

December 22, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As you know, on November 8, 2021, the Administration implemented a global vaccine and testing regime for all inbound international air travelers. These new entry requirements are a critical step in our nation's economic recovery especially in the travel and tourism industry. We respectfully urge you to take all necessary steps to restore visa processing operations, reduce the backlog of appointments, and lower visa wait-times as soon as possible.

As of October 2021, approximately 60% of U.S. embassies and consulates were partially or completely closed for visa processing, with just 95 of 237 visa processing sites fully operational. However, even for the visa processing sites that were open, average wait-times for an appointment had skyrocketed to more than 6 months (192 days) in August—with many sites exceeding that average, including Sao Paulo, Brazil (365 days) and Sydney, Australia (199 days).¹

Limited visa processing capacity and extended wait-times are a legacy of measures taken in the early days of the pandemic that are no longer appropriate or necessary as testing and vaccines become more widely available. Furthermore, they disrupt the reopening of American businesses. According to the U.S. Travel Association, international visitor spending in the U.S. dropped by 76% in 2020, leading to the loss of \$141 billion and 1.1 million American jobs. As international and domestic travel begin to recover, many travel businesses rely on H-2B and J1 visas to meet short-term and seasonal workforce demands that cannot otherwise be filled. With such a significant portion of U.S. visa processing sites fully or partially closed, travel businesses will not have the international visitors or the temporary workers they need to generate a speedy and robust recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we look to your leadership to help the country regain its footing, we kindly ask that you consider taking the following recommendations developed by the U.S. Travel Association to restore and improve visa processing:

- (1) Create a plan to fully restore U.S. visa processing operations at U.S. embassies and consulates as soon as possible, including by publicly identifying the statistical benchmarks used to determine when to restart visa processing operations.
- (2) Develop a pilot program for the use of videoconferencing technology in visa interviews with low risk, returning visa applicants and visa applicants with urgent or time sensitive

¹ According to an analysis of State Department data by the U.S. Travel Association.

travel. The pilot should be ready for implementation as soon as possible. Videoconferencing technology has advanced greatly in recent years and can now adequately serve both the security and operational needs of the government, while reducing the health risks associated with in-person appointments.

- (3) Prioritize visa processing resources to the embassies and consulates that have a high demand for visas or facilitate a high amount of travel exports (through B1/B2 visas), like Brazil and Australia.
- (4) Develop new ways to make the visa process more efficient for medium-to-large group travelers.

These steps are needed to help reunite families and loved ones, restart student and cultural exchanges, increase international business and leisure travel, strengthen our global leadership, and accelerate our nation's economic recovery. We ask that these recommendations are given full and fair consideration, within applicable laws, rules and regulations. We stand ready to help you in whatever way we can and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Peter Meijer
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



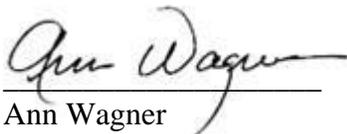
Gus M. Bilirakis
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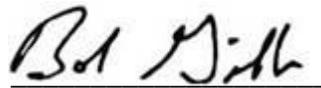
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Cindy Axne
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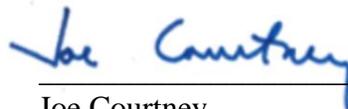
Charlie Crist
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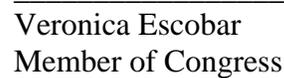
Raja Krishnamoorthi
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Susan Wild
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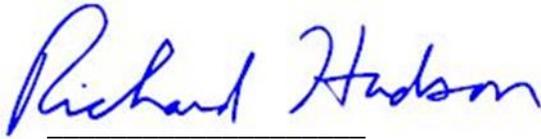
Veronica Escobar
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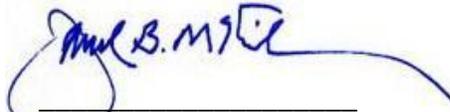
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David B. McKinley P.E.
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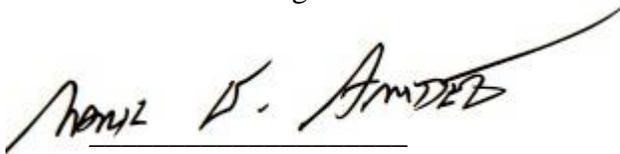
Mike Levin
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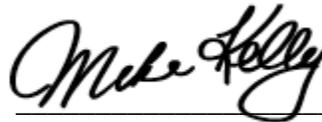
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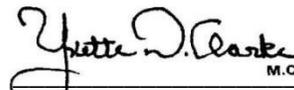
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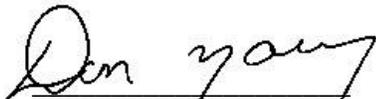
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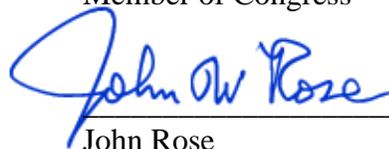
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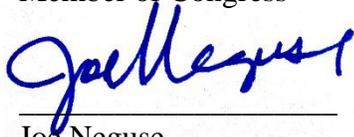
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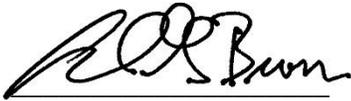
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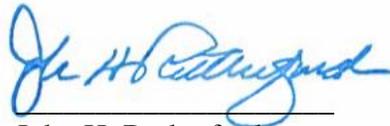
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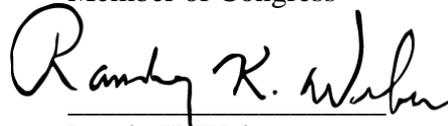
Maria Salazar
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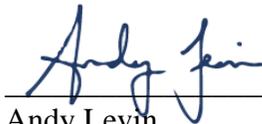
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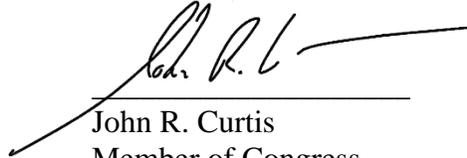


Andy Levin
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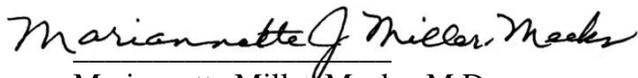
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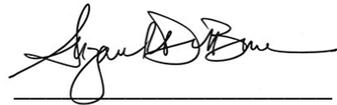
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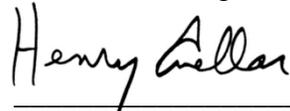
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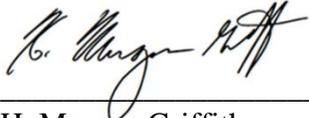
Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress



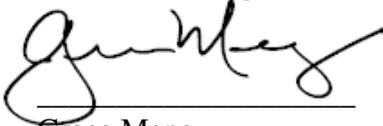
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Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



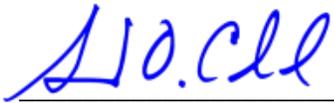
H. Morgan Griffith
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Grace Meng
Member of Congress



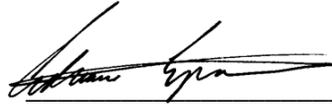
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Salud Carbajal
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Linda Sanchez
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Adriano Espaillat
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Tom Reed
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Mike Bost
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