



The United States Conference of Mayors

1620 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone (202) 293-7330 • Fax (202) 293-2352
E-mail: info@usmayors.org URL: usmayors.org

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Contact: Elena Temple
202-309-4906/etemple@usmayors.org
Carlos Vogel
202-257-9797/cvogel@usmayors.org
Lina Garcia
202-341-6113/lgarcia@usmayors.org

THE NATION'S MAYORS WELCOME VISA WAIVER PROGRAM EXPANSION

Washington, D.C. – On behalf of the nation's mayors, U.S. Conference of Mayors President Miami Mayor Manny Diaz today applauded the Administration's recent expansion of the Visa Waiver Program. Mayors understand that travel/tourism are driving economic forces for many America cities, with travel and tourism contributing \$740 billion in direct expenditures to the nation's economy and supporting millions of jobs.

Just this month, the mayors held a Forum on Tourism and the Arts intended to challenge the next Presidential Administration to invest more in travel/tourism to spur economic growth in America's cities and metropolitan areas, which are the economic engines of the nation accounting for 86 percent of the Gross Domestic Product and where over 85% of people in the country live.

"For too long, we have dealt with these issues in a piecemeal fashion and have not addressed the needs of these industries in a comprehensive manner," said USCM President Diaz, who has also called for visa waivers for countries in the Western Hemisphere.

"The nation's mayors are pleased that President Bush has expanded the visa waiver program to seven more counties. Such a move will have a great economic impact on our cities and country. We will be urging the new President to expand the program further, especially to Western Hemisphere countries that currently have no visa waiver program with the United States," Diaz added.

The mayors also called for expansion of the Visa Waiver Program at their annual gathering in Miami this past June.

Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann, who is the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Tourism, Arts, Parks, Education and Sports Committee, has long pushed for a travel policy that would ease travel restrictions and make it easier for visitors from allied countries to visit Hawaii and the mainland.

"The future of the world is in the Asia Pacific, so it only stands to reason that granting visa waivers for more of these countries will benefit the U.S. and Hawaii," Hannemann has said. "Currently, only 4 out of the 27 countries that have visa-waiver status are in the Asia Pacific region, so the addition of South Korea is a huge gain."

Recommendations from the mayors' Arts/Travel and Tourism forum will be presented to the next President of the United States during the critical first 100 days of the new administration toward the creation of a metro/national/urban agenda.

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