

RELEASE IN FULL

THE PASSPORT CARD TRAVEL ENHANCEMENT ACT (S. 321)

As part of efforts to implement the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), the Department of State (State) developed the U.S. passport card as a cheaper, more portable alternative to the U.S. passport book in 2008 as required by P.L. 109-295. Over 1 million passport cards have been issued to date.

Applicants for a passport card complete the exact same application as applicants for a passport book (http://travel.state.gov/passport/ppt_card/ppt_card_3926.html), and those applications are adjudicated by State using "the exact same standards" (http://travel.state.gov/passport/ppt_card/ppt_card_3921.html).

Despite these similarities, State only allows U.S. nationals to use the passport card to enter U.S. land and sea ports-of-entry from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda. State does not allow the passport card to be used for any air travel despite the fact that, prior to 2007, rarely was any documentation required for U.S. citizens to travel by air between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and the Caribbean.

Therefore, the Passport Card Travel Enhancement amendment would require the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State to accept the passport card as a WHTI-compliant document for air travel between the U.S. and Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda. In today's economic climate, such steps are necessary to provide more, less expensive ways for U.S. citizens to comply with WHTI.

While the passport card is not a globally interoperable document that conforms to International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards, Senator Voinovich questions why the card needs to be a globally interoperable document in order for U.S. nationals to use it to fly within the Western Hemisphere to Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and the Caribbean since U.S. nationals generally didn't need any documentation to fly to those destinations prior to 2007 and even today, Canada, Mexico and Bermuda rarely require any documentation from U.S. citizens, much less ICAO compliant documentation. Further, he questions why the passport card needs to meet ICAO standards since DHS already accepts NEXUS cards, which do not meet ICAO standards, for air, land and sea travel between the U.S. and Canada (http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/trusted_traveler/nexus_prog/nexus.xml).

Additionally, Senator Voinovich does not believe allowing the passport card to be used for Western Hemisphere air travel would cause any more confusion than is already associated with WHTI and the multiple travel documents that have been deemed WHTI compliant for some or all entries, or than will result from the status quo, which allows the passport card to be used for some (land and sea) but not all (air) Western Hemisphere air travel;

Lastly, Senator Voinovich does not believe allowing passport cards to be used for limited air travel would increase the cost of providing emergency citizen services abroad because prior to 2007, rarely was any documentation needed to travel to Mexico, Canada, Bermuda and the Caribbean, and the cost of emergency citizen services abroad at that time was not an issue, and furthermore, State does not track the cost of such services by country, so at present, there is no way to track increased costs.

In its comments to State's Proposed Rule regarding the passport card, the Canadian Government suggested allowing the passport card to be used for air travel between Canada and the U.S. Additionally, at the 2008 U.S.-Canada Inter-Parliamentary Group meeting, a resolution was passed declaring that passport cards should be valid for air travel between Canada and the United States.

S. 321 is cosponsored by Senators Klobuchar, Collins, Tester, Murkowski and Bingaman and is supported by the Air Transport Association, the U.S. Travel Association and the National Business Travel Association.