



## UNITED STATES TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

December 12, 2013

The Honorable Penny Pritzker  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Pritzker:

Significant strides have been made in implementing President Obama's National Travel and Tourism Strategy since its release on May 10, 2012. For example, improvements with visa processing in growth markets such as China and Brazil, coupled with a worldwide drop in visa waiting periods, helped generate a welcome tailwind for an American travel industry that grew faster than the overall economy in 2012. We attracted 67 million international visitors, up 7 percent over 2011 and those visitors' spending —\$168 billion — rose 10 percent. It was a very encouraging turn in the long road back from what some see as the "lost decade" after 9/11 for international travel and tourism in the United States.

A key question now before the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (Board) and the Commerce Department is how to sustain that momentum as we push toward the President's stretch goal of receiving 100 million annual international visitors by the end of 2021.

One obvious answer is to fuel the engine with an ongoing campaign to ensure that lawmakers and other opinion leaders, as well as the public, actually *know* about the recent success of our public-private partnership, as well as the continuing, impressive story of the economic and reputational impact of the U.S. travel and tourism industry.

**We therefore strongly urge the recommendations outlined below be specifically included in the National Tourism Strategy, be funded sufficiently to achieve results and implemented by the National Travel and Tourism Office. We are confident that such an approach will**

**drive more and measurable success for an industry that is contributing significantly to the economic and reputational health of the nation.**

As you are aware, tourism is one of America's leading exporters, a powerful economic engine, jobs creator, business enabler and promoter of cultural understanding, but our public profile doesn't match that reality. Support would be far stronger from the business community, state and local agencies and individual taxpayers for NextGen and other needed improvements and promotional programs if those sectors had a deeper recognition of the common stake in travel and tourism.

We need to engage these audiences in new, more effective ways — amplifying the brilliant work of Brand USA in advertising overseas by deploying a long-term, strategic public relations campaign on behalf of the travel industry itself on a local, regional and national basis in our own country. In addition, we urge creation of a pan-industry crisis plan to protect the tourism industry from post-crisis economic loss as a result of natural or other disasters, such as Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina, which created negative public impressions that lingered long after the regions involved were ready for tourists to return.

**OVERALL GOAL: Create deeper appreciation and engagement among local, regional, tribal and national decision makers, as well as consumers, for the shared benefits derived from the success of the American travel and tourism industry.**

Progress toward this goal would help achieve a variety of critical industry objectives: securing strong support among funders and key influencers; building recognition that everyone plays a role in this, from policymakers who make travel easier to consumers who book trips; increasing collaboration with Brand USA; increasing participation in new programs such as Global Entry and Pre-Check; and paving the way for NextGen by making it more understandable and likely to attract vocal allies. Global Entry and Pre-Check have reduced airport line congestion and increased traveler convenience in a few short years. Increased communications about the benefits will enhance travel to and within the country and help dispel any personal privacy concerns.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATION: The first step toward achieving the goal would be creation of a communications plan equipping the industry to speak in unison and more effectively tell the story of the value of tourism. The plan would be built around three broad message pillars:**

- **Extrinsic, tangible value of travel/tourism**
  - Creates jobs
  - Enables business, commerce
  - Generates consumer spending

- Reduces foreign debt, increases U.S. exports
- **Intrinsic, intangible value**
  - Builds pride
  - Opens minds, broadens understanding/respect for differences
  - Stimulates interactions
  - Promotes health, well being (relaxation, intellectual stimulation, etc.)
- **Travel has become easier**
  - Global entry
  - Pre-Check
  - Shorter visa waits
  - NextGen

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATION: Consistently drive appreciation for the part everyone — not just the industry alone, or public bodies — plays in the tourism success story.**

Apart from equipping the industry to do a better job of telling its story, the plan would acknowledge the role of policymakers in driving needed changes to make travel easier, as happened in the visa offices last year. It would also encourage the broader business community to see the travel industry as integral to their success. And finally, it would deliver tested messages encouraging Americans to travel, to take their vacation time because it's enjoyable, good for health and well-being AND for the economy.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATION: Recruit advocates for the industry among funders and other supporters by regularly reaching out to them, actively promoting the benefits of the industry to their constituents through Webinars, blogs, social media, 1:1 talks and mainstream media outreach.**

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATION: Create an online vehicle to drive travel/tourism in the United States.**

Brand USA's recent activities in promoting U.S. travel in international markets, particularly high-growth countries such as Brazil and China demonstrates its key role in the nation's travel industry success. Brand USA is uniquely positioned for pro-active media relations to highlight the benefits of Global Entry, Pre-Check, Next Gen and other travel initiatives. In addition, Brand USA's work suggests the potential benefits of a companion effort within our country. There are of course myriad public and private efforts already promoting visits to both signature and lesser known destinations in the United States, but they hardly speak in one voice or with a subtext on the general benefits of domestic "travel and tourism." We need a vehicle for that, and perhaps a comprehensive stretch goal for domestic travel that parallels President Obama's target of 100 million foreign visitors in 2021.

One relatively low-cost yet powerful way to begin the effort is to activate a bold online storytelling campaign using a central hub that borrows from content distribution and social media best practices in order to show (not just tell) the story in its infinite variations.

Consumer habits, especially within the travel industry, have shifted to favor organic search and social discovery as the primary means for researching and decision-making. Central to making an impact within the context of this shift in behavior is producing credible (accurate and from a source of influence), discoverable (search-engine friendly) and sharable (social-media-enabled and engaging based on historical content performance) information throughout the calendar year to influence behaviors. Because of the scope of the Board's connections to industry thought-leaders, influencers and partners, it is well positioned to contribute quickly and effectively to the current travel conversation.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATION: Pave the way for advances such as NextGen air traffic infrastructure by explaining it in clear terms, such as “GPS in the sky,” to stakeholders who don't understand its economic and environmental benefits.**

The rationale for NextGen and a program for effectively promoting it are presented in recommendations of the Board's Infrastructure and Sustainability Committee, so we needn't go into detail here. Nevertheless, the central importance of NextGen to our industry, to the President's aggressive goal for 2021 and to the image of U.S. travel globally warrants a callout in our subcommittee's recommendations as well.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATION: Protect the industry's reputation through preparation of a crisis communications plan.**

As we have learned, most recently from Hurricane Sandy, major negative events can disrupt perceptions among travelers well beyond the time tourist attractions or regions are ready to become travel-worthy again. A well designed crisis communications plan would focus on building crisis leadership, communication, planning and rapid response capabilities.

Research suggests that systematic crisis planning can help an organization recover two to three times faster than it would without such a plan. Development of a pan-industry crisis plan for use in specific kinds of circumstances would be likely to limit the economic and reputational impact on the travel industry, and help restore public confidence more quickly.

## **CONCLUSION**

Activities carried out under the banner of these plans would be held to clear objectives and measurable results, transparently reported, with the intent of supporting the President's stated travel and tourism goals. Foremost among these goals is to increase jobs through tourism industry growth.

Again, Secretary Pritzker, we strongly urge that the recommendations included here be explicitly integrated into the National Tourism Strategy and implemented accordingly. Consistent, innovative and well-targeted communications about the positive impact of our industry, particularly in the digital realm, are essential to sustaining the public support it needs to flourish, as it has begun to do so promisingly in the last two years.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "TODD DAVIDSON" in all caps.

Todd Davidson  
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Gilliland" in a cursive style.

Sam Gilliland  
Vice-Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Lynch" in a cursive style.

Robert Lynch  
Advocacy Subcommittee Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maureen Bausch" in a cursive style.

Maureen Bausch  
Advocacy Subcommittee Vice-Chair