

THE PRESIDENT'S EXPORT COUNCIL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

March 11, 2011

President of the United States of America  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to express our concern over the effects our country's visa policies are having on our ability to do business in the short term and to remain competitive internationally over the long term. We ask you to designate a high-level representative to meet with us to learn more about the barriers to America's competitiveness and innovation posed by current U.S. visa policies and to work with relevant government agencies and Congress to address the specific problems outlined below.

Timely, transparent and fair visa policies and processing procedures are critical to our ability to innovate domestically and compete internationally. Efficiently transporting and relocating talent around the world are critical to the survival of U.S. businesses in a world characterized by just-in-time global supply chains and immediate customer and supplier demands. Many American companies utilize business-related visas to facilitate the entry of suppliers, customers, foreign employees, business partners, prospective investors, and conference and trade show participants.

A series of changes in the visa process following 9/11 have added time and uncertainty to the application process and made it more difficult for global companies to grow their business. These policies include increased security checks of certain visa applicants, the collection of biometric data to secure a visa, and the institution of mandatory in-person interviews for most visa applicants. A survey released in 2004 calculated direct and indirect losses to business of over \$30 billion due to visa restrictions. We believe those losses have continued in the intervening period. These policies are costing U.S. jobs by encouraging trade shows to locate meetings abroad and for centers of global research and collaboration to be built offshore.

Conversations with the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the Commerce Department and Congress over the years have been promising, but few lasting improvements have occurred. Our experience has been that each time a problem appears to be solved; a new one pops up to take its place. In particular, we urge you to work with the business community on the following priorities to improve the ability of U.S. companies to innovate and compete globally:

- **Facilitate visa processing for B visa travel.** While AmCham and other business programs have cut processing times for some business travelers, many of the U.S. companies and associations who most require short turnaround times for visas are least able to afford participation in the programs designed to facilitate travel. Increasing the

use of dedicated business windows, setting aside time specifically for B visa traveler interviews, and encouraging post-specific initiatives in conjunction with AmChams to assist small business-related travel would help to facilitate important business transactions and movement of international personnel.

- **Streamline the visa interview and issuance processes.** Increasing the number of consular officers worldwide, moving resources to those posts with the highest demand and the longest waiting periods, and waiving the interview requirement for business-related visa applicants in appropriate low-risk cases would facilitate visa issuance and make the United States a more welcoming place for foreign business travelers. The Administration should work to reinstitute the option for those already working in the United States to renew their visas without leaving the United States.
- **Work with Congress to reform U.S. visa and immigration policies** to better attract and retain the kind of highly-skilled workers, entrepreneurs and innovators from around the world. Common-sense reforms that are essential if the U.S. is to out-innovate the rest of the world – such as reforming the quota system for highly-skilled temporary entry and immigrant visas and stapling a green card to the diplomas of highly-skilled foreign students studying in the United States – cannot wait for comprehensive immigration reform and must be pursued in the near term.
- **Establish a Trusted Employer Program through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services** to facilitate and streamline travel for employers with strong track records of compliance. The newly deployed system known as VIBE, Validation on Instrument for Business Enterprises, may be one tool to streamline the process.
- **Form an informal public-private working group** to serve as a mechanism to improve transparency and increase communication between the Departments of Commerce, Homeland Security and State, other relevant government agencies, and affected U.S. companies and industry groups.

Sensible reforms of current visa policies can aid efforts to deny entry to those who seek to harm us by refocusing resources where they are needed most. We would appreciate a report on progress made on these proposals at our next meeting in November. In the interim, we urge you to have the Interdepartmental Working Group on Business-Related Visa Issues, created by Commerce, State, and Homeland Security in late 2009, to meet with us, learn more about the difficulties we have experienced, and then work with the relevant agencies to address the specific problems and changes we have suggested. <sup>1</sup>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Jensen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that this letter has been prepared by the private-sector appointed members of the PEC.