

Subcommittee Chairman Gus Bilirakis Opening Statement  
November Hearing on Time, Travel, and Tourism  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade

Good morning, and welcome to today's hearing examining time, travel, and tourism and how they can strengthen our economy and our communities. Thank you to our witnesses for their testimony.

For me, this topic hits home. I grew up in Tarpon Springs, Florida, where the Sponge Docks and our annual Epiphany celebration have welcomed visitors from around the world for generations. In Florida's 12th District of Citrus, Hernando, and Pasco Counties—tourism supports family-owned restaurants, hotels, and outfitters, helping to sustain our Nature Coast way of life.

In Crystal River you can swim with the manatees. In Weeki Wachee Springs, you can see the famous live Mermaid show. And in Pasco County is home to a vibrant sports tourism industry with countless kayaking waterways and the AdventHealth Ice Rink.

To further highlight the importance of tourism to the State of Florida, I'd like to introduce for the record a study commissioned by Visit Florida showing tourism's economic impact in the state; as well as Visit Florida's Marketing Effectiveness survey revealing tourist preferences and ways to boost demand. (so ordered).

Nationwide, travelers spent roughly \$1.3 trillion last year, generating nearly \$3 trillion in economic output and supporting over 15 million jobs. International visitors alone spent over \$250 billion. As we prepare for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, we have a once-in-a-generation runway to welcome the world and spread those benefits to communities large and small.

A critical tool here is Brand USA, our public-private partnership that markets American destinations abroad. I was proud to author the bipartisan Travel Promotion, Enhancement, and Modernization Act of 2014 to reauthorize Brand USA, because it helps attract visitors without relying on taxpayer dollars for funding. We should ensure Brand USA remains strong and accountable as the global competition for travelers intensifies. To achieve that, I filed legislation yesterday with Mrs. Castor to increase funding for Brand USA, as we gear up for the America 250 celebrations.

Today we'll also examine the tradeoffs to commerce, health, and safety that come with Daylight Saving Time and any adjustments to our clock changing practices. Many argue that more evening daylight boosts consumer activity and tourism; others raise valid concerns about sleep, road safety, and school routines.

Our job is to take actions that help American workers, businesses, and visitors alike, so we can deliver wins for communities like mine and yours—giving families and businesses opportunity and certainty, whether we “lock the clock” or maintain the status quo.

Thank you to our witnesses. I look forward to the discussion. I yield back and recognize my friend, Ms. Schakowsky, the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee.