

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

New Travel Requirements Now in Effect

As the spring travel season is getting underway and you are starting to plan your summer vacation, it is important to remember that new travel requirements are now in effect for United States citizens returning from any part of the Western Hemisphere.

Beginning February 1, 2008, all U.S. citizens returning to the United States by land and sea are now required to present proof of citizenship at U.S. ports of entry.

The new travel requirement, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), was mandated by Congress in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 to strengthen border

security and facilitate entry into the United States for citizens and legitimate international visitors.

The requirements have been implemented in two phases. The first, which went into effect last year, requires all U.S. citizens, including children, traveling by air between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda to present a valid passport, Air NEXUS card, or U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Document, or an Alien Registration Card, Form I-551, if applicable, in order to return to the United States.

The second phase, which was implemented earlier this month, requires ALL persons, including U.S. citizens, traveling between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda by land or sea (including ferries), to present a valid passport or a government-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license, plus proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate.

The new passport requirement does NOT apply to U.S. citizens traveling to or returning directly from a U.S. territory. U.S. citizens returning directly from a U.S. territory are not considered to have left the United States.

At a later date – which has not yet been determined – the full requirements of the land and sea phase will be implemented requiring U.S. citizens to present a U.S. passport; or U.S. passport card; or NEXUS card; or U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Document, or an Alien Registration Card, Form I-551, if applicable, in order to return to the United States via land or sea.

Complete information on how to apply for a passport is available at the Consular Affairs website, <http://travel.state.gov/>.

Once you have applied for your passport, you can monitor the status of your passport application on the Department of State's website <http://travel.state.gov/passport> and within one week of

applying, you are able to track the progress of your application.

If it is within two weeks of your departure date, and the website does not indicate your passport is completed, you should call the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) toll-free at 877-487-2778 for assistance in arranging to have your passport ready in time for your trip.

Fortunately, it appears that the passport backlog at the State Department has been reduced. The State Department now reports that passport processing times are back to their normal range of four to six weeks. Keep in mind as travel season is getting underway, there is a higher demand for passports this time of year, and processing times may once again increase.

My office will continue to work diligently to help those of you who have applied for expedited passports, but it is important that you allow plenty of time, at least 10 to 12 weeks, in order to make the necessary arrangements so you won't have to delay that important business trip or well-deserved vacation.

Mobile Cruise Port Named Port of the Year

Speaking of travel, there is even more good news to report related to south Alabama. Carnival Cruise Line recently named Mobile's cruise terminal the Port of the Year - the top national customer service award.

Based on customer comment cards, the terminal and staff of Mobile's cruise port were recognized for their outstanding service throughout the entire cruising experience – from embarkation through to disembarkation.

The Holiday cruise ship has become a familiar fixture at our port over the past four years. This award is an even more impressive distinction for Mobile when you consider Carnival Cruise lines has terminals throughout the country – from Miami to Los Angeles to Honolulu.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

For release the week of Monday, February 25, 2008. For more information please contact Mike Lewis at (202)225-4931.