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REFUGEES, BORDER SECURITY,
AND INTERNATIONAL LAW



J. Randy Forbes
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4th District, Virginia

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Chairman Tom Lantos
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
B360 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lantos and Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen:

As you know, following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, considerable concern was raised regarding a lack of documentation required for entry into the United States and the resulting vulnerability to further terrorist attack this lack of documentation caused. The report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (also known as the 9/11 Commission) maintained that border security was not considered a national security matter prior to September 11 and made several recommendations that underscored the urgency of implementing legislative provisions on border security. Congress enacted some of these recommendations several years ago, partially in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. One of the changes implemented by this law required that U.S. citizens, traveling by air between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda be required to present a valid passport as of January 23, 2007.

As these more stringent passport policies have gone into effect, however, serious concerns have risen about the ability of the Department of State to meet the needs of U.S. citizens applying for new passports. In the last several months, my office has been inundated with requests for assistance from constituents who are unable to receive a response from the Department of State regarding the status of their passport application. The majority of these constituents have followed the procedures as outlined by the Department of State and have allowed months for the processing of their applications. Now, some of them within days of their scheduled departure for business, personal, or family travel find themselves still without the necessary passport and facing the forfeiture of expensive travel that will not allow for alterations or refunds.

Equally concerning is the lack of response that these constituents and my staff have been able to elicit from Passport Agencies. My staff has devoted extraordinary amounts of time on behalf of constituents attempting to contact Passport Agencies by phone, fax, and email, often continuing their attempts after regular working hours and on weekends. More often than not, my staff is unsuccessful in obtaining a representative who can help them and subsequently have not been able to assist constituents.

As my constituents and my staff struggle to navigate these serious passport processing delays, I understand the Department of State has implemented a waiver period regarding this provision until the

backlog of passport processing is addressed. Nevertheless, I respectfully request that the House Committee on Foreign Affairs schedule a hearing to evaluate the Department of State's implementation plan for increased passport processing, to assess the current backlog of passport applications both in numbers and in processing time, and to ascertain what additional resources, systems and staff are required to address passport processing delays.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. With kind personal regards, I am

Yours truly,



J. Randy Forbes
Members of Congress