

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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U.S. TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

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WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER 15, 2021

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The Advisory Board met in the Auditorium of the Herbert C. Hoover Building, 1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC, at 11:00 a.m. EDT, Kurt Ekert, Chair, presiding.

PRESENT

KURT EKERT, President and Chief Executive Officer, CWT, MN, Chair
BRAD DEAN, Chief Executive Officer, Discover Puerto Rico, PR, Vice Chair
CAROLINE BETETA, President and CEO, Visit California*
BRIAN CHESKY, Co-Founder and CEO, Airbnb*
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DAVID GILBERT, President and Chief Executive Officer, Destination Cleveland and Greater Cleveland Sports Commission
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BILL HORNBUCKLE, CEO and President, MGM Resorts
DEBBIE JOHNSON, Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

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ALSO PRESENT

GINA RAIMONDO, Secretary of Commerce
JENNIFER AGUINAGA, Deputy Director for Policy and
Planning, National Travel and Tourism
Office, and Travel and Tourism Advisory
Board Designated Federal Officer
ISABEL HILL, Director, National Travel and
Tourism Office
SARAH MORGENTHAU, Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Travel and Tourism

*Present via Video Teleconference

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

11:04 a.m.

MS. AGUINAGA: Good morning everyone and welcome to this meeting of the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board. As the Designated Federal Officer, I declare this meeting officially open and I turn it over to Chair Kurt Ekert.

CHAIR EKERT: Jennifer, thank you, and welcome everyone especially to the new members on the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board. It's great to have you here today. We have a very exciting agenda, and obviously we're going to be experimenting and doing this hybrid in-person, and for some of you, virtually.

With that, let me turn it over to our esteemed guest, the Secretary of Commerce. Madam Secretary, the floor is yours.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Thank you, Kurt. Good morning everybody. It is so fantastic to be with you all in person, and I want to thank

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you all for traveling to be here.

We are very lucky this morning to have a special guest with us on the screen, Jeff Zientz, who is I guess behind me and in front of most of you. Jeff and his team are doing, I think, a phenomenal job leading the President's COVID response, and so we asked him to be here with us this morning.

The topic at the top of all of our minds is international travel. And I have been talking to Jeff probably more than he likes about the topic because I know how much it matters, and so we're going to let him give us, you know, his view on where the President is and where we should be, and then answer a couple of questions because I know it's so important for you guys in your industry.

I do also want to take a second to recognize our new Deputy Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism, Sarah Morgenthau, thank you, and recognize Isabel for her fantastic work. All

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of you are nodding. We are so lucky to have Isabel and her work. She's not going anywhere, that's the good news and we're welcoming them.

(Applause)

So with that, I want to turn it over to you, Jeff, and give you a minute to talk to us about your plans on international travel, and vaccines, and COVID generally. You're muted.

MR. ZIENTS: Good morning everyone. It's nice to see -- can you hear me --

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes.

MR. ZIENTS: -- so many faces, and Secretary Raimondo and I worked together during the Obama Administration when she was the Governor. And she was one of my favorite Governors because she got so much stuff done, and she's doing the exact same thing not surprisingly as Secretary, so it's wonderful to have your leadership and partnership on so many issues. Thank you, Secretary.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Thank you, Jeff.

MR. ZIENTS: So I thought I'd provide, as the Secretary said, an update on the progress we're making overall in this fight against COVID and discuss the importance of the President's plan that he put out last week to drive additional progress this Fall and accelerate our path out of the pandemic.

Stepping back, we've always known that our economic recovery hinges on getting the pandemic under control. And it's been clear following the science that getting Americans vaccinated is the single best way to get the pandemic under control.

And that's why from the first day the President has marshaled truly a wartime-like effort to get shots in arms. It's been a whole of Government effort, and as a result I think we've made some significant progress.

Nearly 75 percent, so three out of four of Americans that were eligible for vaccination, and that includes everyone 12 years

of age and older have gotten at least their first shot. And as of today, over 179,000,000 Americans are fully vaccinated. That's up from 2,000,000 when the President took office. So 179,000,000 of Americans fully vaccinated.

Importantly, because of our successful vaccination program and the resources provided through the American Rescue Plan, our economy is on the right track. In fact, we've had record job creation for a new administration, and economic growth unmatched in four decades, 40 years.

But despite this progress as all of you know, the more transmissible Delta variant -- Delta's just more contagious -- is driving the surge in cases, and we certainly cannot let up. This is a pandemic of the unvaccinated. But with unvaccinated Americans filling our hospitals and putting our kids and our economy at risk, their actions in turn are affecting us all.

And that's why last week the President

outlined a six-pronged action plan to drive additional progress this fall and accelerate our path out of the pandemic. The six pieces are boosting vaccinations for those who aren't vaccinated; preparing for booster shots; increasing testing; keeping kids safe and in school; supporting small businesses; and strengthening our medical response in those areas where Delta is surging.

The plan is comprehensive, it's aggressive, and it builds on the work we've been doing since day one. The President's plan will get more people vaccinated, keep schools open and our economy growing, and decrease hospitalizations and deaths. So getting more people vaccinated continues to be the cornerstone of both this plan and our day-to-day actions.

After President Biden announced vaccination requirements for Federal Workers in July, hundreds of private and public sector institutions have stepped up and adopted

requirements covering now tens of millions of Americans.

Last week the President dramatically expanded the reach of vaccination requirements requiring through a rule that the Department of Labor's OSHA Division is developing. That businesses with 100 or more employees ensure every worker is either fully vaccinated or gets tested at least one time a week.

Second, requiring workers in healthcare settings that receive Medicaid or Medicare, I think that's over 50,000 settings, 17,000,000 million workers to be fully vaccinated. So with those healthcare workers, the requirement is to be fully vaccinated.

Requiring Executive Branch employees and employees of Federal Contractors, this obviously includes the military, to be fully vaccinated.

And also requiring teachers in the Federal System, they're mostly at the Department

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of Defense and over at the Department of the Interior, and all Head Start educators and staff to be fully vaccinated. The President also called on Governors to have full vaccination requirements for teachers in their states.

Nationwide, the requirements that the President announced last week cover about 100 billion workers. That's two-thirds of all workers in America, so big impact.

Since the President actually made his announcement last Thursday, we've seen broad support from across the country. Several polls from the just past few days show that a majority of Americans support vaccine requirements. Leading economists have said the requirements of the President's plan will be good for the labor market by leveling the playing field and help stimulate job growth and the economy.

The American Medical Association, the National Nurses Union, the American Federation of Teachers have all come out in favor of the

President's plan.

And the business roundtable led by Josh Bolton, which as you know represents more than 200 business that employ a total of 20 million or so workers, welcome the President's plan.

Employers both large and small across the country, Columbia Sportswear and 3M for example, have stated that they will adopt vaccination requirements joining as I said the hundreds of small and large businesses across the country who already have it in place.

And later today the President will meet with a group, nine CEOs, hospital executives, and a college president who have all implemented vaccine requirements or who are moving to do so, in order to understand better implementation and how we ensure that more and more companies and institutions adopt these requirements.

Yes, I think the important thing here

is that vaccination requirements work. You know, at companies that have already implemented requirements, they have seen vaccination rates at their companies increase significantly.

Arkansas-based Tyson's Food for example announced that its employees would need to be fully vaccinated no later than November 1st. At the time a few weeks ago when they announced that, only 45 percent of the Tyson's workforce had gotten a shot. And in less than a month since the announcement, that has increased to 72 percent. And remember, that's a November 1st deadline, so that's well ahead of the deadline. And we see that in companies and institutions across the economy and country.

The bottom line is that the President's vaccination requirements are becoming the standard for American workers across the country, they're widely supported, they work, and they're good for the economy.

I know many of you in the Travel and

Tourism Industry have already stepped-up to protect your workers. Disney, United, Amtrak, just to name a few, the early adopters of vaccination requirements and many others, you know, following.

If you haven't already, I would argue now is the time. And also if you run large entertainment venues, such as sports arenas or concert venues, the President has called on those types of large venues to require vaccination or a negative test as a condition of entry.

Before I close I want to address the issue of international travel. The Administration clearly understands the importance of international travel across so many fronts, you know, in terms of the economy, relationships, personal, cultural, et cetera, and we are committed to reopening international travel in a safe and sustainable way.

Our guiding principle on this, just as it's been with every issue related to COVID, is

to follow the science and the public health. Given where we are today in terms of the Delta variant, both here and around the world, we're maintaining the existing travel restrictions at this point.

However, you know, as some of you are well aware, our interagency working group is working to develop a plan for a consistent and safe international travel policy so that we have a new system ready to press go on, so we can reopen travel, so we don't suffer any significant lag time between the decision and the implementation.

The new system includes certainly strengthening our mitigation efforts to the greatest extent possible and our approach to testing and surveillance. We will also be putting in place contact tracing to enable CDC to follow up with in-bound international travelers and those around them if someone has potentially been exposed to COVID-19.

And we are exploring considering vaccination requirements for foreign nationals traveling to the United States. I want to emphasize this is one of the paths being considered, but there are other paths being looked at as well.

The goal, as I said before, is to have this policy ready so there's little delay or no delay when we are able to, driven by the science and the public health, reopen travel.

And I'll just close by reiterating the President is committed to doing everything he can to drive more progress in our fight against the virus to save even more lives in the months ahead.

We all recognize the importance of international travel for the reasons I talked about before. And, you know, getting more Americans vaccinated is the single best thing we can do right now to accelerate our path out of the pandemic, protect our economy, and you know, get us on a road to returning to life closer to

normal.

So we're taking strong action to do just that, but we need everyone to step up and do their part too. As always, we stand ready to help in any way that we can, and my team and I have an open door for any feedback along the way, any questions, anything we're missing.

With that, I'll turn it back over to you, Secretary Raimondo.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Thank you, Jeff. That was fabulous and I appreciate it, and I very much appreciate your hard work. It's not an exaggeration to say that Jeff and his team literally have been working seven days a week around the clock since the beginning, and we're also grateful for your leadership.

We have a few questions from the Board, so if you'll give us a few more minutes I did want to give Kurt the opportunity ask a couple questions.

CHAIR EKERT: So Jeff, thank you first

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of all for the great work you're doing, and for taking the time to join us today.

Travel and Tourism globally is an industry that is a 7 trillion dollar industry, at least a pre-Covid number. It accounts for 10 percent of global GDP, 15 percent of global employment, and is so important to the U.S. economy and employment as well as you well know.

Despite some recovery in domestic and leisure travel, corporate travel, international outbound and inbound travel, and the meetings and events industries remain in a severe depression, and we're 18 months into this of this very difficult circumstance.

So I appreciate that much of that is driven by decisions by the U.S. and other governments appropriately so around public health, and trying to balance that about what's right for the industry and economy.

As you look at -- since we're only going to have a few questions, we'll start with

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a multi-part question to keep it simple. As you look at international travel, just as you roll down a bit, Jeff. So today we have a lot of restrictive countries where effectively the policy says somebody who has been immunized still cannot come to the United States even if they're from a restricted country.

What are the thoughts around the use of data, and how are you going to use that data, and when to begin to change that policy because the folks in the industry and the ability to hire people are really suppressed given the way the policy works today, and know to follow the science. But why would we not allow somebody who has had the shots to come into the country today, especially from a developed market where we trust the health standard?

MR. ZIENTS: Well, good question. And again, I want to re-emphasize that we get the importance of this for so many reasons. You gave the unbelievably impressive economic numbers, but

it's important for many other reasons, too, to open international travel as soon as it's safe to do so.

You know, I don't have a silver bullet answer for you. You know, we are all over case rates, hospitalizations, what's happening here, what's the state of the pandemic across the globe, tracking variants. And to your point, I want to emphasize that vaccination rates matter here at home and other countries.

So that is, you know, a positive development that's happened across the last many months is that we now have significantly high vaccination rates. We're trying to drive it higher here as you know, but there are countries that have high vaccination rates, some even higher than the U.S. as you know.

So all these factors, trust me, will be considered alongside those stepped-up mitigation efforts we're putting in place to get a complete picture of how we make sure we reopen

as soon we can, but again, driven by the science making sure we do stuff, you know, do it in the most safe and prudent way.

We, at the same time, know that the world will never have zero risk because that's unrealistic, but we want to make sure we're doing this at the right time and in the right way.

Given where we are, as I said, with Delta in the moment, we're not in a position to reduce at this time, but we're working out a be ready to replace the current restrictions with the new system for international travel that is safer, stronger, and sustainable. And as I said, you know, may indeed look at vaccination status.

So I know it's a difficult time. Let's be ready to move to a new system when the public health conditions permit, and we'll be looking for that opportunity as soon as possible.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you. Brad?

VICE CHAIR DEAN: Thank you Mr. Chairman, and good morning Jeff. Brad Dean from

Discover Puerto Rico. Thank you again for your time and what you're doing on behalf of the people of America.

Just following up on the Chairman's question. What you have here today is really a microcosm of the industry. We're not six degrees of separation, we're one degree of separation from every segment of the industry that's been hardest hit by the Federal Government's policy.

So with that in mind, and bear in mind that while our primary role is advising Secretary Raimondo, we also serve as a pathway of collaboration to ensure that the public sector and the private sector are working together. What can we do as the Travel and Tourism Industry to help replace 212(f) proclamation and revive the industry that creates one in 10 jobs in America?

MR. ZIENTS: Well, first of all, you've done a lot to get us to this point where, you know, I do think we're making real progress

in getting the systems in place.

You know, the American people need to trust that the new system for international travel is safer even as we reach that point where we'll be letting in more travelers. And I think, you know, there's two big specific things that come to mind at the risk of being a little repetitive here.

First, please work with us to put in place the strongest mitigation measures possible. We will need industry support to help implement many of these mitigation steps for inbound international travel. That will largely fall to the airlines which have been very helpful with pre-departure testing requirements, and will be helpful with collecting and sharing contract tracing information.

So that whole area of getting ready, and then ongoing implementation of the policies. The mitigation is going to be really critical in implementing it well as always.

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I think the second piece is help with your workforces. Help accelerate the end of the pandemic here at home by stepping up and requiring vaccinations for your employees for those of you who have not already. You know, we're going to move as fast as we can for the federal requirements to kick in. You certainly don't have to wait. Move as soon as possible to get your entire workforce vaccinated.

There's a real economic case, and you've made it very compellingly for your industry to do this. It keeps your workers healthy and on the job, and you know, to ensure your customers feel safe enough to travel for business or leisure.

So many of you have already stepped-up as I articulated earlier, and you all show a lot of leadership here and bring other major employers outside of Travel and Tourism along with you.

I think the faster we get our

vaccination rate to a higher and higher level, you know, the quicker the path is out of the pandemic, and I do think that is linked to opening up international travel directly also.

I want to -- I do need to run, Secretary. I appreciate this. I understand the stakes here and appreciate everyone's hard work and patience. And as soon as we see that opening driven by the public health and the science, we will reopen in a way that's safe and makes sense and gets us back on track to having the kind of international travel that we all want.

So thank you, Secretary, and thank you team.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Thanks Jeff. I appreciate you participating with us.

MR. ZIENTS: Thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you. It was wonderful to have Jeff here just to give context in terms of where the Administration is heading. If you have any comments before I hand the floor

to the Secretary, and you'll have the opportunity for some Q & A with the Secretary as well.

For those of you who are new to the Board, this is a partnership where we're trying to create public-private focus on what we can do from a policy perspective to improve the industry, employment, et cetera. Then we make those recommendations to the Secretary and then work in concert through the, Isabel and the NTTO team, to effect those.

We have earlier this year made two sets of recommendations to the Secretary, and I'm pleased to say that there's been great progress on those on many different fronts, and we'll socialize that information with the Board following the meeting.

That largely has focused on how do we restart the industry; how do we recreate demand in the industry. And we'll be hearing from the Secretary about those things. But also prospectively, what additional value we can bring

as a Board.

So Madam Secretary, thank you again for your hard work and the floor is yours.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Thank you, Kurt. Well, good morning again, and to all of those of you on the screen, thank you for participating.

A few thoughts. First, I was very pleased to be able to have Jeff with us this morning. We can have some more open dialogue in a few minutes, but you know, rest assured that I have been in constant contact, our team, with him and his team, and pushing on these issues, and I will look forward to getting your continued feedback today and as we go.

We know we need to open international travel. We want to do that. I know how critical it is for your industries. We just have to do it in the right way and in a way that's consistent with the health guidance and data. But I want you to -- I guess it's important for me for you to know that I'm hearing, he's hearing you, we're

pushing on this in a collaborative way. And you've all already been terrific, and Isabel has been terrific. We'll get there and we'll do it together.

But I just want you to know I know how important it is. Part of the reason I know how important that is, is because prior to this job I had been Governor of Rhode Island for six years, and tourism is a big deal in Rhode Island.

You don't know me, but as the Governor, I was a strong supporter of travel and tourism and hospitality, and a strong advocate of the fact that these are good jobs. You know so often you hear people say, oh well, they're part-time jobs, they're summer jobs, et cetera, and you don't need to educate me on that fact. I get it.

They're good jobs, they're important jobs, they're careers and provide career ladders. And so I just look forward to working with you in the spirit of partnership to strengthen the

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industry and help you to do what you do so you can continue to add these jobs.

So this is the beginning of what I hope will be a very productive relationship between you all and me, and the Department of Commerce.

I want to begin by thanking the new members. We have nine new members. I called you all personally and asked you to do this, so I want to say thank you for agreeing. And for those of you who are continuing members, return members, thank you.

The work of this Board is always important. It's more important now than ever. I mean your industry was disproportionately hurt during COVID which means we have to disproportionately lean in to stand it back up.

And so you're busy, I understand that. Your recommendations matter. We cannot figure this out without your input. You're on the ground. You give us the ground truth. You give

us the ideas. So thank you for serving, and just know that your feedback matters.

A couple other quick points. As Jeff mentioned, we need to get everybody vaccinated. I mean it really is that simple. Some folks in your industry, you know, like United have come out early and said everyone's going to get vaccinated. I would encourage the rest of you who haven't done that to do that.

Now that the President has shown leadership and come out, you know, from the top if you will, hopefully gives you all the space to pile on behind that. It's amazing the progress we've seen already since the President's announcement, you know.

As Jeff just said, the vaccination rates have already started to increase. And so if you've already had vaccination mandates for your employees and your guests, thank you for your leadership. If you haven't, you ought to do it. Please. I think you ought to do it. If

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you're not there yet, you ought to think about it harder.

Because we have to. You want international travel to come back, you want people to stay in your hotels, you want people to go to your casinos, get everybody vaccinated and it will happen.

Anyway, you understand this, but it is still the case that in certain workforces or certain parts of the country, vaccination rates are not where they need to be, and get rid of these damn masks. So, you know, I'm just saying, obviously the President, I think, has shown great leadership and we're asking you to follow the lead and get everybody vaccinated and consider doing the mandates.

And, I know you've already done this, but continue to think creatively. We've been trying the creative approach. Now we've gone a bit more heavy-handed approach. But do both. Do both creative and heavy-handed because the

quicker we get everybody vaccinated, the quicker your industry gets back on its feet.

A couple other thoughts. I am in constant contact really truly weekly with the airline executives, hotel executives, members of your industry so that I can hear the viewpoint from industry, and then represent that viewpoint to the White House, to the President, to Jeff's team, to my colleagues in the cabinet. So the more you can tell me, the more you can share with me, the better I can get the work done at the Administration in a way that supports your industry. So I just wanted you to be aware of that.

I was able to help open the door to international students for summer work-travel visas and academic visas. Again, these are two issues I'm extremely familiar as Governor. Block Island is a place. Block Island cannot function without summer work visas.

There's 20 colleges and universities

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in Rhode Island. I understand the need for the academic visas, so I was pleased to be able to play a role in that.

We are very supportive of the custom and borders protections work with airlines to accelerate biometric technology for entry and exit at airports which just makes travel quicker, easier, and seamless.

A couple other quick things. With respect -- and Kurt mentioned this -- we're listening to your recommendations and taking action on your recommendations.

The Administration announced \$3.2 billion in June to research new COVID therapeutic drugs. We heard that from you. We put forth, and Isabel deserves great credit here along with my team, the EDA put forth \$750 million grants to help travel and tourism. That funding, the state tourism grant funding, should start flowing by the end of October if not before.

And, importantly, due to the fact --

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I heard this from you all -- the money will be able to be used for marketing, so encourage folks to get back traveling again. And we heard that from the State Travel and Tourism Board.

So in October, three quarters of a billion dollars will start hitting the street and will be used for marketing, which I hope is going to be helpful. And it will be good timing. It will be really good timing if we continue the acceleration of the vaccinations, we'll hit with a big marketing push. I hope that that's helpful.

I'm convening a Tourism Policy Council later this Fall to develop a National Travel and Tourism strategy. So that's going to be important. I'm really excited for that and I'm excited for your input on that.

Brand USA, we need more money. I got that memo from you all, and I support that. So I've been in touch with Senator Klobuchar and Senator Blunt personally and numerous times, and

they are both supportive to secure additional funding for Brand USA. It's necessary obviously for all the reasons you know, so I want you to know that is a priority. We are working on that, securing senate support for that. And as I say, both of those senators -- and it's bipartisan -- the good news, this is a bipartisan, not just Brand USA but Tourism, so we're working on that.

And then the final thing I will say before I turn it back over to Kurt, in the midst of dealing with COVID and all those challenges, we have to keep our eye on climate change because that is a huge impact on your business.

Again, I was the Governor of the Ocean State. Hurricanes, wildfires in the West, it is extremely damaging to your industry, not to mention to the world and our general sustainability.

But I want to continue to have discussions with you all around what we can do together as it relates to resiliency because the

extreme weather events are going to get more extreme and more frequent and be a greater threat to your industry. And we have to work together on resiliency strategies so that we can meet the needs of climate change and frankly help your industry in the process.

So it's a lot. It's a lot. We have to tackle COVID, and changing travel patterns, and changing consumer needs, and climate change, but we're up for it. And if we get creative and get innovative and be collaborative, I like our chances.

CHAIR EKERT: So we were clairvoyant. We'll come back to climate change a little bit later on.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Good.

CHAIR EKERT: Madam Secretary, did you have any questions for the Board or would you like to take inbound questions?

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: I think better to take inbound questions. I told you what I

care about, you know, but I want to hear from you all.

CHAIR EKERT: Bill, welcome.

MEMBER HORNBUCKLE: Thank you and good morning. I'm Bill Hornbuckle, I'm CEO of MGM Resorts and I appreciate the invitation to participate here.

Our industry, our business like all these has been greatly impacted. Going back on the President's policy of, obviously we employ more than 100, we actually employ up to 80,000 if you go international; about 55,000 Las Vegas.

We have mandated for all salaried employees a vaccination come October 15th. We are leaning heavily into all programming and hopefully it gets hourly there, but it's a double-edged sword. If I could fill 6,000 jobs tomorrow with people I would, and I can't. And so we have this double-edged sword and we're making the commitment.

The challenge and the opportunity that

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the President has provided with ultimately the mandate of 100 get tested and/or, when does OSHA act -- when does that actually go into -- how do I think about that?

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes. So we've been told that I would say weeks, in a matter of weeks. They're working as hard as they can. I can check back in with Secretary Walsh and get you an even sharper answer because they're working on it in real time. But we have been told in October.

MEMBER HORNBUCKLE: A very meaningful and helpful, obviously continuing to work with labor, but it would be critical to have a real clean voice on that, so that I can do the obvious.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Okay, very good.

MEMBER HORNBUCKLE: Thank you.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: That's good feedback, thank you. I just want to say this. Maybe you could -- it relates to what you're saying and it's something that I think about a

lot and perhaps you could each touch on it in this discussion which is this general question of workforce. Everyone I talk to in your industry is struggling with workforce. So what do we do about it?

Is it a hiring issue? Is it a training issue? Is it retention? You know, some of the data that we have suggests that retention is as big a part of the problem as hiring.

You make an excellent point and we'll get on that. But as you ask me questions and we can go around the horn, we need some strategies. And we want to help support strategies to help you with hiring and retention.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you. And again, we'll come back to that when we talk about casting going forward.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Okay.

CHAIR EKERT: This has become a less attractive industry to, especially hourly workers, because of the uncertainty of the

current and the future status of the industry, so that's something we need help with. But Olga, I think you had a question.

MEMBER RAMUDO: Secretary Raimondo, an honor to be here with you. Olga Ramudo, Express Travel, Miami, Florida. And I know we have gone round and round and round with international travel, but I just want to make a simple and quick comment.

Small minority businesses, such as mine, many of them have had even to close down because of the uncertainty. Hiring, like Kurt said, absolutely, but it seems to me that we are contradicting ourselves.

We are all supporting the vaccination. We all support it. Everybody here is vaccinated. I had my booster shot. They tell me to get a fourth one, I will. So does my staff. But then we are not transferring that message to international travelers.

Wouldn't it support international

countries to uptick their vaccination if we opened up to vaccination travelers? Corporate travel is affected. Vacation travel, you know the numbers, I don't need to tell you. But it seems that we are contradicting ourselves who are putting efforts in Brand USA, but our travelers cannot come in. Those travels that they are targeting and they're promoting to cannot come in.

So that was basically, and I know the conversation has gone around that, but just wanted to stress --

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: So you're saying if we allowed vaccinated travelers to come in as an incentive?

MEMBER RAMUDO: Correct.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: For folks that, yes, I think it's -- I mean you heard Jeff say that's an idea that's on the table. I think at the moment the -- I don't know -- the current situation with Delta right now, it's a difficult

time right now to expand international travel, but we're trying to get there quickly. We'll take your idea up the food chain, but I think it's something worth considering for sure.

MEMBER RAMUDO: Thank you. And thank you for all your efforts.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes.

CHAIR EKERT: Adam.

MEMBER SACKS: Thank you. Secretary Raimondo, thank you so much for having us with you. I'm Adam Sacks, President of Tourism Economics.

I appreciated Jeff's remarks. You know, philosophically, absolutely, you know, we want to follow the science on these decisions, and, you know, I'm thrilled. We didn't even need a vaccine mandate for my entire team in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia to be vaccinated, so we're certainly believers.

But I wonder on the -- it feels a bit opaque on the decision process on international

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travel. If you consider some of the major markets were vaccination rates are higher and COVID rates are lower, you would see that allowing visitors in would be a lower risk than allowing domestic travel.

Is there a way to get more clarity or transparency? What metrics are going to define that?

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: So that is exactly the question that we are wrestling with right now, which is trying to answer the question of what you said.

So we understand, we hear the frustration; Jeff mentioned it with 212(f). We want to move to away from that into a metrics-based objective system, and we're trying to figure out exactly what that looks like.

What do you think it should be? If we're going to go to that, what are your recommendations? You can tell me now, you can follow up later.

MEMBER SACKS: Yes, we're not scientists, but it does seem if a market has higher vaccination rates than the U.S., and if COVID transmission rates are lower, those two criteria would seem to be a lower risk than what we're already allowing as far as domestic travel.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes. I hear you. It's reasonable. Do you want to add anything?

MS. HILL: Yes, the only thing that I think is sometimes overlooked in this equation is that it's not only about international travelers coming here, it's also the conditions on the ground here. What are our hospitalization rates? What are the conditions with our own healthcare provisions?

So there are two sides to this equation, and I totally, and I think the Secretary I know totally understands the question that if we are going to be metrics-driven, we should know the metrics.

But I think it's not a one-way street. Basically, you have to kind of consider the conditions, and I think that's what I was hearing Jeff Zientz say about why the timing was awkward now was a lot about what's happening domestically, hence the need to get vaccinated.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes, exactly. That's what I'm saying. The environment now with Delta, it is very difficult. We want to do what I said and move away, we want to move to a metrics-based system. But first before we can do that, we have to get a better handle on the domestic situation which requires us to get everyone vaccinated.

And it's excellent to hear about your employees. I was with the CEO of a large manufacturer yesterday, large manufacturer. The vaccination rate in his factories is 30 percent. So your workforce, terrific. I'm here to tell you we've got a lot of work to do which is why I've said what I've said. If employers would

mandate vaccinations, we could get ahold of the drastic situation and then we could have that discussion that you want us to have, which by the way is deeply underway. We just have to get Americans vaccinated and anyway, I'll leave it at that.

MS. HILL: I would also add from a market perspective it's important that people feel safe when they travel here, right? So there are a lot of elements about the timing of opening up which is not only dependent on the conditions in the source market.

CHAIR EKERT: Yes, and just to beat a dead horse and put the travel to bed, the -- again where we have, especially with corporate travel and meetings and events, you have highly vaccinated populations coming from developed countries with high rates overall, there's a strong demand for people if the policy was there.

One of the things, and not to criticize Jeff and it was great to have him here,

is a lot of opacity in the way this is happening. I guess what we're seeking is some transparency in terms of what's coming. I know that's hard because it's a theoretical question. As policy is made, if it can be explained that the why, I think we would all buy in and it would be helpful for us.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes. No, and we're trying to do that. You know, I personally played a very big role with cruise ships earlier in the, I guess early summer, and we heard the same thing from them which is like tell us. What's the threshold? What do we have to do and we'll do it. And we got there. That's exactly what we did.

So I, we're moving in that direction. I think I hear you. You wanted transparency.

CHAIR EKERT: We want to vest all the authority in you, Secretary.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Now that's definitely not the solution, but I mean listen,

I agree with you.

CHAIR EKERT: We have a question from Brian Quinn.

MEMBER QUINN: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Secretary. Just to continue riding that horse a little bit, I just returned from Italy, and I flew to Italy and used the mobile app, uploaded my vaccine card. I did it at the airport before I exited the U.S. Stopped at a pharmacist as I was leaving Italy, got a test, uploaded it to the mobile website and returned.

So there's technology out there, you know, that works. And I wore my mask the whole flight both ways. But that was a mobile app that was very simple. United Airlines was able to explain it to me right while I was there. And I know that's super tactical, but just wondering, you know, when we could embrace something like that for the vaccinated folks?

And then on a similar thought, the vaccinated government employees that are still

under some of the travel restrictions, that may be a way to bring a segment of travel back to the industry, to the restaurants and hotels. I know the military has loosened their rules a bit, but most of the government travel is still under some of the regs that don't allow them to travel even if they're vaccinated, and that's a huge, you know, workforce.

And then one other thing we had chatted about at one point is Mexico and Canada account for about 30 or 40 percent of the inbound travel. So if we wanted to test something or do something incremental, we could do those two countries and take a pause and manage, you know, see what the impacts are. And then obviously shut it down if there was a problem, but it would also be an easier way to maybe implement it. So just a few additional thoughts to elongate that. Thank you.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: No, no. I think it's all good. All good thoughts. We've also

considered the possibility of a US-UK pilot corridor, but these are good suggestions. Thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: Brad.

VICE CHAIR DEAN: To the Secretary, we realize this is complex and there's no easy solution, but I think as, and in perhaps in your leadership role with the TPC, one suggestion I think we would make on behalf of the industry is there's probably some low-hanging fruit. If we just look for the gaps that simply defy logic.

Two industries that have been so proactive are the airlines and cruise lines, and yet, they're held to a much different standard. We're meeting every day in America safely throughout this country in meetings and conventions, and yet we're still behind in allowing that, not only the federal employees but others.

I come from an island that's 85 percent vaccinated and we're not maxed out in the

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hospitals, but the CDC holds us to a different standard than every state in the mainland.

So there's some policies that just defy logic, and I think that's a starting point. The gaps that exist today, that may be the first steps towards leading to a much more comprehensive and effective policy.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: I think that's smart. Thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: We have a question from Dean Taylor.

MEMBER TAYLOR: Thank you so much, Madam Secretary, and I really feel honored to be on this Board. Two things. I'm not going to reiterate about international travel except to say that, you know, when I talk to our folks let's say New York or Boston state we're having folks from very low-vaccinated states come to our city, but we won't allow folks to come from other countries that have very high vaccination rates, and they can't understand the logic of that. But

that's not what I want to talk to. I'm just telling you how people are thinking.

On this worker shortage, which is everywhere, this idea that if folks weren't getting the additional \$300, somehow or another the worker shortage issue would be solved has proven to be false. That's not the issue.

I think there's a few things we should consider. One, I can't emphasize enough this question of childcare, particularly for folks whose kids are not in school yet. The loss of a lot of childcare facilities through COVID has been acute, and I think that is a real issue.

Number two. I think somebody referred to this. When I've talked to a lot of workers who have not gone back to the industry, they go I'm going to go work in a warehouse. I know I'm making a little less money, but I'm getting 40 hours a week and I'm not going to get laid off.

So the insecurity of scheduling, and

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job, what your income is going to be, is a real issue we have in our industry right now where people have fled the industry.

Three, I think training does make a lot of sense, and we should think about it. Because even if you went in as let's say a dishwasher or a housekeeper, you want to know is there a path to do something higher? And often there's no way to do that because there's no inherent training on that. So I think we should think through that as our industry.

And then finally, I think the industry as a whole needs to advertise that these can be very, very good jobs, and you should highlight the people where they have been made good jobs. Because when you talk to a lot of people, a lot of, frankly, politicians in cities where the tourism industry is the second or third largest industry in their city or state, they tend to describe the jobs just like the highest critics do.

So I think we have a job to do, but I can't emphasize the question of childcare, this question of consistency about hours that somebody referred to, and this question about how I can move up, and the kind of money I think that needs to go into training in order for people to make a career of it as compared to just a stop-gap way.

So I appreciate everybody's attention on this, and hopefully we can figure out some positive steps to address this labor shortage. Because it is very, very serious everywhere in the United States.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes. So let me say thank you Dean, it's good to see you even on the screen.

MEMBER TAYLOR: Good to see you.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: A few thoughts I hear all the time from employers, not just in your industry. You know, basically, women aren't coming back to work or they want to promote women

who are some of their star employees. Women say, no, no thanks, I can't handle the promotion.

So obviously, the President has a proposal before Congress right now to make big investments in childcare, and in Pre-K, and in home care. And as Commerce Secretary, I firmly believe those investments are good for businesses, so we're working on that.

We need to have a discussion, a whole discussion as a group, around how your industry is going to improve the quality of jobs I guess is the way to put it. Improve quality like he said, and that isn't just pay. It's career ladders, scheduling, a lot of it's seasonal which is a challenge. I understand these are challenges.

By the way, I'm not suggesting this in any sort of accusatory way, it's just time for change. Because as the rest of the economy changes, you have to innovate as well in your business models and I really look forward to

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working with you to do that. I think we can make these changes, but this won't be easy or quick.

But I think you're exactly right. I hear from people a ton. I heard it as Governor. Why would I work in restaurant, in a hotel, in a whatever when I've got to work nights, it's a hard job, the scheduling is difficult. I could go get a fill-in-the-blank, you know, tech job, digital services job, customer service job in a tech company, and have opportunity for mobility.

So we have to work at this together. But I am optimistic because as we said before, these are good-paying jobs and I think there are career ladders. We just have to conceive of it differently.

CHAIR EKERT: We have a question from Will Morey of the famous Morey's Piers.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: I'm very familiar with Morey.

MEMBER MOREY: Thank you, and good morning Secretary and all present. So you were

very supportive of being proactive as it relates to managing this disease, and certainly vaccination is a giant step towards that.

There are a number of folks that are really concerned about, you know, the privacy issues or, you know, how their rights so to speak for choice. A number of folks have had COVID and have COVID antibodies. Has there been any consideration given to sort of alternate compliance? In other words, either vaccinated and can continue to work without testing, or I have evidence of antibodies that are alive, well, and present which I understand from science, you know, would protect me well.

I don't know if that's settled science, but we're seeing more and more evidence that those who have antibodies from actually having the disease are, have good protection.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: The answer is I don't know if that has been considered. But I think I will take it back. You know, some of

this is ease of administration as much as it is following the science. And as somebody was just saying you can show a vaccination card. In Europe they have the code, but I don't know. So I'll get you a proper answer to that.

MEMBER MOREY: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: We have a question from Christine Duffy.

MEMBER DUFFY: Good morning Madam Secretary and the Board. It's good to see you and glad to be here. I'll make a comment first wearing my cruise hat, Carnival Cruise Line, to say that the work that you and the interagency group have done when you engaged with us really made such a significant difference in our ability to actually restart operations successfully.

We really, I think putting my US Travel hat on as chair of US Travel and Brad's comments when you think about this recovery, one of the advantages we have in the cruise industry is we have a lot of pent-up demand, and so we

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have not had any issues, you know, being able to get people who want to take their vacation.

I think we do see this very uneven recovery for business travel, and in particular, groups, meetings, conventions.

So back to Brad's point and taking a page from the work that we were in progress that we've been able to make on the cruise side, identifying these very basic gaps, if you call them, or areas where maybe there is an interim solution. I think one of the ongoing questions that is not feeling clear to us is it sounds like international inbound and that solution has still got many months to go.

So could we focus in on corporate, say, meetings or conventions. There are many conventions that are held where you do have international attendees. You have Federal Government people that come from outside.

We have an event that US Travel does every year, IPW, that's happening in Las Vegas

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this weekend, and the team was able to effectively work with the State Department, with CVP to go through a process where we have 400 buyers from outside the U.S. that are able to attend and participate.

And so while that doesn't solve the whole problem, I think this idea and what we've seen in the cruise industry that has worked with the interagency group, with CDC, is taking small steps versus waiting until we get the big solution which does seem, and we all recognize, is complicated.

So I just offer that as potentially, I know US Travel is holding a press conference today with members of the Meetings and Convention Industry to really just speak to this issue. But as you said, everybody recognizes the economic impact of jobs. How do we, could we do some things that would enable us to have a start?

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes. So a couple things. First of all, thank you. You

guys were great. You were patient, you were collaborative, you were problem solvers, and I really appreciated that. That's what we have to do, just exactly that.

Secondly, Zack Schwartz who I think is here in the audience, is on my team, deserves a ton of credit --

MEMBER DUFFY: And he's been terrific. I haven't had a chance to meet Zack, but Zack, thank you.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Stand up Zack. Say hello. There's the man.

MEMBER DUFFY: Thank you, Zack.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: But anyway, as a follow up to this meeting, I like what you're saying. I like what you say. I hear you guys, I hear you. Like where are the specific concrete places where we could set out some criteria safely to make some steps.

So I'm hearing it. And maybe Zack and I can work on a way to do some engagement and

figure out what those are. And we ought to probably -- we will, we will. I don't want to chew up all the time here. But I hear you, I think it's a smart suggestion, and we'll follow up in the spirit of that kind of problem solving to say what are some no-brainers.

I will say though, I'll say this, we had been making quite a bit of progress in the interagency moving towards a metrics-based system away from 212. And then Delta came along and the domestic situation has been starting to get out of hand.

So your guys are beating the dead horse. I'm going to beat the dead horse. Get your people vaccinated. Get your customers and your employees and your neighbors vaccinated. Because if we can get a handle on the situation domestically, it makes all of these other decisions easier to make.

But, I like this suggestion and I will commit to getting on it. Thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: David.

MEMBER GILBERT: Thank you, Kurt and Madam Secretary. Thanks for having us. Getting back to the employment issue, we've been asked on a community level to play a point in really thinking through, you know, it's every sector across the industry. It's hotels, it's restaurants, it's venues and so on.

Looked at solutions of tying in employment in travel and tourism with, in our case advanced manufacturing or others as pipelines, and the one thing, just one suggestion is -- and maybe Department of Commerce can help take a lead -- is doing some research on why people have left. And the question we're really grappling with, how much is permanent versus.

You know, has COVID really caused a permanent shift in how people view employment in the industry, and I think knowing that and having some of that research would help all of us try to think through what are the best solutions.

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SECRETARY RAIMONDO: I think that is an excellent idea. You know you see these statistics that 70 percent of Americans are thinking of getting a new job right now. We've never lived through anything like this. This is all unchartered territory.

It's a bit more acute in your industry, so that's why I was saying like I think that's an excellent idea; we will follow up on it. But that's the scary news. This is a moment for innovation, and the industries that innovate and are creative will be the winners for the talent.

MEMBER GILBERT: I mean we're thinking this may be a fundamental shift for the industry.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: I really think it is.

CHAIR EKERT: Yes, I mean we effectively kicked people out of the industry. There was nowhere for them to go in the industry.

So this is permanent dislocation we're going to have to solve against. It's very different than what we've experienced before.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: But, you know, I'm not going to tell you how to do your business, but there are going to be people who want what you have. So the question is figuring out what that is and making it work, but we will partner with you to do that. I love your idea.

CHAIR EKERT: Yes, last one.

MEMBER WEBB: Just really quickly. I think all of these topics have circled around really a couple of similar things which is visibility to the process and the data that's being used in that process. So when you say, when, you know, Jeff says, you know, we're looking at the science, we're looking at this, but get everybody vaccinated.

And then on the other side we still are being restrictive against vaccinated individuals that aren't from the U.S. So there's

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a lack of consistency there that I think causes, at least in the industry, some frustration because there's a lack of understanding of what exactly are you looking at; what's the timeline in which you plan to look at it; what's the evaluation criteria that's going to be used, and then we're going to take some action on it.

And so I think the issue that you're hearing around the table, and then goes to the job issue which is trying to hire into an industry that can't provide answers for what recovery should or will feel like over a period of time is very difficult.

And that's also causing, you know, as we said before, retention rates to grow as well because people are going I just don't know how the industry is going to recover, so I have some transferable skill sets that I will take somewhere else.

So I think they're all the same issue which is just visibility to the process.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Thank you.

CHAIR EKERT: Madam Secretary, we're going to talk in a bit about next steps and the tasking for the Board. But we'd love to hear from you what you'd like to see from us so that we can help you and the Administration as we go forward.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes, so a few things. I think much of it has been covered, but just to put a quick finer point on. The first is on this issue of vaccinations, we still do have a ways to go locally, and I hear what you're saying. Although as Isabel said, there are some communities in America where we're just not where we need to be.

So I'll be looking to you for recommendations around what we can do in a partnership between industry and the Government for how we increase rapidly vaccination rates across the board.

Second thing is on employment. So the

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statistics are pretty shocking, you know. We had been doing well in your industry, and then of course in recent weeks we've gone the other way.

The statistics around job openings, retention are pretty alarming, so help me. Help us. The continuation of this. You gave an excellent idea, David. So help us to understand, you know, what is it like on the ground; what can we do in partnership with you to increase retention and job quality; how do we, if it's necessary, change the narrative of what it means to have a job in your industry, but we really want to have an intensive focus on employment, skills, job quality.

And then the final thing I mentioned which is climate. We didn't get chance to talk about that in our group. But I saw this in Rhode Island how devastating these weather events can be. In coastal areas for example, we can be shut down for three weeks in August. That's your whole season. Same thing for fires, same thing.

So questions for you would be how do you see that? How do you factor that in? What unique threats does your industry face because of the climate crisis? What policies do you want from the Government to help you to become more resilient? What are you doing in your own businesses? So those are kind of the areas that we would love consistent feedback around.

CHAIR EKERT: Thank you very much, Madam Secretary. We're not going to have time today for public comment. There was one comment that was submitted in advance and that was Chris Thompson from Brand USA who submitted a letter which we will distribute to the Board and make sure the Government gets that as well.

And again, separately, before I jump into the next topic, for the sets of recommendations that we've done earlier this year, we'll provide a full status update to the Board following the meeting which we have.

So it sounds like we have, we're going

to add a fourth to the tasking if that's okay, Madam Secretary.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: It depends what it is.

CHAIR EKERT: You'll like it, I think. Very goal oriented. So we want to form four subcommittees with the objective of having recommendations to the Secretary by November 3rd, so there'll be iterative dates between now and then. And Isabel, and Jennifer, and Sarah will really provide us a lot of guidance and help as we go through this process.

So if there is a subcommittee to which you're attracted, please let Jennifer know and she'll coordinate and make sure that we do that properly.

So the first one we want to do is actually, we have a National Tourism Strategy which is quite outdated in the age of COVID, so we think we should refresh this and have a new national goal. Now in the interim that's a very

difficult thing to drive, but if you assume that we get to a normal stasis at some point, there's nothing wrong with having a goal three to five years out as far as what -- and this is really focused on both domestic and inbound tourism -- what that can be.

We're fortunate that Adam Sacks has agreed to chair this. The scope would be providing recommendation for a five-year goal for international visitor arrivals and spending by international visitors. But again, if we want to encompass domestic as well, that's a giant part of the puzzle as well.

The second, Madam Secretary, is climate change. Caroline Beteta from Visit California has agreed to chair this. Thank you. And the scope here is providing recommendation on the top three issues facing the sector relating to climate change and how data collected by the NOAA can be used to support the sector. So very important.

Third is vaccination. I think that we've heard that vaccination matters. Tricia Primrose from Marriott has agreed to chair this. Thank you, Tricia. And the scope here is specifically how can the Federal Government partner with the private sector to accelerate vaccination.

And the fourth is employment. Russ Hedge from Hostelling International has agreed to chair this, and Dean Taylor, it sounds like this may be a good committee for you. The scope is what are the key drivers for labor shortages in the travel and tourism industry, and how can the Federal Government partner with the private sector to provide for current and long-term employment in the sector, taking into consideration the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and on minorities. So that one's very important.

With all of these, remember that we want is not just an esoteric white paper, but a

set of very specific actual recommendations that the Secretary can move upon rather than just sit and think about. So let's help her and be very instructive in terms of what makes sense and what matters.

Any questions on those four committees?

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Can I just briefly say a couple things picking up on what you said related to your idea of, you know, doing some kind of a survey. The same could be true for climate.

So one of the agencies that reports up to me is NOAA in which we have the National Weather Service. So it could be that data is what you need as you think about your climate strategies.

So, you know, exactly what Kurt said. I need a to-do list. But as you develop your to-do list as it relates to climate, just remember that here at the Commerce Department we have

massive amounts of climate data and weather data, and there could be something there for you to think about.

And you are correct, I omitted we fully support the five-year goal spending per capital for international traveler and specific strategies around that.

Final thing on this vaccination point, as you're thinking of creative ways to get folks vaccinated, you are all massively influential in your communities, and don't underestimate your influence.

Furthermore, this is really crushing your industry. I mean the kind of job loss and real economic pain to your employees is significant. So I would just encourage you to be thoughtful around how you can use your voice in that regard to get the domestic vaccination rates up.

CHAIR EKERT: As you look at these four subcommittees, we don't want to ignore the

fact also that the fundamental issue for the industry and the world is that the industry, again for appropriate reasons, has been largely shut down and suppressed. So how do we stimulate demand? That's the overriding issue.

For those of you who are new to the Board, much of what we recommended to the Secretary earlier this year focuses on that reopening and event generation. So again, if you don't have that, we'll provide that information to you. But we want to make sure we're solving these other things as well concurrently to those challenges.

So we're going to move to close. We've been very efficient today. So a few quick thoughts. One is this work is so important. You know, we're never going to solve and get to nirvana here, but we can be very impactful in terms of policy-making by and with the Government and really try to stimulate and restart this industry and do that in a very collaborative

fashion. So it's wonderful that we have an open forum to do that with the Commerce Department.

So personally, I just want to thank everybody for the good work. The NTTO staff led by Isabel has been tremendous this year, and I know that we're counting on them as we go forward.

The Board members here, Brad especially who's our Vice Chair, have really worked tirelessly and I think add a lot of value and provide for great impact.

The Secretary and her team have already jumped in and we've seen a very different pace perhaps than I have experienced in prior years, and that's been great to see as well.

On a personal note, I have after 25 years in the industry semi-retired. So in consultation with the Secretary, I'm going to be stepping down as Board Chair and we'll share in the near future who will succeed me. But I just wanted to thank everybody. I'll still be around and it's been wonderful to work with everybody.

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Madam Chair, the floor is yours.

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: So he said in consultation, but I begrudgingly agreed. I'm not sure this was part of the deal. But in all seriousness, Kurt, you have done this job. You've been here since 2016, you've been fantastic. Your leadership will be sorely missed. It's been a difficult year and you've definitely helped more than we ever thought this past year getting us through this. You deserve a retirement at this point.

CHAIR EKERT: My hair turned color. I was a redhead a year and a half ago.

(Laughter)

SECRETARY RAIMONDO: But seriously, this takes a ton of time. And I think I can speak on behalf of everybody we're grateful for your leadership, so thank you.

(Applause)

CHAIR EKERT: Well I think that concludes things. Jennifer, over to you.

MS. AGUINAGA: Thanks Kurt. And with that, this meeting is officially adjourned. Thank you all. I look forward to seeing you soon.

(Whereupon, this matter went off the record at 12:15 p.m.)