

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

APRIL 23, 2021

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The Board met via Videoconference, at
2:00 p.m. EST, Kurt Ekert, Chair, presiding.

PRESENT

KURT EKERT, President and Chief Executive
Officer, CWT, Chair

BRAD DEAN, Chief Executive Officer, Discover
Puerto Rico, Vice Chair

LIZ FITZSIMMONS, Managing Director, Maryland
Office of Tourism and Film

DAVID GILBERT, President and Chief Executive
Officer, Destination Cleveland and Greater
Cleveland Sports Commission

RUSSELL HEDGE, President and Chief Executive
Officer, Hostelng International USA

DEBBIE JOHNSON, Director, Arizona Office of
Tourism

STEPHANIE JONES, President and Chief Executive
Officer, Cultural Heritage Economic
Alliance

ROLF LUNDBERG, Vice President and Assistant
General Counsel and Head of External
Affairs and Global Public Policy, Choice
Hotels International

DUFFIELD MILKIE, Executive Vice President,
General Counsel, Secretary, Cedar Fair
L.P.

WILL MOREY, Chief Executive Officer, Morey's
Piers

MARY MOTSENBOCKER, President and Chief Executive
Officer, International Tourism Marketing,
Inc.

VINAY PATEL, President and Chief Executive
Officer, Fairbrook Hotels

CATHERINE PRATHER, President, National Tour
Association

TRICIA PRIMROSE, Executive Vice President of
Global Communications and Public Affairs,
Marriott International

BRIAN QUINN, Chief Development Officer, Domio

OLGA RAMUDO, President and Chief Executive
Officer, Express Travel

STEPHEN REVERTRIA, President, Giants Enterprises

DANIEL RICHARDS, Founder and Chief Executive
Officer, Global Rescue, LLC

ADAM SACKS, President, Tourism Economics

MONICA SMITH, President and Chief Executive,
Southeast Tourism Society

ROB TORRES, Managing Director, Travel, Google,
Inc.

RON VLASIC, Chief Operating Officer, Hostmark
Hospitality Group

GREG WEBB, Chief Executive Officer, Travelport

ALSO PRESENT

ARUN VENKATARAMAN, Trade Counselor for the
Secretary of Commerce

ISABEL HILL, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Travel and Tourism

JENNIFER AGUINAGA, Deputy Director for Policy
and Planning, National Travel and Tourism
Office, and Travel and Tourism Advisory
Board Designated Federal Officer

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2 2:02 p.m.

3 MS. AGUINAGA: Good afternoon,
4 everyone, and welcome to this meeting of the
5 United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board.
6 As the designated federal officer, I am pleased
7 to open the meeting.

8 A few notes before we begin. But
9 first, if you could all put your phones on mute,
10 that would be great. If you are not a member of
11 the Board or not speaking, please turn your video
12 off so that we can try to keep the bandwidth
13 high. And it will also be easier for the Chair
14 to see the members.

15 For those of you wishing to speak,
16 please use the raise your hand feature if
17 possible. If you are on the phone, please make
18 yourself known by stating your name, and the
19 Chair will recognize to take the floor.

20 A reminder for those joining who are
21 not members of the Board, your opportunity to
22 speak will be during the public comment portion

1 of the agenda.

2 If you have any difficulties while
3 we're on the call technically please contact my
4 colleague, Christina Gay at christina.gay, G-A-Y,
5 @creative.gov. And with that, I turn it over to
6 our Board Chair, Kurt Ekert.

7 CHAIR EKERT: Jennifer, thank you, and
8 welcome everyone. Thank you so much for taking
9 the time on a Friday to be here. And I'll just
10 repeat what Jennifer said, if you don't mind
11 muting your phones when you're not speaking,
12 that'll make for better sound quality for all of
13 us.

14 We have a relatively fixed purpose
15 today. You'll recall that we met, I think, just
16 three weeks ago. And the Secretary asked us to
17 focus on two things. One was to look at the
18 funding available under the Economic Development
19 Administration, to come back with specific
20 recommendations for our industry and country.
21 And the second was to form a technology
22 subcommittee and look at opportunities and

1 recommendations there.

2 And so we've had three subcommittees
3 formed. Everybody's been very hard at work. And
4 I think that the work products that you're going
5 to hear about today are very powerful and very
6 pointed. So in advance, thank you for the great
7 work that everybody has put forth.

8 We're also privileged today to be
9 joined by Arun Venkataraman, and I hope, Arun,
10 I've said your name properly, who is the Trade
11 Counselor for Secretary Raimondo. And without
12 further ado, Arun, the floor is yours. And thank
13 you for joining us.

14 And, Arun, we can't hear you, maybe
15 you are on mute.

16 MR. VENKATARAMAN: You know, 14 months
17 in, I still can't figure this stuff out.

18 (Laughter.)

19 MR. VENKATARAMAN: But thank you,
20 thank you, Mr. Chair. And props for pronouncing
21 my name, thank you very much for making the
22 effort.

1 On behalf of Secretary Raimondo, I'm
2 pleased to be here for this meeting of the Travel
3 and Tourism Advisory Board. As you all have
4 heard from Secretary Raimondo at your previous
5 meeting, she's keenly aware of the devastating
6 impact of the pandemic on the travel and tourism
7 industry.

8 And she is deeply committed to
9 engaging the resources at her disposal to support
10 the recovery of this vital sector. We know
11 travel and tourism remains hard hit by shutdowns
12 and travel restrictions. Overseas visitor volume
13 in March 2021 was only 13 percent of the volume
14 of March 2019.

15 But on the positive side, there are
16 signs that domestic repositions are beginning to
17 improve. Employment in the leisure and
18 hospitality sector increased 664,000 in February
19 and March, 2021. That reflects the biggest two-
20 month gain since July/August 2020.

21 Drive travel in the US is also
22 improving. After being down 20 percent year over

1 year during the final three months of 2020, drive
2 travel is down only 15 percent in March 2021
3 compared to March 2019 and up five percent during
4 the first two weeks of April 2021.

5 Air travel in the US is also
6 improving. After being down 63 percent year over
7 year during the final three months of 2020, TSA
8 throughput was down only 48 percent in March 2021
9 compared to March 2019 and only 38 percent during
10 the first two weeks of April, 2021.

11 As you know, this economic crisis we
12 are facing is the result of a public health
13 crisis, and vaccines are a key part of that
14 recovery. As of April 21, more than 134 million
15 people have received at least one dose in the US.
16 And 34 percent of the US adult population is
17 fully vaccinated.

18 The United States is on a solid upward
19 trajectory in this area which, of course, is a
20 prerequisite for recovery of the travel and
21 tourism sector and economic recovery overall.

22 To help accelerate this recovery,

1 Secretary Raimondo did ask you to provide her
2 with your recommendations on how the Commerce
3 Department can best use the \$750 million provided
4 by Congress to the Economic Development
5 Administration as part of the American rescue
6 plan to support communities affected by the
7 decline in travel and tourism.

8 As our Chair mentioned, she had two
9 specific asks of you, looking specifically to the
10 areas that would be most impactful in assisting
11 states and communities that have suffered
12 economic injury related to travel, and tourism,
13 or outdoor recreation, both the leisure and
14 business sectors and including infrastructure and
15 non-infrastructure processes. These
16 recommendations will be critical in informing her
17 decisions as she directs EDA on how to use these
18 funds.

19 As the Chair also mentioned, she did
20 ask the Board to write recommendations on how the
21 federal government can support the use of
22 technology throughout the travel continuum to

1 facilitate travel and eliminate the transmission
2 of COVID-19.

3 We all fully know that these requests
4 were not easy to respond in any time period, much
5 less in a tight three-week time period. And we
6 thank you, really, for your extraordinary efforts
7 to get us where we are today with these
8 recommendations.

9 I look forward to hearing the
10 discussion and to receiving your final
11 recommendations. Thank you for the invitation,
12 and back to you, Mr. Chair.

13 CHAIR EKERT: Arun, thank you, and
14 thank you so much for the support. And clearly,
15 we are seeing some very green shoots with
16 domestic leisure tourism, and that's superb.
17 Inbound and inter-regional leisure travel remains
18 very depressed. Business travel remains in a
19 depression, and the meetings and events industry
20 remains in a depression. So we are far from
21 being out of the woods in this industry today.

22 The first conversation we're going to

1 have is going to be led by Liz Fitzsimmons. Liz
2 and Brad Dean, respectively, led the Leisure and
3 the Business Travel Subcommittees. And Liz is
4 going to speak on behalf of both herself and
5 Brad.

6 And I should note with that
7 subcommittee, as well as the Technology
8 Subcommittee that was formed, almost all of the
9 members of the Board were actively involved in
10 the development of these recommendations. So my
11 hat's off to you, and I really appreciate that.

12 The floor is yours.

13 VICE CHAIR DEAN: Mr. Chairman, this
14 is Brad. I just got a text from Liz. I think
15 she's exiting another meeting and going to be in
16 in just a moment.

17 If it pleases the Chair, we may want
18 to go ahead move to the other subcommittee and
19 let Dan present that. And then hopefully, by
20 that time, Liz will be on. And if not, I'll be
21 happy to --

22 MEMBER GILBERT: Brad, thank you. So

1 Dan Richards will lead us through the Technology
2 Subcommittee, and we're just going to be nimble
3 here. Dan?

4 MEMBER RICHARDS: Thank you, Chairman
5 Ekert. Can everybody hear me okay?

6 CHAIR EKERT: Yes, you're good.

7 MEMBER RICHARDS: Okay, great. So
8 thank you for the time and the opportunity to
9 address the committee here this afternoon. So
10 the Technology Subcommittee has spent its time
11 over the last few weeks developing really three
12 core recommendations.

13 And those recommendations can be
14 broken down into really two categories. The
15 first category is in the near immediate term and
16 addresses the existing crisis that's going on
17 with respect to the damage inflicted by COVID.

18 And then the third recommendation is
19 a longer term recommendation. And that
20 recommendation revolves around how we can prevent
21 something as destructive as a pandemic like the
22 one that we're experiencing now from impacting

1 our industry the way that it has ever again.

2 So in terms of near term recovery, our
3 recommendations are as follows. And the first
4 one has to do with being able to confirm the
5 status with respect to people who have been
6 either vaccinated, recently tested, or who have
7 had prior instances of the disease.

8 And we recommend that the US
9 government take a leadership role in recommending
10 secure technology standards where users, rather
11 than centralized organizations, store and control
12 data used for vaccine, previous infection, and
13 testing verification for COVID-19, and for future
14 disease outbreaks.

15 So while we recognize that our country
16 doesn't have a centralized healthcare system like
17 they do in Europe and other parts of the world,
18 in Europe they are moving ahead with developing
19 standards for confirming somebody's COVID status.

20 And we don't have a seat at the table,
21 you know, with Europe and with others with
22 respect to how we believe that this data should

1 be both stored and presented. We run the risk of
2 having American citizens who are traveling, you
3 know, be forced to comply with regimes from these
4 foreign countries where we have no say.

5 So I think it's incredibly important
6 for us to focus on making sure that we do have a
7 seat at the table, that we are recommending
8 standards that make sense for Americans, and for
9 Americans traveling abroad, and that can be
10 utilized efficiently and effectively by those
11 travelers where they have faith in the security
12 of their data and the control of that data as
13 well.

14 Our second recommendation is that the
15 US government should invest in the development
16 and distribution of COVID-19 therapeutics in a
17 manner similar to those employed by Operation
18 Warp Speed with respect to the development and
19 distribution of vaccines.

20 And what we mean by this is, if you
21 can turn the COVID-19 virus and symptomology into
22 something that is more consistent, say, with a

1 seasonal flu, which I know we've all heard, you
2 know, comparisons made throughout this pandemic
3 to the seasonal flu, the therapeutics have the
4 ability to make that happen.

5 And the technology today exists out
6 there to both dramatically reduce the likelihood
7 of infection, number one, and number two, to
8 reduce dramatically the severity of infection for
9 those actually who do contract COVID-19.

10 If the government were to put its, you
11 know, weight behind the development and
12 deployment of these therapeutics for our
13 industry, it would make an incredibly positive
14 difference in the speed with which we would be
15 able to recover.

16 And the third recommendation has to do
17 with a longer term outlook. And that is that the
18 US government should develop capability to
19 identify, detect, and respond to COVID-19 and
20 emerging pathogenic threats by leveraging
21 improvements in technology, including technology
22 that detects active infection of COVID-19 and

1 other emerging human vector diseases on exhaled
2 breath.

3 And let me be clear. One of the
4 biggest problems with the current crisis is that
5 we have not been able to detect who is infected
6 and who is not. And for those who are infected,
7 we know that the finger print of that infection
8 can be found on their exhaled breath.

9 The technology has taken a gigantic
10 leap forward over just the last year. And
11 scientists have taken technology, for instance,
12 developed to analyze automobile exhaust, and
13 catalytic converter air, and other kinds of
14 technologies used in other applications, and have
15 basically adapted it to detecting COVID-19 on
16 exhaled breath. So we do have the ability. The
17 technology is right on the cusp of being able to
18 be deployed at scale.

19 And if the federal government were,
20 again, to invest in and create a public market
21 and a set of standards and requirements for the
22 detection of pro-COVID 19 and other emerging

1 pathogenic threats in a highly accurate, rapid,
2 and efficient way, we would not only be able, I
3 think, at the tail end of this crisis, to employ
4 that technology to help us back on our feet but
5 also to dramatically reduce, if not eliminate,
6 the likelihood that future pandemics have the
7 same kind of destructive impact that COVID-19 has
8 had on our industry.

9 So thank you very much for giving me
10 the opportunity to speak. And if you have
11 questions regarding my statement, I'd be more
12 than happy to take them. Thank you very much.

13 CHAIR EKERT: Dan, thank you. I feel
14 we may see you next to Dr. Fauci on one of the
15 networks soon. Really good work.

16 MEMBER RICHARDS: Thank you.

17 CHAIR EKERT: Liz has now joined us.
18 And again, Liz is going to be presenting on
19 behalf of herself and Brad for both the Business,
20 Travel, and the Leisure Subcommittee. Liz, the
21 floor is yours. And thank you for being here.

22 Liz, can you hear me?

1 MEMBER FITZSIMMONS: Hello?

2 CHAIR EKERT: Liz, we're not able to
3 hear you.

4 MEMBER FITZSIMMONS: Teams has not
5 been my friend throughout this whole process.
6 Can you guys hear me?

7 CHAIR EKERT: Yes, now we can. Thank
8 you.

9 MEMBER FITZSIMMONS: Okay, great. So
10 I would like to thank Brad, and his team, and
11 then the great team that was on the Leisure
12 Subcommittee. We had several meetings, a lot of
13 great thoughts, a lot of smart people on that
14 group.

15 And during the conversations we looked
16 at the fact that so many business and leisure
17 travel recommendations really overlapped and that
18 we, Brad and I decided that it probably made
19 sense for these to all come together as one.

20 But I think that one thing that we can
21 all agree on very clearly is that driving demand
22 is really the number one item that we really need

1 to put forth to EDA to be able to support that.

2 There's product development, there's
3 infrastructure, but without driving demand and
4 getting people to come to our destinations, we
5 really are in the business of tourism at that
6 point. So that really was our main one.

7 And another one that we focused on was
8 being able, the facilitation of being able to get
9 the dollars out quickly to the communities
10 through various ways, but also understanding that
11 this is a once in a lifetime amount of money for
12 EDA. It's a big pot. And they've never had to
13 push through that many funds in what we hope to
14 be a really a short period of time.

15 So with that, Brad, you want to share
16 some more?

17 VICE CHAIR DEAN: No, I think that Liz
18 covered it very well. And I would just also add,
19 Mr. Chairman, kudos to the staff at the EDA who
20 availed themselves to both subcommittees so that
21 we could start some very important conversations
22 about how to make this work for the industry and

1 the federal government.

2 So, Liz covered the details very well,
3 and both subcommittees are very much aligned.

4 CHAIR EKERT: Great, and terrific work
5 by both subcommittees. Again, thank you to
6 everybody who participated in that.

7 Brad, is there anything else you'd
8 like to share before we go to input from the
9 Board more broadly?

10 VICE CHAIR DEAN: No, Mr. Chairman.
11 Congratulations to everybody for some very quick
12 and fine work. And I'll turn it back to you, Mr.
13 Chairman.

14 CHAIR EKERT: Brad, thank you. And
15 your leadership as vice chair is terrific.

16 So we're now at the stage of the
17 meeting where we're going to open up the call for
18 anybody on the Board who would like to raise any
19 issues, ask questions, recommend any changes,
20 hopefully pursuant to the documents that have
21 been distributed on the Technology Subcommittee
22 and then both on the Business and Leisure funding

1 recommendations to the EDA.

2 So with that, I think if you'd like to
3 speak, you can use the raise your hand feature if
4 you're on the phone. I think, Jennifer, that
5 doesn't work, we'll have to just speak up and let
6 us know that you're interested in talking.

7 And I will ask that, for those of you
8 who do want to speak, try to keep your comments
9 to less than two minutes. I've always thought
10 that brevity is a sign of intelligence. So we'll
11 run a test here.

12 I think David Gilbert has his hand
13 raised. So David, the floor is yours.

14 MEMBER GILBERT: Right, thanks, Kurt.
15 And I will be brief. One point, it is certainly
16 reflected in one of the letters, but I feel it's
17 worth a highlight, is that \$750 million of these
18 funds are meant to be dedicated to the growth and
19 regrowth of travel and tourism and would just
20 highlight that consideration is given to how to
21 make sure that is what those funds are for, and
22 not intermingled with other community purposes

1 that may, somehow or another, have a thread to
2 travel and tourism, be it a separate application
3 or other, but just important that those dollars
4 really go to the purpose for which they were
5 meant. So thank you.

6 CHAIR EKERT: David, that's a great
7 comment. And we should just think within the
8 letter about specifying that these should be used
9 specifically for the purposes of promoting travel
10 and tourism regarding infrastructure specifically
11 for this industry. I think that's very
12 important. I agree.

13 Will Morey is next. Will?

14 MEMBER MOREY: Thank you. On the
15 Technology Committee, I was curious as to, it was
16 a very distinction about user-controlled
17 information versus central-controlled
18 information, I'm not using the terms exactly
19 correct, I think, that I understand is being
20 pursued in Europe.

21 I'm just wondering, that sounds like
22 a very important aspect. How do we best

1 emphasize that and/or, you know, make a
2 convincing argument that that's the appropriate
3 approach to the data?

4 CHAIR EKERT: Dan, do you want to
5 comment on that since you're the author and the
6 expert?

7 MEMBER RICHARDS: Yes, sure. And,
8 Will, thank you for the question. As for the
9 seminal issue that is occurring right now in the
10 state around certification of COVID status, so
11 Europe, because it has socialized medicine, has a
12 centralized repository for basically everybody's
13 vaccine status.

14 And if you get tested or whatever, it
15 actually goes into the centralized repositories
16 at the, you know, the country or state level.
17 And it's managed by the state or the country.

18 The other model here is being
19 developed by the common project, and that is a
20 decentralized model where what you are providing
21 to the people that want to confirm your COVID
22 status is simply a confirmation of that status.

1 There is no data exchanged or any of
2 other kind of data that is put at risk. And it
3 gives the user complete control over how that
4 data is managed. So for countries that don't
5 have centralized health system, the commons
6 approach is a very good one. Because you'll be
7 getting data from a lot of different sources.

8 The European approach obviously is the
9 centralized approach, because they've already got
10 all the data. So these are sort of two very
11 different approaches to solving the same problem.

12 In America, obviously, we don't have
13 centralized healthcare, or nationalized or
14 socialized medicine in our country. So giving
15 users and these individual operators the ability
16 to control their data, and you manage how it's
17 deployed so that it's not, you know, used for
18 nefarious purposes, at least, again, one man's
19 opinion, that is a great way to solve this
20 problem without exposing American travelers, you
21 know, to data breeches and security problems.

22 MEMBER MOREY: And the systems will

1 work with one another, in other words, the
2 European system as you described, and what you're
3 recommending here in the US, they'll essentially
4 interface?

5 MEMBER RICHARDS: Well, that's the
6 \$64,000 question. And what the groups are doing
7 right now, there are inter-operability meetings
8 occurring, you know, occurring nationally weekly.
9 And it would, be from our perspective, most
10 helpful if the federal government were to weigh
11 in and assist with the development of what the
12 standards should look like for American citizens.

13 That would certainly give us a place
14 at the table, because the Europeans are actually
15 going to Parliament here, I think, in the next
16 month or two to actually enact what their
17 systems, you know, draft legislation for what
18 their system is actually going to do, what it's
19 going to look like.

20 We, as an industry, need a seat at the
21 table. And the way that we do that here,
22 obviously, from the United States is to have our

1 government have that seat at the table. Because
2 none of us have the ability to sit in that seat
3 like our federal government does. So I think by
4 having our federal government do that, we will,
5 you know, basically guarantee that we do have a
6 seat at that table and that our interests are
7 protected internationally going forward.

8 CHAIR EKERT: Great, thank you.

9 MEMBER RICHARDS: My pleasure.

10 CHAIR EKERT: Thank you both. I don't
11 see any other raised hands. Jennifer, are there
12 any questions over the phone line that we may not
13 be able to see?

14 MS. AGUINAGA: I have not received
15 anything.

16 CHAIR EKERT: All right. Any other
17 comments or questions from members of the Board?

18 All right. A very compliant group
19 today. We'll now just, I was fiddling, move
20 along. This is now the section for public
21 comments. So for folks who are attending the
22 meeting today but are not member of the Board

1 that would like to add commentary or ask a
2 question, this is the time to do that. And
3 again, you're all subject to the same test which
4 is brevity is a sign of intelligence. And with
5 that, I open the floor for public commentary.

6 All right. Well, I don't see any. So
7 again, a very compliant group today. I guess we
8 just did great work in advance of the meeting.

9 At this point, we're going to move
10 speedily on to voting on the two, effectively the
11 two letters. One is the EDA funding
12 recommendation, two is the Technology
13 Subcommittee letter.

14 I think we will incorporate those
15 modest changes that we talked about earlier. So
16 the draft will change nominally. But we're going
17 to basically do a simple yea or nay. And,
18 Jennifer, if you can help me when we vote, you
19 have to unmute and just say yea or nay.

20 So we'll do this all as a single
21 motion if that's possible. And that is to
22 approve both of the letters that we want to

1 submit to the Secretary. For all of those in
2 favor, it's a yea. And just unmute your phone
3 and say, one, two, three --

4 (Chorus of yea.)

5 CHAIR EKERT: And do we have any nays,
6 any naysayers?

7 (No audible response.)

8 CHAIR EKERT: All right. Well, both
9 letters passed, it sounds like, unanimously.
10 Thank you for that. It's been really good work.
11 And again, to be able to respond to the Secretary
12 in a mere three weeks with such thoughtful work,
13 after the last set of recommendations we did
14 previously, is incredibly impressive.

15 And so, you know, Brad, Liz, Dan, and
16 everybody who put forth the effort, thank you so
17 much. I'd be interested to see what the
18 Secretary and the Department is able to do with
19 what we've recommended here. But we're certainly
20 going to stay hot on their tails to make sure
21 that we get some good traction here.

22 So I also want to just thank Jennifer,

1 and Isabel, and the whole team at the NTTD who
2 remain very committed and very helpful for
3 everything that we do. And they're sort of the
4 wind behind our sails for all this effort. They
5 make us look a lot better than we would otherwise
6 be.

7 Arun, my thank you again to you for
8 taking the time to attend today and for your
9 insightful comments. And again, thank you
10 everybody. I think really good work. And
11 everybody demonstrated a very high degree of
12 intelligence today, I must say.

13 Jennifer, that concludes today's
14 meeting subject to any closing comments that you
15 may have.

16 MS. AGUINAGA: I have a few comments.
17 I think Arun may have some closing comments as
18 well. So I'll pass it on to him.

19 CHAIR EKERT: Oh, my apologies.

20 MS. AGUINAGA: No, sir, I'll pass it
21 to him, sir. And then I will close the meeting.

22 CHAIR EKERT: Arun, my apologies, go

1 ahead.

2 MR. VENKATARAMAN: No, not at all.
3 You run a tight ship. So I certainly don't want
4 to get in the way of that here.

5 Just a couple of points, first of all,
6 let me underscore again the Secretary's
7 appreciation for not only the rapid turnaround on
8 these recommendations but what was clearly the
9 effort and thought that was put into them.

10 Certainly a couple of things I wanted
11 to note in particular, I think Dan's comments on
12 technology, and particularly the forward looking
13 aspect of that third recommendation, it's always
14 helpful, I think, to find - we focus so much on
15 fighting the previous war that we forget that
16 there needs to be a longer term outlook. And so
17 it's always helpful to get sort of some
18 thoughtful perspective on preparing for down the
19 road, so that we're not caught in this situation
20 again. Because something will happen again.

21 So it's good to hear that kind of
22 thoughtfulness and, certainly, the points that

1 were made about making sure EDA is focused on the
2 demand side and the importance of the timeliness
3 of disbursement is also well taken.

4 So I want to thank all of you for
5 really the thoughtful content of the
6 recommendations in addition to the speed in which
7 they were developed. Certainly the Secretary
8 will be extremely appreciative and interested in
9 the recommendations. As we imagine moving
10 forward, she's going to use this input to inform
11 her thinking along with the leadership of the
12 Economic Development Administration on how best
13 to distribute this assistance as quickly and as
14 efficiently as possible.

15 Because again, from her perspective,
16 she shares your laser-like focus on the actual
17 impact and not just sort of ideas in the ether.
18 So these recommendations will very much be well
19 received.

20 She, of course, is focused on making
21 sure that these funds are allocated in the way
22 that reflects the losses that we've seen in all

1 50 states, the territories, and Washington, D.C.,
2 and to ensure that we're considering the needs of
3 under-served communities and our goals of
4 building back better.

5 Before I turn it over to the Chair and
6 Jennifer again, I did want to follow-up on one
7 thing. The Secretary wanted to make sure that I
8 brought this up. I know in your previous meeting
9 the Secretary, includes conversations with the
10 Secretary there was an issue about the J1 visas.
11 And she specifically asked me to let you know
12 that she did speak with Secretary Blinken on the
13 availability of summer program, work program
14 visas.

15 And while COVID, of course, continues to be
16 a challenge to the operations of many embassies,
17 there have been measures taken, under the
18 authority of the Secretary of State, to optimize
19 the availability of, to issue visas under the
20 summer work program and related categories.

21 So the good news is that we're happy
22 to report that an estimated 70 percent of the

1 known summer 2021, summer work travel and
2 households these applicants can now be
3 accommodated.

4 The State Department has sent notices
5 to the 1,500 sponsors for these visa categories
6 on the availability of the means of appointments.
7 We're happy to connect you with the Bureau of
8 Educational and Cultural Affairs should anyone
9 have any additional questions. But she did want
10 me to convey that following up on the issue that
11 was previously raised last time.

12 So again, on behalf of the Secretary,
13 I want to thank you all for your outstanding work
14 and the time and initiative to helping us help
15 get this sector back on track. Thank you.

16 CHAIR EKERT: Arun, thank you. And
17 it's wonderful to hear that speed of
18 responsiveness. I know well, and some of the
19 other folks who are highly dependent on seasonal
20 workers, really do appreciate that. And so thank
21 you.

22 With that again, I really appreciate

1 the hard work, and we're going to continue to
2 push forward in a great partnership with the
3 government.

4 Jennifer, the floor is yours.

5 MS. AGUINAGA: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 And thank you all for participating in this
7 meeting.

8 One final process note, I have
9 captured those Board members who joined through
10 the Teams meeting link. If you were on the
11 phone, please just send me an email that you were
12 in the meeting so that I can record your
13 attendance.

14 And with that, this meeting of the
15 Travel and Tourism Advisory Board is officially
16 closed. I hope everyone has a wonderful
17 afternoon and a wonderful weekend. Thank you
18 all.

19 CHAIR EKERT: Thank you.

20 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter
21 went off the record at 2:33 p.m.)
22

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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Before: US DOC/ITA

Date: 04-23-21

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