U.S. TRAVEL
ASSOCIATION

August 31, 2026

Dear Members of Congress:

A FIFA World Cup host gets one chance to show the world who it is and this summer, eleven American cities gave the world that answer. Now Congress has a chance to make that answer last by supporting Brand USA, the organization funded by international visitor fees—not taxpayer dollars—and built to turn a single summer's attention into years of visitors.

For five weeks, these eleven cities served as America's front door—a door that fans from 210 countries walked through, making this the most attended World Cup in the tournament's history, including the single highest-attended day the event has ever recorded.

We're grateful to Congress for the $600 million in homeland security funding and the increased federal transportation funding that empowered World Cup attendees to travel efficiently from airports to stadiums. We're also grateful to the administration for implementing FIFA PASS, a crucial tool that helped bolster international visitation for the event. We thank the administration, the White House World Cup Task Force, and the state and local leaders who helped deliver the largest World Cup ever staged, and at a scale few believed possible. We also want to thank the summer's real stars: the Americans who gave directions, recommended the barbecue spot, and treated millions of strangers like guests. The American people delivered, and the world noticed.

In our cities, the world did more than fill stadiums. Many of our visitors spent their time between matches venturing beyond the host cities into small towns, national parks, and roadside institutions —all part of the fabric of America and collectively helping drive the nation's economy.

But the most valuable thing that happened was on our visitors' phones.

Norway's Erling Haaland, with over 74 million Instagram followers, spent the World Cup shopping for a cowboy hat in Texas, declaring himself a "proper cowboy," trying a towering New York deli sandwich, and cataloguing his American "side quests" for an audience that viewed his posts more than half a billion times.

A German fan's road trip to Waffle House became a popular talking point and was celebrated all the way up to the President's Cabinet. Scottish supporters serenaded a New England neighborhood with bagpipes. Millions watched visitors marvel at Buc-ee's, ranch dressing, free refills, and front-porch hospitality. Every one of those visitors left with a positive experience – and became an ambassador for our country in the process.

Every one of those posts was a travel advertisement for the United States: unscripted, unpaid, and delivered to audience sizes no advertising campaign could ever reach.
This warm welcome was more than a moment of hospitality. It was an investment in our economy, our communities, and our reputation around the world. There's an organization whose entire mission is to make moments like this happen on purpose: Brand USA.

Brand USA is the nation's destination marketing organization, a public-private partnership established by Congress in 2009 built to support every corner of the nation doing what the World Cup just did. The organization brings international tour operators, media, and creators to America on hosted trips, which in turn, puts American vacations on the world's screens. That turns into booked flights, hotel stays, and billions of dollars deposited into our local economies. And it's funded by foreign visitors' fees and the travel industry itself, not American taxpayers.

In Texas alone, Brand USA's work has driven more than 200 social media features, roughly 450 retail placements, and seven hosted media trips. It's so successful that every dollar invested in Brand USA generates more than $20 in visitor spending.

Yet just as the world's cameras turned toward America, Brand USA's funding was cut by 80 percent at the very moment our country needs it most. Each additional one percent drop in international travel spending costs America another $1.8 billion.

But there's a fix, and it won't cost taxpayers a dime. The VISIT USA Act would restore $160 million to Brand USA from fees already collected from international travelers through the ESTA program. Congress took the same step in 2022 to pull tourism back from its COVID-era losses, and it worked.

A tournament lasts five weeks. A first impression lasts decades. And America's decade is just beginning. We already celebrated our 250th birthday, but now we're looking toward the 2028 Summer Olympics, the 2031 Rugby World Cup, the 2031 Women's World Cup, the 2034 Winter Games and thousands of other events in every corner of the nation. We already welcome nearly 70 million international visitors a year. Every one of those events could be another World Cup–sized audience, if we choose to reach it.

The world just spent a summer falling in love with America. The posts are still live. The film is still developing. But we cannot lose that momentum now that the tournament is over and fans have returned home. Congress must pass the VISIT USA Act for Brand USA to turn that attention into future visits.

Our country sure looks great on camera and this summer, the world saw that too. Let's make sure they come back. The World Cup showed what's possible when America welcomes the world. The task now is to make that the rule, not the exception – by passing the VISIT USA Act and ensuring Brand USA has the resources to invite the world back for years to come.

Sincerely,

William Pate
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President & CEO
Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

Michael Heckman
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