



## The Oregonian

### Proposal to require passports at Canada border raises concern

**Security - The leaders of Washington and British Columbia fear economic losses from the U.S. plan**

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OLYMPIA -- Washington state and British Columbia are objecting to a U.S. proposal to require passport checks at border crossings.

Tourism officials fear that visits between the two countries will drop, knocking a big hole in the regional economy, if the U.S. Department of Homeland Security begins enforcement Jan. 1, 2007.

Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire and British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell are drafting a joint letter to the agency expressing their concerns.

"We have to have security; there is no question about that," Gregoire said. "On the other hand, can we have security to the point where we can really harm the economies?"

Jarrod Agen, a Homeland Security spokesman, said the intent is not to crimp trade in the name of protecting citizens.

"Even the president himself has said he doesn't want it to stifle flow at the border and affect the economy and trade," he said.

There are indications, however, that the passport requirement would do just that.

A July report by the Canadian Tourism Commission predicts that 7.7 million fewer Americans would visit Canada in the following three years as a result of the change. Of those, 1.3 million would be travelers to British Columbia. The agency also estimated a drop of 3.5 million trips from Canada to the United States, tens of thousands of them Washington-bound.

The report even noted a decline this year as travelers without passports dropped their travel plans, thinking the law already had taken effect.

Only a quarter of Americans are estimated to have passports. Currently, photo identification and a birth certificate will get a traveler across the border.

Darrell Bryan, executive vice president and general manager of the Victoria Clipper tourism boats, said ridership into Canadian ports is down compared with last year, even as numbers have increased on routes wholly within Washington.

He said 17 percent of the summer passengers who were surveyed said they wouldn't make the trip if they were required to get a passport.

"Seventeen percent would put us out of business," Bryan said. "We want to find ways to enhance security at the border, but we don't believe security should trump trade. There has to be a balance."

The passport requirement was recommended by the Sept. 11 commission. It requires citizens of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, the Caribbean, and Central and South America to have passports when entering this country.

Enforcement would begin in 2007 for those traveling by air or sea, and one year later at land border crossings.

The proposal arrived with little debate or evidence that it would boost safety, said Ken Oplinger, head of the Bellingham-Whatcom Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"I don't know that requiring soccer moms to have passports will make us safer," he said, noting that all of the 19 terrorists involved in the Sept. 11 attacks had passports. "It may only give us the illusion we're safer."

At the urging of tourism leaders, Gregoire is joining the fray. Earlier this month, she sent a letter to the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection calling the passport requirement "burdensome documentation" without "sufficiently accounting for the costs and benefits of this strategy."

Two more letters are expected soon, one co-signed with Campbell, the B.C. premier, and another signed by the governors of Idaho, Montana and Oregon. In January, state legislators will be asked to pass a resolution expressing their concerns.

In Washington state, tourism overall in 2004 accounted for 140,000 jobs and \$11 billion in spending, according to a study by Dean Runyan and Associates. An estimated seven out of 10 international travelers into the state come from Canada, mostly from British Columbia.

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