



2019 FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 116TH CONGRESS

Legislative Priorities and Endorsements

The U.S. travel and tourism industry is currently responsible for over 10.7% of all U.S. exports – growing 74% over the last decade – and nearly one-third of all U.S. services exports. With one out of every 18 Americans employed either directly or indirectly in tourism-related jobs, the industry currently represents over 3% of U.S. gross domestic product.

With its federal priorities, Visit San Antonio will continue to actively support its travel and tourism partners, including the U.S. Travel Association (USTA), Destinations International (DI) and Meetings Mean Business (MMB) and their legislative issues that further the mission and vision of Visit San Antonio.

Specifically, Visit San Antonio's Federal Advocacy priorities are:

- ◆ Brand USA Funding
- ◆ Rename and Expand Visa Waiver Program (VWP)
- ◆ Trusted Traveler Programs
- ◆ Infrastructure Modernization

Brand USA Funding

Visit San Antonio calls on the 116th Congress to fund Brand USA, and provide certainty of funding through 2027 for this extraordinarily successful public-private partnership that is a key economic driver not only for our country, but also individual states.

Brand USA is a non-profit, private partnership dedicated to increasing inbound international travel to the United States. Brand USA's purpose is to promote international visitation to the U.S. through advertising campaigns, improving America's image abroad and clearly communicating our visa and entry policies.

Taxpayer money is not used to fund Brand USA's marketing efforts. Half of Brand USA's budget comes from a portion of the fee assessed once every two years on travelers visiting the U.S. from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries, through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) which is levied only on foreign travelers. The other half comes from cash and in-kind contributions from the private sector.

It is important to note that Brand USA doesn't just promote the major gateway cities, in fact the bulk of its marketing efforts are dedicated to highlighting smaller and medium-sized destinations across the country.

According to the independent research firm Oxford Economics, from FY2013 – FY2017 Brand USA's marketing efforts generated:



- More than 5.4 million additional visitors to the US who might not have visited otherwise;
- \$38.5 billion in total economic impact; including \$17.7 billion on travel and fare receipts with U.S carriers;
- The creation of 51,580 additional American jobs per year; and
- Yielded a 27-to-1 return on investment.

During the 2018 federal budget process, ESTA fees were extended through 2027 while Brand USA's funding from the program was not.

Rename and Expand the Visa Waiver Program

Visit San Antonio calls on Congress to rename the Visa Waiver Program to the Secure Travel Partnership as supported by the U.S. Travel Association and the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (TTAB), which would better reflect the program's dual purpose as both a security program and a means of travel facilitation. Additionally, Congress should support the expansion of the VWP to include additional qualified countries who echo America's dedication to secure traveling and advanced information sharing.

The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) allows citizens from 38 participating countries to travel to the United States for business or leisure trips for up to 90 days without first obtaining a "tourist" (B-1/B-2) visa from a U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

The VWP is an important tool for increasing security standards, advancing information sharing, strengthening international partnerships and promoting legitimate trade and travel to the United States.

In 2017, **more than 23 million visitors to the United States**, 58 percent of all overseas visitors - i.e., international visitors other than those from our next-door neighbors Canada and Mexico - arrived through the VWP.

However, the Visa Waiver Program's name is, in and of itself, problematic in fostering a welcoming climate for international visitors, since many Americans mistakenly believe that the program reduces the level of security required to gain entrance to the U.S.

It is vital that the American public understand that Visa Waiver countries actively cooperate with the U.S. to share intelligence and that the program, in fact, enhances security related to international inbound travel.

Each individual is vetted for security against multiple law enforcement and security databases (including terrorist screening databases) before boarding a plane, and must obtain preauthorization from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in order to travel to the United States.

The VWP requires stringent security standards, facilitates actionable information-sharing with participating countries and enhances our ability to identify potential threats.

Trusted Traveler Programs

Visit San Antonio calls on Congress to increase resources to market TSA PreCheck and Global Entry that will help enroll a larger segment of air travelers, effectively shrinking the pool of unknown travelers. The more travelers enrolled, the shorter wait times will be at airport security and the safer travelers will be as a whole.

“Trusted Traveler” programs permit the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to provide expedited screening to low-risk travelers departing from the United States and focus attention on high-risk and unknown passengers at security checkpoints. Security and efficiency are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are equally important and equally achievable objectives.

For example, the TSA PreCheck is an established program that is available at more than 200 airports with 56 participating airlines. More than 7 million individuals are registered with various trusted traveler programs. PreCheck program provides better efficiency in the security screening process that allows trusted travelers to be directed to expedited screening lines. In October 2018, 93% of TSA PreCheck passengers waited less than 5 minutes.

Trusted Travelers are allowed to: leave shoes, belts and light outerwear on, keep their laptop in its case, keep small containers (3.4 oz. or less) of liquids and gels in a carry-on, have children aged 12 years and under go with the TSA PreCheck passenger in the expedited screening line, and use a magnetometer for screening versus the full body scanners.

Infrastructure Modernization

Visit San Antonio encourages the 116th Congress to support an overall increased investment in the nation’s travel-related infrastructure to better fund critical airport improvement projects, and to raise the PFC to \$8.50 and index it for inflation to ensure the purchasing power is not compromised.

Some of the nation’s most heavily utilized travel infrastructure systems are in dire need of modernization, both to remain competitive with other destinations, and to facilitate easier access to U.S. markets. Specifically, America’s airports are critical to the nation’s overall infrastructure system and are a key component of commerce, jobs and continued economic growth.

Further, the FAA forecasts that the number of U.S. airline passengers will increase from 840.8 million in 2017 to 1.28 billion in 2038, a growth of more than 50%, placing additional burden on an already strained system.

Among the fiscal avenues available to address these pressing infrastructure needs is an increase in the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC). The Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) was approved by Congress in 1991 with a \$3 cap and raised again in the year 2000 to \$4.50. However, adjusted to inflation, the value today is less than \$2.85. Additionally, airlines receive 11 cents per flight segment to process and distribute PFC payments.



PFC is a local airport user fee that finances the construction of new gates, terminals, runways, and other airport improvements that are Federal Aviation Administration approved projects. PFCs can only fund federally approved capital-improvement projects “that enhance safety, security, or capacity; reduce noise; or increase air carrier competition.”

In addition to creating direct, tangible benefits for both residents and visitors alike, these efforts have the added benefit of driving workforce development and creating new American jobs.