

## State Department Suspends Passport Requirement for Locations in Western Hemisphere

(Washington, DC) - U.S. Representative Jason Altmire today commended the decision by the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security to temporarily lift passport requirements for U.S. citizens flying to Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.

Under this suspension, U.S. citizens traveling to these locations may temporarily enter or depart from the United States by air through September 30, 2007 with a government-issued photo identification and official proof of an application for a passport from the Department of State. Children under the age of 16 with a parent or legal guardian will be allowed to travel with an official proof of application. Proof of application can be obtained at <http://travel.state.gov>.

This accommodation for air travel by the Departments of State and Homeland Security comes after a surge in passport applications following new rules that require American citizens traveling to and from these locations to possess a valid U.S. passport. Due to expanded passport requirements under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, millions of passport requests have inundated passport centers nationwide and are waiting to be processed.

The Department of State warns that citizens who have not applied for passports will not be accommodated. This temporary suspension of passport requirements also does not affect entry requirements to other countries. Citizens traveling by car or cruise ship are not subject to the passport rule until January 2008.

"I am sure families across the country who have planned trips to these popular destinations are sharing a collective sigh of relief today in knowing that their summer plans won't be ruined or delayed because of trouble obtaining a passport," said Congressman Altmire. "Under these hastily implemented passport rules, people nationwide were facing the prospect of losing their money and long-awaited vacations, as well as business opportunities. I've received a number of requests for help in expediting applications locally and my staff has fortunately been able to help a lot of people get to where they need to go. But the reality is that most people call my office only after they've been waiting a very long time."

According to Congressman Altmire, a quarter of his constituent requests are passport related. Some individuals have been waiting upwards of four or five months to receive their passports, instead of the previous average of six to eight weeks.

"I hope that by delaying these passport requirements until September the administration will establish a process that is more efficient for approving passport applications," added Congressman Altmire. Congressman Altmire urges anyone with questions or concerns regarding passport applications to contact his office directly at (724) 378-0928.