

STATEMENT OF PETER GADIEL, PRESIDENT
9/11 FAMILIES FOR A SECURE AMERICA
For the
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND OVERSIGHT

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Thank you for the chance to speak on behalf of 9/11 Families for a Secure America, a group comprised exclusively of relatives of those murdered in the September 11th attacks and of victims of violent crimes committed by illegal aliens.

My members and I paid a terrible price for the open borders espoused by the travel industry, which profits from our government's failure to properly screen the millions of aliens who enter our country each year. So I will not mince words: the policies that the travel industry successfully lobbied for led directly to the admission of the terrorists of September 11 and thus to the murders of 3000 Americans.

The culture of 'open the doors and let everyone in' which, prior to 9/11 pervaded the State Department's Consular Service, was exposed in the 9/11 Commission staff monograph entitled *9/11 and Terrorist Travel*. This report showed how travel industry lobbying had instilled this open doors mindset in consular officers whose job was purportedly to screen potential visitors to the USA. It detailed how State Department officials were grossly negligent in creating the "Visa Express Program," the set of lax procedures which permitted the 9/11 terrorists to enter our country. And what term did the 9/11 staff use to describe Visa Express? They called it a "virtual Visa Waiver

Program.” And they made clear that this virtual Visa Waiver Program came about as a result of travel industry lobbying.¹

The 9/11 Commission monograph proved beyond doubt the need to tighten and enforce visa requirements for *all* foreign visitors, yet today the citizens of 27 countries can visit the US without first obtaining a visa. Among those countries are France and Great Britain, homelands of Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called 20th 9/11 hijacker, and shoe bomber Richard Reid. But 27 visa waiver countries is not enough for the travel industry which today lobbies for more countries to be exempted from the screening process which a visa application is supposed to entail. They continue to put profits over the safety of their fellow Americans.

It is fascinating that Mr. Freeman’s group on its website alleges that one of its primary motives is to increase foreign support for the War on Terror. It claims that promoting travel to America “may” result in nations viewing the US more favorably and that parallel with this improved view will come more support for our anti-terrorism efforts. But the website names Spain as a country where support for the war on terror has been declining and India as a country where it has been increasing. Yet Spain is in the Visa Waiver Program so its citizens don’t need visas to visit the US while India is not a Visa Waiver nation and its citizens must get them. Thus, Mr. Freeman’s own website suggests that looser standards for foreign visitors contribute to a *decline* in other nations’ support for the war on terror rather than the other way around.

Let us not be fooled by industry claims that amount to saying “golly, we’re only doing this only for the good of our country.” The real motive is profit. The GAO reaffirmed this fact last July in a report on the Visa Waiver Program saying “The program was

¹ 9/11 and Terrorist Travel Staff Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, Washington, D.C. 2004 PP 4-32, 43-44, 111, 119-120. See also U.S. Department of State, Office of Inspector General, Review of Nonimmigrant Visa Issuance Policy and Procedure, Memorandum Report ISP-I-03-26 December 2002.: Office of Inspector General stated that “Until the events of September 11, the visa process was seldom considered a major element of national security. This was so despite the fact that after the first attack on the World Trade Center [in 1993] Congress mandated” that visa applicants’ names be run through various terrorist watch lists.

designed to boost international business and tourism.” In other words, its purpose is to increase profits.²

The travel industry has not been content with undermining the process for issuing visas. Consider the following direct quotes from the 9/11 Commission Monograph resulting from interviews with customs agents at Ports of Entry: “The travel industry...airlines in particular—loudly insisted on efficient passenger processing. Most inspectors said that their supervisors would monitor processing times and “remind” inspectors to keep within 45 seconds for each passenger.... if processing times were not kept to a minimum, a supervisor would threaten to send the inspector back to training...immigration inspectors were graded on how fast airline passengers were processed... Driving this emphasis on speed was a 1990 congressional guideline that limited the total amount of time for a visitor to disembark from a plane and be processed through immigration inspection to 45 minutes, regardless of the number of passengers on the flight...The...effect of this guideline was that inspectors... had between 30 seconds and one minute to decide whether a visitor was admissible...”³

Lawrence Tisch, Chairman of both the giant Loew’s Hotel Corporation and of the Travel Business Roundtable states in the Roundtable’s website that increased profits is that group’s reason for being. But Mr. Tisch also resorts to the pretense that tourism is a solution to our problems saying that when people from other nations visit the US “they interact with the American people and that goes to dispel growing myths overseas.” It appears that Mr. Tisch doesn’t care that the open borders he helped to bring about led to an “interaction” of Mohammed Atta and 18 other terrorists on four aircraft on 9/11/01 which resulted in the murder of my son.

² GAO Report 06-854 July 2006: Border Security: Stronger Actions Needed to Assess and Mitigate Risks of the Visa Waiver Program

³ 9/11 Commission Monograph 9/11 and Terrorist Travel pp 135-136

The groups represented by the other two witnesses have boards of directors that are filled the heads of huge corporations, so powerful that officials of the State Department and many other Administration have promised support on this and other issues. According to a September 2006 issue of National Journal, Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez has become, in effect the travel industry's chief lobbyist. If only the average citizen of this country had such a powerful voice in this Administration.

Last July's GAO report listed many ways in which Visa Waiver substantially increases the threat of terrorism. Two examples:

Visa officers at US embassies have time to interview applicants, in their own language and they have country specific knowledge. But the Visa Waiver Program transfers the entire burden of screening visitors to inspectors at ports of entry who have less than a minute to make a decision, are probably unable to converse with the person before him in Urdu or Farsi, and have none of the other advantages available to American personnel stationed in the travelers' countries of origin. Putting the entire burden of screening on POE inspectors is system designed to fail with catastrophic results.

GAO report also noted stolen blank passports from Visa Waiver countries are used by aliens from non Visa Waiver nations to evade the visa requirement. It added that several unnamed Visa Waiver countries failed to report thefts of blank passports. In one case a theft of 300 blanks was not reported for 9 years after the theft. Thus it was impossible for the American officials to know that these passports were not perfectly legitimate. Nevertheless DHS permits these nations to remain in the Visa Waiver Program.⁴

GAO's list of the dangers is far too long for my oral testimony, but it is enough to say that many of these are inherent in the nature of the program and even if sufficient funds were guaranteed for the foreseeable future and even if the bureaucracies assigned to police the program were always highly motivated and competent (two questionable

⁴ Ibid.

propositions) the program would still present a danger to the American people. The threat can be summarized briefly in one phrase: Maussaoui and Richard Reid.

Earlier, I mentioned Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez's role as lobbyist for the tourist industry. He is perfectly suited to this Administration. Shortly after 9/11 Pres. Bush stood atop the ruins of the WTC. Because I have never received any remains of my son that is the only tomb my son will ever know, and Mr. Bush announced to America "I hear you." But since that time he has shamelessly and consistently refused to secure our borders in order to increase corporate profits. Members of Congress, you have the power to thwart wealthy corporate interests and act on behalf of the "little guy" who would like not to see a loved one go off to work in the morning only to see him or her die in the hell of a crashing airplane or burning skyscraper.

I close with the following thought: The first time I had the opportunity to speak for 9/11 families on Capital Hill I said that the main obstacles to securing our borders were the Congress and the White House, and I predicted that sooner or later the great mass of our citizens would come to understand this. I say with confidence that this process of recognition is now well advanced. So, if you expand the VWP, when a future Moussaoui or Shoe Bomber succeeds in committing mass murder, Americans will understand that he was allowed to enter the USA without proper screening because people in Congress voted to allow him to do so. How many members of Congress will want to face the voters having to admit that they cast a vote that brought this about?

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be heard.