

Senator Jacky Rosen

**Subcommittee on Tourism, Trade, and Export Promotion
Hearing: “Reviving Conventions & Tourism Through International Travel”
June 7, 2022**

Opening Statement

Good afternoon, and welcome to the sixth hearing of the Subcommittee on Tourism, Trade, and Export Promotion. Today’s hearing, “Reviving Conventions & Tourism Through International Travel,” will examine the state of international travel to the United States, with a particular focus on how lower, pandemic-related international business travel volume is impacting conventions, trade shows, and the economies of states that rely on the travel and tourism industry.

Travel and tourism drive job creation and economic growth in states across America, and especially in Nevada, where these industries and the workers they employ are essential to our state’s prosperity. From the excitement and energy of the Las Vegas Strip, to the beautiful outdoor recreation opportunities from Lake Mead to Lake Tahoe, the Great Basin National Park and everything in between, people love to visit Nevada.

Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, about 55 million people visited the Silver State, a record number. In the Las Vegas area alone, direct visitor spending reached almost \$37 billion, supporting 242,500 workers in the tourism, leisure, and hospitality industries.

But in addition to leisure tourism, Nevada’s economy also relies on business travelers who come to our state from across the country and around the world for conventions, trade shows, and conferences. Las Vegas is the convention capital of the world, hosting nearly 22,000 meetings, conventions, exhibitions, and events each year. According to the Trade Show News Network, we’ve been named the number one trade show destination in North America for 25 straight years. And our reach is global, with the World Trade Centers Association noting that well over 230 countries are represented at trade shows held in Las Vegas. One need look no further than CES – the most influential tech event in the world – to see our international impact.

The COVID-related international travel slowdown has therefore meant job losses throughout Nevada – at our amazing hotels and casinos, in our world class convention halls, and at airports. It’s also devastated many of our restaurants, retailers, and live entertainment venues.

To be sure, there have been signs of significant progress. International travel is ticking up, and just last week, the Labor Department’s jobs report showed that leisure and hospitality added 86,000 jobs nationwide in May, the most of any industry.

But according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are still over a million pre-pandemic jobs in this sector that have not yet returned. Over one million jobs. Gone.

That’s nearly three-quarters of the total worker shortfall in the U.S.

That's because while domestic leisure travel has rebounded, international travel – particularly business travel to conventions – is not yet at pre-pandemic levels.

We need a coordinated, comprehensive approach to deal with this challenge – not only to complete the economic recovery from the pandemic, but also to help international business travel to U.S. conventions and trade shows thrive in the future.

That is why Ranking Member Wicker and I – along with Ranking Member Scott and Senators Klobuchar, Sullivan, Cortez Masto, Blunt, and others – worked together to develop the ***Omnibus Travel and Tourism Act***. This bill would, for the first time, create an Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism, allowing the federal government to take a more coordinated approach to supporting international travel to the U.S.

I know there are more ideas out there on how we can boost international travel generally, and to conventions, specifically. That's why I'm so glad we have an excellent panel of witnesses here today, both virtually and in person, to share their expertise, provide insight and recommendations for the best paths forward, and take questions from members of the Subcommittee. Witnesses will discuss the challenges posed by depressed international travel, and why bringing international travelers back to Nevada and the rest of the country is so critical for conventions, trade shows, and our overall travel and tourism economy.

For today's hearing we have representation from:

- The Global Business Travel Association, which represents the business travel industry;
- Miami International Airport, the largest travel gateway between the U.S. and Latin America; and
- The US Travel Association, which is the national, non-profit organization representing and advocating for all components of the travel industry.

It is my hope that today's hearing will help us to better understand how we can continue to encourage international travel to U.S. conventions and bring back the one million jobs we've lost.