

Strengthening the Security of the Visa Waiver Program

Background on the Visa Waiver Program

- The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) was created in 1986 and allows nationals from participating countries to travel to the U.S. for up to 90 days for business or tourism without obtaining a U.S. visa, by presenting a valid passport, and by meeting certain other requirements.
- Currently, there are 38 countries that participate in the VWP, ranging from Australia to the United Kingdom.
- To be designated as a VWP country, the country must participate in security reviews every other year and meet several key conditions, such as offering reciprocal visa-free travel for U.S. citizens and meeting a host of information-sharing and security requirements.
- The VWP is a privilege. Citizens of most countries have to get a visa to travel to the United States, just like U.S. citizens have to do when they visit most countries around the world.
- Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled their war-torn country and ISIS terrorists and sympathizers have made clear that they plan to infiltrate Western countries through the refugee system.
- And this threat from ISIS is real. One of the terrorists responsible for the horrific attacks in Paris entered Europe by posing as a Syrian refugee.
- As thousands of Syrian refugees are set to be resettled in European countries – most of which participate in the VWP – this has raised legitimate concerns that terrorists could come to the United States through this fast-track system.

Visa Waiver Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015

- To address these concerns, House Republicans have introduced the Visa Waiver Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015 to strengthen the security of the VWP so that we protect national security and enhance Americans' safety.
- This bill takes reasonable, commonsense steps to protect national security. It requires dual nationals and individuals who have traveled since March 1, 2011 to certain countries of concern and State Sponsors of Terrorism – including Syria, Iraq, and Iran – to obtain a visa before coming to the United States.
- This simply means that these folks will have to apply for a visa just like citizens of most nations already have to do in order to come to the United States.
- Additionally, the bill allows the Secretary of State to designate additional countries of concern so that travelers to these countries and those who hold dual citizenship in these countries also have to obtain visas before coming to the United States. For example, the Secretary could use this authority if he/she determines that the country has a significant presence of a foreign terrorist organization or that the country is a safe haven for terrorists.
- The bill contains a number of other security enhancements to the VWP to prevent the program from being used as a fast-track for terrorists to enter the United States.

