



NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier
Office of the Governor

B.C. & WASHINGTON CALL TO DELAY PASSPORT REQUIREMENT

VANCOUVER – The governments of British Columbia and Washington have joined together in a joint letter to the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada to call for a delay to the proposed passport requirements for re-entry into the United States.

The letter was signed today by B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell and Washington Governor Chris Gregoire at the first ever high-level dialogue between the two jurisdictions, held in Vancouver, B.C., to address shared security issues and to improve cross-border relations.

“We all want to ensure our border is secure from the threats of terrorism, but there is no proof that requiring passports is going to improve border security,” said Campbell. “B.C. and Washington depend on the free flow of goods and people across the border and the continued uncertainty over the passport requirements is already having a negative impact on cross-border tourism. We believe there are more effective ways to ensure security and we’re inviting both federal governments to work with us to pursue those options.”

“Washington and B.C. have a long history of friendship, and our citizens are accustomed to great flexibility when travelling across our shared border,” said Gregoire. “Requiring all travellers to have a passport will significantly alter the quality of life for our citizens and affect the economic prosperity of our businesses, while terrorists will continue to falsify any documents required for travel.”

Premier Campbell and Governor Gregoire signed a letter to President Bush and Prime Minister Harper reiterating the need to resolve uncertainty at the border and outlining their concerns regarding the proposed Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative which will require passports for all re-entries to the United States by January 2008. Last month, Canada’s Western Premiers also jointly called for a delay in the passport requirements to allow time to consider and implement alternatives.

The passport requirements were part of the discussion of a range of issues under the theme of prosperity and security at today’s B.C.-Washington dialogue. The two jurisdictions also agreed to:

- Establish a new B.C.-Washington Working Group to develop workable technological solutions that would meet the border security needs of our respective federal governments and strengthen the security of identity documents issued by the State and the Province (such as driver’s licences);
- Improve co-ordination of resources and support during emergencies through the Pacific Northwest Emergency Management Arrangement;
- Formalize ongoing cross-border collaboration on preparation, response and recovery for public health emergencies, such as pandemic flu and the West Nile virus, through the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Public Health Emergencies;

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- Address congestion issues through improved communication flows between agencies, expanded use of intelligent transportation systems and increasing the number of travellers using accepted secure documentation like NEXUS and FAST to cross the border; and
- Hold annual summit meetings between the two jurisdictions to discuss and resolve issues of mutual interest.

Other results of today's meeting include commitments to:

- Hold a Joint Border Security Forum to address current security and law enforcement issues specific to the border between B.C. and Washington; and
- Examine shared economic and tourism opportunities in anticipation of the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympics Games in Vancouver.

Governor Gregoire also extended an invitation for British Columbia to participate in Washington State's Education and Early Learning Summit in November 2006.

At their meeting last fall, Premier Campbell and Governor Gregoire agreed to hold a high-level summit to bring together senior B.C. and Washington officials to discuss areas of common interest.

B.C. and Washington are home to a combined population of more than 10 million people. More than \$10 billion in two-way trade travels between the two jurisdictions each year and an estimated 32,000 vehicles pass cross the B.C.-Washington border every day. About 30 per cent of overseas visitors to B.C. also travel to Washington and throughout the Pacific Northwest when visiting B.C., and Washington projects that up to 25 per cent of visitors to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver will travel through the state on their way to B.C.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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