

**Testimony of Brian Beall, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism before
Senate Commerce Committee’s Tourism, Trade and Export Promotion Subcommittee
“Oversight and Implementation of Travel and Tourism Legislation”**

June 13, 2023

Chair Rosen, Ranking Member Budd, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to update you on the state of the U.S. travel and tourism industry and progress on the National Travel and Tourism Strategy (National Strategy) and implementation of the Visit America Act.

Travel and tourism are an engine of prosperity for Americans in communities across the United States. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories benefit directly or indirectly from domestic travel and international visitation, and the United States has long been a top destination for global travelers.

The pandemic-related declines in the travel and tourism industry were unprecedented. While the travel and tourism industry has weathered many natural disasters and unforeseen events that curtailed travel in the past, never has this sector lost so much economic output virtually overnight. U.S. travel and tourism exports declined by 65 percent and 4.3 million travel and tourism jobs were lost from 2019 to 2020¹.

Fortunately, travel and tourism are on a path to recovery as the world moves beyond the pandemic, economies rebound, and more people are traveling. Businesses are working hard to recapture lost markets, and the United States remains a top aspirational destination for prospective international visitors, thanks in part to the ongoing efforts of Brand USA. Total U.S. travel and tourism output increased to \$1.7 trillion in 2021, reaching 83 percent of the output generated in 2019. The number of jobs supported by travel and tourism increased by 1.9 million to 7.4 million in 2021².

After major pandemic-related travel restrictions between the United States and other countries ended in November 2021, international visitation to the United States more than doubled to over 50 million in 2022 and spending by international travelers in the United States rose to \$164 billion³.

The travel and tourism industry provides jobs with good wages and benefits, consistent with President Biden’s bottom up, middle out approach to the economy. But much work remains to be done to fully recover and rebuild a more resilient travel and tourism industry, and that includes creating and sustaining even more good-quality jobs. This was the goal when the federal government came together through the interagency Tourism Policy Council (TPC), led by the Department of Commerce (Commerce), to develop the 2022 National Strategy – to bring a whole-of-government approach to increasing American jobs and growing the economy through travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation, and to support a more robust and sustainable industry moving forward.

¹ Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

² Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

³ Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, National Travel and Tourism Office and the Bureau of Economic Analysis

The National Strategy establishes a five-year goal of attracting 90 million visitors, who are estimated to spend \$279 billion, annually. The work of the National Strategy is organized around four pillars: 1) promoting the United States as a travel destination; 2) facilitating travel to and within the United States; 3) ensuring diverse, inclusive, and accessible tourism experiences; and 4) fostering resilient and sustainable travel and tourism.

As we mark the one-year anniversary of the National Strategy, we are on track to reach the overarching visitation and spending goal by 2027. Commerce continues to coordinate a whole-of-government approach through the TPC to advance progress under the National Strategy's four pillars. As examples, to promote the United States as a travel destination, Commerce is leading an initiative with the Department of State (State) at U.S. missions in top international visitor markets to coordinate local U.S. Government efforts to promote travel to the United States. To facilitate travel to and within the United States, State has made progress in reducing visa interview wait times at U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world as travel demand has surged. To ensure diverse, inclusive, and accessible tourism experiences, federal agencies are working together to expand and improve access for travelers with disabilities and communicate more clearly to travelers what accessibility resources are available. To foster resilient and sustainable travel and tourism, federal agencies are working to educate stakeholders on how to strengthen resilience to climate change and extreme weather events.

On June 7, 2023, the TPC convened to further focus efforts on advancing work under the National Strategy in year two. Private sector recommendations from the United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board will continue to help guide the TPC's efforts and support the private and public sectors working together to increase the value of travel and tourism as outlined in the National Strategy.

Finally, Commerce thanks the Subcommittee for its role in the enactment of the Visit America Act (Act) as part of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act. Commerce is committed to implementing the Act's provisions as swiftly as possible. However, Commerce will need additional appropriations from Congress to ensure the successful implementation of the Act.

Accordingly, the President's 2024 Budget included nearly \$3.5 million in funding for Commerce's International Trade Administration to support the creation of a new Travel and Tourism business unit, which would be overseen by the Assistant Secretary for Travel and Tourism established in the Act. The Budget Request also includes \$1.5 million for Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis to meet expanded research activities enumerated in the Act.

In summary, Commerce appreciates the opportunity to update the Subcommittee on the state of the U.S. travel and tourism industry and to provide an overview of progress made to achieve the goals of the National Strategy. Through continued public-private sector collaboration, we will expand opportunities for travelers from around the world to meet the people and visit the places that make the United States a truly unrivaled destination.

Thank you for having me here today. I look forward to answering your questions.