

U.S. TRAVEL
ASSOCIATION®

WRITTEN STATEMENT

OF

**Ms. TORI EMERSON BARNES
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND POLICY
U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION**

ON

**“LEGISLATIVE HEARING TO PROTECT CONSUMERS AND
STRENGTHEN THE ECONOMY”**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND
COMMERCE’S
CONSUMER PROTECTION AND COMMERCE SUBCOMMITTEE
MAY 26, 2022**

Chair Schakowsky, Ranking Member Bilirakis, and members of the subcommittee, good afternoon.

I'm Tori Emerson Barnes, Executive Vice President of Public Affairs and Policy for the U.S. Travel Association. Thank you for inviting the travel industry to participate in today's hearing.

Before I start, I'd like to thank Ranking Member Bilirakis for his leadership on the Restoring Brand USA Act, and Chair Schakowsky and members of this subcommittee for supporting its enactment. The two bills being considered today are a continuation of the work on Brand USA and exemplify this subcommittee's ongoing bipartisan engagement on travel and tourism issues.

The Visit America Act (H.R. 6965) and the Travel and Tourism Act (H.R. 7820) would both support the economic recovery and long-term competitiveness of America's travel and tourism industry. While both bills contain similar provisions, there are also some key omissions in the Travel and Tourism Act which we look forward to working with this committee to address.

Pass the Visit America Act (H.R. 6965)

The Visit America Act is a bipartisan bill with strong support across the travel industry. There is also companion legislation in the Senate, led by Senator Sullivan, and the Act is included in the Senate's bipartisan Travel and Tourism Omnibus Act of 2021.

First, and most important, the bill establishes an Assistant Secretary of Travel and Tourism position at the Department of Commerce.

- The Assistant Secretary would provide high-level leadership, accountable to Congress, that could work effectively across federal agencies to develop and implement national strategies and policies that grow travel.

- Travel policy touches so many federal departments and agencies, from DHS, TSA, CBP, to State, Consular Affairs, DOT, FAA, and more.
- The U.S. is the only G20 country without a federal agency or cabinet-level official in charge of tourism policy. Establishing an Assistant Secretary would put the U.S. on par with its top competitors for tourism and provide a high-level official to work with our partners across the world on travel facilitation issues.

Second, the Visit America Act directs the Department of Commerce to develop a COVID-19 recovery strategy.

- At the end of 2021, international travel spending was 78% below pre-pandemic levels while business travel spending was down 56%.
- This provision ensures that the federal government works productively with the private sector to develop and implement a plan to quickly restore travel and respond to future pandemics.

Third, the Visit America Act directs the Department of Commerce to consistently develop national goals and strategies to grow travel. The bill also charges the Assistant Secretary with carrying out the strategies on an annual basis.

We'd like to thank Secretary Raimondo for her work to develop a national strategy for the next decade. She has been a strong advocate for our industry's recovery and future competitiveness. Unfortunately, this same type of leadership has been inconsistent from administration to administration. The Visit America Act would ensure that national tourism strategies are consistently developed and carried out across administrations.

Finally, the Visit America Act directs the Assistant Secretary to work with the International Trade Administration and the U.S. Commercial Service to promote and facilitate

U.S. bids to host large international trade shows and events.

- The Department of Commerce provides export promotion and trade facilitation services for other top U.S. exports, like transportation equipment and manufactured goods.
- But the Department does not consistently do the same to help U.S. destinations and travel businesses compete for large international events and trade shows, even though international inbound travel was our nation's second largest industry export pre-pandemic.

This is a crucial provision to ensure that the U.S. does not miss out on major international events, which generate substantial economic impact for local communities. For example, U.S. Travel will host IPW, the leading international travel trade show, next week in Orlando. Past IPWs have generated an estimated \$28.9 billion in export spending in the U.S, which is equivalent to exporting 69 Boeing 747s, 700 GE9X engines or 57,958 John Deere Combines. This demonstrates international travel's substantial economic power, and how travel should be prioritized on par with other top U.S. exports.

Additional Provisions Needed for the Travel and Tourism Act (H.R. 7820)

Next, I'd like to turn to the Travel and Tourism Act, which includes many of these same provisions—including development of a COVID recovery strategy and direction for the Department of Commerce to set national strategies at least every 10 years. However, the bill is missing two critical policies:

- **First**, the bill does not establish an Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism at the Department of Commerce.
- **Second**, the bill does not direct the Secretary of Commerce to support and facilitate U.S. bids for large international trade shows, conferences and events.

In our view, these are two important and impactful policies, both of which are within this committee's jurisdiction.

Conclusion

We want to thank Representatives Titus, Case, Dunn, Soto and Salazar for their work on these critical bills for recovery and competitiveness. We hope to work with the bill's sponsors and this committee to ensure we can amend the Travel and Tourism Act to include similar provisions so that both bills are able to move forward.

Thank you for your time today and for your continued support of the travel and tourism industry.