

March 30, 2012

Schumer says: 'Drop Visas For Poland' Polish Americans Can Make It Happen

By Alex Storozynski, President of the Kosciuszko Foundation

After years of broken promises from Washington, Poland finally has a chance of being included in the Visa Waiver Program thanks to Sen. Chuck Schumer. Sen. Schumer came to the Kosciuszko Foundation on Friday for a meeting with myself, Nowy Dziennik publisher Leszek Sadowski, Polish Consul Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka and members of other Polish organizations to discuss his new legislation called the "Jolt Act."

"I am committed to getting this done," Schumer said during an hour and a half meeting with Polish leaders at the Kosciuszko Foundation. "But you have to work at it," he said. "This has to come from you."

When Schumer marched in New York's Pulaski Day Parade in October, the Kosciuszko Foundation, the Nowy Dziennik and others brought the Visa Waiver issue to his attention and urged him to find a way to drop visas for Poland. Sen. Schumer promised to do something. He kept his word. As Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship, Schumer took several immigration bills sponsored by various Senators and combined them into one bill.

Senators Barbara Mikulski of Maryland and Mark Kirk of Illinois sponsored legislation to include Poland in the VWP. And in the House of Representatives a bipartisan collection of Congressmen such as Mike Quigley, Dan Lipinski, Marcy Kaptur, and others have done the same. These bills are now part of the "Jolt Act" to boost tourism. It will add billions of dollars to our economy and create hundreds of thousands of jobs over the next decade. It will also cut red tape for tourists and business travelers from India, Brazil, China, and increase tourism from Canada.

But now Polish-Americans across the United States, especially those in swing states, must unite to ensure that the "Jolt Act" becomes law. We must get President Obama's attention.

When Obama was a Senator from Illinois, he told Polish-Americans that he supported Poland's inclusion in the visa waiver program. Obama's former chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, made the same promise as a Congressman from Chicago. But once they got into the White House, they did nothing. And now that he's Mayor of Chicago, Emanuel wants to do away with Chicago's Pulaski Day holiday.

President Obama is wavering on his support for Poland and Polish-Americans.

I was in the White House Oval Office with other journalists on Dec. 8, 2010, when Obama met with Poland's President Bronislaw Komorowski. Obama said, "I indicated to President Komorowski that I am going to make this a priority. And I want to solve this issue before very long. My expectation is, is that this problem will be solved during my presidency."

A Polish journalist asked, "So it has not been your priority in the past two years?" Obama looked upset by the question and said, "I'm sorry, what I said was that it has been a priority and we've been continuing to work on it, but it hasn't gotten solved yet."

Obama is upset that he keeps getting this question. Trust me, Polish-Americans are more upset that we still have to ask it. It's now 2012 and this is still not a priority for Obama.

Earlier this month, after a meeting with Poland's Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski, Obama's Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was asked about this issue and said, "I know the President pledged that this would be done before the end of his presidency, and probably that will be a little longer than the end of this year."

A little longer? Obama tells Polish-American voters to wait until after the election, while at the same time, Obama is telling the Russians that things will be better for them after the election as well. This week, unaware that the cameras were rolling, Obama told Russian President Medvedev: "On all these issues, but particularly missile defense, this can be solved, but it's important for him [Putin] to give me space. This is my last election. After my election I have more flexibility."

Flexibility? Talk about political gymnastics. What a backflip. The Russian judge gave Obama a score of 10!

Not since the 1945 Yalta Conference has an American President been so willing to sacrifice Poland to the Kremlin's sphere of influence.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that Obama's open mike comments about missile defense referred to Poland. That's where these missiles were to go in the first place. Poland has been a thorn in Moscow's side for centuries. That's why there are now 10 million Polish Americans in the United States, because Russian dictators harassed our ancestors for centuries.

In 1791, Poland passed the first democratic Constitution in Europe and Russia was upset. In 1920, Poland won a war against the Soviet Union to stop the spread of Communism in Europe and Russia was upset. In the 1980s, Poland's Solidarity movement brought down the Russian empire, and today Poland is part of NATO and

the EU. So of course Putin is upset. That's why Russia built a pipeline under the Baltic Sea directly to Germany to avoid Poland.

Obama studied international relations at Columbia University, so he knows the history. And he obviously knows the present state of affairs. Today, because the United States has no embassy in Damascus, Poland represents U.S. interests in Syria. But at the same time, Russia is vetoing efforts to stop the massacre of Syrians by the Assad regime. So why is Obama playing games with Poland, a staunch U.S. ally, while Russia allows the murder of innocent Syrians to continue?

Enough is enough. Obama received 56% percent of the Polish-American vote in 2008, to McCain's 44%. The swing states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio and Pennsylvania have very large Polish populations. And don't forget the 430,000 Polish-Americans in Florida. Obama won those states in 2008. Without them this time around, Obama's campaign is in trouble.

Instead of worrying about Putin's flexibility, Obama must worry that Polish-American voters are no longer flexible on visas. The Polish American Congress has been pushing the visa waiver issue for a decade. But clearly they need help. That is why all Polish organizations across the United States must rise up to demand that visas for Poland be dropped - especially those in the swing states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

The Polish community in Baltimore and Chicago persuaded Senators Mikulski and Kirk and Reps. Quigley and Lipinski to sponsor the original legislation on visa waiver. And now the Polish community in New York has gotten the attention of Sen. Schumer, and he has sponsored the Jolt Act.

We need all Polish organizations across America to get involved in this fight. We need: Gen. Rowny's American Polish Advisory Council; Michigan's PIAST Institute; The Orchard Lake Schools in Michigan; The Polish Falcons of Pittsburgh; The Polish Cultural Center of Philadelphia; the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America and the Polish Museum of America; The John Paul II Polish-American Cultural Center of Cleveland Ohio; The Cleveland Society of Poles; Polish Youngstown; The Polish American Club in Columbus, Ohio; The Polish Center of Wisconsin; Milwaukee's Polanki; The American Council for Polish Culture; The American Institute of Polish Culture in Miami; The Jan Karski Institute for Tolerance and Dialogue; etc. etc.

Forward this article to all your friends and to every Polish American organization that you know and ask them to post it on their web site. All local Polish organizations should start letter writing campaigns to their Senators and Congressmen.

Click here to sign [Drop Visas for Poland Petition](#).

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Founded in 1925, the Kosciuszko Foundation promotes closer ties between Poland and the United States through educational, scientific and cultural exchanges. It awards up to \$1 million annually in fellowships and grants to graduate students, scholars, scientists, professionals, and artists, and promotes Polish culture in America. The Foundation has awarded scholarships and provided a forum to Poles who have changed history.