

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 9, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

In just over a year, our nation will celebrate America's 250th anniversary. As the Senators from the Commonwealth of Virginia, we are particularly proud and excited to welcome our fellow Americans and visitors from across the globe to celebrate our nation's history, our people, and our democracy in the place where this great experiment began – Virginia. The events surrounding the celebration of our America's 250th anniversary are anticipated to bring in over 9 million visitors to participate in the programming with an estimated \$1.5 billion economic impact to the Commonwealth, including the creation of 22,000 jobs.¹

We are increasingly concerned that the Department of State is not prepared for the influx of international tourists we hope will come enjoy our nation's and Virginia's many exciting offerings during the America's 250th celebrations. International visitors were projected to bring in more than \$200 billion to the United States in 2025², though this administration's tariffs and treatment of foreign visitors is actively driving down international tourism³, resulting in a projected \$9 billion loss in visitor spending.⁴ Very little time remains to recover, but the rewards for doing so will be tremendous. America's tourism industry has the opportunity to be dramatically buoyed when the United States begins hosting millions of international soccer fans for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will be the first tournament that includes an expanded field of 48 nations. Virginia is eager to welcome visitors during their time in the United States to enjoy our beautiful state and national parks, historical sights, cities, restaurants, and small businesses.

The Commonwealth and our nation are reliant on Department of State infrastructure and resourcing to make that happen, and our confidence is flagging. Recent reporting indicates that, instead of increasing capacity at foreign embassies to address this influx of tourists to the United States, staff is being cut from the State Department, including at embassies and consulates around the world.⁵ These staff are responsible for interviewing potential visitors and processing visas ahead of tourist travel to the

¹ Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission. (2025, March 18). *Invest in Virginia's legacy: A unique opportunity to lead in the 250th commemoration*. Virginia Commemorations, Inc. https://va250.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/VA250_OneSheet-2025-0318.pdf

² U.S. Travel Association. (2025, January 9). *Travel forecast*. <https://www.ustravel.org/research/travel-forecasts>

³ Durbin, D. (2025, April 9). *US expected a big travel year, but overseas visitors — angered by Trump — are heading elsewhere*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/tourism-us-travel-trump-visitors-international-14c31b490fd382d09ad5cae625ddc937>

⁴ Svirnovskiy, G. (2025, May 5). *'We definitely are collateral damage': Tourism industry roiled by Trump's new world order*. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/05/trump-tourism-declining-canada-europe-00323566>

United States. This function is critical to ensuring U.S. national security by evaluating the safety and suitability of those visiting our country, and ensuring our visitors are secure in their status during their time in the United States. This vital work is labor-intensive and time-consuming. It requires a robust diplomatic corps free to exercise their expertise. Given the broad international interest in visiting the United States when we host global events, increasing capacity at embassies and consulates to screen and process the increased volume of potential visitors will have a direct positive economic benefit on American communities and businesses.

Visa wait times at United States embassies and consulates have been a challenge for years, and there were bipartisan efforts in Congress during the past administration to increase resourcing commensurate with demand. We have strong concerns that, rather than working to chip away at these backlogs, the staffing policies by this administration threaten to dramatically increase tourist visa wait times. Based on publicly available federal data, the wait time at some U.S. embassies abroad already eclipses the number of days until next year's events. In the absence of intensive efforts to reduce visa wait times, international visitors will be unable to visit Virginia and other states for America's 250th anniversary celebrations, and soccer fans from several likely FIFA World Cup qualifiers will be unable to obtain visas to see their national teams play in the United States. The economic and reputational losses our nation will suffer if you do not resolve the current backlog and implement a surge visa processing plan would be significant.

As our nation's top diplomat, we do not have to tell you that our greatest tools in diplomacy are America's democracy and our culture. America's 250th anniversary and the FIFA World Cup are historic opportunities to share both with an enormous international audience, while bringing in tremendous economic benefits. We urge you to ensure your staffing model for embassies and consulates is calibrated to the unprecedented influx of international tourists our nation can expect over the coming months.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator

⁵ Steakin, W., Faulders, K., & Kingston, S. K. (2025, February 12). *US embassies instructed to prepare for staff reductions: Sources*. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-embassies-instructed-prepare-staff-reductions-sources/story?id=118755936>