

AN APPEAL TO POLISH AMERICANS IN CALIFORNIA

According to the 2000 United States Census there are some 491,325 Polish Americans in California, and it is my sincere hope that there will be many among them who will be interested in helping the Polish American Congress continue the national battle to gain Poland's admission to the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) of our Department of State. The continuing exclusion of Poland from VWP is an insult, a slap in the face if you will, to Poland as well as to Polish Americans.

Poland, whose finest sons -- Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Casimir Pulaski -- served our nation's "Glorious Cause" with distinction, integrity, and honor during the American Revolution, deserves better than this from our government in the matter of the Visa Waiver Program. Poland, a proven friend and loyal ally of the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the war against radical Islamism and mindless terrorism, deserves better than this from our government in the matter of the Visa Waiver Program.

I am writing to you from Massachusetts, the state whose legislature -- members of whom I approached in search of legislative sponsors -- passed the first-in-the-nation Visa Waiver for Poland Joint Resolution in May 2004. In my national role for the Polish American Congress, I went on to coordinate securing passage of Joint Resolutions (JR) or similar Resolutions in other states. A Joint Resolution signifies passage by both houses (Senate and House of Representatives) of the legislature, and in the case of Poland's admission to the Visa Waiver Program, are officially sent or "memorialized" to the President and Congress of the United States in Washington, DC.

Subsequently, New Jersey followed in October 2004 (JR), Vermont in January 2005 (JR), Pennsylvania in April 2005 (JR), Connecticut in May 2005 (Senate Resolution), Maine in May 2005 (JR), Nebraska in June 2005 (Unicameral Resolution), New York in June 2005 (JR), Ohio in June 2005 (JR), Michigan in June 2006 (JR), Arizona in April 2007 (JR), and Illinois in October 2007 (JR). Except for Maine, Nebraska, and Vermont, all of the states named have Divisions of the Polish American Congress, as does your state, California.

California plays a crucial role in the story of Poland being excluded from our nation's Visa Waiver Program because your senior United States Senator, Diane Feinstein, is the leader of the obstructionists in the United States Congress who continue to work to exclude Poland, a loyal friend and ally of the United States, from the Visa waiver Program.

Currently, only Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Malta, and Cyprus remain excluded from the Program. Poland's technical exclusion devolved in recent years on the matter of the so-called "refusal rate" of Polish citizens seeking to travel to the United States, a refusal rate determined somewhat arbitrarily by U.S. Embassy and/or Consular authorities in Poland. Some five years ago, Poland's refusal rate was in the 30 percentile range. The cut-off point for entry into the VWP was and remains, for now, 10%. Over the past five years Poland worked to bring down its refusal rate so that it is just above 10% at this time.

However, the current "pilot" VWP runs out in June 2009. Thus, your Democratic Senator Feinstein and Republican Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona, are preparing legislation requiring a refusal rate not greater than 3% which, if enacted, would effectively exclude Poland from VWP permanently. While many hoped that with President Obama, a new era of bipartisanship in the United States Congress would prevail, Polish Americans do not need the type of bipartisanship being proposed by Feinstein and Kyl in the VWP matter.

The bitter irony of the matter, if their proposed new VWP legislation should be enacted in June or thereafter, would be that Poland, the nation that led the way in the downfall of communism in central and eastern Europe and went on to be the regional model for post-communist democracy, will have to achieve a 3% refusal rate for admission to VWP whereas Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, etc. gained entry into the Program at a 10% refusal rate.

That would add exacerbate the insult and deepen the injury.

As part of its national campaign to combat this unfair and prejudicial treatment of Poland by our government, the Polish American Congress has launched a petition campaign in California to collect at least 4,000 signatures, preferably more, to leverage your state legislature in Sacramento to pass a Visa Waiver for Poland Joint Resolution.

For this reason, California's active participation in this national campaign is long overdue. It's about time that Polish Americans in California engage in this necessary battle for securing Poland's fair, evenhanded, transparent, and honorable admission of Poland to the Visa Waiver Program by our government.

During the past two weeks, I have had conversations with Marty Cepielik who agreed to publish the petition in his News of Polonia newspaper, with Andrzej Prokopczuk who is a National Director of the Polish American Congress, and with Richard Widerynski and Zdzislaw Zakrzewski, Presidents respectively of the southern and northern California Divisions of the Polish American Congress, all of whom agreed to help our National Office collect signatures.

I will be working from this side of the U.S. with Dr. Barbara Borzuchowska Andersen, Director of Research in our Washington, DC office to identify prospective legislative sponsors (by reviewing their biographies and records of legislation, among other points) in Sacramento. Once identified, we will use the petitions as leverage to enlist their support, thereby having the 4,000 signatures or more to serve as "clinchers". In short, the more signatures of Polish Americans in California the more likely we will be to attract sponsors and co-sponsors in Sacramento.

At the same time, please note that the Polish American Congress is currently engaged in a VWP petition campaign in Indiana, and two weeks from now, will launch similar campaigns in Texas and Florida. By the end of March, the national website of the Polish American Congress will contain VWP petitions for all states yet to pass Visa Waiver for Poland Resolutions, so that our fellow Polish Americans in Hawaii, Alaska, Idaho, Nevada, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, Alabama, Kansas, North Carolina, Missouri, Georgia, Kentucky, and New Hampshire, for example, can download petitions particularized for their states and engage in the campaign as we.

All signed petitions collected in California will be sent by those noted above first to our Washington, DC office, and once the prospective legislative sponsors are identified, we will confer with Presidents Widerynski and Zakrzewski on the matter of when and who will approach the legislators on site in Sacramento with petitions in hand.

The petition that I am sending should, after completion, be collected and/or sent to the News of Polonia whose address is posted in the lower right portion of the petition.

I hope that you will be among the anticipated great number of concerned Polish Americans in California who are interested in participating in this campaign by widely distributing the petitions to Polish Americans, Polonia organizations, and friends, colleagues, and associates of other ethnicities as well who may be inclined to help us help Poland.

With sincere appreciation,

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The petition is at: <http://www.poloniasf.org/english/20090306petition.pdf>