



## TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT

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GOVERNOR

May 6, 2013

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
217 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-4207

Dear Congressman Blackburn,

On behalf of the \$15.36 billion tourism industry in Tennessee and the more than 143,000 Tennessee jobs generated by that industry, I am writing to update you on the growing importance of the travel and tourism industry in both Tennessee and the United States and the important role of the Federal government in insuring that dynamic job growth continues unhindered.

With travel 'leading the way' as the U.S. economy recovers from a devastating recession, it is now one of America's largest industries, generating \$1.8 trillion in economic impact with \$759 billion spent directly by domestic and international travelers. Travel continues to outperform other U.S. exports, bucking the trend in March and continuing its steady increase – the eighth in the past 12 months. So far this year, travel exports have grown more than three times faster than other exports.

This industry is also gaining recognition as a vital generator of jobs and a solid foundation for America's prosperity. One in eight Americans is currently employed by the travel industry. The travel and tourism business not only creates current jobs, but also provides millions of Americans a gateway to promising career paths that provide them with the opportunity to join the nation's middle class.

Tennessee's tourism industry is a powerful and rapidly growing economic engine which has created over \$1 billion in state and local tax revenues for the past six years. As you know, these dollars provide the funds for critically important essential services, such as education, transportation and health care, to communities across our state.

While the travel industry is making great progress, several important issues have arisen that I would like to bring to your attention and ask for your consideration and support.

There is an unprecedented opportunity for Tennessee as well as the rest of the United States to increase overseas visitation. This is extremely important to the economy as international visitors stay longer and spend an average of \$4,455 per visit, considerably more than a domestic visitor. In 2012, international visitors added nearly \$130 billion to the U.S. economy, generating more than \$19 billion in federal, state and local tax revenues. Tennessee's international visitation increased by 14.6% last year and we are looking forward to an increasing share of these wonderful visitors.

To insure that these increases continue and accelerate, there are several specific issues that need to be addressed at the federal level. We would respectfully ask your support of the JOLT Act, a bipartisan legislation that would leverage the benefits of inbound international travel to the U.S. to increase economic growth, create more jobs, generate additional tax revenue and boost U.S. exports.

The JOLT Act would:

- Modernize and expand the Visa Waiver Program by updating eligibility requirements to allow more travelers from countries closely allied to the United States to enjoy the same visa-free entry that travelers from 37 other countries currently enjoy. This provision alone could increase annual visitation by more than 600,000, adding more than \$7 billion to the U.S. economy, and 40,000 additional American jobs, with the addition of ten countries such as Poland, Israel, Chile and Brazil;
- Facilitate the use of secure videoconferencing to conduct visa interviews by authorizing a pilot program to test feasibility;
- Reduce visa wait times with measures that include establishing a goal of interviewing 90 percent of applicants within 10 business days for all non-immigrant visas worldwide, with recognition of the need to concurrently maintain U.S. security and address resource allocation;
- Expand the highly successful Global Entry Program that allows pre-approved, low-risk international travelers the ability to use an expedited clearance process upon entry into the United States. Expediting entry for 'trusted travelers' enables U.S. Customs and Border Protection personnel to focus inspection resources on unknown or risky travelers.

We respectfully ask that Congress include provisions of the JOLT Act in any comprehensive immigration reform package.

In addition to the JOLT Act, I would also ask that Congress support the following initiatives.

- Support for Brand USA and its marketing campaign work for America to boost travel to the United States and help spread American values.
- Support investments to modernize America's travel and transportation infrastructure to enable America to capture increased benefits from inbound international travel to the U.S.
- Support the approval of responsible government meetings, conferences, meetings and events which delivers important services to businesses and individual taxpayers. In 2011, government travel alone supported more than 290,000 American jobs.

Congressman Blackburn, I thank you for your distinguished work on behalf of the people of Tennessee. Working together we can continue to position the United States as the premier destination for travel, creating trillions of dollars in economic impact and millions of jobs throughout America, especially within our beautiful, musical state of Tennessee!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Whitaker". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Susan Whitaker