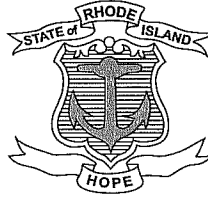


State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

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Senate Chamber

Vice Chair,
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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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RAPTAKIS ASKS PRESIDENT BUSH TO SET ASIDE "POLITICAL ISSUE" BLOCKING GREECE'S INCLUSION IN EXPANDED VISA WAIVER PROGRAM

State Senator says decision threatens to undermine program and unfairly punish American and Greek travelers

(COVENTRY 10/14/08) With the Bush Administration preparing to announce the expansion of the Visa Waiver Program, which allows foreign nationals to travel to the United States for business or tourism purposes without having to secure a visa, Rhode Island State Senator Leonidas Raptakis is asking the President to reconsider a decision to block Greece's participation because of a "political issue".

Raptakis said that even though Greece is positioned as a leading candidate to take part in the program and has been working closely with the Department of Homeland Security to meet the program requirements, political considerations are essentially over-ruling the intent of the program.

"Threatening to obstruct the entry of a NATO ally into this program—essentially punishing an ally over politics—undermines the intent of the visa waiver expansion," said Raptakis. "This was supposed to be about establishing standard security policies and encouraging strong economic, cultural and social ties between the member nations. Using the visa waiver program as a political club is unworthy of the United States and threatens to diminish our standing in the world."

As a long-time advocate of stronger ties between Greece and the United States, Raptakis said he believes Greece has established itself as a strong candidate for inclusion in the program:

- **Greece is the only nation of all the candidate nations that has been formally nominated by the State Department;**

- **Greece's visa refusal rate is well below the 3 percent refusal rate of U.S. non-immigrant visa applications (1.6 percent); and**
- **Greece has established passport biometrics standards which exceed the technology used by current Visa Waiver Program nations.**

“Greece made a serious commitment to work with United States Department of Homeland Security to be an effective partner in the visa waiver process,” said Raptakis. “Blocking Greece’s entry into the expanded Visa Waiver Program will only unfairly punish American citizens of Greek heritage and countless Philhellenes who look to their country’s involvement in this program as a sign of the strong ties and trust between our nations.”

Raptakis concluded, “I have urged the Bush administration to put politics aside and do what is right, not only for our country, but for the world. The Visa Waiver Program needs to be recognized as an effort to bring like-minded nations together and promote secure travel, as opposed to being viewed as a political tool creating divisions among allies.”

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Senate Chamber

Vice Chair,
Committee on
Environment and Agriculture

Secretary,
Committee on Judiciary

October 14, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

As your administration prepares to announce the expansion of the Visa Waiver Program, I am writing as a concerned citizen asking you to reconsider a recent policy decision which would block Greece's participation because of a "political issue" that has arisen between the United States and its long-standing NATO ally.

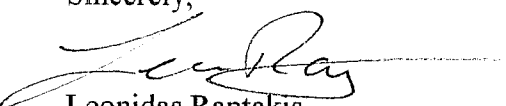
Greece is well-qualified and positioned as the leading candidate country for visa waiver expansion, having worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security to meet program requirements. Allowing a "political issue" to obstruct Greece's participation in the Visa Waiver Program threatens to undermine the intent of this initiative. At the same time, it will unfairly punish American citizens of Greek heritage and countless Philhellenes, who look to Greece's designation as a visa waiver nation as an opportunity to strengthen economic, cultural, and social ties between our nations.

Putting political considerations aside, the case for Greece's inclusion in the program is strong:

- Greece is the only nation of all the candidate nations that has been formally nominated by the State Department;
- Greece's visa refusal rate is well below 3 percent (1.6 percent); and
- Greece's passport biometrics exceeds technology used by current VWP nations.

Given the validity of Greece's position, the Greek government's commitment to work with the United States to meet the necessary security requirements, and the strong ties between the two nations, I urge you to provide Greece with a "green light" in its quest to become a visa waiver nation. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Leonidas Raptakis
State Senator