

(February 28, 2007) Congressman Lipinski Honored at Polish Embassy for Leadership on Visa Waiver

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Leadership on Visa Waiver Program Expansion

Washington, DC - Today, at an event held at the Embassy of Poland, Congressman Dan Lipinski was honored for his leadership in the effort to expand the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to Central Europe. Ambassador Janusz Reiter of Poland was joined by the Ambassadors from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Lithuania, as well as representatives from the Hungarian and Latvian Embassies, in thanking Congressman Lipinski for his work on this issue.

"We appreciate Congressman Lipinski's leadership in the expansion of the Visa Waiver Program," said Ambassador Reiter. "His efforts will benefit the nearly 10 million people of Polish descent living in America and will continue to strengthen the already close ties between Poland and the United States."

The Visa Waiver program allows people from 27 countries to visit America for travel or business purposes for up to 90 days without a visa. Each year, this program attracts 15 million visitors to the United States, allowing U.S. citizens the ability to visit with loved ones and generating up to \$15 billion for the U.S. economy. However, visitors from non-visa waiver countries, such as those of Central Europe, must go through the difficult and costly process of obtaining a visa to enter the United States.

"I have helped countless constituents whose family members had not been able to obtain travel visas to visit from Poland," said Lipinski. "These constituents simply wanted what many of us take for granted - the ability to have loved ones attend major family events such as weddings and baptisms. By expanding the Visa Waiver Program, we can reward some of our closest allies, increase tourism to Chicago, and make life easier for many Chicago-area residents."

Congressman Lipinski is the lead cosponsor of H.R. 561, the Secure Travel and Counterterrorism Partnership Act. This bill directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to permit probationary participation in the Visa waiver program to countries meeting certain security requirements that prevent illegal entry and overstays in the United States.

"By setting common standards and policies for participating countries, the VWP reduces illegal entry and unlawful presence in the United States while hindering travel by terrorists and transnational criminals," said Lipinski. "Expanding the number of countries participating in the VWP will increase the number of states meeting common security standards and allow the U.S. State Department to shift consular resources used to issue visas to other missions."

"Since being freed from Soviet control, the nations of Central Europe have made great economic and democratic strides," said Lipinski. "They have also been firm allies in fighting terrorism, having supplied troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States should be rewarding these nations, not burdening them with costly visa requirements."