

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 3773 | NOVEMBER 13, 2012

Global Entry Reciprocity: U.S. Should Follow Australia's Lead

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Visiting the land down under just became easier for a number of American travelers. On November 1, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service announced a trial program extending Australia's SmartGate program to U.S. Global Entry members.

The announcement marked a step in the right direction in creating a trusted traveler superhighway between the U.S. and its allies. Yet while select U.S. travelers can now gain expedited entry into Australia, Australian visitors to the U.S. still lack the same privilege.

The U.S. should follow Australia's lead and sign a reciprocity agreement allowing Australian citizens to become members of the Global Entry program. With the U.S. share of international travel declining,

the U.S. should ease the burden of international travel and once again present itself as open and welcoming. Working with strong friends and allies such as Australia is the perfect place to start.

SmartGate Entry. SmartGate, like the U.S.'s Global Entry program, provides expedited customs and immigration checks to selected nations, allowing travelers to "self-process through passport control." Rather than waiting in line to be interviewed by an Australian Customs and Border Patrol officer, travelers can simply approach a SmartGate kiosk at eight of Australia's major international airports and confirm their identities through the use of facial recognition and electronic passport data.

Effective November 1, U.S. travelers became the first non-Australians to be allowed to use SmartGate since the program was opened to New Zealanders in 2007. To gain expedited entry through the program, U.S. visitors simply need to be already enrolled in the Global Entry program, the U.S. equivalent of SmartGate. The pilot program allowing expedited U.S. entry is part of continued efforts by Australia's Customs and Border Protection Service to increase the number of travelers

arriving in Australia through its international airports.

Extending Global Entry to Australians. Within the U.S., the Global Entry program provides much the same function as Australia's SmartGate, allowing low-risk, pre-approved travelers expedited access into the U.S.

In order to gain membership in the program, applicants must undergo rigorous background checks and complete an interview process. Once cleared, program members can simply approach a Global Entry kiosk at any of the 25 participating U.S. airports and present a machine-readable passport or U.S. permanent-resident card, place their fingertips on a scanner for verification, and make a customs declaration. Provided the information presented matches the traveler's identity and there are no further security concerns, the traveler is then cleared to enter the United States.

At present, Global Entry is open not only to U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents but also to citizens of the Netherlands and South Korea. Citizens of the United Kingdom, Germany, and Qatar may also participate in limited Global Entry pilot programs, and Canadian citizens may participate through

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib3773>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies

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membership in the bilateral trusted-traveler program between the U.S. and Canada, known as NEXUS.

As a member of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), Australia has a long history of cooperation on international travel with the U.S. Yet, despite this fact and Australia opening up its own SmartGate program to U.S. Global Entry members, Australian visitors to the U.S. still lack the same privileges. In May, the U.S. and Australia committed to exploring the possibility of linking the Global Entry program and SmartGate. Simply exploring the potential for travel reciprocity with Australia, however, is not enough.

Already, Australian citizens visit the U.S. in large numbers, contributing to the U.S. economy and returning to Australia with a greater understanding of the United States. In 2011, for example, a little over a million Australians visited the U.S., compared to only 520,000 in 2004. To put this in perspective, in 2011, Australians visited the United States in numbers nearly equal to the number of individuals who visited the U.S. from China. These Australian tourists then spent an estimated \$4.963 billion, infusing money into the struggling U.S. economy.¹ Further enhancing the ease of travel for these visitors is of compelling interest to the United States.

Additionally, through Australia's membership in the VWP, a potential concern for Global Entry reciprocity is alleviated. Though SmartGate does not require background checks for program membership like Global Entry, Australian visitors to the U.S. are already vetted through the Electronic System for Travel

Authorization (ESTA) as part of the VWP. Any reluctance on the part of the U.S. to extend the Global Entry program to Australians therefore makes little sense from multiple perspectives.

What the U.S. Should Do.

Beginning with Australia, the U.S. should expand Global Entry reciprocity agreements. In signing these agreements, the U.S. should look to build on existing partnerships not only among nations already participating in Global Entry but also with other VWP member countries. By entering into these bilateral agreements, the U.S., in addition to achieving expedited entry for U.S. citizens traveling abroad and enhanced ease of travel for foreign visitors to the U.S., would enhance security by providing for the vetting of foreign nationals before their arrival in the U.S. per standards agreed upon by the U.S. In this way, the U.S. and its allies could create a trusted travel superhighway while both enhancing security and facilitating international travel to and from the U.S.

At the same time, the U.S. should also look to bring new nations into the VWP, of which Australia is already a member. Made permanent in 2000, the VWP allows for citizens from member countries to travel to the U.S. for up to 90 days. Similar to how Global Entry members must be pre-screened and cleared to visit the U.S., VWP members are vetted before their arrival based on information submitted through ESTA to ensure that they do not pose a security threat.

Nations seeking membership in the program must also meet a number of specific security- and travel-related

steps, such having a non-immigrant visa refusal rate (i.e., the percentage of visa applicants denied by the State Department) of no more than 3 percent, issuing all residents machine-readable biometric passports, and meeting a determination that membership presents no threats to U.S. law enforcement or security interests. Further, participating countries must now meet greater standards with regard to information sharing, reporting of lost or stolen passports, and airport security.

Since 2008, expansion of the VWP has largely been placed on hold. Given the program's extensive benefits in terms of public diplomacy, security, and economic benefits, however, VWP modernization and expansion remains long overdue.

Greater Travel and Security.

Entering into trusted traveler reciprocity agreements and expanding key programs such as Global Entry and the VWP would increase travel and benefit the U.S. economy while also improving our public diplomacy efforts. Perhaps most important, it would improve security by pre-screening trusted travelers before they arrive in the U.S., allowing security officials to focus on other potentially high-risk passengers.

Starting with close allies such as Australia, the U.S. should expand these important programs to take advantage of their economic, diplomatic, and security benefits.

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1. U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, "2011 Market Profile: Australia," http://tinet.ita.doc.gov/outreachpages/download_data_table/2011_Australia_Market_Profile.pdf (accessed November 8, 2012), and "2011 Market Profile: China," http://tinet.ita.doc.gov/outreachpages/download_data_table/2011_China_Market_Profile.pdf (accessed November 8, 2012).