



## ***EBTC INFORMATION BULLETIN***

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***SUBJECT: Passports***

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The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative was supposed to protect the United States from terrorism. But so far all it seems to have done is cause potential travel headaches for residents.

Passed into law by the U.S. Congress in 2004 as part of a slew of anti-terrorism efforts recommended by the 9/11 Commission, the initiative created new travel requirements for residents of the United States, Canada, Mexico and Bermuda.

Among them is the requirement that citizens of these countries display passports that bear their identity and nationality to enter or re-enter the United States. The air portion of that initiative launched this year; the sea and land requirements are expected to kick in next year.

And while the emergency bill passed by the U.S. House and Senate over the last month that allows the State Department to rehire former employees to confront the passport backlog is expected to help, U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy also has two amendments pending that would offer long-term fixes to these problems.

The first, attached to the new State Department budget, allocates \$76 million in new funds for the agency to allow it to hire hundreds of new workers to confront the continued influx of new passport applications.

That amendment has passed a key committee and a floor debate on the budget is expected in the next several weeks.

Leahy's second proposed amendment on the new regulations would force the State Department to postpone the new land and sea provisions for 17 months beyond the expected early 2008 implementation date.

This is a follow-up to a Leahy bill passed by the U.S. Senate last year that asked

the State Department to wait on the new provisions. The new proposal, attached to the new Homeland Security appropriations bill, would make that request mandatory.

"WHTI in the hands of [the Department of Homeland Security] is like a skydiver who jumps first and tries to pack his parachute on the way down," Leahy said last month. "Today's huge passport backlogs, prompted by the launch of DHS's requirement for air travel passports, are just a taste of the chaos that's likely next summer when they want to start enforcing passport checks at our land and sea borders, which account for 10 times the volume for air travel."