

Destination Capitol Hill: Talking Points and Key Asks

U.S. Travel members and DCH participants should use these points to guide their conversations with members of Congress.

[Introduce your group to the member of Congress/office]

- Travel is essential to every state and district across the country, driving economic growth, supporting jobs and boosting the U.S. trade balance.
- We represent travel businesses and workers in [State/Congressional District], which are critical to our local and national economy.
- In 2022, travelers spent [\$XX] in [State]. By comparison, pre-pandemic travel spending supported [XX] jobs in our [State/Congressional District] and X in taxes.
- Note: please refer to your state/congressional district data in your folder or available on ustravel.org
- Travel's growth and success also fuels other vital industries across the United States—from manufacturing and agriculture to health care and more—which depend on travel to generate business, spur innovation and support education. **When travel thrives, America's economy thrives.**
- There are policies that Congress can enact **this year** to support the travel industry's full economic recovery and ensure our nation's future growth and success.

FULLY FUND THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR TRAVEL AND TOURISM

TALKING POINTS

- The new Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism will lead efforts across the federal government to grow domestic and international travel—which in turn boosts the overall economy. There was very strong bipartisan support last year as this position was created.
- International travel to the U.S. is one of our nation's largest industry exports, but there has never been a high-level, Senate-confirmed, government official tasked with developing and coordinating a national strategy.
- This new position will increase our country's global competitiveness by putting us on par with every other G20 nation, which all have ministers of tourism.

OUR ASK

- **In the FY2024 appropriations for the Commerce Department, set aside \$3.5 million to fund the office of the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism.**

The Assistant Secretary of Travel and Tourism position within the Department of Commerce was established last year after the passage of the bipartisan Visit America Act. Specifically, the Assistant Secretary will be tasked with developing and implementing a national strategy to expand the travel economy, streamlining government processes affecting both business and leisure travel, and helping U.S. cities and counties compete for large international meetings and events.

LOWER VISITOR VISA WAIT TIMES

- International visitor spending is a major driver of the U.S. economy.
- In 2019, international traveler spending generated \$239 billion in travel exports and a \$54 billion trade surplus that lowered the overall U.S. trade deficit by 10%.
 - **HOWEVER**, total travel exports fell to \$165 billion and the U.S. travel trade surplus slipped to just \$3 billion in 2022.
- A major barrier to fully restoring this sector: unacceptably long wait times for a U.S. visitor visa (B1/B2 visas), which average more than one year in the top countries for inbound travel.
 - In 2019, a staggering 43% of international visitors came from countries that require a visa to enter the U.S.
- These delays are estimated to cost our industry 2.6 million visitors and \$7 billion in spending in 2023.

- **SENATE:** Please contact [Senator Klobuchar's office](#) to join legislation that would (1) set a 21-day average goal for visa wait times, (2) codify existing authority to waive in-person interviews for low-risk visa renewals and (3) provide additional resources to consulates with high wait times.
- **HOUSE:** Please work with [U.S. Travel Association](#) to draft legislation that would (1) set a 21-day average goal for visa wait times, (2) codify existing authority to waive in-person interviews for low-risk visa renewals and (3) provide additional resources to consulates with high wait times.

PROVIDE H-2B CAP RELIEF

- Despite returning to pre-pandemic employment levels, the leisure and hospitality industry **still has 1.5 million open jobs**—that's 15% of all job openings across the U.S. economy.
- Many travel businesses rely on H-2B temporary worker visas to meet their workforce needs.
- The H-2B cap has not been adjusted in over 30 years, but the country's workforce needs have evolved greatly.
- Without access to workers, travel businesses are forced to limit operations and reduce services, which is devastating to seasonal businesses and the overall economy.

OUR ASKS

- **Exempt returning workers from the H-2B cap: Ask House and Senate Appropriators to continue including this provision in funding legislation.**
- **Contact U.S. Travel Association to work on legislation that:**
 - **Increases the current cap on H-2B visas from 66,000 to 150,000; and**
 - **Establishes a cap exemption formula for employers that previously participated in the program over the past five years and remained in good standing over those years.**

BACKGROUND

As set by the Immigration Act of 1990, the H-2B visa program is capped at just 66,000 visas per year. For the past several years, annual appropriations bills have included exemptions for returning workers, which effectively adds about 64,000 H-2B visas above the statutory cap. **This is needed as a minimum.**

ADVANCE FAA REAUTHORIZATION PRIORITIES

TALKING POINTS

- The future growth and competitiveness of America's travel industry requires an air travel system that is modern, efficient, dependable and secure.
- Getting people from point A to point B is essential to our country's economic success, but the current air travel system falls woefully short.
- This year's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization presents a critical opportunity to confront staffing shortages and technology deficiencies.

OUR ASKS

- **Provide at least \$50 million per year for aviation workforce development programs, which would help increase the supply of qualified pilots and mechanics.**
- **Direct the FAA to update their staffing models for air traffic control to account for projected growth in air traffic demand, while also ensuring the agency has enough funding to hire needed air traffic controllers to help prevent delays and cancellations.**
- **Provide at least \$4 billion per year in Airport Improvement Program Grants and enable medium- and large-hub airports, which have the largest infrastructure needs, to keep more of their grant funding.**
- **Extend the Sustainable Aviation Fuel tax credit through 2032.**

BACKGROUND

The Airport Improvement Program (AIP) provides grants to public-use airports for infrastructure improvements through formula funding. Currently, medium- and large-hub airports account for 80% of enplanements, but only receive around 25% of AIP funds.

- We have a leave-behind for your office that summarizes the major opportunities to grow the travel industry, but please reach out if you have any further questions.
- We look forward to continuing to work with your office.
- Thank you for all you do to support the travel industry in [State/Congressional District].