

Anchor babies Inc. is out of business: Rubio slams door on birth tourism racket

Secretary of State Marco Rubio is shutting the door on foreign operators who make money arranging “birth tourism” in the United States, announcing new visa restrictions just hours before Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived for a three-day visit.

The State Department announced Wednesday that it will deny visas to foreign nationals who knowingly participate in or facilitate commercial birth tourism, using a provision of federal immigration law that allows the secretary of state to deem someone inadmissible on foreign-policy grounds.

The restrictions reach beyond the people who own and operate the businesses. Visa “fixers” who coach clients to provide false information, foreign medical providers who knowingly help arrange birth-tourism travel and others who enable the operations can also be targeted. The department said certain family members may be covered as well.

Rubio said commercial networks have openly marketed U.S. citizenship to foreign customers, coaching applicants to misrepresent the purpose of their trips and charging tens of thousands of dollars to arrange births in the United States.

“The United States will not allow foreigners to exploit our immigration system and violate the sanctity of U.S. citizenship,” Rubio said.

The policy does not amount to a blanket prohibition on pregnant foreigners entering the country. It targets people the administration determines are knowingly involved in commercial birth-tourism schemes. Existing State Department rules already say traveling to the United States primarily to give birth so a child can obtain U.S. citizenship is not a permissible purpose for a visitor visa.

Wednesday’s move builds on a crackdown already underway at the State Department. Rubio said last month that a newly formed Birth Tourism Prevention Task Force

revoked more than 600 visas during its first month while investigating suspected birth-tourism activity and related visa violations.

The timing was notable. Rubio announced the restrictions Wednesday, the same day President Trump personally greeted Xi at Joint Base Andrews for the Chinese leader's Sept. 23-25 state visit. The State Department policy, however, does not single out China or any other country.

Congress is also taking up the issue.

Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC) introduced legislation last week that would impose criminal penalties on people who recruit, transport or harbor foreign nationals as part of a birth-tourism operation. The proposal would allow sentences of up to 15 years per offense, with tougher penalties for criminal organizations.

"America is not the world's maternity ward," Mace said.

The new push comes less than three months after the Supreme Court dealt President Trump a major setback on birthright citizenship. In Trump v. Barbara, the Court held that children born in the United States to parents who are unlawfully or temporarily in the country are citizens at birth under the 14th Amendment, blocking Trump's attempt to narrow automatic citizenship through executive action.

Trump has since pursued other avenues to combat birth tourism, including directing federal agencies to tighten enforcement against people entering the country for the primary purpose of giving birth.

Exactly how widespread the practice is remains difficult to establish because the federal government does not maintain a definitive count of birth tourists. Steven Camarota, research director at the Center for Immigration Studies, told a House Oversight panel this month that his organization estimates between 200,000 and 300,000 children may have been born to birth tourists during the past decade, based on earlier estimates of roughly 20,000 to 26,000 births per year.

Rubio's latest move goes directly at the commercial infrastructure behind those trips: the businesses, intermediaries and other foreign operators accused of turning an American passport into something they can sell as part of a travel package.