors in 2019.⁶ As the United States attempts to continue its economy recovery, now is the time to invest in our travel and tourism businesses and workers by encouraging visitation to the U.S., especially from low-risk, high-volume countries like Israel.

We urge DOS to formally nominate Israel for the VWP and DHS to use its authority to certify Israel as an eligible country for participation in the program. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator

³ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46300>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/VWP-Qualified-Countries_final.pdf

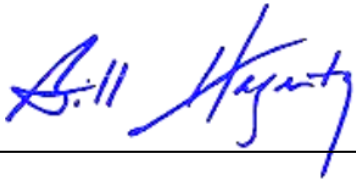
⁶ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46300>



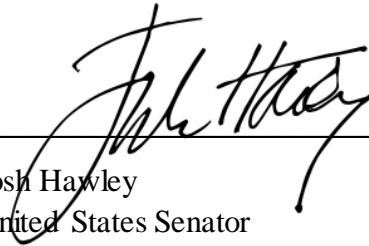
Mike Braun
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Bill Hagerty
United States Senator



Josh Hawley
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
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John Hickenlooper
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