

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

Dear Mr. Speaker and Madam Leader:

The United States travel industry creates \$2.4 trillion in economic output and supports over 15 million American jobs. As representatives of this industry, we write in support of Brand USA—a public-private partnership established by Congress to market and promote the United States as a destination to international travelers. Through Brand USA's work over the past six years, millions of international visitors and billions of dollars have positively impacted local communities across the United States, at no cost to taxpayers. These include rural areas and small towns that otherwise would not have seen these benefits. However, Brand USA's future has been unintentionally placed at risk. As members of this industry who partner with the federal government to fund Brand USA, we respectfully request that Congress work to determine a legislative solution that ensures reauthorization and funding for this essential program this year, so that this public and private sector alliance may continue promoting communities all over the country.

Brand USA has worked with over 800 partners and brought 5.4 million incremental international visitors to the United States since fiscal year 2013, which has created incredibly positive economic impact across the country: \$17.7 billion generated in visitor spending and \$5 billion in tax revenue, all of which support an average of 51,000 American jobs in destinations large and small.

A main goal of Brand USA is to not only promote best known destinations, but also sites beyond the gateways, including regional and local attractions across the country. Without Brand USA marketing these local communities, located throughout every Congressional district, the surrounding hotels, restaurants and shops will see far fewer international travelers, and the jobs these businesses support may be affected. Brand USA partnerships have promoted smaller destinations and less traveled parts of the country, like Sioux Falls, Louisville, Reno, and Baton Rouge, as well as larger metropolitan areas like New York City and Dallas.

Through its original enactment by the Travel Promotion Act of 2009 and its subsequent reauthorization, Brand USA is funded by a portion of a fee assessed from international travelers coming to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program. These funds are matched 1:1 by funds from the private sector travel industry. This means Brand USA receives no federal taxpayer money.

However, a 2018 congressional budget caps agreement provision diverted this fee revenue. While this transition was not intended to undermine Brand USA's strong performance, this financial insecurity places the future planning and progress of travel promotion for communities rural and urban across the United States at great risk. Without this funding, private sector partners of Brand USA are limited, and in some cases deterred, from marketing to highly valued international travelers.

Travel is up around the world, as much as 8-10%, but the United States' share of global travel is declining for the first time in a decade. As nations like China, France, Spain, and others are outpacing our growth, our industry seeks to maintain this partnership with the federal government, through Brand USA, to promote the entire country to international travelers and help regain billions of dollars in visitor spending. Without Brand USA, this distribution of international visitors would not have nearly the same level of funding to promote all regions of the country. If the United States wants to win international travelers, we need Brand USA more than ever to compete with the travel promotion programs of other countries.

We respectfully and earnestly urge Congress to ensure a stable funding source for Brand USA and to reauthorize the program this year. Without this public-private partnership, this formal coordination would not exist between the United States federal government and the travel industry—two entities keenly focused on supporting our national economy and American jobs and promoting tourism in all areas of our great nation.

Sincerely,