



Secure Borders and Open Doors in the Information Age

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Dean Acheson Auditorium

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Rice-Chertoff Joint Vision: Secure Borders and Open Doors in the Information Age

(10:35 a.m. EST)

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much and welcome to the State Department and, of course, a very special welcome to Secretary of Homeland Security Mike Chertoff. Mike, welcome. I'd also like to recognize a number of other government officials who are here, but particularly the President's Assistant for Homeland Security, Fran Townsend, who's sitting in the front row here. (Applause.)



After taking office, Mike and I began working together to realize President Bush's vision for secure borders and open doors in the information age. We have done so with the help of many in this room and we're grateful to our many private partners who join us this morning, partners from travel and tourism, academia and the sciences and from the business community.

Four years ago, our government took dramatic new actions to secure America from an unprecedented new threat. Since that time, while continuing to increase border and travel security, we have made significant changes to ensure that America remains also hospitable to the tens of millions of foreign visitors who enter our country every year.

Earlier this month, President Bush addressed our University Presidents Summit here at the State Department that was cosponsored with the Department of Education. He reaffirmed that it is a vital national interest for America to remain a welcoming nation even as we strengthen security in the fight against terrorism.

Today, Mike Chertoff and I want to share with you our joint strategy, a strategy that has three main pillars. First, we seek to use new information technology to renew America's welcome, making it as easy as possible for foreign visitors to travel to the United States and to do so securely and safely.

Second, we seek to create travel documents for the 21st century, documents that can protect personal identity and expedite secure travel.

The third pillar of our strategy is to conduct smarter screening in every place that we encounter travelers, whether at a consulate abroad or at a port of entry into the United States.

Secretary Chertoff will speak to you about the second and third parts of our strategy, but right now I want to address the first pillar that I mentioned: how we will update our technology to achieve a faster, more secure and more respectable process of welcoming foreign visitors to the United States.

In recent years the Department of State has made tremendous progress in renewing America's welcome. With the support of Congress we were able to create 515 new consular positions since September of 2001. We are

automating obsolete visa processing systems and we're making the visa process more transparent, more efficient and more predictable. Today, 97 percent of approved travelers receive their visas in a day or two and we have dramatically decreased the wait time for the rest.

A Russian scientist, for example, who applied for a visa two years ago would have waited 75 days, perhaps even longer, while his application underwent additional screening and review. Today, that review time would take less than two weeks. The actions we are taking are getting results. From 2003 to 2004, the number of international visitors to the United States rose by 12 percent to more than 46 million people. The largest single increase -- single year increase in arrivals in over a decade. In addition, the number of students receiving visas over the past year increased by nearly nine percent from the previous year.

These trends are important, but they are only the beginnings of our efforts to create more secure borders and more open doors. And today, while advancing our legitimate security interests, we are taking new steps to welcome a greater number of foreign visitors to America than ever before. We are renewing America's welcome to general travelers and tourists.

Working with Congress, the private sector and local officials, DHS and State will soon introduce a pilot model airport program. The pilot project will include customized public video messages to help foreign travelers move efficiently through the border entry process and it will feature friendly greeters to assist foreign travelers once they have been admitted to our country. We have selected two airports for this pilot project this year: Washington Dulles and Houston.

We are also exploring ways to use cutting-edge technology to transform traditional visa application methods. Later this year, we will begin testing how digital videoconferencing technology could rapidly expedite the issuing of visas. Of course, we must ensure that the security of the visa process remains intact, as does the biometric information of applicants. Yet, if we can do this successfully, this process might make life dramatically easier for foreign citizens who must now travel great distances to be interviewed in person.



We are also renewing America's welcome to students and professors and researchers. At all of our 210 visa processing posts, getting visas into the hands of foreign students is becoming a top priority. In addition, we are actively encouraging students, researchers and scientists to pursue their studies in the United States. In the coming months, our two departments will work together to expand the length of time that foreign students can arrive and live and learn in America. We will now issue student visas up to 120 days before classes begin, as compared to 90 days under current regulations. And we will allow students to enter the country 45 days in advance of their studies, as compared to 30 days at present.

Finally, we're renewing America's welcome to business people and entrepreneurs. For our economy to continue to grow and prosper, the foreign employees and customers of our business community must be able to enter our country quickly and efficiently. To improve this process, State and DHS are enrolling companies for expedited visa processing and we are making visa application forms and comprehensive information available online, a process that we will soon expand.

The State Department has also established a visa -- business visa center that is currently helping hundreds of U.S. companies every month get the visas they need. At the same time, our embassies and consulates in over 100 countries are working closely with local America Chambers of Commerce to expedite the visa process for legitimate business travelers.

In China, for example, we are working directly with 400 American Chamber of Commerce companies. The local employees of these companies may apply at any time for a visa at our embassy and thereby, bypass the standard waiting period for a visa interview. We processed nearly 10,000 visa applicants through this channel just last year.

Public/private partnerships such as these are essential and we will create more of them in the future. In fact, the Department of Homeland Security, with State Department participation, is creating an advisory board to formalize our existing relationship with our tourism, business and academic partners. This board will take your views into account and identify best practices to develop more ideal travel policies.

A final note before I turn to Mike. When he and I took office a year ago, we found a stereotype, a caricature, if you will. The State Department was the welcoming department, but maybe a little soft, and the Homeland Security department was the tough enforcer and maybe a little heartless. One of our earliest resolutions was to show people that this stereotype was wrong on both sides. We at the State Department ... are fully committed to border security and to protecting our nation and we will make the necessary tough decisions to do so.

The same is true of our colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security, as Mike will explain. We share an interest in an open and fully secure America. Please welcome Secretary of Homeland Security, Mike Chertoff.

(Applause.)

Remarks by Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff
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