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Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Business Travel Card

The Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO) and the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO) represent the interests of millions of Americans living and working abroad, including hundreds of thousands who live in the APEC member economies. We call on the Department of Homeland Security to expand implementation of the APEC Business Travel Cards Act of 2011.

APEC is an intergovernmental grouping of twenty-one members including the United States, referred to as "member economies", which account for approximately 40% of the world's population, some 55% of world GDP and about 44% of world trade. Since 1997, APEC member economies have participated in the APEC Business Travel Card ("ABTC") program that allows ABTC holders to use dedicated ABTC lanes at points of entry into member economies. In APEC member economies that require entry visas, the ABTC also functions as a pre-cleared, multiple-entry visa.

A study by APEC's Policy Support Unit found that for the 100,000 cardholders, in the 12 months preceding the survey, cardholders saved 43.3% in time-costs completing visa applications, spent 27.8% less money on fees for visa applications, and saved 54.4% in time-costs completing immigration procedures at airports.

For many years the United States participated in the ABTC program as a transitional member, whereby it offered foreign holders of the ABTC access to airline crew and diplomat immigration lanes at airports. However, US citizens were shut out of this useful program. After years of advocacy by the stakeholders, on November 12, 2011, President Barack Obama signed the APEC Business Travel Cards Act of 2011 to authorize issuing the ABTC to US citizens.

Consistent with the re-balance to Asia and US leadership in the Trans Pacific Partnership trade agreement negotiations, DHS has commenced implementation of the ABTC program for US citizens, We thank DHS for this significant step forward.

AARO and FAWCO Call on DHS to:

- Provide substantive updates to Congress, and on the Customs and Border Protection website, about the status of ABTC implementation.

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- Educate travelers about the integration of the ABTC with DHS's trusted traveler (SENTRI, NEXUS, and Global Entry) programs for pre-screened U.S. travelers under which the ABTC is only offered upon successful application to these programs.
- Issue a plan to work with relevant stakeholders to publicize ABTC availability.
- Offer trusted traveler program interviews at US embassies and consulates in APEC member economies (including the American Institute in Taiwan's Taipei Office), publicize when the interviews are available, and make the interviews available to all US citizens rather than limit the interviews to US citizens resident in that APEC member economy.
- Address APEC member economies' refusal to allow US citizen ABTC holders to use dedicated ABTC lanes at points of entry due to DHS' decision to not print on the ABTC the member economy name for which the cardholder has received approval to use such lanes; and
- Encourage APEC member economies to follow Hong Kong's example of issuing the ABTC to US citizens who are permanent residents.

Business facilitation with Asia is of critical importance to America and its economy. ABTC implementation increases the sale of US goods and services in Asia, creates better employment opportunities for Americans both domestically and internationally, and frees US citizens from the straightjacket of immigration delays which impose time-consuming and expensive costs on business travel. It is time for DHS to further expand availability and use of the ABTC.

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