

The Jobs Originated through Launching Travel (JOLT) Act

Section by section summary

Section 1: Short Title

- This Act may be cited as the “Jobs Originated through Launching Travel Act of 2015.”

Section 2: Encouraging Canadian Tourism to the United States

- Under current law Canadian citizens are not permitted to remain in the United States for longer than 180 days without going through the arduous visa process. If permitted, many Canadians would remain in the U.S. for a longer period of time to take advantage of the warmer climate and for other reasons. In addition, Canadians who currently return to Canada after spending 180 days within a 12-month period in the U.S. are unable to take day-trips across the border to northern-border-states in America.
- This section allows Canadians who: (1) are over age 50 (with derivative benefits to a spouse); (2) can show that they own a residence in the United States or have purchased rental or hotel accommodations in the United States for the duration of their stay; and (3) are not otherwise inadmissible to stay in the U.S. for at most 240 days per year. These Canadians would not be permitted to have work authorization or access to any government benefits.

Section 3: Secure Travel Partnership Program (STTP) Enhanced Security and Reform

- The JOLT Act renames the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) the Secure Travel Partnership Program (STPP) to more accurately reflect the purpose of the program. Section 3 is the first section referencing the name change. A conforming amendment appears later in the legislation.
- Currently, a number of close U.S. allies and partners—including Poland, Israel, and Brazil—are not members of the U.S. VWP (STPP). The VWP (STPP) enables citizens of participating countries to securely travel to the U.S. for short-term business or tourism purposes without having to go through the lengthy and complicated visa application process. There are powerful security and economic rationales for expanding the VWP to qualified countries.
- Section 3 amends the Immigration and Nationality Act regarding the STPP (formerly VWP) to:
 1. Update eligibility criteria to require applicant countries to have both a visa overstay rate and a visa refusal rate of not more than 3%;
 2. Reinstate the Secretary of Homeland Security’s authority to waive the 3% visa refusal rate requirement, up to a maximum of 10%, if a country meets all other STPP requirements;

3. Revise probation and termination provisions; and
 4. Direct the Comptroller General to review the Secretary of Homeland Security's methods for tracking aliens entering and exiting the United States and for detecting visa overstays
- In order to protect the homeland and ensure that STPP (VWP) countries adhere to U.S. security standards, the JOLT Act requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to enforce several security requirements that were previously considered discretionary. The Secretary is required to report to Congress on each STPP (VWP) country's adherence to these provisions.
 - These security-related considerations include a program country's airport security standards, whether it assists in the operation of an effective air marshal program, and the standards of passports and travel documents issued by the VWP country.
 - The report must also include other security-related factors, including the country's cooperation with the United States' initiatives toward combating terrorism and the country's cooperation with the United States intelligence community in sharing information regarding terrorist threats.
 - Making these provisions mandatory will ensure the STPP (VWP) countries adhere to U.S. security standards in order to maintain their status in the program.
 - Includes a Sense of Congress on Nonimmigrant Overstay rates stating that the Secretary of Homeland Security has not complied with the statutory requirement to collect and report to Congress data on visa overstay rates and that the Secretary should comply with this requirement.
 - The bill requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to conduct an evaluation of the Electronic System Travel Authorization (ESTA), including an assessment of any the reforms that are necessary to improve the efficiency, accuracy and comprehensive vetting of travelers.

Section 4: Visa Processing

- This section would set goals for visa processing. Upon enactment, 90 percent of all visa interviews must be conducted within 10 business days of requesting an appointment. This provision provides exceptions for security reasons and for national emergencies. With a statutory commitment to faster visa processing worldwide, a climate of certainty would be created for future personal and business travelers, thus ensuring increased and sustained demand for travel to the United States. Meeting this requirement would represent small but meaningful improvements by State versus their current processing standards

Section 5: Interviews of Visa Applicants

- Due to the lack of access to a U.S. consulate in geographically-larger countries, the in-person interview requirement remains a major hurdle for many potential visitors in high demand markets. In order to reduce deterrents for potential visitors, the U.S. should use technology to minimize the burden of traveling to obtain an in-person interview. This section would amend the definition of an in-person interview and require State to complete a 2 year pilot program to conduct visa interviews via secure videoconferencing.

Section 6: Visa and Trusted Traveler Application Coordination

- U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Global Entry program is a voluntary expedited clearance program that allows pre-approved, low-risk international travelers the ability to bypass the traditional CBP inspection process and utilize automated kiosks upon entry. Taking "trusted travelers" out of the normal customs inspection lines reduces wait times and allows CBP to focus their limited resources on the unknown individuals. In order to fully realize the benefits of Global Entry, the program will need to continue both domestic and international expansion. To encourage further growth, this section encourages State and DHS to coordinate the visa and Global Entry application and interview processes for eligible travelers.

Section 7: Electronic Passport Requirement for Secure Travel Partnership Program

- This provision improves passport security by closing a loophole that allows citizens of the 27 countries participating in the STPP (VWP) before 2008 to use non-electronic passports if those passports were issued before October 2006. Biometric or e-passports are the most secure travel documents available and should be utilized by every traveler visiting the U.S. from a STPP country.