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June 14, 2007

The Honorable Maura Harty
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Harty:

With an increase in the number of individuals and families making plans to travel abroad, I would like to express some concerns over recent problems many people in Eastern Washington have encountered with the Passport Agencies. Over the last few months, I have seen a nearly 94 percent increase in the number of people asking for help receiving their passports. While I understand there has been an increase in applications across the country, I am concerned as to what plan of action the agency is taking to correct the long waiting times and lack of timely service to those citizens requesting passports.

People are growing increasingly frustrated after waiting months for passports, some even having to cancel trips because they received no response or reply from the agency. Many have told me they are getting no answers from the Passport Agency or are getting a busy signal when calling. While I appreciate that the Congressional Status Check line has added further staff, my office still encounters busy signals, inability to get through on the line and full voicemails of staff from around the country.

At the same time, my office has received numerous complaints from frustrated people who cannot get through on the public lines with their questions and urgent problems. Some spend all day trying to reach a person who they can talk to about their application; many others decide to contact my office, hoping to make progress after they cannot get through to the agency itself. It is disheartening when my office and those throughout Eastern Washington are not receiving answers in a timely manner.

In several cases, travelers have contacted me within three or four days of their planned departure date without receiving a passport they had applied for 14 weeks earlier. When my office contacts the status check line to follow up, we are informed that a request will be sent to the appropriate passport center for the application to be upgraded and that another request can not be sent for 48 hours. Many had also paid the extra amount for

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expedited service and I applaud the recent decision to refund that amount for those that did not receive the expected service.

With passport requirements for land travel changing, we need solutions. Those seeking passports deserve better customer service and a level of comfort knowing the money they spend on their trips will not be money wasted. I would like to request information or plans that will assist us in facilitating the timely processing of passports for constituents who have applied in the time frame recommended by the passport agency. I appreciate you looking into these concerns and look forward to your response.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy McMorris Rodgers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Cathy McMorris Rodgers