

**Testimony of Rosemary A. Vassiliadis**  
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**Before the**  
**Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Trade, Tourism and Export Promotion**  
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Chairwoman Rosen and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to share my views on ways to encourage the resumption of travel, especially international tourism which is so vital to Las Vegas. Restarting international air travel is a critical step to supporting the recovery of our tourism-based economy. Prior to the pandemic, nonstop international service was a wonderful success story for Las Vegas. The number of passengers who came to Las Vegas via foreign-flag air carriers increased each year from 2011 through 2019, topping out at nearly 3.8 million annual passengers in both 2018 and 2019. These are remarkable numbers for a point-to-point destination market such as Las Vegas, which differs greatly from traditional U.S. gateway hubs such as Atlanta, Chicago or Los Angeles. At our 2019 peak, Las Vegas enjoyed nonstop service to and from 11 different countries around the globe; now that number is down to one, with Mexico representing our lone international market currently in service. Over the first four months of 2021, our international volume has amounted to less than 80,000 passengers.

There is hope on the horizon, however. Almost every day I or members of my team hear from representatives of international air carriers expressing interest in quickly resuming service to Las Vegas. Many cite strong pent-up demand among their customers who can't wait to return to the United States once today's travel restrictions – particularly those affecting “non-essential” leisure and convention visitors – are finally lifted. These airlines ask us point blank: What is the U.S. doing to reopen travel? When will our airline be able to resume bringing vacationers and conventioners to Las Vegas?

To take advantage of this opportunity, ideally in time for the 2021 summer travel season, we need immediate, active leadership from the U.S. government to develop a risk-based roadmap that will allow global travel to return in earnest while protecting the health and safety of the traveling public and

citizenry. One such approach is recommended in the “Testing and Cross-border Risk Management Measures Manual” published by ICAO (with support from the FAA). If implemented, it could enable global connections based on a flexible approach which adjusts as the prevalence of COVID-19 changes on either end of a route. The EU is gradually deploying methods to reopen its members’ borders for vaccinated passengers, and the United Kingdom has embraced an approach similar to ICAO’s as documented in its Global Travel Taskforce report published in April 2021. These actions have opened the door for U.K. residents to begin non-essential travel to select countries later this month. I must note that the United States was not included among the U.K.’s recent list of cleared destinations, creating a major hurdle toward reconnecting Las Vegas with its top overseas visitor market.

The targeted, risk-based approaches we see in other nations are a more effective strategy than the blanket, blunt approaches currently employed here, where a Presidential Proclamation presently bans all travel between the U.S. and specific countries. The 212(f) and 215(a) immigration restrictions from the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), put in place by the Presidential Proclamation on January 25, 2021, do not necessarily achieve the goal of reducing transmission of COVID-19, and unnecessarily cripple the ability for economic productivity that could safely be supported through the aforementioned recommended models occurring elsewhere around the world.

In addition to adopting a targeted, risk-based approach, the U.S. government also needs to lead the world in establishing ways to safely admit international travelers. To be clear, aviation industry members are not advocating for a Digital Health Credential (DHC) mandate, but we do need the government to set the parameters and criteria for accepting solutions that are already being implemented in other parts of the world. The U.S. should engage these worldwide discussions with guidelines or standards for the use of DHC in authenticating testing and vaccination status for international travelers. Establishing a harmonized approach for the implementation of these DHCs will allow the traveling public to understand the requirements for international travel and reduce the occurrence of fraudulent documentation.

Once guidelines are established, the U.S. government needs to work to recognize and accept other countries' DHC programs, such as the European Digital Green Certificate. On 17 March 2021, the European Commission presented a proposal to create a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate the safe, free movement of its citizens within the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital Green Certificates will be valid in all EU Member States. A Digital Green Certificate is digital proof that a person has either, 1.) been vaccinated against COVID-19; 2.) received a negative test result; or 3.) recovered from COVID.

The U.S. has long been recognized as the world leader in commercial aviation, and this is an important opportunity for it to lead the world back to global connectivity and the creation of economic vitality.

Finally, Congress must enable the necessary investments in our nation's airports to make essential changes to our health infrastructure. These could include upgrading our ventilation and filtration systems, installing more Plexiglas barriers, or building out terminals to accommodate for physical and social distancing. We cannot accomplish these needed airport modifications without an increase in the amount of funds airports can collect from the passenger facility charge (PFC). With the dramatic decline in passengers and PFC revenue over the past year, many airports were forced to extend their collection periods for current PFC-funded projects, depleting available funding for other critical projects. Adjusting the federal cap on local PFCs would reduce this financial pressure and give airports the option of using more local funds for their infrastructure needs. The PFC cap has not kept pace with rising construction costs or inflation since it was last adjusted to \$4.50 more than 20 years ago. Since then its purchasing power has eroded by 40 percent. Modernizing the outdated federal cap on PFCs would give airports the self-help they need to invest in the terminals, gates and ramps necessary to build back better, and once again attract new air carriers and entice existing ones to expand, thereby promoting competition and lowering airfares for their communities. Thank you.