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*Office of The President
Mr. Paul Tonšetić-Kunder*

June 21, 2013

The Honorable Robert W. Goodlatte, Chairman
The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member
Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Visa Waiver Program Expansion – H.R. 490 and H.R. 1354

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Conyers:

As President of the National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation (NFCACF), a Croatian American umbrella organization representing Croatian Americans throughout the United States, I write to you today in support of H.R. 490, the Visa Waiver Program Enhanced Security and Reform Act of 2013, and HR 1354, the Jobs Originating Through Launching Travel Act of 2013 – also referred to as the JOLT Act.

We respectfully request that the House Judiciary Committee include the Republic of Croatia in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) expansion legislation that may be considered during the 113th Congress. The NFCACF has consistently supported this important initiative for Croatia. Our letter to the Judiciary Committee pursuant to this request during the last Congress was included in the House Immigration and Border Security Subcommittee hearings record on December 7, 2011 (Hearing No. 112-91).

Both the Visa Waiver Program Enhanced Security and Reform Act of 2013 (H.R. 490 and S. 223) - and H.R. 1354 which is also known as the JOLT Act - aim to update and modernize VWP requirements, ultimately making U.S. allies such as Croatia eligible to participate in the VWP for the first time. Moreover, the

bipartisan legislation encourages travel and tourism to the United States that creates and sustains American jobs, while at the same time enhances US security through the set of criteria that each applicant country has to fulfill.

As part of the VWP, citizens of 37 foreign countries can travel to the United States for up to 90 days without a visa. To be admitted to the VWP, a country must meet various security and other requirements, such as enhanced law enforcement, counterterrorism, and security-related data sharing with the United States. This includes timely reporting of both blank and issued lost and stolen passports.

The Visa Waiver Program Enhanced Security and Reform Act would require applicant countries to maintain both an average non-immigrant visa overstay rate and a visa refusal rate of not greater than 3 percent. At the same time it authorizes the Secretary of Homeland Security to include countries in the program if they meet all United States security standards and have a refusal rate below 10 percent, based on the total number of individual applicants. The legislation updates the VWP framework to reflect improved capabilities to track travelers entering the US and improves annual reporting to increase oversight and transparency.

The United States has proved to be a staunch supporter of Croatia, and we continue to build ever closer relations between our country and Croatia. This was marked by Congressional bipartisan support for Croatia's accession to NATO several years ago, which is particularly remembered and appreciated by all Croatian Americans. This could be another crucial milestone for our two countries as the Visa Waiver Program Enhanced Security and Reform Act of 2013 would enable Croatia to join the VWP.

It should be noted that Croatia is in full compliance with all conditions having not only entered into all the relevant arrangements with US government departments and agencies, but has already started their implementation. However, Croatia has been excluded from the VWP because of visa refusal rate slightly higher than the one prescribed by current legislation.

At present, 4.4% of Croatians are denied visas (FY 2012 data) and 3% is the present threshold. In absolute numbers it comes only to several hundred refused visa applications. As significantly fewer than 3% of Croatians who come to America stay longer than allowed on their visas, should the draft proposal apply, Croatia would be entitled to join the VWP.

Croatia is one of America's reliable allies in NATO and has been fighting alongside the United States in Afghanistan as a member of ISAF for years. Croatia is one of the main United States partners in South East Europe and will join the European Union on July 1, 2013. By further expanding the VWP to include Croatia, would further strengthen the ties between Croatian and the U.S.

This expansion would also enhance U.S. security and prosperity by providing for the pre-screening and clearance of passengers thus allowing DHS and our consular offices to focus their attention on other potential travelers who may pose threats to our national security. Furthermore, by increasing international travel, the program would also help to create needed jobs in the tourism sector and provide investment in both countries' economies.

We urgently request that the Republic of Croatia be included in any legislative update related to the VWP and the immigration reform legislation that the House may consider in the coming weeks and months. If we can provide additional information or testimony, please have your staff contact our Public Affairs Director, Mr. Joe Foley, on 301-294-0937. We will be pleased to provide further input on this important matter for the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian American community who have requested help on these visa matters for friends and family for many years.

Thank you for your consideration of our interests on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Tonšetić-Kunder". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Tonšetić-Kunder
President
National Federation of Croatian Americans
Cultural Foundation

CC: The Honorable Trey Gowdy, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security
House Judiciary Committee

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security
House Judiciary Committee

The Honorable Mike Quigley (D-IL), Sponsor of H.R. 490

Members of the Congressional Croatian Caucus