

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C.

June 9, 2020

The Honorable Carl Risch
Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Risch,

Our members would like to commend the actions undertaken by the U.S. Department of State to repatriate American citizens stuck overseas during the coronavirus pandemic. These efforts resulted in the successful return of over 95,000 individuals to their loved ones on a total of 1,017 flights. Many of our constituents stranded in other countries would not have made it home if not for the Department of State's hard work.

With the exhaustive process of bringing Americans back to the U.S. complete, our members look forward to a resumption of day-to-day operations. It has come to our attention that the Bureau of Consular Affairs stopped processing all passport applications on March 19 due to COVID-19 concerns, resulting in a rapidly growing backlog of 1.6 million applications.

While we are in the midst of an unprecedented health crisis, government agencies must ensure that non-COVID-19 work is completed in a timely fashion to better prepare for an economic recovery once conditions improve. The department rightfully issues travel advisories to inform American citizens of conditions overseas, and international travel remains inadvisable for many individuals. However, a backlog of this magnitude is unsustainable and has very real implications for our economic recovery as parts of the country begin to reopen.

Constituents expressing frustrations with their passport applications have little recourse for updates. Our members would appreciate an update on how Congress can work with the department to better serve these individuals. Specifically, our members would like an update on the department's timeline and plan to eliminate this backlog, as well as when we can expect a channel for routine constituent services communication to be reestablished.

For many individuals, a passport not only serves as documentation to travel overseas, but also as a primary or secondary form of identification. Between the looming REAL-ID compliance deadline in 2021, and the need for documentation to vote in the November 2020 elections, there are pressing needs to address this situation now. We urge you to make passport renewals and applications a priority of the bureau, and while we appreciate recent reports of efforts to address this problem, we would still like further specificity from your office.

Once again, we appreciate the outstanding work by the department to respond to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic and look forward to a resumption of passport processing as an important step towards economic reopening.

Sincerely,



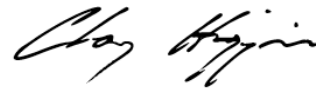
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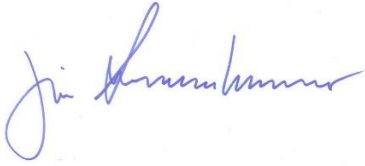
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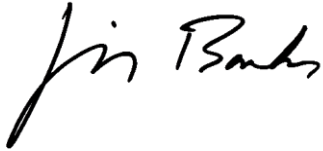
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