



## UNITED STATES TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

November 29, 2017

The Honorable Wilbur Ross  
Secretary of Commerce  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On September 6, 2017, you requested specific and actionable recommendations from the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (TTAB) as to how the U.S. Government can strategically engage the private sector to help accelerate recovery in the destinations affected by the recent hurricanes. The recommendations below would facilitate a public-private sector partnership with the goal of accelerating both short-term response efforts and long-term economic recovery initiatives in these destinations. They recognize the ability of the Department of Commerce and its National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) to convene, update, and engage private industry so it can effectively assist in these efforts. They also recognize the challenges the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) faces in facilitating short-term response efforts by private industry given regulatory constraints. Lastly, given that the recommendations below can effectively accelerate recovery from several types of natural disasters, they are framed accordingly.

### **Recommendations**

**We recommend that:**

- I. The Department of Commerce convene the Tourism Policy Council by 01/31/2018 to discuss the current status of the areas affected by the recent natural disasters. This would provide an opportunity to request updates from council members and other participating agencies regarding their ongoing efforts, location-specific needs, and how government agencies could more effectively engage the private sector to assist in the aftermath of these events. *We recommend requesting issue-specific updates from the following Departments and their agencies:***

- **Department of Homeland Security (FEMA):** *To report on the FEMA recovery efforts in affected areas to-date, ongoing needs, thoughts on how the tourism industry could assist locally, and current regulatory challenges coordinating private sector assistance.*
- **Department of the Interior (National Park Service):** *To report on the status of short-term recovery efforts, federal employee impacts, and current impacts on visitation to National Parks affected by the recent hurricanes, including on the island of St. John.*
- **Department of Housing and Urban Development:** *To report on how Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program (CDBG-DR) funding was used to support tourism-related economic development efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and to report on current plans for CDBG-DR funding relating to the 2017 hurricanes.*
- **Department of Labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics):** *To report on employment statistics in regions affected by the recent hurricanes, including specific figures for the travel and tourism industry.*

*We also recommend inviting business representatives from the travel and tourism industry to report on challenges they faced in the immediate aftermath of these events, as well as potential opportunities for greater collaboration with the public sector.*

**II. The Department of Commerce work through its component agencies and offices, including the National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO), to:**

- a. **Develop lists of key local actors in natural disaster-prone areas to consult throughout the process outlined below by 12/31/2017.**
- b. **Establish a natural disaster task force composed of key Tourism Policy Council members, representatives from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Agriculture, the Army Corps of Engineers, key industry actors, trade associations, non-profits, the National Governors Association, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and key local, state, and federal governmental agency representatives by 01/31/2018. A suggested list of task force members is attached.**
- c. **Convene the task force by 02/28/2018 in order to develop a strategic plan to facilitate private sector engagement in short-term on the ground recovery efforts for future natural disasters by 5/31/2018. We recommend that the task force engage the private sector division of FEMA throughout the process, and that the plan include:**

- i. An assessment of FEMA’s current information distribution system, and plan for an updated or alternate system to convene, update, and engage the private sector in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster.** *During and after these events, businesses are frequently looking for updates and guidance on how to help. The Commerce Department is well positioned to serve as a clearinghouse for this information and provide regular updates to interested parties as to the on-the-ground situation and immediate needs. We recommend that the system include facilitating regular update calls and emails with information directly from FEMA and other relevant agencies. Trade associations should be included and encouraged to cascade information to their members. Corporate leadership should be engaged directly in order to expedite corporate response time. Establishing a formal system will help engage business strategically and systematically, and provide a needed resource for the business community.*
- ii. The development of a toolkit for businesses outlining how they can stay informed and help affected areas.** *The Department of Commerce can help promote more active, organized, and impactful involvement by the business community in the aftermath of a natural disaster by proactively providing a toolkit to companies that outlines how they can provide assistance and stay updated. There is a predictable set of needs that national and local businesses can help address. Examples may include supplying volunteers, granting philanthropic dollars, and providing travel assistance, lodging, flights, and supplies. The task force should consult natural disaster-prone areas in order to take location-specific needs into account. These toolkits could be distributed to the business community directly by the Department of Commerce, as well as through trade associations and other industry actors.*

**III. The Department of Commerce direct the NTTTO to work with the private sector to assess current needs and develop replicable strategies for accelerating economic recovery in local travel and tourism industries in the aftermath of a natural disaster. We recommend that the NTTTO collaborate with local advisors and the aforementioned task force, as necessary, to:**

- a. Partner with local convention and tourism bureaus to convene meetings in the regions recently impacted by natural disasters by 03/31/2018. These meetings would provide an opportunity to assess ongoing needs, discuss local industry challenges, and help facilitate economic recovery efforts.** *We recommend that these meetings include representatives from FEMA, the local federal delegations, governors’ offices, mayors’ offices, state economic development agencies, local hotels, insurance companies, meeting and event*

*companies, large local companies, travel and tourism operators, hotel and lodging associations, restaurant associations, and the local chamber of commerce. These meetings can serve as the starting point to develop the location-specific strategic plans discussed below.*

- b. Develop a strategic plan to accelerate economic recovery in the travel and tourism sector by 05/31/2018 that can serve as a resource for all regions likely to experience a natural disaster.** *Although each community will have unique needs, they have common issues related to economic recovery and the rehabilitation of the tourism sector. There are workforce and unemployment challenges, employee housing issues, and the need for timely and effective communication and marketing plans. These issues extend beyond the tourism sector, but addressing them is essential to ensuring these locations become, and are known to be, “open for business” for both leisure and business travel. Collaboration is key to this effort, and the NTTTO has the ability to bring key actors together develop effective strategies for use in future events. The Department of Labor and FEMA can work with private industry to help employ laid off tourism sector employees to help with recovery efforts; Brand USA can collaborate with airlines, hotels, and other private industry actors to promote coordinated messages; federal and local housing authorities can work with the hotel industry on short-term housing; meeting and event companies can help promote affected destinations with their clients. These are just a few potential ways the private and public sector could partner, but there has to be an organizing force to drive collaboration, utilize local expertise, and help formulate achievable strategies and partnerships.*
- c. Assist in the development of location-specific plans to accelerate economic recovery in the travel and tourism industry for natural disaster-prone regions. We recommend that the NTTTO collaborate with local government officials, convention and tourism bureaus, and other industry actors throughout the process, and that the plans be finalized by 06/30/2018.** *Many natural disaster-prone regions have various protocols in place for dealing with the aftermath, but have also expressed the need for greater collaboration between public and private actors to develop truly comprehensive plans. The broader strategic plan referenced above can serve as a basis, and will reflect local expertise, but each area is ultimately unique. The NTTTO should determine priority cities and regions in coordination with FEMA, and start the development of these plans through engaging relevant private and public sector actors. It is important that the plans articulate tailored legislative processes around accessing emergency funding for tourism industry recovery at both the state and federal level.*

- d. **Establish clear benchmarks to evaluate economic recovery in travel and tourism sectors in regions impacted by natural disasters in 2017. We recommend that the NTTO partner with FEMA and other relevant government agencies to utilize existing data collection practices when able. We also recommend that the NTTO report on these benchmarks to the Department of Commerce every 3 months commencing on 03/31/2018. *This would include how many tourist-related businesses were closed and re-opened, and statistics on unemployment, infrastructure investment, and tourism related revenue. These benchmarks could be used for future events as well.***

**IV. Direct the NTTO to provide an update on the status of these recommendations at the next TTAB meeting.**

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Public Sector Role**

As outlined above, we recommend that the Department of Commerce use its platform to (1) convene the Tourism Policy Council, (2) establish a natural disaster task force composed of public and private sector actors, and (3) utilize the NTTO to convene public and private sector actors to rehabilitate local travel and tourism industries in the aftermath of the recent natural disasters. The Department of Commerce is well situated to facilitate engagement with these key actors, collect feedback, draft strategic plans to help in short and long-term recovery efforts, and direct the execution of the same.

A meeting of the Tourism Policy Council would be the critical first step in this process. It would provide an opportunity for the Department of Commerce to receive updates on the affected regions, including overviews of current efforts, continuing needs, and ongoing challenges in engaging the private sector. The establishment of a natural disaster task force would drive collaboration between the public and private sector to develop strategies to overcome these challenges. A directive to the NTTO to convene key actors together in recently affected areas will help drive recovery in the local travel and tourism industries. This engagement would also provide critical feedback to start the development of strategic plans to help accelerate recovery in these industries in the aftermath of future natural disasters.

#### **Private Sector Role**

We recommend that the private sector participate in accelerating recovery in the aftermath of disasters through the task force outlined above as well as through local meetings organized by the NTTO. The private sector is well situated to provide expertise, assist with strategic planning, use high profile platforms to engage key actors and reach consumer audiences, and help provide on-the-ground support in both short and long-term recovery efforts. The private sector is looking for guidance on how to strategically engage in these recovery efforts, and the Department of Commerce is well positioned to serve as an organizing force to provide that assistance.

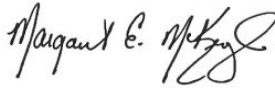
We thank you for the opportunity to provide guidance on how the U.S. Department of Commerce can facilitate engagement with the private sector to help accelerate recovery in the

aftermath of these devastating events. We believe the recommendations outlined above will help effectively facilitate impactful private sector engagement in both recent and future natural disaster recovery efforts.

Respectfully submitted,



John Sprouls  
Chair



Margaret McKeough  
Vice Chair



Greg Stubblefield  
Vice Chair

## Attachment: Suggested List of Task Force Members

Hurricane Recovery Task Force Recommendations	
Task Force Member	Notes
<b>Government Agencies &amp; Organizations of Elected Officials</b>	
Department of Energy	
Department of Homeland Security	TPC member
Department of Housing and Urban Development	
Department of Interior	TPC member
Department of Labor	TPC member
Department. of Agriculture	TPC participant
FDA	
FEMA	TPC member (via Dept. of Interior)
FEMA: Private Sector Division representative	
Local DEED entities in high-risk regions	
National Conference of State Legislators	
National Governors Association	
State & local agencies from frequently impacted areas	
State Tourism Directors	Gene Bryan is highly recommended, former Director of Tourism in WY during 1989 wildfires
Department of State Office of Commerical and Business Affairs)	TPC member
Tourism Policy Council Delegates	
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	TPC participant
U.S. Commercial Service	
U.S. Conference of Mayors	
U.S. Housing Authority	
<b>Trade Associations &amp; Industry Groups</b>	
AH&LA	
Airlines for America	
ASTA	
BrandUSA	
Committee to Encourage Corporate Philanthropy (CECP)	
Convention & Vistors Bureaus	
Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA)	
Destination International	
IATA	
International Inbound Travel Association	
Meetings Mean Business	Paul Van Deventer (CEO of MPI, co-chair of Meetings Mean Business Coalition)
National Tour Association	
New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau	Stephen Perry recommended, former TAB member, Hurricane Katrina experience
Travel South	
Travel Tech	
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	
U.S. Travel	
Visit USA Committee Representative	
<b>Private Industry</b>	
Cellphone Service Providers	
Car rental companies	
Logistics companies	
Major airlines	
Major amusement parks	
Major cruise lines	
Major utility companies	
Online travel agencies	
Relevant TTAB members	
Ride share companies	
Short term online rental companies	
Tour operators	
Travel magazines	
Travel management companies	
<b>Nonprofits &amp; Philanthropic Associations</b>	
American Red Cross	
Council on Foundations	
Habitat for Humanity	
National Council of Nonprofits	
Tourism Cares	