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## 'Brand USA' helps keep Oregon a world-class travel destination

Jason Brandt May 15, 2019

A little-known but effective federal-private partnership is a big reason millions of visitors each year come to Oregon.

But without additional federal action, this program is at risk of grinding to a halt, ultimately putting Oregon jobs and communities at risk.

Brand USA is a unique federal-private partnership that diverts a small portion of travel fees paid by foreign travelers who use the visa waiver program — and matches these with private sector funds to support advertising and promotional content, all without a dime of taxpayer money.



The program targets potential visitors to Oregon in the United Kingdom, Canada, China and Australia, among other hubs, pinpointing these audiences through advertising and a variety of partnerships and events.

Brand USA partners in our state include groups like the Central Oregon Visitors Association, Clackamas County Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, Hells Canyon Adventures, Mt. Hood Columbia River Gorge Regional Tourism Alliance, Southern Oregon Visitors Association, The People's Coast, Travel Oregon, Travel Portland, Travel Portland Oceania, Tualatin Valley, Washington County Visitors Association and Willamette Valley Visitors Association.

Brand USA's work produces results. Here are just a few examples: "Jeni & Olly's West Coast Wine Adventures," a popular Travel Channel series, produced an episode showcasing our thriving wine culture and industry. Its sister program, "Olly's Ale Trail," showed off our breweries and their surrounding communities.

Cindy Cournoyer, a popular Canadian online influencer, shared her Portland and Newport adventures with her 36,000 YouTube and 70,000 Instagram followers. "Through Great Outdoors," a 12-part series on BBC, featured noted Oregon winemaker Maria Ponzi. This type of coverage translates to traveler destination decisions.

Originally created by Congress in 2009, the Brand USA program passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and was reauthorized with bipartisan support, in 2014. But its future is uncertain.

Oregon Congressman Greg Walden has been a champion of this effort along with a bipartisan coalition of House and Senate lawmakers from around the country, who, like my industry and its members, recognize that competition for foreign travelers is fierce. For a relatively small state like Oregon, having an outside partner like Brand USA in our corner helps us punch above our weight against the big-spending U.S. travel regions when it comes to pulling in foreign visitors.

Earlier this year, the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, along with the National Restaurant Association and nearly 600 businesses and organizations whose success is each tied to travel and tourism, urged Congress to reauthorize Brand USA as part of a diverse Visit U.S. Coalition.

The Oregon restaurant and lodging industry employs more than 200,000 employees on an annual basis, and even more during the busy summer season. These workers know their jobs and communities are supported by foreign travel dollars, and we're glad to do our part in showing off just what makes Oregon so special.

*Jason Brandt is the president and CEO of the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association.*