

U.S. Senator Jacky Rosen

**U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Subcommittee on Tourism, Trade, and Export Promotion**

“Examining the 2022 National Travel and Tourism Strategy”

July 12, 2022

Good morning, and welcome to the seventh hearing of the Subcommittee on Tourism, Trade, and Export Promotion. Today’s hearing, “Examining the 2022 National Travel and Tourism Strategy,” will analyze the Department of Commerce’s recently published strategy to strengthen the global competitiveness of our nation’s travel and tourism industry, and to make it more sustainable and resilient.

The Department developed the first National Travel and Tourism Strategy in 2012 and updated it in 2019, before travel, tourism, and hospitality businesses and workers were devastated by the impacts of the pandemic. As the pandemic worsened, I joined the Chair and Ranking Member of the full Commerce Committee, as well as Ranking Member Scott, in asking Secretary Raimondo to update the national strategy to address the impacts of the pandemic and help the travel and tourism industry flourish again.

I continued to push for a new national strategy when Ranking Member Wicker and I – joined by Ranking Member Scott and several other members of this subcommittee – introduced the Omnibus Travel and Tourism Act, which passed the full committee in December. Our “TourBus” – as we like to call it – would, among many other things, require the Department of Commerce to regularly update its travel and tourism strategy and present it to Congress.

So I thank Secretary Raimondo and the Tourism Policy Council for heeding our call and for developing an ambitious strategy to enhance travel and tourism to the United States.

This new strategy specifically aims to:

- promote the United States as a premier travel destination, including broadening marketing efforts to encourage visitation to underserved and underrepresented communities;
- facilitate safe and efficient travel to and within the United States and its territories;
- ensure diverse and accessible tourism experiences, with a focus on showcasing the nation’s federal lands and national parks and protecting them for future generations; and
- foster resilient and sustainable travel and tourism.

Additionally, the Strategy establishes an overarching goal by 2027 of increasing American jobs by attracting 90 million international visitors each year, who are estimated to spend \$279 billion annually.

Tourism and international travel grow our country's national output of services and increase foreign currency earning – as such they are a service export. And the new Strategy recognizes international travel as a top U.S. service export. When travelers from global markets visit U.S. destinations, they buy our goods and services – from staying in fabulous hotels on the Las Vegas Strip, to eating at our amazing restaurants, to attending conventions and trade shows, like CES. They pay for tickets to see live entertainment, rent cars, ride tour buses, and spend time in the cities and towns near our fantastic outdoor recreation spots – from Lake Tahoe to Great Basin National Park to Red Rock Canyon. This foreign demand means export income for the U.S. economy. By spending their money in America, international travelers improve the U.S. trade balance, just like overseas buyers of products shipped from a U.S. manufacturer.

In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 80 million international visitors came to the U.S. each year and contributed about \$239 billion to the U.S. economy, making the U.S. the global leader in revenue from international travel and tourism.

But of course, the travel and tourism industry was one of the hardest hit sectors impacted by the pandemic. From 2019 to 2020, travel exports decreased nearly 65 percent, and the decline in travel and tourism contributed heavily to unemployment – with leisure and hospitality losing just over 8 million jobs between February and April 2020. In fact, according to the Department of Commerce's National Travel and Tourism Office, the decline in travel and tourism to and within the U.S. accounted for 56 percent of the decline in U.S. gross domestic product.

Thankfully, travel and tourism is beginning to recover. I am happy to report that Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas has had the best capacity recovery from the pandemic of any airport worldwide, with seat capacity last month up 7 percent from 2019, which had been its best year on record.

By following the new National Travel and Tourism Strategy, the federal government can continue to support this growth and help travel and tourism businesses in Nevada and the nation fully recover.

Today, we will have two witness panels to review and assess the recently released Strategy.

Testifying on the first panel is Grant Harris, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Analysis. In this role, Mr. Harris and his team help define the future of international trade, investment, and export promotion, including tourism promotion through the National Travel and Tourism Office.

Sitting for the second witness panel, we have the Chair and the Vice Chair of the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board, which serves as the advisory body to the Secretary of Commerce on matters relating to the travel and tourism industry in the United States. The Board advises the Secretary on government policies and programs that affect the U.S. travel and tourism industry, offers counsel on current and emerging issues, and provides a forum for discussing and proposing solutions to industry-related problems.

We are privileged to have testifying before us board Chair Bill Hornbuckle and Vice Chair Brad Dean. Mr. Hornbuckle is Chairman and CEO of MGM Resorts International, and Mr. Dean is CEO of Discover Puerto Rico. I will introduce them both to the subcommittee when we begin Panel II.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing each of you share your experiences and expertise with us as we review the new national strategy. I'll now turn it over to Ranking Member Scott for his opening statement and then introduce our first witness panel – Senator Scott.