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# It's Time To Treat Poland As A Welcome Guest In The United States

By Tad Taube

Reforming and restoring equality to America's immigration laws – arguably the most significant thing Congress will do this year – is much like the legendary Gordian knot. The goal is clear, but untangling the threads to shape a clear and fair path to the goal is murky.

Not to mention long overdue.

It will soon be 30 years since Congress' last stab at deciding who gets to enter, stay or visit our country. Much has changed since then, both at home and abroad.

Back in the 1980s, my native Poland, from which I fled as a young child shortly before the Nazi

invasion and the beginning of World War II, was struggling to free itself from the shackles of Soviet oppression. Today, Poland has a vital civil society and is one of Europe's most vibrant economies.

Yet, remarkably, a free Poland isn't treated fairly by an America it now emulates. It's the only European Union country whose citizens need visas to visit the U.S. With immigration reform now in the works, what better time to remove that requirement that unfairly singles out the Polish people? The bipartisan JOLT Act (Jobs Originated through Launching [Travel](#)), now part of the larger immigration effort that's making its way through Congress, would do precisely that by granting Poles the same visitation rights afforded to the other 25 European countries in the Schengen Area.



(Photo credit: Wikipedia)

If enacted, JOLT would enable more visitors from Poland, as well as from Israel, Brazil and Chile. And it would address an inequity which puts the U.S. at an economic disadvantage: over the past decade, the global long-haul travel market has grown by more than 40%, yet the U.S. share of the market has fallen from 17% to 12%. During that time, we've missed out on \$2 billion in visitor spending and some 43,000 U.S. jobs in tourist-related industries.

And by holding Poland to that different standard, we're not taking advantage of all to be gained by tapping into a Polish economy that's grown by 19% (compared to a Eurozone average of 0% growth), yet remains an underutilized trading partner – only \$6 billion in two-way trade in 2011.

For the past 20 years, Poland hasn't required visas for visiting Americans – a sign of a country that embraces America not only in words but deeds. It's time this country reciprocates – opening the door for Poles to do more business in Silicon Valley, celebrate Chicago's Taste of Polonia Festival, or visit [Washington](#) D.C. to pay homage to General Tadeusz Kosciuszko, whose assistance during America's War of Independence is honored by a statue facing the White House, in Lafayette Park.

The time is now: for Congress to make good on its promise to bring America's immigration laws into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. But that effort will fall short if it fails to strengthen our ties to Poland by granting that democracy the same reciprocal Visa-waiver relationship we grant our other European friends.

In doing so, we acknowledge those who, while not Americans, carry America in their hearts.



*The Hon. Tad Taube, President of the Koret Foundation, is the Republic of Poland's Honorary Consul for the San Francisco peninsula region.*

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