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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FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 26, 2021

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The Board met via Video Teleconference, at 3:00 p.m. EST, Kurt Ekert, Chair, presiding.

PRESENT
KURT EKERT, Carlson Wagonlit Travel, Chair
BRAD DEAN, Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, Vice Chair
RUSSELL HEDGE, Hostelling International USA
STEPHANIE JONES, Cultural Heritage Economic Alliance
DUFFIELD MILKIE, Cedar Fair L.P.
WILL MOREY, Morey=s Piers
MARY MOTSENBOCKER, International Tourism Marketing, Inc.
CATHERINE PRATHER, National Tour Association
TRICIA PRIMROSE, Marriott International
BRIAN QUINN, Domio
OLGA RAMUDO, Express Travel
STEPHEN REVETRIA, Giants Enterprises
DANIEL RICHARDS, Global Rescue LLC
MONICA SMITH, Southeast Tourism Society

ROB TORRES, Google, Inc.

**ALSO PRESENT**
**ISABEL HILL, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism, I&A**
**JENNIFER AGUINAGA, Designated Federal Officer, NTTO, I&A**
**CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON, President and CEO, Brand USA**
**TORI BARNES, Executive Vice President, Public Affairs and Policy, U.S. Travel Association**

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

3:02 p.m.

MS. AGUINAGA: Okay. Welcome everyone to this meeting of the United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board. As the designated federal officer I declare this meeting officially opened. Just a few notes before we begin as this is our first virtual meeting.

You, let's see, you should be receiving a message that this meeting is being recorded so you have the opportunity to disconnect now if that is not okay with you.

If you have the ability, please disconnect from your VPNs to ensure the most bandwidth. I know there are always technical issues but we can try to limit them as much as possible.

Please keep yourself on mute when you're not speaking. That's probably the most important thing.

We will not be utilizing the chat function so please raise your hand if you have a

question. Use the raise your hand little, little icon.

Reminder that for those joining who are not members of the board, your only opportunity to speak will be during the public comment portion of the agenda.

If you do have any technical difficulties that you're not able to solve while we're on the call, please contact my colleague Christina Gay. You can reach her at Christina.Gay@trade.gov.

And just a reminder for those of you who joined through Teams, if for some reason you get kicked off of the virtual meeting there is just a call-in option that you can use. And that's 253-372-2016 and you can use the conference ID 676371042. And this, this information is all in the meeting invite so, so please look at that if you're having any issues.

Before turning it to the chair, I will take the roll call of members for the record. You should (audio interference) as I take the

roll.

Again, if everyone could mute if they're not speaking, please do that now. Okay, roll call.

Kurt Ekert?

MR. EKERT: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Brad Dean?

MR. DEAN: I'm here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Liz Fitzsimmons?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: David Gilbert?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: Russ Hedge?

MR. HEDGE: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Russ. Debbie Johnson?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: Stephanie Jones?

MS. JONES: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you, Stephanie. Rolf Lundberg?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: Duff Milkie?

MR. MILKIE: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Duff. Will Morey?

MR. MOREY: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you. Mary Motsenbocker?

MS. MOTSENBOCKER: I'm here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Mary. Vinay Patel?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: Catherine Prather?

MS. PRATHER: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Catherine. Tricia Primrose?

MS. PRIMROSE: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Tricia. Brian Quinn?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: I thought I saw Brian join. Olga Ramudo?

MS. RAMUDO: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Olga. Stephen Revetria?

MR. REVETRIA: Present.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Stephen. Daniel Richards?

MR. RICHARDS: I'm here, Jennifer.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Dan. Adam Sacks?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: Monica Smith?

MS. SMITH: I'm here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks, Monica. Rob Torres?

MR. TORRES: Here.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks. Ron Vlasic?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: And Greg Webb?

(No audible response.)

MS. AGUINAGA: Okay, thank you all. Well, it looks like we have a quorum so I now turn it over to you, Mr. Chair.

MR. EKERT: All right. Well,

Jennifer, thank you and first of all for the first virtual WebEx I think you've already outdone yourself. This seems very well-organized, so thank you.

And good afternoon everybody. I know that since the last time we got together as a team over the phone, which was a very fun way to do this, there have been four sprints going on with the four subcommittees. And the work that's been done, the level of thought has been outstanding and we're going to be able to vet that and discuss that today here on the call.

We wouldn't have gotten here without the great work the National Travel and Tourism Office and Isabel Hill, who's now the -- I'm going to get the title right I think, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism and Director of the NTTO. That title basically which is so broad speaks to how broad and impactful Isabel's role is within the government.

So I'm going to turn the phone over to Isabel to provide some context for today's

conversation.

MS. HILL: Thank you Kurt for that very kind introduction and good afternoon everyone. And let me add my welcome to this meeting of U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board.

I want to thank you for joining this meeting to deliberate the recommendations that will be delivered to the Secretary of Commerce on actions that can be taken to help the recovery of the travel and tourism sector.

We all know the enormity of the task before us and clearly the public and private sectors need to work together to address an economic crisis that was created by the COVID-19 health crisis.

As you know, the Biden administration and federal agencies are undertaking a number of efforts to address these challenges and I wanted to touch on a few of them that would be of interest to you that have transpired since we met in January.

The administration, in concert with states and the private sector, is working on three relevant fronts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and to get the U.S. economy, including the travel and tourism industry, on the road to recovery.

First is to address the underlying issue of the transmission and severity of the pandemic and to get it under control. As of yesterday, 89 million doses of vaccine have been distributed to more than 20 million people and more than 20 million people have received two doses making 6 percent of the U.S. population fully vaccinated.

And yesterday Johnson & Johnson and the Food and Drug Administration announced that the company's new single-shot vaccine provides strong protection against severe disease and death. The FDA could soon authorize distribution of that vaccine with as many as 100,000,000 doses available by the end of June.

But already the United States had

purchased sufficient vaccines to vaccinate the entire U.S. population, and even at previous rates half of the country could be vaccinated by summer and more than 75 percent by October.

The intensity of this effort is extraordinary and the progress is moving at a rapid rate. And this is great news for those of us who live in the United States and for the travel and tourism industry.

Data shows that people want to visit destinations where they feel that they and their families will be safe and so this is an important step to set the stage for the recovery of both domestic and international travel.

Second is the effort to support businesses and their employees and those who find themselves out of work because of the pandemic. Congress is at work on the administration's American Rescue Plan which includes stimulus measures with the goal sustaining families and firms until the vaccines are widely distributed.

Additionally, the White House is

working on ensuring equitable relief to hard hit small businesses, even as there has been progress on the current round of PPP compared to a year ago.

For instance, the share of funding going to small businesses with fewer than 10 employees is up by nearly 60 percent. The share of funding going to small businesses in rural areas is up nearly 30 percent.

The share of funding distributed through community development financial institutions and minority depository institutions is more than up 40 percent.

So this is a wonderful step towards equity and with the number of small businesses supporting the traveling and tourism experiences for travelers to the United States is wonderful news.

Third, efforts are under way to develop protocols to open safe domestic and international travel while reducing the opportunity for transmission of COVID-19 and its

variants.

And as you know, on January 21st, President Biden signed an executive order on promoting COVID safety night -- excuse me -- promoting COVID-19 safety in domestic and international travel. The order, as you know, requires masks to be worn in compliance with CDC guidelines in airports and on commercial aircraft, trains, public maritime vessels and all forms of public transportation. And it requires that travelers seeking to enter the United States from a foreign country to produce proof of recent COVID-19 test prior to entry.

And while the CDC is not currently recommending testing for domestic flights, it continues to monitor the pandemic and watch the spread of new variants.

And meanwhile, under the executive order, agencies continue to work on the development of safe travel protocols. Agencies are also working on these issues with international organizations including the World

Health Organization, which the United States has rejoined, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation and the G-20, among others.

In the area of contactless travel, Customs and Border Protection and the Transportation Security Administration are continuing to make progress on efforts to streamline travel and reduce physical contact throughout the process.

For instance facial comparison technology for entry is now deployed at 32 airports and includes nine pre-clearance locations and biometric exit is deployed at 28 airports.

And also CBP has just announced the launch of its new app, CBP-1, which will offer travelers and stakeholders a range of services to streamline their entry and exit from the United States.

And pointing specifically to the

increasing availability of the vaccine, the Transportation Safety Authority has announced that they will fill nearly 6,000 security office positions by this summer, a 12 percent uptick in that workforce.

And on one further note in response to the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board recommendations we have created the new COVID-19 Travel Industry Monitor. The monitor can be found on the NTTO website and after this meeting we will include a link it, along with a copy of the final recommendations.

I know we all look forward to the day when travel returns, when we can all be together and where and when a significant number and level of international travelers can now again be welcomed to the United States.

And we know that when it was -- is safe to travel that there will be demand. Families want to be reunited and the interest in outdoor and off the beaten path and cultural heritage experiences is high.

People want their canceled events to be rescheduled. Many long to visit theme parks, and the interest in urban experiences is also expected to rebound in time.

And people are looking for destinations where safety protocols are developed and in place, and thankfully, the United States meets all of these tests.

But we know we have a lot to do if we're to capitalize on this potential and in the process build back better. Your recommendations are, will be an important input to the -- as the administration establishes their policy priorities for economic recovery.

And we greatly appreciate the work of this board and look forward to hearing the discussion today. Thank you, Kurt.

MR. EKERT: Isabel, thank you, and it's clear that you and your team are up to a heck of a lot. And we hope we can augment that and help support what you said.

What we're going to do here is go

through each of the four subcommittee recommendations. I'm going to ask that each of the four subcommittee chairs speak for three to five minutes, no more than five minutes or else there will be severe punishment administered by Jennifer.

And we'll kick off, and we will have an opportunity to ask questions and vet these thereafter, but I'm going to ask Brad to take the lead on this.

MR. DEAN: Super, thank you. Good afternoon and thank you Mr. Chairman. I want to begin first off just expressing my appreciation on behalf of all of the TTAB members, to you Mr. Chairman for your leadership.

I've had the privilege of serving on the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board for several years. Personally, I cannot recall any TTAB getting out of the gate so quickly with such a broad array of very meaningful, potentially very consequential recommendations.

So thank you to leading us to this

point not even halfway through the president's first 100 days and, and awaiting a new secretary already jumping into work on behalf of the industry. So we appreciate your leadership in that regard.

I want to also acknowledge the great work, the time and the passion invested by the Facilitating Travel Subcommittee, David Gilbert Dan Richards, Duff Milkie, Olga Ramudo and Stephen Revetria, all of whom played a critical role in formulating the recommendations that we're bringing to our colleagues today.

And of course, thank you to Jennifer and Isabel for the exceptional support.

Our task as a subcommittee was to develop succinct, actionable recommendations for the secretary designed to facilitate safe and secure travel to and within the country.

In the course of our discussions we heard from our friends at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Customs and Border Protection. We also engaged with Airlines for

America, the U.S. Travel Association and Brand USA.

We had some far-ranging discussions that centered on the immediate challenges at hand, the here and now so to speak, but we were also very, very mindful of the need to address the long-term consequences and challenges of this pandemic and ultimately were guided by the need to ensure that America is better prepared for the next pandemic-type situation.

And I'm confident that I speak on behalf of everybody when I saw that we all agree it would be an absolute shame if we don't learn from the experiences of the past 12 months and come out of this wiser, stronger and better prepared for the future.

So with this in mind we bring to our TTAB colleagues three specific recommendations today, each of which, I believe, align very well with the other three subcommittees' work. And I think these also align with some of the previous work done by the prior Travel and Tourism

Advisory Board.

So I'll briefly review each of the recommendations. The first, which I think has already been shared with all the members of TTAB, is to accelerate the resumption of travel and tourism through establishing policies and protocols that prioritize safety while mitigating the risk to economic vitality.

In the last TTAB it was noted that the CDC faces a massive challenge in responding to and manage the COVID-19 pandemic while lacking the scope of data capture and analysis necessary to identify the spread of the disease and implement effective contact tracing.

And of course, this is further complicated by contending with the impact of international inbound arrivals coming into our country that do not adhere to the same standard reporting measures and public health protocols.

During our most recent meeting with the CDC it's apparent that this situation persists and it's clear to the members of our

subcommittee that the approach being followed lacks adequate performance-based standards where even today, as we speak, we see infection rates following, yet travel guidance and restrictions are not closely following this trend.

Even more concerning for us is the approach currently used which appears to lack adequate predictive metrics as we're tending to respond and react to what's happened in the past. You know, we've all heard a lot about flattening the curve, but we believe it's important for the United States to get ahead of the curve, and frankly, this is one milestone where our nation should lead the world.

Without this, policymakers may feel compelled to continue deploying measures such travel bans and quarantines and lockdowns that are arguably inefficient and effective.

But we believe this situation begs for attention and one of the many concerns identified by our subcommittee is that while we recognize the CDC has been very challenged to manage an

extremely difficult situation, to borrow from the old analogy, the CDC has had to build a plane and fly it at the same time.

But after we looked into this we were sort of left wondering if they're going to be able to land this plane as efficiently as we all hope when consider the de-escalation of protocols and standards used during this crisis and future similar crises that could very well take place.

So this, of course, is a major consideration for all of us. Our recommendation centers around the premise that if we are to accelerate the resumption of travel safely and effectively, the federal government should consider using a model for reopening travel that's consistent with the decline in infection and death rates.

A model reliant upon reliant upon and responsive to data research and analysis, which ultimately will fuel the kind of recovery our industry needs and our nation deserves.

This model could likely include

improved data collection, expanded use of new or emerging technology and also performance-based standards to guide policymaking.

And one key component of this process will likely need to be careful evaluation and contemplative consideration of measures such as travel bans, quarantines, lockdowns, as well as the merits of testing at various stages of the travel process, recognizing that technologies in place today are quickly emerging that could eliminate the need for some testing.

Our second recommendation is to harmonize a system of established policies and protocols with respect to land, sea and air travel in collaboration with the private sector that will mitigate the health risks of infection, infectious diseases, while ensuring economic stability.

As we considered how best to facilitate travel to and within our nation, one key element is the flow through our nation's borders. And the deeper we went into this, the

more we noticed what I can only describe as a structural disconnect amongst the federal agencies in managing inbound international arrivals into the United States.

The CDC bears responsibility for establishing standards related to health and safety, but, you know, they acknowledge that they don't have the data needed to effectively implement contact tracing which, of course, is essential to slowing and stopping the spread of infectious diseases.

Customs and Border Protection bears responsibility for admissibility related to national security but does not collect data related to health and safety. Much of that recent data collection is actually happening by the private sector, or the airlines, as it relates to health safety standards set forth by the federal government.

And yet arrivals for land ports are subject to different standards than arrivals to airports.

So all of this, as you might imagine, prompted a lot of discussion. And ultimately we found ourselves trying to answer one key question and that is is there a better way to manage health admissibility at the border, especially in light of the technological advances, whether that the equipment that samples your breath to detect infectious diseases or digital travel passes it can be used to store and share test results and vaccination records?

Ultimately, our subcommittee recommends we seek a seamless border entry process through all ports of entry which ensures optimal efficiency and adequate data collection while addressing the inconsistencies of international inbound arrivals to both air and land ports of entry.

This is a major, major initiative, one that can only be accomplished at the highest levels of government. It could be helped by incorporating private sector partners who are part of the travel process, but in the end, this

would require the kind of attention from the public sector that a major national security issue receives.

Perhaps some high level taskforce designed to address roles, responsibility and needs within the federal government and ultimately seek to strengthen the institutional capacity to integrate public health considerations into the development of national travel and tourism policy.

Obviously, this extends way beyond the normal scope of responsibility of the Department of Commerce, but recognizing that economic vitality is essential to national security, we submit to our colleagues today that if we don't make this recommendation who will?

And if the Secretary of Commerce doesn't lead this effort, who would?

And then finally, our third recommendation, which is smaller in scope but certainly no less important in the potential impact that it could have, is to reduce the

number of physical touch points throughout the travel continuum by accelerating the use of available technology.

Much of the technology necessary to achieve a contactless travel process is currently available and could be put to greater use today.

We certainly don't want to overlook that there has been a lot of progress made in this area typically by agencies like Homeland Security, CBP and the U.S. Department of Transportation. So by accelerating and expanding the use of available technology the federal government could increase the efficiency of flow through ports of entry and also limit the spread of infectious diseases.

Just imagine leaving for a future trip and from the moment you enter the airport until the moment you board the airplane the only things you touch are things that you brought with you from your home.

That level of contactless travel would yield great efficiencies and would also

contribute to the health and safety of all travelers.

So on behalf of my colleagues on the Facilitating Travel Subcommittee, I'm pleased to submit these recommendations to the full Travel and Tourism Advisory Board. Mr. Chairman, that concludes my review and I'll turn the discussion back over you.

MR. EKERT: Brad, you and the Facilitation Committee did a unbelievable job, and you also pulled double duty as the vice chair and I know did a lot of work there as well. Thank you.

Jennifer will administer, administer your punishment later, but a really good set of thoughts there.

Russ Hedge is going to lead us through a conversation of governance next.

MR. HEDGE: Thanks, Kurt. We're bringing forward two recommendations as a Governance Subcommittee, one related to elevating the travel and tourism function within the

Commerce Department and the second related to strategy planning for our industry's growth and, and recovery.

I want to give a shot up to the five subcommittee members Will Morey, Maurice Pears, Vinay Patel, Fairbrook Hotels, Dan Richards, Global Rescue, Adam Sacks, Tourism Economics, Monica Smith, Southeast Tourism Society.

Our subcommittee met three times, numerous emails and these recommendations are the, are the result.

So let me read recommendation number one, elevate travel and tourism within the U.S. Commerce Department by creating a U.S. travel and tourism agency headed by an assistant secretary vested with authority, including granting authority, to advance both domestic and international segments of the U.S. travel industry.

We appreciate the work that's been done on behalf of the travel and tourism industry by the National Travel and Tourism Office as part

of the International Trade Administration.

I think we're all painfully aware that it, COVID, has exposed needs and challenges across the industry that's going to require some new approaches to problem-solving.

And our belief is that can better be delivered by an elevated U.S. travel and tourism agency with a charge to advance both domestic and international segments of the U.S. travel industry.

Currently, NTTO's charge is focused on building inbound international travel, and as part of the International Trade Administration that focus is understood and it's appreciated, but international travel makes up a relatively small share of U.S. travel spending.

By comparison, 85 percent of U.S. travel spending is domestic, and we feel like we need an agency focused on both. COVID didn't stop at national borders, and we don't feel that policymaking for travel and tourism can stop there either.

Our second recommendation is, and let me read this one as well, "lead a comprehensive strategy development process that firstly supports recover of the travel and tourism industry and then focuses on the industry's resiliency and growth."

The 2012 national travel and tourism strategy we feel is a, is a federal strategy that delivered. That strategy has become the framework that many of us useful we talk about travel and tourism, including TTAB. And the 2012 goals have largely been accomplished.

That 2012 strategy had a ten-year horizon, meaning that it expires in 2022. We do feel it should be updated, but our recommendation is that there be some refinements in the strategy development process.

We recommend that before the ten-year strategy planning begins that a recovery strategy first be developed and implemented.

This would be a short-term strategy focused on rebuilding our industry and then after

the recovery strategy is sufficiently implemented then the new ten-year strategy would be developed and that would include a international visitation and spending goal.

So with that, Kurt, I'll turn it back to you.

MR. EKERT: Russ, thank you and terrific work by you and, and your committee as well.

We're next to hear from Mary Motsenbocker who is going to talk through World Class Customer Experience, obviously very impactful and important.

MS. MOTSENBOCKER: There we go. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Our subcommittee was Creating a World Class Customer Experience and we also had some excellent meetings with our first recommendation, the SBA U.S. travel, which where a great expert gave us some good expertise in our recommendation.

Our second recommendation we met with federal agencies such as Forest Service, National

Parks, AIANTA, which gave us some excellent direction also.

Our subcommittee members were Stephanie Jones of the Cultural and Heritage Economic Alliance, Rolf Lundberg, Choice Hotels, Catherine Prather of the National Tour Association, Ron Vlasic of Hostmark Hospitality Group, Debbie Johnson of Arizona Office of Tourism and a special shout out to Natalie Volin Lehr, who was our backup and was very helpful in creating these recommendations and helping us tweak them.

Our first recommendation is to ensure liquidity for the travel and tourism sector through expanding qualification for existing programs and providing new grant, loan and tax benefits for small and medium-sized businesses in the industry.

What we found, of course, and as we all know, travel and tourism businesses of all sizes have needed support throughout this pandemic. Many of them did not qualify for the

CARES program.

Some of the problems were narrow business size constraints; the PPP wasn't accessible to those who didn't qualify as per small business SBA guidelines.

The Economic Loan Injury Disaster program just was limited to businesses with 500 or fewer employees. There were very narrowly-defined parameters for targeted loan programs and this in turn made many businesses ineligible for these programs.

The funds in some cases were hard to access because a significant portion of this funding was unspent and there's no resource to turn to for clarification or qualification assistance, which left some businesses out in the cold.

There are currently existing programs that could be changed and expanded to provide much-needed support such as expanding the Shuttered Venue Operators Program, we are asking this to include tour operator (audio

interference) --

MR. EKERT: Mary, just -- whoever is not speaking please mute. It's hard to hear her.

MS. MOTSENBOCKER: Okay, Sure. And second is existing program would be to expand employee retention credit program. New programs that would be much needed and would be very beneficial would be an industry-specific PPP program.

Now, a program that would provide low interest loans in grants for the needs other than payroll, such as mortgage, rent, tax and utilities. Tax credits for businesses that purchase meeting and event organizing services. There are unused funds from the CARES Act and those funds could be used to fund these programs.

Many businesses need additional and effective guidance and technical assistance in applying for these programs, and there seems to be a lack of resources to train (audio interference) these programs and getting questions answered.

The impact of providing these grants and loans and tax benefits to small and -- small and medium businesses, of course, as we all know, would be great.

This would also help one of the most distressed industries throughout this period, which is our travel and tourism industry and help us recover.

This could be accomplished by expanding the definitional requirements of existing programs, as well as expanding new industry-specific programs.

Legislation would be required to establish and expand these programs and tax credits.

Our second recommendation is to create recovery opportunities for small, underserved minority and rural businesses in the travel and tourism industry by funding a grant program for capacity building and technical assistance that would be managed by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

This would assist small minority, rural and underserved travel and tourism business with tourism readiness, capacity building and business enhancement trainings.

These businesses have been hit especially hard during the pandemic, and they fall further behind as the nation starts to recover. A study that was provided by the Federal Reserve of New York shows that more than 40 percent of black-owned businesses have ceased operations just in this past year.

Minority-owned and rural businesses have -- were already facing challenges, like this lack of access to capital, broadband connectivity, issues like that are putting everybody even further behind.

Industry research also shows us that consumers want multicultural and rural travel experiences and most of these areas that can provide those experiences lack the resources to attract these tourists.

So this recommendation is requesting

funding through a grant program that would be administered and overseen by the Department of Commerce. This would help destinations broaden their cultural heritage program product and as well as their capacity for visitors.

Programs such as this are currently under way in minority markets, but the challenge is in getting the funding and keeping the funding and getting resources necessary to keep the programs running.

This would give the funding for technical assistance, education and training that would assist these underserved businesses.

It would provide means for capacity building that has not been previously available, and it would also provide new itineraries for tour operators and opportunities for travelers to experience the diversity of products in the United States.

Allocating the spending would help these businesses create new employment opportunities, as well as broaden their cultural

heritage tourism product offering. Legislation is necessary to establish these funding programs.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, we would like to put forth these two recommendations to be considered and passed on to the Secretary of Commerce.

MR. EKERT: Mary, thank you and thank you to your full committee, really excellent work. And I think this will have a profound impact on the industry.

The last presenter is going to be Tricia Primrose who led the group looking at Marketing and Communications.

MS. PRIMROSE: Thank you so much, Kurt, and thank you Dean, members of the TTAB and the Travel and Tourism Office.

I will move quickly. I'm a New Yorker so I'm going to speak quickly to make up some time for us.

I want to start by thanking the members of the subcommittee, Liz Fitzsimmons, who's the Managing Director of the Maryland

Office of Tourism and film, Stephanie Jones, CEO of Cultural And Heritage Economic Alliance and the founder of the National Blacks in Florida Tourism Collaborative, Brian Quinn, Chief Development Officer at Domio, Rob Torres, Managing Director of Travel at Google and Jordan -- excuse me -- and Greg Webb, CEO Travelport.

Also just a quick thank you to Julie Heizer, Deputy Director of NTTO, who worked very closely with this subcommittee and was a great support and obviously to Isabel Hill who's -- for her guidance and support throughout.

And lastly, Melissa Froehlich Flood on my team, just an unbelievable resource to us as we put together these three recommendations.

So here you go, a high level summary, let's start with our first recommendation. It addresses the need to secure adequate funding for Brand USA and state and local destination marketing organizations or DMOs to ensure viability and enable international marketing and promotional efforts that will play a key role in

the recovery of U.S. competitiveness and grow the travel economy.

As we all know, funding streams for Brand USA and DMOs have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, so this recommendation has three components.

We believe that an emergency short-term legislative proposal to infuse Brand USA with a $250 million appropriation outside of the existing matching funds process would ensure that Brand USA has the resources necessary to partner with government and the industry to hasten the recovery of the lucrative international travel market.

They'll be a key partner in pulling through important travel-related updates and policy changes as travel resumes and normalizes.

In addition, temporary suspension of the new 50-50 cash to in-kind ratio could be considered by Congress to allow Brand USA greater matching requirement flexibility.

Lastly, we believe there is an

opportunity for the DMOs to be included in a future recovery bill with the allowance of travel promotion through EAA and step grants. These measures, particularly if taken together, will help the United States remain globally competitive and ensure the viability of important communications and marketing partners.

Our second recommendation is to develop and implement a coordinated interagency education campaign, creating a single verified government source for all pandemic-related travel requirements and provide travelers with the resources they need to meet them.

A single source or a portal acts as a one-stop shop across the full travel continuum. It's necessary to bring together the different resources and information being put out there by different agencies.

This portal should contain verified information to educate travelers of requirements and provide trusted resources. It should also highlight the steps being taken to protect public

health and safety throughout the entire traveler journey.

This would mitigate confusion in the marketplace and create a much needed confidence in business and leisure travel. We believe that this work should be done collaboratively with the private sector and destinations to educate travelers worldwide.

Our final recommendation is for the administration to develop amendment -- ah, I'm going too fast guys -- to develop and implement a travel promotion communications plan leveraging high profile private and public sector leaders for its implementation with a lead by example component which which focuses on getting the federal workforce traveling when it's safe to do so.

We know the pandemic will continue to impact travel behaviors which will have lasting implications for the travel sector jobs and economic recovery. When the time is right, the federal government could utilize their resources

and communications methods to promote travel three ways: highlighting any new domestic travel initiatives developed by Congress or by federal agencies; leveraging high profile leaders as messengers with additional amplifiers like private sector in DMOs by leveraging assets from across the government, including the Department of Interior and National Park Service; and by implementing proactive communications that showcase our country's rich natural resources and diverse cultural heritage to demonstrate America's travel economy is open for business and to increase engagement of minority and rural businesses and attractions.

As a first step in the plan of execution, the government could lead by example in encouraging federal employees to travel again when it's determined by health experts that it's safe to do so. And wouldn't you know a call would come in? And demonstrate a commitment to travel industry recovery and reinforce confidence in travel.

It has been a privilege to work with this subcommittee on these recommendations, as well as to work with the broader TTAB on the recommendations contained in the letter.

As an industry we're grateful for the opportunity to provide input on the ways in which the Department of Commerce and Congress can have an immediate impact on recovery of the travel and tourism sector. Thank you.

I don't know if I'm going to get in trouble, Kurt. I tried to keep it fast.

MR. EKERT: You were, you were appropriately concise, Tricia, thank you.

MS. PRIMROSE: Thanks.

MR. EKERT: I can think nothing better to honor Arne Sorenson than to have a Marriott executive lead this subcommittee and provide the great work that you and your team have done. So thank you, Tricia.

MS. PRIMROSE: Thank you very much, appreciate it.

MR. EKERT: I thought that Chris

Thompson will, we hope, be appreciative of, of the first recommendation from your subcommittee.

We have, so in total we have, we've narrowed this down to 10 recommendations. There was a lot of other stuff on the board, you all know that. So this represents what we believe is a very impactful package to take to the new secretary upon her appointment.

And it doesn't mean that this is what we're going to do wholly for the next two years. Again, this represents at a point in time what we can do to dramatically impact the recovery of the industry, especially for the United States.

With that, we're now going to open it up for members of the TTAB, those are board members, to ask any questions, provide any comment or any guidance to the board and to the NTTO staff. So the floor is yours.

If you have a question or a comment, please hit the raise your hand key, I think. I don't know what it's called, and Jennifer will probably need to help me in administering this,

but the floor is open.

MS. AGUINAGA: And if there's any members on the phone we can't utilize a raise your hand function, please feel free to just jump in if you're a board member.

It looks like Olga has raised her hand, Mr. Chair.

MR. EKERT: Olga Ramudo.

MS. RAMUDO: I was trying to figure out how to raise my hand. I guess, I guess I did it, yeah. This will be better.

I mean, first, I think I should say and be modest about it, congratulations to all of us. These are incredible recommendations.

These are, you know, a heck of a letter, so I mean, congratulations to us. I can tell you that from a personal stance, standpoint, the restrictions on travel have put a dent on all of our businesses.

I can tell you that small businesses in particularly are suffering tremendously. ASTA is forecasting that 85 percent of small traveling

agencies will close by year-end unless help is on the way.

So I think many of these recommendations definitely will help, you know, our industry and get us going. The number one, which is I'm happy about to see is let's get travel started and that's what we need and then all the others will follow through.

So thank you.

MR. EKERT: Well-said, Olga, thank you so much for your contributions as well.

MS. AGUINAGA: I'm not seeing any other raised hands.

MR. EKERT: We'll take that, we'll take that as tentative affirmation of the critical points by the subcommittee so far. Any -- before we move off of this section any other commentary or questions from any members of the TTAB Board?

All right, great. Well, I like an efficient meeting. We now have an opportunity to open the floor for public comment and that is for

anybody else who is attending the meeting as a member of the public who would like to ask a question or make any comments. You are now invited to do so.

I would ask that you keep your commentary to no more than two minutes and that's a hard and fast rule. And again, use the raise your hand function or if you can't do that then do that a visibly or narratively.

MS. AGUINAGA: And Mr. Chair, before we move on to whoever may raise their hand from the public, it looks like Will Morey has raised his hand.

MR. EKERT: Oh, okay. Will?

MR. MOREY: Yeah, thanks very much. Sorry I was slow trying to find the raise your hand button. I was congratulating and doing all kinds of things.

But I'm just wondering from this point forward, Kurt, you had mentioned sort of engagement over the next couple of years. So just it's sort of maybe a snippet of an overview.

Assuming these recommendations move forward, how will we stay in touch with them? How will -- will we be called upon to explore them further, to expand on them, to participate in implementation in some way? Just curious.

MR. EKERT: It's a great question. I know that Isabel is going to speak about this toward the end of the meeting today, so I don't want to steal her thunder on that.

What I will say is that's part of the job of the Board. I think once we get these things posted, once we get them active and moving, then it's our job in concert with Commerce and the NTTO office to determine what our agenda is going to be from this point forward.

So I look at this as we're sitting in the emergency room right now, we're triaging in the patient. Once we get the patient out of surgery I think in partnership with the government we then need to determine how we want to spend our time over the next two years.

So I don't, I don't think that as a preordained set of actions. That's for the Board to determine.

MR. MOREY: All right, thank you.

MR. EKERT: Any --

MS. AGUINAGA: And now --

MR. EKERT: -- any other comments from board members?

MS. AGUINAGA: Yeah, it looks like we have Brian Quinn.

MR. EKERT: Yes, go ahead. Brian, did you have something you wanted to share?

All right, let's, let's -- can you mute, Brian? No, somebody's mowing the lawn or edging their garden or something.

MR. QUINN: I'm not mowing the lawn. Am I coming through now?

MR. EKERT: Yes, you are.

MR. QUINN: All right. I just wanted to reiterate great work by everybody, appreciate the scale and scope of it and Tricia's leadership on our group as well.

Just three quick points as you lock in the letter, one of the other groups was talking about, you know, who got the assistance and who didn't in the previous stimulus, stimulus packages and recovery acts.

One gap in the development side that sometimes gets missed is if you had a project in development or under construction or about to start construction, a lot of the tests in the Recovery Act and in the CARES Act want you to already have employees and want you to already have revenue, right, some of the tests that are in there.

And if you have a project that's about to start construction or that's under construction, that was a reason why a lot of those projects fell out of the ability to be compliant with the loans.

It's a nuance but if you think about bringing travel back and hiring people and the bigger impacts on the, on the economy, those projects that are in the pipeline for my hotel

company partners here they fell through some of those cracks that were talked through.

So I don't know the ability to tweak that. I know at different times the banks have tried to help and industry has tried to help, but just a nuance there for you to be aware of.

So --

MR. EKERT: I think that's -- so -- and there's a ton of those things. For example, my company doesn't qualify for anything because we're too large.

MR. QUINN: Right.

MR. EKERT: But the impact to employees very similar. My sense is that that gets into the legislation piece of this and we would work through, through with the NTTO staff to try to impact the narrative that's in the legislation.

MR. QUINN: Yeah.

MR. EKERT: But I would defer to Isabel and team on the best way to get that done, but very good feedback.

MR. QUINN: Yeah, I just wanted to call that out. I get a lot of that feedback.

Second real quick on the international inbound, about 50 percent of it, if I have the numbers right, come from Mexico and Canada and we talked through that in our group, but just as the rules do form up, assuming we all go, you know, in the positive direction that we're all hopeful that we get to, maybe the opportunity to use those two countries as test cases as we form up the, the the rules around international travel s.

So much of it comes from those two countries. They are geographically close, democracies, you know, all positive reasons why we could test some things out on them.

And 50 percent or just under 50 percent comes from those two countries so if we could get those to right it would go a long way to, to bring it back.

And then last point, and this is sort of new news, but we probably all have been experiencing the interesting adventure of gassing

up your car the last two weeks. Oil prices mean, you know, usually green shoots for the, for the economy but when you think about how people are going to start to stick their necks out and travel it will probably be by care more than by air.

And the cost of traveling by car has gone up pretty dramatically in the last three weeks. So I know that changes all the time but I just wanted to raise that as a, as a new issue, like we needed that.

MR. EKERT: Hear, hear, and we will not subject that to Texas heating pricing practices. But thank you for the feedback.

Any other, again any other feedback from the Board before moving to public comment?

MS. AGUINAGA: I'm not showing any, Mr. Chair.

MR. EKERT: All right, great. Thank you, Jennifer. So we'll now open it up for public comment for anybody that would like to ask a question or offer --

Jennifer, I don't see any --

MS. AGUINAGA: I don't. I thought Chris Thompson had asked to do a remark. I don't know if Chris was still interested in that? Perhaps they're having some technical issues.

MR. THOMPSON; No, Mr. Chair?

MS. AGUINAGA: And this is, this is -- oh, Chris, are you --

MR. THOMPSON: Yeah, I found it. So Mr. Chair --

MS. AGUINAGA: Okay.

MR. THOMPSON: -- and the committee, thank you very much. I have no comment. I appreciate the support. Thank you, sir.

MR. EKERT: That's the best acceptance speech I've seen so far.

MS. AGUINAGA: If you're not speaking, folks, please mute your phones. It's hard to hear otherwise. Whoever it is that's vacuuming maybe hold off just a few minutes on completing that.

Sounds like -- are there any other

public comments from anybody in the meeting?

MS. BARNES: Hi, this is Tori Barnes from U.S. Travel. I'm sorry. I kind of got unmuted when Chris was trying to speak. Can you hear me now?

MR. EKERT: Yes.

MS. BARNES: Okay, great. I just wanted to say thank you, a huge thank you to all of the folks on the TTAB for all this important work and we at U.S. Travel are committed to working with you to move forward all of these proposals in coordination with NTTO.

And just, again, grateful for all the time and hard work that's been spent on these issues and looking forward to working with you as you move forward.

MR. EKERT: Thank you, thank you.

MS. AGUINAGA: And I'm showing no additional comments.

MR. EKERT: Great. Well, we now, we now move to the most fun part of the meeting where we're going to vote yay or nay on adopting

the recommendations. I think everybody has a full copy of the recommendation letter that we would propose to send to the new Commerce Secretary.

I will ask everybody to unmute and you're either just going to say aye or nay. So all in favor?

GROUP: Aye.

MR. EKERT: Any opposed? All right, the resolution and the letter passes. Thank you very much everybody for the terrific, terrific work, really just amazing.

You know, we sat here a month ago or so saying, hey, we want to fast track and take advantage of the opportunity for a new administration, a new incoming secretary and try to catalyze the badly needed help for this industry.

And I think that we've taken a very important first step to get that done. So again, thank you. And the subcommittee chairs, especially Brad as the vice chair as well doing

double duty.

Brad, I'm a little bit jealous that you're still a ginger while my ginger has abandoned me in recent years but thank you. Just terrific work by everybody.

I'm going to ask Isabel now to just talk about what comes next from a process standpoint with the letter and with our recommendations.

MS. HILL: Absolutely Kurt, happy to do that, and, and congratulations. This has been an extraordinary effort and now that you have approved the recommendations we will be forwarding them to the secretary.

We expect the secretary to be confirmed and onboard imminently, so I'm delighted that these recommendations will be here to greet her when she arrives.

The way the process moves forward is that the secretary will then take these recommendations onboard to inform her priorities as she seeks to look at the economic recovery,

the initiatives that may need to be taken for the economic recovery of the United States.

And so these will be very, very important inputs into, into her considerations and her action agenda.

The Board will continue to meet over the, over with with her, we trust, and then over the course of the next two years we will continue the conversation.

And obviously it is an iterative process. As, as the situation improves then the new, you know, new subjects arise perhaps deeper dives into some of the subjects you've touched on, perhaps new issues will arrive. So it is a dynamic and ongoing conversation.

So I really, you know, want to thank you for your, your work. I remember listening to the governor when she was in her confirmation hearings and she was asked about travel and tourism. And she said, well, the department is going to have to be as bold and creative as we can be, and I think the recommendations that you

have given will really help that.

They really meet that test, so I think that is, that is a wonderful thing.

I think that one of the things that, that you all can take great pride in is the -- not only the speed with which you've done this but the quality of the recommendations. And I think that they would be considered very, very seriously by the incoming secretary.

Obviously, I can't get in front of her decisions but I'm quite sure that she will be very focused on the recovery of the sector, which as we know is one of the hardest hit in, in the entire economy.

So these will be really, really important for her. So thank you for that.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chair and Brad, vice chair, for your leadership, Natalie for helping work with us to bring this home.

And I would also like to thank the U.T. Travel Association, Brand USA, Airlines for America, AIANTA, the Small Business

Administration, the Economic Development Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and our colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of the Treasury and Transportation, Interior and Agriculture, all of whom worked with you to provide information necessary for you to put these recommendations forward.

I really appreciate your engagement with them and conversely their engagement with you. That is what makes the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board a really special and impactful organization.

So on behalf of Jennifer Aguinaga, Julie Heizer and Cur Cottle, who were also helping to staff these committees and the rest of the team at the National Travel and Tourism Office, it's been a pleasure supporting you.

And we really look forward to our continued engagement as we work towards our common goal to get this business of recovery up and running as quickly as we can.

Thank you Mr. Chair, over to you.

MR. EKERT: Good. Well, Ms. Deputy Assistant Secretary, thank you so much and I think this is a great illustration of the partnership between the government and the private sector.

And I think again, as I said, it's a very important first step that we've taken as a group, and really appreciate (audio interference).

With that, we're going to close the meeting and I'm going to give it back to Jennifer to do that. Thank you.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for your participation in today's meeting. This meeting is officially closed and I look forward to seeing you all again soon.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record at 3:58 p.m.)

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Before: US DOC ITA

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Place: teleconference

was duly recorded and accurately transcribed under my direction; further, that said transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

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Court Reporter