

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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U.S. TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

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MEETING

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WEDNESDAY
JANUARY 13, 2021

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The Board met via Teleconference, at
1:00 p.m. EST, Kurt Ekert, Chair, presiding.

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ALSO PRESENT

WILBUR ROSS, Secretary of Commerce
JOSEPH SEMSAR, Deputy Under Secretary for
International Trade
NAZAK NIKAKHTAR, Assistant Secretary for
Industry & Analysis
PHIL LOVAS, Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Travel and Tourism, I&A
ISABEL HILL, Director, National Travel and
Tourism Office (NTTO), I&A
DAVID HUETHER, Deputy Director for Research,
NTTO, I&A
JENNIFER AGUINAGA, Designated Federal Officer,
NTTO, I&A
DAVID SHORT, DAS, Department of Transportation
DIANE SABATINO, Deputy Executive Assistant
Commissioner, Customs and Border
Protection
DR. JEFFREY NEMHAUSER, Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON, President and CEO, Brand
USA
KIMBERLY WEISSMAN, Customs and Border Protection

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P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

1:02 p.m.

I. Opening

MS. AGUINAGA: Good afternoon and welcome to this meeting of the United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board. As the designated federal officer, I would like to formally open the meeting and turn it over to Board Chair Kurt Ekert.

CHAIR EKERT: Jennifer, thank you. And a most warm welcome to everyone here today. And I thank you for joining this year's inaugural meeting of the U.S. TTAB. In the spirit of COVID we're doing this via phone, but I certainly hope that we can do so in person very, very soon. We have with us today both old and new faces which represent great experience, as well as fresh perspectives. And I think each of -- I thank each of you for participating and joining the Board. And I thank you in advance for the great work that I know you're going to do in the next

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two years.

Before we start, I am delighted to introduce Brad Dean, who is the CEO of Discover Puerto Rico, as our Vice Chair. Brad has contributed so much to the Board over the years, and I know he will be a very strong leader this term.

Since its establishment in 2003, this Board has advised the Secretary of Commerce on key issues impacting travel and tourism which range from visa facilitation and travel security to workforce development and the importance of international tourism to our economy. In this long-standing public-private sector collaboration, it is more important than ever, given the current state of the world and the crisis that we all face.

Now this is not the first crisis on which the Board has advised. As recently as 2017 we have made recommendations on how the private sector could partner with government to

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accelerate economic recovery in destinations impacted by the hurricanes of that year. The Department of Commerce, led by the National Travel and Tourism Office -- or what we call the NTTTO -- took our recommendations forward and made a substantive impact in helping the local travel industry recover. We now have a very material opportunity to help with the current crisis. Last year the Board provided recommendations on -- on data to track the impacts of COVID-19, and to track recovery of the industry. And we'll hear some more about that today.

The Board also provided advice on restoring consumer confidence in traveling when it is safe to do so. The circumstances, as you all know, have sadly intensified and the impacts on our industry have since then become even more severe. But together I know that we can continue to make policy recommendations to help speed the recovery process. So we're very thankful to Secretary Ross for the opportunity to work on

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these issues under his leadership. And I am pleased now to introduce Deputy Under Secretary of the International Trade Administration, Joe Semsar, who has been a key asset to the Commerce Department, and will now introduce the Secretary.

II. Remarks and Charge to the Board

MR. SEMSAR: Thank you very much for that introduction. Good morning all. Thank you for attending this important discussion today between the U.S. Department of Commerce and the United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board, or TTAB. Before turning it over to Secretary Ross, I would like to quickly draw attention to the good work that has been done by the TTAB over the last four years. The 2016 to 2018 TTAB and the 2018 to 2020 TTAB delivered recommendations on many aspects of travel and tourism, including establishing a new, 10-year numerical, international visitation and spending goal; planning for recovery from future hurricanes; developing the tourism workforce; working with

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the private sector to accelerate progress on implementing the biometric entry and exit system for travelers at ports of entry; leveraging potential membership in the U.N. World Tourism Organization to advance U.S. travel and tourism interest; restoring consumer confidence in traveling post-COVID-19; and tracking and reporting key indicators to monitor the recovery of domestic and international travel and tourism.

These recommendations helped shape initiatives of ITA's National Travel and Tourism Office. And the advice from this meeting will help further develop policy recommendations for a report due to Congress at the end of February. With that I'd like to now welcome the United States Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross. Wilbur L. Ross, Jr. was sworn in as the 39th Secretary of Commerce on February 28, 2017. Secretary Ross is the former chairman and chief strategy officer of W.L. Ross and Co., LLC and has over 55 years of experience in investment

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banking and private equity. He has restructured over \$400 billion of assets in a multitude of industries, and has been a chairman or lead director of more than 100 companies operating in more than 20 different countries. Named by Bloomberg Markets as one of the 50 most influential people in global finance, Secretary Ross is the only person elected to both the Private Equity Hall of Fame and the Turn-Around Management Hall of Fame. Secretary Ross is a graduate of Yale University and Harvard Business School and he's been a wonderful mentor to me. With that, I will hand the floor over to you, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY ROSS: Thank you, Joe, for that kind introduction and for your steadfast service on behalf of the American Travel and Tourism industry. My thanks also to Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism Phil Lovas for shepherding the work of the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board under the Trump Administration.

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I am also thankful to Chairman Kurt Ekert and Vice Chair Brad Dean. You each contribute meaningfully to this advisory board and to the industry through your remarkable private sector expertise.

2020 obviously was not a kind year to your businesses, field workers and the overall industry. But thank you to the perseverance of millions of Americans, the guidance of the Administration, and the diligent work of this Board, we will soon recover. Leisure and hospitality employment began to recover in May, and reached 13 million in employment in December. The 4.4 million increase in leisure and hospitality employment accounted for 35.8 percent of the 12.3 million increase in overall employment between April and December, which does not minimize the struggles of travel businesses or their employees during this difficult period. Travel spending remained depressed by 48 percent as recently as early December 2020 relative to

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the same figure one year earlier.

Yet even under the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic and its associated economic downturn, this Board has logged remarkable achievements. I have been pleased to watch over the last four years as you have first successfully established new, 10-year, international visitation and spending goals. Second, laid the foundation for recovery from future national disasters. Third, encouraged private sector innovation of technologies that will improve travel. And fourth, tracked and reported key indicators to monitor the rebound of travel and tourism.

These accomplishments have all directly impacted the lives of millions of Americans employed in the industry. And throughout the administration, the TTAB also provided 13 sets of recommendations to me. The National Travel and Tourism Office has worked with the interagency Tourism Policy Council,

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which I chair, to implement these recommendations as appropriate. Key actions of the U.S. Government in implementing TTAB recommendations include support for the acceleration of reliable rapid testing for COVID-19, strengthening institutional capacity to integrate public health considerations into travel and tourism policy, lifting a global level-four health and advisory and returning to the previous system of countries specific levels of travel advise in order to give travelers detailed and actionable information to make informed travel decisions.

In addition, there are plans for hurricane recovery and recommendations of the new national goal for international travel and tourism visitation and spending. So all of you have cause to be proud that you've benefitted some of our country's most vulnerable workers during an unstable period. And I look forward to seeing what the new members of this Board, serving over the next two years, will accomplish.

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I have no doubt that all of you now clearly understand what needs to happen next in this sector of the economy. So now, please at this meeting develop focused recommendations on the maximum -- or the ten -- most important current priorities in travel and tourism to support the recovery and growth of the sector and restore international travel.

Congress has directed that we provide to them a report that includes the next steps that the Federal Government can take to assist industry as efforts to recover from this crisis are underway, including policy recommendations and legislative proposals. Your recommendations will assist us in responding to this congressional request. And your Commission is complex and impacts workers from every walk of life across all 50 states. And I trust that you will create sage, actionable advice that will continue to accelerate both your sectors' and America's recovery from COVID-19.

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So I thank you again for your service and I hope you find the rest of the meeting both enjoyable and productive. Thank you again.

CHAIR EKERT: Mr. Secretary, thank you. And we look forward to taking on the mantle that you've given us, and that is to assist our country and our industry with taking actions that will help the industry recover and -- and grow once again. And I want to personally thank you for your service to our country and your stewardship of our industry during your tenure leading the Commerce Department. So thank you, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY ROSS: Well thank you. I look forward to the future.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you very much. We're going to turn now -- we're privileged to have five members of the government here with us who are going to share information today. There will be the opportunity to ask questions of the -- of the presenters after the -- after all of

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the five presented. So please note that that is coming.

And to start us off today, we're going to hear from the Assistant Secretary for Industry and Analysis from the Department of Commerce. And that is Nazak Nikakhtar. Nazak, the floor is yours.

III. U.S. Government Presentations

MS. NIKAKHTAR: Yes, thank you very much. Good afternoon everyone. Again, I am Nazak Nikakhtar, the Assistant Secretary for Industry and Analysis. I want to first and foremost thank this group for your dedication and your hard work to ensuring that your input, your guidance, your expertise is considered as we look at the enormously complex and very nuanced landscape of the path to economic recovery.

Travel and tourism and -- with respect to our Office, the Travel and Tourism Office -- Phil Lovas, thank you for your leadership and your position as DAS. You've done an incredible job

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in this office and it's really been just a great privilege to see and to work with a leader like you.

For the group -- our office -- just in terms of the context, we work -- we cover the manufacturing sector, services sector, certainly travel and tourism. As you know, textile, consumer goods, materials, and all trade policy analysis. So really all aspects of industry, industry competitiveness, and certainly economic recovery we are involved in -- and our mission has been to do what is right for industry -- before the pandemic, to help industry grow -- certainly during the pandemic, how to -- how to get -- how to improve the conditions, I should say, for the industry. So when we get out of this -- the pandemic through the economic recovery to a position where you -- where industries can grow and thrive again.

What I'm here really to talk about today is Privacy Shield and the Schrems II

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ruling. We in the United States are certainly deeply concerned about the uncertainties that was created by the European Court of Justice this summer in validation of the European Commission's adequacy decision that underlied the E.U.-U.S. privacy shift framework. And the implications of that decision for the viability of using standard, contractual clauses, binding corporate rules, and other mechanisms for the E.U.-U.S. data transfers.

Even though we're deeply disappointed, of course, we don't agree with the Court's decision, we are committed to working with our European Commissioner -- European Commission counterparts to address the Court's concerns and enable companies to continue to transfer personal data from the E.U. to the United States. The Administration seeks to ensure the continuity of the most important transatlantic data flows in a manner that is consistent with U.S. economic and national

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security interests.

It's important to note that the Schrems II ruling focus exclusively on government access to data. The Court didn't question the extent of protections Privacy Shield offers E.U. individuals with respect to the commercial collection and use of the personal data. We believe Privacy Shield already provides strong and predictable protections for E.U. individuals and any enhancements to the framework is going to build on this strong foundation.

We know that companies on both sides of the Atlantic now need greater clarity in the wake of the Schrems summer judgments. And I really want to assure everybody that we are and we have been working closely, around the clock, with the European Commission and the European Data Protection Boards to address this, and this certainly has been a whole-of-government approach.

In the view of the considerable

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uncertainties concerning the use of the standard contractual clauses, we worked with our interagency colleagues to bolster companies' ability to utilize these clauses while we work to negotiate the necessary enhancements to Privacy Shield. To that end, the U.S. Government released a white paper to assist organizations when using these standard contractual clauses, and making case by case assessments called for under the Schrems II decision as to whether U.S. law concerning government access to personal data meets the E.U.'s standards.

The white paper, if you haven't had a chance to look at it, is incredibly helpful. It was drafted in coordination with the Department of Justice as well. It includes a wide range of information about the extensive privacy protection in the current U.S. law and practice relating to government access to data for national security purposes, and it sets forth the protections provided under our system.

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Again, if you haven't reviewed it, it provides a lot of useful guidance for companies. We hope that the E.U. members' state-data protection authorities will work with the United States and the European Commission to avoid further disruption in Trans-Atlantic data flows while our teams are continuing to work and are working to address the concerns raised by the court. The recently released guidance from the European Data Protection Board does not provide a ready and clear path for the use of its standard contractual clauses to transfer personal data to the United States from most firms. This is making the negotiation of a privacy shield -- enhanced Privacy Shield framework all the more important at the moment.

Finally, I wanted to affirm the United States' commitment to working with our European partners to preserve the continuity of Trans-Atlantic data flows and privacy protections. We've had three successful joint annual reviews

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of the Privacy Shield framework. The E.U. and the U.S. officials demonstrated their shared commitments to strong and credible enforcement of rules that protect privacy and ensure trust in a digital economy. Our regular interactions with E.U. officials before, during, and after these Privacy Shield reviews -- these annual ones -- afforded numerous constructive opportunities for Trans-Atlantic coordination and cooperation on promoting trust in the digital economy. This work is going to continue as we seek to develop durable solutions to ensure continued and unimpeded Trans-Atlantic data flows moving forward.

We at the International Trade Administration, the Commerce Department, and the Administration remain committed to continuing these discussions and restoring clarity and certainty to Trans-Atlantic data flows and privacy as quickly as we can. I should mention, just to be forthcoming, the negotiations still

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are in early stages. There's still a lot more work to be done. But we are hopeful, based on the robustness of the discussions that we've had, that our European Commission partners share our sense of urgency and we will continue on as positive trajectory as we have been thus far.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to present and I will await questions at the appropriate time. Thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you very much, Assistant Secretary -- really appreciate the comments. We're next going to turn to David Huether, who is the Deputy Director for Research at the National Travel and Tourism Office within the Department of Commerce. And I believe, Deputy Director, that you are going to be walking through a presentation that's been pre-distributed to everyone involved. So the floor is yours.

MR. HUETHER: Great, that's right. Thank you very much. And I would invite everyone

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to go to slide two of my presentation. I am going to give a little walk-through about where travel and tourism was in 2019 and where it's gone in 2020. So, first of all, setting the stage would be good -- slide two of my presentation.

In 2019 the United States welcomed nearly 80 million international arrivals. And these visitors spent roughly \$234 billion in the United States last year -- or, in 2019. And this spending accounted for approximately 9 percent of total U.S. exports and goods and services during that year. And that spending supported 1.1 million jobs in the United States.

In terms of overall economic impact, domestic international travel and tourism generated nearly \$2 trillion in output last year -- or, in 2019 -- and supported 9.5 million jobs. If we go to slide three, we see that as much international travel was suspended earlier in the year. And the U.S. economy was temporarily shut

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down in the spring. Travel to and within the United States was severely impacted. And you're looking here not only at COVID cases by week in the United States, but also travel metrics such as TSA throughput, drive travel, occupancy -- hotel occupancy and travel spending, all showing year over year changes.

And as the economy began to open up, travel did begin to recover. But more recently -- really starting at about mid-October, the recovery has slowed fairly significantly. If we move on to the next slide, we see that international in-bound visitation to the United States also dramatically declined in the spring of 2020. And it has remained severely depressed. Visitation from Canada, which was down 98 percent year over year in April, was down a similar 96 percent in October. Mexico visitation, which was down negative 88 percent in April, remains fairly depressed at negative 69 percent in November. And overseas visitation, which accounts for about

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half of the international travel of the United States, which was down more than 99 percent in April, still remained down 90 percent in November.

If we move to the next slide, slide five, we see that the resulting downturn in visitation translated obviously into less spending in the United States by international visitors. Travel exports fell from nearly \$20 billion in February to just \$5 billion in November, which represents a 73-percent decline. Meanwhile, travel imports fell from \$14 billion to just -- in February to just \$3 billion in November, representing a 78-percent decline.

As a result, while travel remained a surplus industry in terms of international trade, the surplus of \$4.2 billion in February declined to under \$2 billion in November. If we now move to slide six what we see is that year-to-date, January to November, overall travel exports were down 61 percent, which is much more significant

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than the decline in other service exports or goods exports. And in fact, travel alone accounted for 35 percent of the decline in total U.S. exports during the first 11 months of last year.

If we move to the next slide, slide seven, we see that the dramatic decline in international travel has also resulted in a significant decline in ESTA Travel Promotion Fund collections, which totaled just \$62 million in Fiscal Year 2020, which was down 60 percent compared to Fiscal Year 2019. This will obviously have an impact on the funding of Brand U.S.A.

If we move to the next slide, slide eight -- which we're looking at employment now -- and we're -- since travel employment is not measured on a monthly basis by the government, we're using leisure and hospitality as a proxy. And as the Secretary already mentioned, leisure and hospitality employment fell 49 percent from

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February to April -- far greater than the 10-percent decline in the rest of the economy. So even though leisure and hospitality accounted for just 11 percent of total employment in February, the 8 million jobs lost by April accounted for 38 percent of the 22 million jobs lost during that period of time.

And from April to November leisure and hospitality employment did increase 57 percent, which was faster than the rise in overall employment during that period of time, where employment in the rest of the economy rose approximately 6 percent. However, after seven consecutive months of growth, leisure and hospitality employment fell by nearly a half a million in December and remains 23 percent below the peak in February. Whereas in the rest of the economy, employment is just 4 percent below the peak.

If we move to the next slide, the Census Bureau began a small business poll survey

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in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to measure the impact of the pandemic on small businesses. And what you're seeing here is responses from -- on the -- or, are responded bi-weekly and asked these responses -- these respondents are indicating if they have reduced revenue in the past year. And what I'd like to highlight for you is that the accommodations and food services sector, which in mid-February -- mid-October about 43 percent said that they were losing revenue, that percentage has increased to 60 percent as of the week in January 3rd. So that shows that the leisure and hospitality sector continues to face significant hurdles as the pandemic has increased in recent months.

Finally, if we move to slide 10, which is consumer confidence, we see that in December consumer confidence -- last December, consumer confidence was about 33 percent below where it was in February. But it's important to keep in mind that in December consumer confidence was

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only six percent below its long-term average since 1978.

Now every two months the Conference Board asks American households on their vacation intentions for the next six months. And we see that in February of last year about 55 percent of Americans plan on taking a trip in the next six months, and that was actually higher than in February 2019 when 52 percent said they were going to take vacations. But as you would expect, the percentage of Americans planning on taking trips dropped significantly to 31 percent in April. But by October it had recovered to about 44 percent of households. Unfortunately, the share of households intending to take a vacation in the next six months has since fallen to 34 percent this past December compared to 63 percent in December of the prior year. That adds further evidence that the recovery -- at least in hospitality -- may be hitting a soft spot in the next several months.

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Now I'd like to end my presentation with reporting to you that at the suggestion of the TTAB, the National Travel and Tourism Office has developed a COVID-19 monitor of statistics to measure the state of travel -- the travel industry throughout this pandemic. And at the recommendation of the TTAB, we have also created an interactive, public-facing dashboard that we expect to have live on our website by the end of this month. It will have four sections, including a section on COVID-19, a section on the general U.S. economy, a section on international travel, and a section on general travel in the United States. This dashboard will be updated on a weekly basis, beginning -- once it's up. We hope that this will keep stakeholders informed on the current state of the travel industry. So with that, I'll turn it back. And thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: Well thank you very much, Deputy Director. Much appreciated. We're now going to hear from Dr. Jeffrey Nemhauser from

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the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And I believe, Doctor, that you'll be referring to a pre-distributed presentation as well?

DR. NEMHAUSER: That's correct. Can you hear me?

(No audible response.)

DR. NEMHAUSER: So I'd like to thank the Department of Commerce and the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board for the invitation to speak with all of you today. By way of orientation, I am a medical officer in our Traveler's Health branch at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC, in our Division of Global Migration and Quarantine. We have -- since the very beginning of the response -- played an active role in terms of helping to identify where the efforts were occurring around the globe. And providing advice and recommendations to travelers in order that -- that -- initially so that they could travel safely, and then as the pandemic has spread

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globally, to make sure that people are aware of where the -- the spread is most intensive.

I was very gratified to hear the Secretary's opening remarks -- that there are many groups, and not just public health organizations such as the CDC and the World Health Organization, that recognize the inextricable linkage between public health and travel. And recently -- I want to turn your attention to some recently published documents that identify the importance of that relationship. I am not going to go through all of them, but just to highlight them for your awareness -- and if you need references, please reach out to me. I'm happy to share them.

The first document is the Runway to Recovery, which was jointly issued at the end of December by the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Homeland Security, and my home department -- that of Health and Human Services. Also the International Air Transport Association,

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or IATA, has the document, Safely Reopening Borders. And the International Civil Aviation Organization, or ICAO, has their Manual on Testing and Cross-border Risk Management.

And these documents are important because each of them refers to the importance of knowing the COVID-19 public health situation globally -- so having that awareness is -- is critical to making important decisions, not only for yourself, but for your family or for the people that you may be sending overseas if you're -- if you're a decision maker for an organization, or say a decision maker for a university about study abroad type programs. And all of these documents also integrate that awareness of the COVID-19 global situation -- they integrate that awareness into various mitigation efforts. So masking, physical distancing, avoiding crowds, washing hands, and staying home when sick or after testing positive.

And we need to make sure that if

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people do choose to travel, that they are knowledgeable and take steps to travel safely. Some of the tools that CDC uses to help inform people about risks associated with travel is our Travel Health Notice system. And we can turn to the next slide, please.

The CDC COVID-19 Travel Health Notice System was modified from our existing, or non-COVID system, and we have currently a four-tier, or four-level travel health notice system where we identify the level of COVID in destinations around the globe. And that includes both foreign countries as well as U.S. territories. And you can see they range from very high to low. So, from a score of four down to a score of one. And that is based on a couple of different criteria that we use.

One is the primary criteria -- and depending upon the size of the population of the destination, we either use incidence rate, or we use new case count -- accounting for sizes in

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populations. And then we look at secondary criteria. And the secondary criteria are important because we go one step further. We don't just simply rely on the numbers that a ministry of health, or a territorial health department may be reporting to the WHO, or the CDC, we actually look at hospitalization rates, we look at testing to see how representative the testing is that's being done in that destination to make sure that in fact the numbers that they're reporting do in fact represent the reality of the situation.

And then you can see the guidance that we have depending upon the level of COVID, ranging from all travelers avoiding all travel at a very high level, to the level one or low, where the guidance for travelers to, as we've talked about before and as I'm sure you've heard many times, the importance of wearing masks, watching their distance from others, washing their hands and being aware of their health. Next slide,

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please.

And then you can see on this next slide -- this was as of the 9th of January, so just a couple days ago now -- you can see the distribution of COVID-19 in destinations around the globe. And unfortunately, as you can see, the picture is a pretty bleak one right now. There aren't too many places around the world that fall into the low or moderate category. The very vast majority fall into the very high category because of the rampant transmission of the virus and the real difficulty -- the real struggles that we're having in terms of control. And that's even in places that once had the virus under control. And so as we move into January and February of 2021, things have not changed dramatically from the way they were at the end of 2020. Next slide, please.

And this is our last slide that I have. And it's just to briefly talk about domestic travel and COVID-19. Excuse me, I think

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I skipped a slide. Slide four, I apologize. International air travel and testing recommendations. Effective the 26th of January -- as I think probably several of you on the call are aware -- these are no longer recommendations. CDC will no longer recommend getting tested before travel to the United States. In fact, yesterday, we issued an order requiring proof of negative COVID test results, or recovery from COVID-19, for all airline passengers arriving into the United States.

The Runway to Recovery document that I had mentioned at the outset, they referenced -- that document references a test-based risk assessment process for limiting the spread of COVID-19. So we are in line with that document. And this order was really issued in response to the rise of -- as I'm sure you're aware -- these more easily transmissible SARS-CoV-2 variants -- SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. And I'm sure you're aware of the rise in both the

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U.K. as well as in South Africa and now we're hearing about reports in Brazil of these different variants that are more easily transmissible.

And so rather than closing borders, what we really want to try and do is we want to try and get -- as quickly as possible -- identify travelers who may pose a potential risk to the United States, or really to anywhere in the world. It's important to note that there are, right now in addition to the United States -- there are about 120 countries using some form of testing to monitor risk and to control introduction and spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. So, we are not alone in this approach and it's looking more and more that the -- that many destinations around the globe will go to this.

And now to the final slide. Whereas for international travel we do have these testing requirements, for domestic travel, testing is

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still a recommendation. And you can see the very last bullet on the slide talking about getting tested for COVID-19 before travel, after travel, and reducing non-essential activities. Again, really trying to identify who is representing that risk of transmission -- that risk of translocation of the illness and getting those people to stay home and to recover before they go about embarking on their travel.

Situational awareness is critical whether we're talking about international travel or domestic travel. And we have not yet implemented domestic travel health notices, but it's important to be aware that in most places of the United States, the incidence rate is well over 200 new cases per 100,000 population. So that really puts our own country, the United States, squarely at the very highest level of COVID-19, or level 4. So -- and as you saw on that map, the United States was that same dark red color as many other destinations around the

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world.

So as we move into 2021 and we think about the steps and the processes and the policies that the CDC can offer, certainly in the next couple weeks, the new policy about testing before coming to the United States in order to try and control the new variance -- the introduction of the new variance into the United States is important. But also looking at ways that we can better inform even domestic travelers about the risks that they may be facing when they're going from their home to somewhere else within the United States in order that they can travel safely and that the people at the destination can also be safe in the course of their interaction with those people.

And that's -- that's the -- I am happy to take any question. And I believe that there's a question and answer period after, but that's what I have for you today, thanks.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you, Dr.

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Nemhauser. And yes, we'll -- in about 20 minutes we'll be able to handle some Q&A. We're next going to hear from Diane Sabatino, who is the Deputy Executive Assistant Commissioner of the Customs and Border Protection Agency. Ms. Sabatino, the floor is yours.

MS. SABATINO: Thank you so much. Good afternoon and thank you for the invitation to participate in the meeting today. As he said, my name is Diane Sabatino. Many of you may know I became the Deputy Executive Assistant Commissioner -- that title is quite a mouthful -- for Field Operations at Customs and Border Protection last July having previously served as the Director of Field Operations covering the State of Florida for the last five years.

But being in this role now for around seven months -- certainly during this unprecedented time -- given the devastating effects of COVID-19 on the travel industry, you know, I've spend a lot of the last seven months

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engaged with our stakeholders across the environments -- the air, land, and sea environments, specifically targeting, you know, passenger traffic and travel. But you know, CBP, we're an agency that -- you know, we're adept at being flexible to tackle challenges. And while identifying opportunities to advance our core mission, you know, our priority also facilitating lawful travel and trade.

And we've been implementing our vision of a secure, seamless and touchless travel experience with our air travel partners, well in advance of the COVID-19 pandemic by expanding the use of facial biometrics to automate that identity verification. But the pandemic certainly makes the need for that secure, touchless travel experience more essential than ever. And we've been actively using this time to transform air travel, really looking forward to that business resumption and, you know, being a part of that world class travel system that

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leverages technology resources, and frankly, stakeholder partnerships, which are the most important as we prepare for the return of travelers.

But I am excited. And I think, you know, unfortunately not a lot of great news with the current state of affairs. But very much looking forward to sharing how we're going to support the travel recovery effort. But for the past few years we -- we've proven the success of the use of facial biometrics and expanding public-private partnerships as the best way to fulfill the congressional mandate for the biometric entry-exit system. And we're going to continue to expand biometric exit with our air travel partners to meet the security mandate and support their innovation efforts. And currently we have fully or partially deployed biometric exits with airlines and airport stakeholders at 26 different airports.

But instead of fully focusing on

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implementing biometric exit to compliment the initial biometric entry process that began back in 2004, you know, our wonderful technology team has built a facial biometric matching service to support the entire travel journey -- wherever identity verification is required. And now, CBP, we can offer our stakeholders identity as a service throughout the travel process, including check-in, bag drop, TSA screening, and departure to further secure and streamline the travel process.

And we're very excited to partner with Delta and TSA on the next phase of an end-to-end facial biometric travel process, which will begin in Detroit later this month, building off our joint biometric operations in Atlanta. And this will be the first pilot to use facial biometrics for identity verification from check-in to departure for domestic travel. And travelers can opt-in with their passport number and TSA's pre-check membership.

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But by providing travelers, you know, the option for that secure, seamless, and touchless journey, you know, we can -- you know, again, be part of the solution in rebuilding traveler confidence. You know, limit the spread of those pathogens and frankly enhance the overall customer experience. And for the past few months, we've actually significantly accelerated an enhanced entry process using facial biometrics, many of you are potentially familiar with Simplified Arrival, which is now operational in 27 airports, including six of our pre-clearance locations.

And while arriving at the select airports during international travel, the passengers now simply pause for the photo at the CBP primary inspection area which complements the biometric boarding and exit. But by September 2021, Simplified Arrival is going to be deployed at an additional 45 airports. That will cover about 84 percent of in-bound air traffic relative

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to the travel volumes of what we saw in 2019, with at least 79 percent of that traffic covered by this March.

But again, we're committed to creating that world-class travel system. And this is really the first step in reimagining how travelers arrive into the United States. But we're also exploring way finding and smart queuing technology to personalize and streamline travel for passengers when they arrive to the U.S.

And in the sea environment, collaborating with the cruise industry to develop a new streamlined passenger debarkation or arrival process that uses facial biometrics to verify passengers returning to the U.S. onboard vessels now closed loop cruises -- the ones that start and stop in the U.S. And we've deployed that facial biometric program to seven locations in the U.S. in partnership with nine different cruise lines. And during 2021, our plan is to

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hit the top 10 seaports with that program processing about 85 percent of the nationwide passenger volume. And again, those numbers based on the 2019 figures.

And cruise vessels -- or, cruise lines are reporting that the vessels with the biometric debark experience faster processing times by up to 33 percent, more than vessels without the CBP solution and certainly higher passenger satisfaction. And again, the significance of these deployments, you know, in the environment that we're in now, lending to the health and safety aspects frankly that we weren't contemplating when we initially were envisioning this, you know, touchless vision. But it works very well today. And our plan to accelerate deployments with the cruise lines are optional with further -- you know, will enhance queuing -- minimize the need for queuing -- streamline the processing and limit that exchange of physical documents.

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And in our land border environment, we've deployed Simplified Arrival at seven ports of entry -- four along the northern border, and three along the southern border. But this week we're already moving out into other locations on the southern land border. So by the end of 2021 we'll have deployed nationwide to 97 additional ports of entry, with 84 along the northern border and 13 along the southern border.

And since Simplified Arrival was deployed to roughly 50 percent of all of the southern border POEs, over 300 imposters have been identified in the land environment alone. So certainly our primary mission -- preventing the entry of, you know, people who seek to do us harm, or goods that are dangerous to U.S. commerce or economy, you know -- this is our priority mission -- but the enhanced, you know -- the program itself enhances the overall aspect of that passenger experience. And the opportunities for us to, you know, further

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streamline the processing.

But the deployment of Simplified Arrival at the land ports is expected to result in that efficient primary processing, including measurable time savings, because we're also rolling out processing of I-94 applications with an option to prepay in advance, which is going to save about 30 seconds per traveler -- in the secondary environment. But once it moves out to the primary environment, it will be saving about 30 minutes per traveler. Or, it equates to about 20,000 man hours for us each year in our southern border environment. So significant time savings.

But to date we've processed more than 59 million travelers through biometrics in the air, land, and sea environments. You know, but it's a -- the technology has deployed certainly legitimate questions being raised about privacy. And you know, we're steadfastly committed to travelers' privacy and we take the obligations

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and responsibilities that come with that very seriously. So we're using our facial biometric comparison technology, only at specific times and locations, you know, where travelers are already required to present that proof of identity. And travelers at this time who do not wish to participate in that facial biometric process simply notify a CBP officer and request a manual document check. And they are processed consistent with existing requirements for entry to the United States.

So despite the setbacks from COVID-19, we're going to continue to work closely with our government and stakeholder partners to help rebuild that public confidence in our travel system. And as part of this engagement, we're participating in several, you know, health-focused working groups to develop policies and solutions to assist in the reintegration of travel mobility and continue to work very closely, certainly, with our partners in CDC and

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follow their guidance.

So moving forward, as we continue to collaborate with our stakeholders and leverage the partnerships, you know, we're going to continue to work to advance those border innovation efforts. We continue to expand, as I mentioned, the Simplified Arrival and Biometric Exit -- you know, for those partnerships. But also Global Entry has now been upgraded with facial biometrics at 19 airports as part of the first phase of innovation for our premier Trusted Traveler program.

And to prevent the use of fraudulent documents we've also started implementing the automated document validation process in phases that compares carrier-submitted pre-departure manifest data to the source document that CBP has on file such as a visa or a U.S. passport. And under this program we verify the accuracy and authenticity of the advanced passenger information provided prior to an individual even

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being issued a boarding pass. And to date, several of the air carriers are voluntarily participating in these document checks, which benefits both the airlines and the travelers.

And we've also launched a mobile application called CBP One that acts as an intuitive, single portal for travelers and stakeholders to access CBP services -- like reporting arrivals or exits, applying for provisional I-94s, you know, applying for and updating cruising licenses, or even scheduling cargo or conveyance inspections. So through a series of, you know, intuitive questions it's going to guide each type of user to the appropriate CBP services based on their needs.

And currently CBP One is available for travelers to apply for and view their I-94s, and some of those cargo-related inspection services. But additional services are going to be rolled out over the next year as we continue to upgrade our services to the digital platform. And as

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mentioned, CBP and TSA, we're going to continue to advance the biometrics collaboration we've built over these last few years, which I know has been a key interest to many of our travel partners. And I'm looking forward to our ongoing engagement with the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board, and I significantly and greatly appreciate your support and collaboration -- and you bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise that's going to be imperative to our efforts to rebuild, you know, a secure, touchless travel system for the future.

And with that, thank you very much, again, for the time this afternoon and I will turn it back over.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you very, very much. And our last speaker today, we're going to hear from David Short, who is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Aviation and International Affairs within the Department of Transportation. So Deputy

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Assistant Secretary, the floor is yours.

MR. SHORT: Thank you very much. Thank you for the invitation. It's good to be with you all this afternoon and to have this opportunity to share some information on how the Department of Transportation is supporting the recovery of the travel and tourism industry.

We've all received a lot of statistics already during this meeting, so I don't want to inundate folks with too much more. But let me just touch on a couple of trends that I think may offer some hope for the tourism sector. We've certainly seen a rebound in air traffic volume from the depths where we were in April and May of 2020 when traffic was down by approximately 95 percent -- and even more than that in the international space versus domestic.

Since then, we have seen a marked shift away from traditional business travel toward greater emphasis on leisure travel. So maybe a little ray of hope there for the tourism

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sector. We're seeing less traffic flowing over traditional hubs of the legacy carriers, more leisure traffic moving point to point. The states of Florida, Arizona, Nevada and Colorado have increased their share of national air traffic relative to the other states. We have also seen a significant shift away from the legacy carriers and toward the ultra-low-cost carriers which tend, of course, to cater more to leisure traffic.

So as an example, comparing seats offered in the year 2020 versus 2019 -- American Airlines down 42 percent, Delta down 38 percent, United down 48 percent. Contrast that with Allegiance, ultra-low-cost carrier, is down only 6 percent. And Spirit, another ULTC, down by only 23 percent.

In the international space, with Mexico and the Caribbean, have been holding up fairly well relative to traditional business markets such as Europe and the Far East. Now

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with that as a basis, let me move on to some of the key efforts that the Department of Transportation has been focused on in the last year.

First, maintaining our international air links. And I want to emphasize, there's been a lot of misstatements in the media and elsewhere that the U.S. and other countries have, quote-unquote, taken down flights -- or banned flights. This is not true. This has never happened. The U.S. has always fully respected our international aviation commitment. We have never denied the ability for foreign carriers to fly into the U.S. or for U.S. carriers to fly to foreign destinations.

Now, what the U.S. Government has done is adopt the so-called 212(f) restrictions, which -- that refers to Section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. So we do have some restrictions on non-citizens who have been in certain foreign locations such as China, the

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Schengen Area of Europe, the U.K., Ireland, and Brazil -- to prevent non-citizens who have been in those areas in the preceding 14 days from flying into the U.S. But we have never restricted flights from any of those jurisdictions.

In contrast, we have actually been battling a number of our partners to try to persuade them of the importance of honoring their obligations to keep international aviation running. And let me touch on a few successes -- the first one that we're especially pleased with is China where currently -- actually, since November -- U.S. carriers are operating a total of 10 flights a week. Chinese are operating eight flights a week. This is far more than the Chinese Government wanted to allow at the beginning. They were telling us, I believe it was two flights for the U.S. and -- actually, no flights for the U.S. at all. And then they relented and said it can be two and two. Anyway,

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long story short, we're now at 10 for the U.S., eight for China.

And by the way, that 10 that U.S. carriers can fly is the most of any foreign country. The most that any foreign country is allowed to fly into China. Another success, India. And this is a market that's held up pretty well despite the pandemic. There are no restrictions on non-citizens flying into the U.S. from India. And Air India is operating something north of 80 percent of the capacity they were operating before the pandemic hit. We have been successful in getting -- we have one U.S. carrier that has wanted to go back into India with their own metal -- that's United Airlines. And we're very pleased to report they're currently operating four times a day -- four dailies. They have a Newark-Delhi, a Newark-Mumbai, a San Francisco-Delhi, and most recently they added a Chicago-Delhi. And in addition, Air India is operating reciprocal services to the U.S. In

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addition we -- with some effort we were successful in getting Delta back into the market on a codeshare basis. They prefer at this time to offer service in cooperating with Air France via the Charles de Gaulle hub. And again, India was not eager to see that happen, but we insisted and we were successful in getting Delta back in on a codeshare basis.

In the Philippines, again, a country where there are no restrictions against non-citizens flying into the U.S. from the Philippines. Again, quite a battle. I will spare you all the gory details, but long story short, we have both Delta and United holding authorization from the Philippine Authority to go back into the market at their desired levels of frequency.

Hong Kong -- another jurisdiction where there's no problem under the 212(f) -- we have a 212(f) on China, but it does not apply to Hong Kong, which is treated separately. And

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there we have secured the rights for all of our carriers to go back in. There is -- a separate issue has come up that Hong Kong has complicated requirements for testing of crews and for isolation and treatment of any crew member who might test positive. And because of issues with the crew unions. This has delayed the resumption of U.S. flight passenger service to Hong Kong. But we are actively working on that issue and the basic aviation rights have been recognized by the Hong Kong authorities. Our carriers hold the rights to go back in and will do so. They expect to do so once the crew testing issue is resolved.

Regarding Canada -- of course, our largest in-bound tourism market -- we have -- at the DOT we have consistently been pressing to reopen the land border and to press Canada to reduce, or hopefully eliminate, their very burdensome, 14-day quarantine on Canadians who travel outbound and return to Canada. Of course, aviation continues to be open with Canada.

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There's no problem there. But -- for Canadians to fly into the U.S. But the land border remains closed. And we are told there's a lot of political support in Canada for keeping that status quo because of the high incidence of COVID in the United States. Nonetheless, we continue to press on that. Many of you may have seen Canada adopted a new testing requirement for all passengers flying back into that country as of earlier this month. And we're hoping that with the implementation of this testing protocol, that may set the stage for an easing of the other restrictions.

Let me move on. Runway to Recovery has already been covered. I don't want to belabor that too much. Just to summarize that this is a guidance document. It is not regulation, it's guidance, the intention was to offer a consistent framework for all stakeholders, carriers, airports, passengers -- to know, what are the best practices for

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traveling safety during the global public health emergency.

The important thing now is to push out this best practice information. We're doing that in a number of ways, not least of which is that the document is available on the website for anyone to download and to read. I would add that Version 2.0 of the Runway to Recovery was issued a few weeks ago. This is an evolving document. We intend to update it over time as new information regarding the pandemic comes to light.

So let me touch on another important activity led at the Department of Transportation, which is we were asked to chair a transport working group of the G7 to develop principles to guide the recovery of transport industries globally. So this is the United States, Canada, the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the European Union all participate in this. And given their share of the global GDP, clearly what

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the seven of us plus the E.U. agree on tends to set the standard for the other countries to follow.

And I am very pleased to report that -- well, first of all, we were tapped to chair this effort and as a result, U.S. priorities came through pretty loud and clear in the document, including the need to respect bilateral agreement obligations, as I touched on a few moments ago. Ensuring that public health measures that other countries adopt are non-discriminatory. And another important point is that there is fair treatment of crews because we don't want the crew unions to get upset, to say we're not going to work international trips. We need to have what -- what the U.S. solution to this is, that crews should isolate on their layovers. They should not be going downtown, hanging out at bars, doing that sort of thing. They should go in private transport to hotels near the airport. They should order room service and take other measures

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of that nature to isolate themselves from the population at the destination. And so long as they follow those protocols, there's really no need to enforce onerous testing or quarantine requirements on crews.

Let me move on. Another important issue. Under the CARES Act and the recent stimulus bill passed by Congress, which provides payroll support for the airline industry -- part of the quid pro quo that the airlines have to sign up for if they want the payroll support is to absorb what's called minimum service obligations. And the way Congress structures it is to require service to whatever point the carrier served prior to March 1 of 2020. Now, when we at the Department of Transportation were called on to implement that, we recognized, March 1, 2020 -- that is the winter season. So on that date, you may have a lot of service to ski destinations, for example, where they'd never have service in the summer and where really they

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close up -- nobody goes there in the summer. Conversely, you may have summer seasonable points that weren't being served on March 1 but that really need to be served once summer rolls around, in order to support the tourism economy of those destinations.

And so, point was -- I am talking about points like Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket; Juneau, Alaska -- which, from some carriers receive only summer seasonal service. We were able to structure the minimum service obligation so they were not left behind. Even though they weren't served on March 1, they did receive service under this provision by carriers that have historically served them during the summer season.

Also, a number of tourism-related destinations received their service under our subsidized essentially air service program. And just a couple I can cite as examples -- Bar Harbor, Maine and Lake Placid, New York. In

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administering the Essential Air Service Program, the first thing we did when traffic was down back in April and May -- by 95 percent or more -- we gave relief -- we gave forbearance under enforcement of the contract so that the carriers providing this service could remain liquid -- could remain in business for the long term. We allowed them to reduce the number of frequencies they would otherwise be required to operate. But at the same time, we gave them an incentive to operate as many frequencies as possible, consistent with their essential air service contracts. And at the current time, despite the fact that national air traffic is down by an order of something like 60 percent or so, I am pleased to report that many of the essential air service communities are actually receiving 100 percent of their contracted service.

And the final thing I will touch on -- and it's already been raised by my colleague from CDC, so I don't want to say too much about

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that -- there is the order, CDC, Dr. Redfield issued yesterday calling for, effective January 26, testing -- pre-departure testing of all passengers, citizens and non-citizens, flying into the United States. This is something the airline industry has supported. We at the Department of Transportation support. There's really a very broad consensus supporting it. But there are two main issues. There's a number of operational implementation issues, but I won't get into those weeds in this meeting today.

But two key issues that we really feel need to be focused on as this is implemented. The first one is the need for the CDC National Policy Order to preempt inconsistent state requirements. And the example that I would refer to here -- the State of Hawaii already has its own system that's been operating for some months -- since October nationally and for several months in Japan and Canada -- and there is some significant differences between the Hawaii

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approach and the CDC approach.

Hawaii accepts only nucleic acid amplification tests whereas CDC will also accept antigen tests. Hawaii has a very specific positive list of providers where passengers need to go to get the test. If they don't go to some clinic on the list, their test is no good in the eyes of the State of Hawaii, whereas CDC says as long as the test has been run at a nationally approved lab, it will be acceptable. And lastly, the State of Hawaii requires its tests within 72 hours of the departure time of the flight, whereas CDC is a little more flexible and says three calendar days prior to the departure date of the flight.

So we can see clearly the potential for passengers getting the wrong test, getting an antigen test that the CDC accepts, but Hawaii won't accept -- not going to a designated provider, and perhaps getting the test within three calendar days of their flight, but more

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than 72 hours of their flight -- and being turned away when they try to fly to the State of Hawaii to support the tourism there and have an enjoyable vacation. So that's one issue where we really feel, if CDC is going to do this, there needs to be clear preemption of inconsistent state regimes.

The second point is when the airline industry last week -- Airlines for America sent in a letter to Vice President Pence supporting the CDC proposal for testing, but they made clear that it needs to be part of the pivot away from the 212(f) restrictions against international passengers coming in. So in other words, if you're coming in from the U.K. or Brazil or the Schengen Area of Continental Europe and you are not a U.S. citizen, but you've got a negative COVID test within seven -- within three days, excuse me, of your flight departure, you should be allowed to travel. We should welcome you to come and spend money and support our tourism

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industry. Right now, that's not the case because the 212(f) prohibition against non-citizens traveling remains in place. And so this is not part of the deal, if you will, that the U.S. airline industry signed up for, and we feel it's really not supportable to continue these broad-brush 212(f) restrictions against non-citizens so long as they are complying as they must with the new negative testing requirements.

So let me leave it at there -- at that. I just am reminded, it was actually a year ago this week that the first White House passport on the coronavirus global health emergency was convened. The Department of Transportation has been actively participating in that from the beginning and -- so a lot has happened over the past year. I could probably write a book about it, but I don't think any of you would be too interested in that much level of detail. Let me stop there, but if there are any questions on this or anything else, I will be happy to do my

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best to respond. Thank you for the opportunity.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you very much, Deputy Secretary. And I appreciate all of you taking the time to share such valuable information with all of us today. We now have a portion where the members of the TTAB will have the opportunity to make comments and/or ask questions. I'd ask that each of you limit your comments or questions to one to two minutes, maximum. Following the session with the TTAB members there will be the opportunity for public comment as well. We are a bit time constrained today. And let me just ask the operator to open the phone lines and provide instruction for how people can ask questions or speak, if they'd like to.

IV. Board Discussion

OPERATOR: Thank you. At this time I will be opening all lines for Board Member questions and discussion. To eliminate background noise, please utilize the mute feature

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on your phone when not speaking. Thank you. And all lines are now open.

MEMBER WEBB: Chairman Ekert, Greg Webb with Travelport. I had a quick question -- and I am trying to make it brief. But it really goes across a number of these to Dr. Nemhauser, Deputy Executive Assistant -- Sabatino and --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

CHAIR EKERT: Hold on one second. Whoever is --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

CHAIR EKERT: Go ahead, Greg.

MEMBER WEBB: Yes, I -- I just -- as with your company and mine, we're information providers in -- in the travel sector and it -- what is unclear right now based on the CDC pre-testing requirement is exactly how that's going to get administered and enforced and what documentation is actually required. And so I thought, with this esteemed group that just spoke, maybe get a little direction around what

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should we be advising travelers their expectations are for the -- you know, the pre-travel COVID test requirements are, and what documentation they are required to produce. And is that being produced to, you know, the airline? Is it -- is it required to be sent ahead of time? Is it produced at the airport? Just unclear as to exactly how that's supposed to happen beginning on the 26th. And a little more clarity on where we can find that information.

CHAIR EKERT: Diane Sabatino, are you the right person to respond to that? I'm not positive which organization should speak.

MS. WEISSMAN: Hello, this is Kimberly Weissman. I am also at CBP, U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Ms. Sabatino had to jump off the line, but I can try and help answer any questions. But per this question, CBP just follows CDC guidance. So maybe they would be in a better position to answer that question.

(Simultaneous speaking.)

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MR. SHORT: Yes, if I could -- this is David Short of the Department of Transportation. So the CDC order is on the website and there's also a Q&A. So I would really refer everyone to that for the definitive guidance. But I -- I think the answer is that the passenger needs to get a written, or at least an electronic version of the written report of the test, showing they had a negative test within three days of flight departure. They need to present that to the airline at check-in. If -- any passenger who is unable or fails to present that to the airline must be denied boarding on the flight to the United States. And the passenger -- the airline needs to retain -- and they also sign an attestation -- the passenger signs an attestation that they got a negative test, which is under, I believe, penalties of perjury. There's some federal penalty for any falsification of that document.

The airline retains that for two

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years. The passenger needs to retain it, as I understand it, until they've cleared CBP once they get to the U.S. The expectation is they would not normally have to present this to CBP. The verification is done at check in before departure at the foreign point of origin. But it's possible CBP or CDC could request the -- the documents when the passenger arrives at the U.S. port of entry. Over.

MEMBER WEBB: And I am sorry, just one quick follow-up on that. You -- you had mentioned, I think, in your comments, Mr. Short, that -- that the -- that other proof would also be -- is it -- is -- would you also be allowed boarding with proof of antibody tests? So that you have -- you have had COVID and provide positive for the antibody.

MR. SHORT: Antibody test, no. But antigen tests, yes. Okay? And -- and the other -- the other thing -- there's -- I won't belabor this, but there are some people that are called

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persistent positives. They recovered from COVID and the doctors assure everyone that they're no longer infectious to others, but they persistently test positive when given a COVID test. And so, in those cases, they -- if they can present proof from a licensed medical professional that they have recovered -- they had COVID infection, they've recovered and they're no longer considered infectious, that will be accepted in lieu of a test for those individuals. But -- but to answer the question, antigen tests are not acceptable at all. Excuse me, they are acceptable. Either a nucleic acid amplification test or an antigen test is acceptable to CDC. Antibody test is not acceptable.

CHAIR EKERT: All right, thank you. Do we have -- do we have any further questions or comments from folks in the group?

MEMBER RAMUDO: Yes, this is Olga -- Olga Ramudo, Express Travel in Miami.

CHAIR EKERT: Hello, Olga.

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MEMBER RAMUDO: Hello, how are you? Good afternoon, everybody. Chair Kurt Ekert, you started this meeting listing the goals of this Board, one of them being supporting international travel and tourism due to the importance -- to the impact to the U.S. economy. Secretary Ross mentioned that one of the goals of this Board was to provide recommendations as requested by Congress to restore international travel and consumer confidence and in turn we would soon -- or, we could soon recover.

The new CDC guidelines announced yesterday requiring all in-bound passengers, including U.S. citizens into the U.S., to be tested prior to boarding a flight jeopardize all of those efforts. If testing for return flight shows positive, a U.S. citizen is banned from entering his/her country, causing American citizens to be stranded internationally. This is nothing different than when COVID surfaced and we had thousands of Americans all over the world.

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Who will cover the expense of staying abroad? Will insurance cover it? Et cetera. What happens with short-term travel? Weekend travel? Mexico, Caribbean -- where on the -- on the outbound -- or business travel for a day or so, if the outbound test sufficient for the return flight -- is within this 72-hour span. Those vaccinated are not excluded from the testing requirements, so why are we urging Americans to be vaccinated? International travel is still --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

MEMBER RAMUDO: -- banned, so are we as the Board going to address these issues?

CHAIR EKERT: So we're going to -- Olga, we're going to get to the work of the Board following the public comment section.

MEMBER RAMUDO: Okay, perfect.

CHAIR EKERT: But I don't think we're going to be able to address your specific questions here today. But -- but thank you for

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raising them.

MEMBER RAMUDO: Thank you.

MEMBER HEDGE: Kurt, I have a general comment, if I may.

CHAIR EKERT: Yes.

MEMBER HEDGE: This is Russ Hedge. I am the President and CEO of Hostelling International, U.S.A. And the comment follows from the very good presentations from Commerce and CDC, Customs, and Transportation. And my perspective is, as a second-term TTAB member, which is a perspective that those presentations are very indicative of the sort of presentations that we are supported with at every TTAB meeting. If we look at the presentations it, Kurt, validates the comment that you made at the beginning of the call which is, you know, our industry does face challenges on multiple fronts. And if we pull back, there are even more challenges. And it's a lot. And here's my point.

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I think that in times like these, it's incumbent for each of us, where we can, to share examples of what's working well. And to my mind, now is the time to share TTAB and its record as best practice as an example of public-private partnership that works. And an example of participating with government that works. I think there's a story here -- there's a story of dedicated public servants, private citizens -- like all of us who are devoting our time to inform government. And to my -- to my mind over the last two years it's a body that's used a strictly professional, non-partisan approach to inform government.

So I guess what I'd like to suggest is that for those of us who have been around for a while, and for those of us who may be listening in on this call as an audience because of the value you place on TTAB, that we use our professional networks to get the word out. Not only within the industry, but to broader

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audiences. I think by doing so we'd be sharing our positive experiences. We'd be positioning the travel industry as a leader. And hopefully we'd be encouraging others way beyond travel to share their positive stories as well because there are plenty of them. And I -- I'm suggesting that perhaps we start with TTAB.

CHAIR EKERT: Great suggestion, Russ. Thank you, thank you. We'll take -- I think we have time for one more either comment or question from the members of TTAB before we move to public comments.

MEMBER MOTSENBOCKER: Hello Kurt, this is Mary Motsenbocker. I have a question and clarification for David Short. David you stated the need for the CDC to be able to preempt state requirements, using the example of Hawaii. Could you expand on -- what is the reality of this happening? And what is the current process of working with the states on settling this issue?

MR. SHORT: Right, well what I can say

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is, this was raised with CDC in advance of the finalization of their order yesterday. I did review the order last night. I don't believe the issue was addressed. And so I think it's -- my agency, the Department of Transportation, does not have authority to declare that a CDC order is going to preempt inconsistent state regulations. But I think it's a legal issue that needs to be -- that -- the good news is, we have about two weeks now between now and January 26 when the order that Dr. Redfield signed yesterday actually comes into force. And we're hopeful -- there's a whole litany of issues. I touched on a couple of the more significant ones, but there's a whole lot of operational issues that we think all of us would benefit by having a constructive resolution of those -- of those matters. And I think this is -- this is one of them. So I think, to answer the question, it's going to take some legal input, but we at the DOT at least believe the constructive way forward is to have federal

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preemption. Because if you have -- right now it's Hawaii. You may have other states that have quarantine requirements, testing requirements -- I don't know. But if you have 50 or more state systems and then you have the national system layered on top of it, it's a recipe for confusion. And it's -- I don't think it's what the travel and tourism industries need to recover more effectively.

CHAIR EKERT: That's well stated. I think we'd wholly agree with you. We're going to move now to public comment. And this is an opportunity for members of the public who are not on TTAB to make any comments or raise any questions they may have. And so Operator, let's just ask now that any members of the public attending are able to speak.

V. Public Comment

OPERATOR: Absolutely, thank you. At this time all participant lines have been muted. And we will now begin the public comment session.

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If you would like to make a comment, please press star 1, unmute your phone and record your name clearly. Your name is required to introduce your comments. If you need to withdraw your comment, press star 2. Again, to make a comment at this time, please press star 1. It will take a few moments for comments to come through. Please stand by. Our first comment will come from Chris Thompson. Your line is open.

MR. THOMPSON: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of TTAB. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. First I'd like to congratulate members of this TTAB and their appointments. We view this Board and the interagency Tourism Policy Council as critical components to shaping travel policy and our public-private partnership with the U.S. Government.

As a reminder to our returning members, and as information to new members, our legal mandate and mission is to increase

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incremental international visitation, expand the market share to fuel our nation's economy and enhance the image of the U.S.A. worldwide. We are very proud of the ten-year history of this public-private partnership and very appreciative of the U.S. Department of Commerce for shepherding it.

I would like to quickly just give you a quick kind of overview of where we are and the challenges that we're facing at the moment. We entered calendar, last year, of 2020 with much celebration and optimism. We were just reauthorized in December of 2019 for a second time. Therefore we entered 2020 with nine months to plan the next seven years, beginning October 1st. Then all our worlds were turned upside down beginning last March. Not only did travel within our cities and states and our country come to a screeching halt, most travel internationally was shut down around the globe. And as Deputy Director Huether showed, as was our -- our

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funding source shut down, which is the ESTA fees paid by international visitors from the 39 visa waiver countries.

As with many of our destination marketing partners at the city, state and territorial levels -- in similar positions, but for different reasons -- we had to scale back our activities and our operations significantly. We opened Fiscal 2021 in October 1 of last year and are scaled back what we're calling a state of readiness. This allows us to conserve resources while continuing to influence key aspects of the travel ecosystem.

In this state of readiness, one of our main priorities is to ensure we serve the diverse needs of our partners in the U.S. travel industry. At the end of October we launched the Brand U.S.A. Global Marketplace, an always-on virtual platform that enables U.S. destinations, travel brands, and our federal agency partners to stay connected with the travel trade around the

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globe.

Through this state of readiness we are continuing to monitor a series of gating criteria to determine when conditions are appropriate to transition back to market reentry and recovery marketing. Many of these gating criteria are similar to ones that we all are looking at, which include air service, entry restrictions, consumer sentiment and behavior as well as home market conditions -- like the spread of the virus and the openness of our destinations and attractions.

Once conditions warrant, we will launch a recovery campaign using the best of our content and leveraging partnerships with airlines, tour operators and OTAs to drive bookings to the U.S. The challenge I had for us -- and we realize that we're not -- aren't the only ones affected by this, and virtually every single travel business has suffered from the current economic fall-out. But our -- our public-private partnership is funded by a

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combination of contributions from non-federal sources like our territorial state and city tourism offices, our travel companies, and are matched by funds derived from these ESTA fee collections.

It's been noted that ESTA fee collections are down 97 percent year over year since March 20, due to the pandemic. Consequentially, ESTA fee collections are stagnant and therefore, for the first time -- this year and next year will be the first year where there isn't enough funding -- \$100 million available to Brand U.S.A. for federal source match. And all this means is that when we get to a point when we can go to market reentry and -- and international marketing, we are going to be very hamstrung in our ability to help lead our industry and partnership with the Federal Government back to international travel and spending.

So in closing, I -- as our nation's

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destination marketing organization, we developed a plethora of insights and expertise about key source markets for travel to the United States. We pledge our assistance and support in the months and years ahead. We look forward to extending these resources to the entire Board as well as individual Board Members. And we will do so in every way that we possibly can. Thank you in advance for your individual and this whole Board's support at this critical juncture in our industry. And I look forward to much accomplishment and success in the months and years ahead.

CHAIR EKERT: Chris, thank you. And obviously the work of Brand U.S.A. is so important to recovery ahead. And so it will actually be one of the things that the Board gets to work on. Are there any more comments from the public?

OPERATOR: We are showing no further comments at this time.

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VI. Next Steps for the Board

CHAIR EKERT: All right -- I promise everybody, I know we're at our time. We should be done in about ten minutes if you don't mind hanging on just a little bit longer. At the inception of the meeting, I think everybody heard, the charge from the Secretary. And that is that we're tasked by Commerce to develop and provide no more than 10 focused, actionable recommendations on what the Federal Government should address to support the recovery and the growth of travel and tourism -- and to restore international travel.

And so, to move forward with this charge, what we're going to do is, the Board will divide into four subcommittees. And these are formed and consistent with the pillars of the National Travel and Tourism strategy. Let me just walk through these in very slight detail.

So the first is marketing and communications. And we're privileged that

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Tricia Primrose will chair this subcommittee. The scope of this team will look at recommendations pertaining to what the Government and related entities, such as Brand U.S.A., can do to help restore demand for travel -- particularly for international markets -- through marketing and other communications?

Second -- the second committee will be facilitating travel to and within the United States. And Brad Dean, our vice chair, will chair this subcommittee. This committee will look at issues related to facilitating safe and secure travel to and within the U.S. and could include, for example, recommendations related to testing, quarantine of travelers, travel restrictions, contactless travel and other similar considerations.

Third -- our third subcommittee will look at creating a world-class customer experience. Mary Motsenbocker has agreed to chair this -- thank you. And the scope of this

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subcommittee will be to consider recommendations pertaining to support for travel and tourism-related businesses, including small and medium enterprises, as well as access to and management of public lands, waterways, and monuments.

And last, the fourth committee will be focused on governance. This will be chaired by Russ Hedge -- Russ, thank you. And the scope here is to consider recommendations on ways that the Federal Government can better work to support the competitiveness and growth of the sector. And will include the question of an appropriate target and potential revision of the National Travel and Tourism Strategy, which obviously is outdated in the age of COVID.

And so for each of you I would strongly suggest and urge you to sign up for one or potentially two of these subcommittees to work on. I'd ask that by this Friday, the 15th, you submit your interest to Jennifer Aguinaga from the NTT0. And please note also that the NTT0 led

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by Isabel Hill and her team will be facilitating assisting our work through this process.

From a timing standpoint, we don't have a heck of a lot of time. We're looking at basically about three and a half weeks from now, getting our recommendations into Commerce so that they can review them and -- and share them with Congress. So what we're going to do is, with each of the subcommittees, have an initial checkpoint the last week of January. But there's a lot of work to do and we'll need to really make it very focused and very pointed so that it can be actioned upon.

Before I go further, are there any questions on those four committees? And again, please -- please let Jennifer know your interests.

MEMBER: I would just ask, is -- is -
- Kurt, will -- will an official remit for each of the subcommittees be sent out to members?

CHAIR EKERT: We can do that. And in

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fact we'll get that done here in the next 24 hours. That's pretty simple. And -- and obviously those remits are adjustable based on what the subcommittee chairs and the team determine they think is most important to focus on.

(Simultaneous speaking.)

MEMBER: Yes, thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: But yes, we'll get that done. It's a good follow-up. Let me now invite Deputy Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism, Phil Lovas, to make some remarks. Phil, it's a pleasure to have you here today.

VII. Closing

MR. LOVAS: Great. Well thank you, Kurt. I appreciate that. I will be departing government service on Friday, so this is my last call with the Board and I just wanted to say thank you to a few people who have been very helpful in these meetings over the past two years. First, let me say thank you to you, Kurt, and to Brad for your leadership with the last Board. But

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also, going forward. As I know, this Board is in great hands with you there.

To the Board's returning members, thank you for the productive work that you offered last term. Also, thank you to Nazak and I&A for the support and also to Jennifer, Isabel and everyone at NTTD for making these meetings so productive.

To the returning members and the new members, this is an important time for the Board. I think there's a great opportunity to have a real impact on national travel and tourism policy the next couple years. As was mentioned, Congress passed a bill in December that requires a report from the International Trade Administration on Travel and Tourism Recovery by the end of February. And the National Travel and Tourism Office will head up that effort.

The responses that you provide in the next month on policy recommendations will play an integral part of that effort. The Secretary also

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mentioned a number of NTTD successes over the past four years. I know coming from the private sector myself that sometimes it may seem we provide recommendations to the government, they're filed away -- never heard from again. That's just not the case with this Board, and I wanted to give you a couple of additional examples.

About two years ago, the Board produced a new travel and tourism goal. That goal was acted on and eventually adopted by the Tourism Policy Council that the Secretary of Commerce chairs. We were moving toward having the strategy behind that goal included in a presidential directive on travel and tourism. Unfortunately, before the directive was to come out, COVID struck and the world changed. However, the goals for international visitation and spending -- that's a TTAB suggested -- that you suggested were picked up late last year on Capitol Hill.

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Senator Sullivan filed the Visit America Act which had the ten-year goal of growing to 116 million international visitors at \$445 billion in spending -- the same as the TTAB suggested. So that goal will likely need to be revised. But with the work that you do with was noticed not just by the Administration, but by Congress as well.

Another example is the report you produced in 2019 on the advantages and disadvantages of the United States joining the United Nations World Tourism Organization. I can tell you that that document was viewed as the voice of the private sector throughout government agencies looking at the possibility of joining the U.N.W.T.O. -- whether those be at Commerce, the State Department, or elsewhere. I was even receiving inquiries as late as six to eight weeks ago about this, so I would not be surprised at all if this issue resurfaced in the year ahead.

So the work that this Board produces

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is very important to those of us in government as we look to you as the private sector voice of the travel and tourism industry. So I will leave it at that, and just say thank you and best of luck to -- in the two years ahead to the Board, and I will turn it back to Jennifer.

CHAIR EKERT: Phil, let me just take the opportunity before we go to Jennifer to -- to thank you for your service, your partnership, and for really helping make the -- this Board meaningful during your tenure in the government. And we wish the best of luck. I remind everybody that as we go forward, we really have a great partner here in Isabel Hill and the National Travel and Tourism Office and their team. And so we should look to lean on them and leverage their counsel in how we can be most effective as we go through this process.

Before I turn it over to Jennifer, one thing we need to do is take roll of all of the TTAB Members before we hang up. So I am going

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to let Jennifer formally close the meeting. But please hang on and do not leave yourself until Jennifer has gone through the roll call. Thank you everybody. We have a great opportunity to be impactful and -- get ready to roll your sleeves up. Jennifer, over to you.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Operator, if you can please open the lines, I will take roll call for -- all the numbers, for the record.

OPERATOR: Thank you. All lines are now open for the roll call.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you. Kurt Ekert.

CHAIR EKERT: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Brad Dean?

VICE CHAIR DEAN: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Liz Fitzsimmons?

MEMBER FITZSIMMONS: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: David Gilbert?

MEMBER GILBERT: Here.

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MS. AGUINAGA: Russ Hedge?

MEMBER HEDGE: I'm here, Jennifer.

MS. AGUINAGA: Debbie Johnson?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: Stephanie Jones.

MEMBER JONES: Did you say Stephanie

Jones?

MS. AGUINAGA: Yes.

MEMBER JONES: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you, Stephanie.

Rolf Lundberg?

MEMBER LUNDBERG: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you. Duffield

Milkie?

MEMBER MILKIE: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Will Morey?

MEMBER MOREY: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Mary Motsenbocker?

MEMBER MOTSENBOCKER: I am here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Vinay Patel?

MEMBER PATEL: Here.

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MS. AGUINAGA: Catherine Prather?

MEMBER PRATHER: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Tricia Primrose?

MEMBER PRIMROSE: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Brian Quinn?

MEMBER QUINN: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Olga Ramudo?

MEMBER RAMUDO: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Stephen Revetria?

MEMBER REVETRIA: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Daniel Richards?

MEMBER RICHARDS: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Adam Sacks?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: Monica Smith?

MEMBER SMITH: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Rob Torres?

MEMBER TORRES: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: And Greg Webb?

MEMBER WEBB: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you. And thank

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you to everyone for joining the meeting today.
The meeting is formally closed.

MEMBER VLASIC: This is Ron Vlastic, I
didn't hear my name called.

MS. AGUINAGA: Sorry Ron about that.
All right, I will note you down.

MEMBER VLASIC: Thank you.

MS. AGUINAGA: All right. Thank you
all and have a great day.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled matter
went off the record at 2:40 p.m.)

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