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## U.S. re-examines proposal to expand passport use

*Frequent travelers, president push review*

### **Billy House**

Republic Washington Bureau  
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WASHINGTON - Federal officials said Thursday they are considering more flexibility in a proposal that, as now written, would require U.S. citizens beginning in 2008 to present passports to re-enter the United States from Mexico and Canada and other U.S. neighbors.

Their reassessment is in response to outcries, including from President Bush, about the impact on Americans who regularly travel into Mexico and Canada, many of whom live close to the two borders.

Business owners along the Arizona-Mexico border, especially those in Mexico, have expressed several of the most vehement reservations about the new travel rules being proposed.

"Certainly, we agree with the president that we have to be flexible as we move this forward," said Elaine Dezinski, acting assistant secretary at the Department of Homeland Security's border and transportation security directorate.

Options may include the use of other types of border-passage documents or "some type of global registered traveler program that could be applied at either border . . ." Dezinski said at a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Peace Corps and Narcotics Affairs.

Few details of those other approaches were given Thursday.

Under the current proposal, Canadians and most Mexicans also would be required to produce a passport to enter the United States.

The idea stems from a sweeping intelligence overhaul that Bush signed into law in December that required homeland security officials to develop "as expeditiously as possible to require a passport or other document, or combination of documents . . . for all travel into the United States by United States citizens and others for whom documentation requirements have previously been waived."

In response, homeland security officials, in conjunction with the Department of State, released guidelines in April that would require passports or a select number of other secure documents from anyone, including Americans, entering the United States from Mexico, Canada, Panama and the Caribbean.

The phased-in timelines for the proposed changes are:

- Dec. 31, 2005. All travelers by air and sea, to and from the Caribbean, Bermuda,

Central and South America.

- Dec. 31, 2006. All travelers by air and sea, to and from Mexico and Canada.
- Dec. 31, 2007. All travelers by air, sea and land.

However, upon the release of the guidelines, even Bush expressed surprise. He said he had ordered a review.

"If people have to have a passport, it's going to disrupt the honest flow of traffic," Bush said. "I think there's some flexibility in the law, and that's what we're checking into now."

On Thursday, that sentiment was echoed by Sen. Norman Coleman, D-Minn., chairman of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee.

"It seems logical to have different rules to govern travel between the U.S. and our closest neighbors," Coleman said.

"We need to be vigilant of terrorists, but we cannot give them the victory of making us twist ourselves into a pretzel in the name of security," he said.

In Arizona, no exact figures were available about the number of residents who visit Mexico annually, but it is believed to be in the tens of thousands.

Mexicans and Canadians represent the largest number of foreign visitors to Arizona, according to the state Office of Tourism.

Overall, more than 100 million people, most of them Americans, visited Mexico last year and spent about \$10.8 billion, according to that country's federal Tourism Secretariat. About 72 million people crossed the border for day trips and an additional 7 million arrived by cruise ship.

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