

Address the Visa Processing Backlog:

Background: International business travel was the hardest hit industry segment by the pandemic, and the slowest to recover. According to National Travel and Tourism Office, there were 66.5 million international visits to the U.S. in 2023, reflecting 31% annual growth, but still at just 84% of pre-pandemic inbound visitation levels.

International travel is a key driver of economic growth for the United States, enables major export activity, and facilitates vital corporate and cultural exchange around the world. Continued unacceptably long visa wait times and ongoing processing delays create uncertainty and challenges for the international business travel industry, which serves a cross-section of key economic sectors. While Congress is helping by directing \$50 million in funding for the U.S. Department of State to reduce visitor visa interview wait times, more can be done.

Issues: The wait times for visa appointment availability ballooned significantly during the pandemic, and consular backlogs persist. Often, interview appointments alone can take a year or more to schedule. For example, the average¹ interview wait time for a B-1 visa (used for short term business purposes such as negotiating a contract, attending a convention, or settling an estate) is 451 days in Abu Dhabi, 836 days in Mexico City, 511 days in Madrid, and 435 days in Lagos.

Benefits to Reducing the Backlog: By modernizing visa processing without compromising security, we can increase inbound business travel, drive investment across U.S. sectors, and directly bolster the travel economy. To address the visa backlog and facilitate critical business trips to the United States, GBTA strongly supports the bipartisan Visa Processing Improvement Act (S.2632), sponsored by Sen. Amy Klobuchar and Sen. Jerry Moran. This legislation makes common sense improvements to the visa processing system, increases staffing, and provides the necessary authorities to reduce wait times. Fixing the visa backlog will ensure the United States remains a top destination for business travel and allow businesses to reap returns on their travel investments in the form of networking, team building, professional development, and more effective in-person negotiation. This bill strengthens our industry's ability to drive U.S. economic growth across sectors and multinational business collaboration.

The bill:

- Requires the State Department to set and track interview wait time goals and take steps to lower wait times in locations that consistently fail to achieve those goals.
- Provides the State Department with permanent authority to waive in-person interviews for certain previously vetted and low-risk nonimmigrant visa applicants.

¹ <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/global-visa-wait-times.html>

- Creates a pilot-program to test videoconferencing as an alternative to in-person interviews for certain low-risk, pre-vetted visa applicants from Global Entry countries.
- Improves the service nonimmigrant visa processing experience by providing an expedited processing fee.

Action: Ask for Senators: **Cosponsor S. 2632**, Visa Processing Improvement Act
Ask to Congress: **Pass the Visa Processing Improvement Act.**