

DAVID PRICE  
4TH DISTRICT  
NORTH CAROLINA



2162 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-1784

5400 TRINITY ROAD, SUITE 205  
RALEIGH, NC 27607-3815  
(919) 859-5999

88 VILCOM CENTER, SUITE 140  
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27514-1660  
(919) 967-7924

N.C. MUTUAL PLAZA  
411 WEST CHAPEL HILL STREET  
DURHAM, NC 27701-3642  
(919) 688-3004

[www.price.house.gov](http://www.price.house.gov)

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
CHAIR, HOMELAND SECURITY  
COMMERCE, JUSTICE AND SCIENCE  
TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND  
URBAN DEVELOPMENT

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

June 8, 2007

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice  
Secretary of State  
2291 C Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Secretary Rice:

I am writing to make sure that you are personally aware of the significant delays in passport processing at the State Department and to urge you to take immediate action to remedy the situation.

In the last month, my office has experienced an unprecedented increase in the number of constituent requests for assistance with passport applications. These calls for assistance are the result of delays at the Department that are impeding the timely processing of passport applications.

As you know, effective January 23, 2007, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative required that US citizens traveling by air between the U. S. and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda have a valid passport. It appears that the Department was completely unprepared to handle the increased workload resulting from the new WHTI requirement. In my eighteen years in Congress, I have never witnessed such failure by a department to prepare for a known deadline.

The results of this failure are significant. Congressional district offices are overwhelmed by the number of people needing help. Employees of the Department are drowning in overtime and cannot take leave. US citizens are having either to cancel travel plans or expend further resources to visit a Special Issuance Agency. And worst of all, the Department's failure to manage the most basic of bureaucratic functions has undermined public trust in government.

In light of this situation, I have included language in the report accompanying the House version of the Fiscal Year 2008 Homeland Security Appropriations bill that urges the Homeland Security Department to "coordinate with the State Department to enable it to anticipate and plan for increased passport demand resulting from implementation of the (Western Hemisphere Travel) Initiative."

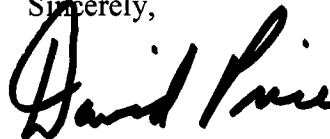
The recent decision by the Department of Homeland Security to temporarily suspend WHTI requirements for U.S. travelers who have applied for, but not yet received, a

passport should help alleviate the situation in the short term for some – but not all – travelers. In addition, I strongly recommend that the State Department’s action plan be immediately amended to include:

- Better communication between the Department of State and passport acceptance facilities to assure that passport agents understand and relay accurate timeframes. Many of my constituents have said “If only I had known when I was talking with the agent at the post office, I would have scheduled my trip later.”
- Accurate information on the Department’s website about processing times. The posted times did not change from 6-8 weeks to 10-12 weeks until May, and it now appears that 12-14 weeks is more accurate.
- Additional staff to meet current and future demand.
- A contact at each processing center for staff working on the Congressional Support Line to address unique problems outside the usual range of questions or a Support Line supervisor who has authority and access to someone in each processing center to address such problems and questions.
- A plan to reimburse applicants who pay passport fees for same day passports at a Special Issuance Agency after having already paid such fees as part of an initial standard application.
- Overnight mail delivery of all passports completed within five business days of intended departure.
- Real time communication between the processing centers and the Congressional Support Line concerning the time and method by which passports leave the centers, so that constituents do not travel to a Special Issuance Agency for same-day service only to find that their passports have been shipped the night before.
- A requirement that adequate staffing be in place prior to the implementation of the land and sea port components of WHTI.

I urge you to act on these recommendations and would appreciate any information you can provide about your efforts to improve the Department’s passport processing function.

Sincerely,



DAVID PRICE  
Member of Congress

DP:ra