

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 29, 2021

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo,

We write to express our concern about the impact the pandemic has had on the travel and tourism industry and workforce. We also write to request additional information on what steps the U.S. Department of Commerce is taking to help ensure that these industries, their workforce, and the local communities that depend on them can recover as quickly as possible from this health and economic crisis.

Prior to the pandemic, the travel and tourism industry generated \$2.6 trillion in economic activity and provided 15.8 million jobs.¹ Recent reports estimate that travel spending in the U.S. has declined by nearly \$500 billion since 2019, with a loss of nearly one million travel-related jobs since last February.² Behind statistics like this are thousands of tourism workers and restaurants, hotels, and small businesses in the travel and tourism industry struggling to make ends meet.³

As we work to safely reopen the country, with all adults expected to be eligible for vaccines by May,⁴ we must also evaluate the impact of the pandemic on international travel. Reports have found that we have seen a nearly 80 percent decrease in international visitors since the pandemic began, which is a critical part of the U.S. economy and workforce, with international travel spending bringing in \$155 billion in 2019 prior to the pandemic.⁵

For these reasons, we introduced the bipartisan *Protecting Tourism in the United States Act* to direct the U.S. Department of Commerce, in consultation with the United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board and the heads of other relevant federal agencies, to launch a

¹U.S. Travel Association. (March 2020). *U.S. Travel and Tourism Overview (2019)*. Retrieved from https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Fact-Sheet_US-Travel-and-Tourism-Overview.pdf.

² Cameron, Doug and Morath, Eric. (17 Jan. 2021). *Covid-19's Blow to Business Travel Is Expected to Last for Years*. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-pandemics-impact-on-business-travel-hitting-local-economies-11610879401>; U.S. Travel Association. (Jan. 2021). *COVID-19 Travel Industry Research*. Retrieved from <https://www.ustravel.org/toolkit/covid-19-travel-industry-research>.

³U.S. Travel Association. (Jan. 2021). *COVID-19 Travel Industry Research*. Retrieved from <https://www.ustravel.org/toolkit/covid-19-travel-industry-research>; Wiita, Tommy. (2 March 2021). *Minnesota tourism lost estimated \$7.1B in travel spending during pandemic*. ABC 5 KSTP. Retrieved from <https://kstp.com/minnesota-news/minnesota-tourism-lost-estimated-7-1-billion-dollars-in-travel-spending-during-coronavirus-pandemic-study-explore-minnesota-conference/6029124/>.

⁴ Mason, Jeff. (11 March 2021). *Biden: All U.S. adults to be eligible for vaccines by May, some normalcy coming by summer*. Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-biden/biden-all-u-s-adults-to-be-eligible-for-vaccines-by-may-some-normalcy-coming-by-summer-idUSKBN2B31DN>.

⁵Lock, S. (16 March 2021). *International travel spending in the United States from 2002 to 2019, with a forecast until 2024*. Statista. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/207083/international-travel-spending-in-the-us-since-2002/>.

comprehensive study of the effects of the pandemic on different sectors of the travel and tourism industry and provide policy recommendations to assist these industries.

In addition, as the co-chairs of the Senate Travel and Tourism Caucus, we are working to ensure that programs like *Brand USA*—a public-private partnership to encourage travelers to visit America—which we worked to reauthorize in 2019, has the resources it needs. *Brand USA* is a proven means to boost tourism and the U.S. economy, bringing in 7.5 million international visitors to the U.S. annually and generating a total economic impact of \$55 billion and over 52,000 jobs annually prior to the pandemic.⁶ We believe it is critical to evaluate the health of this program and assist the hard-hit travel and tourism industry in its recovery.

The U.S. Department of Commerce plays a critical role in helping revive the U.S. economy, including through work on tourism policy, strategy, and advocacy. We believe that short-term and long-term resources and strategies will be key to help ensure the travel and tourism industry and workforce can recover from the pandemic and respectfully request that you respond to the following questions:

1. What are the agency's immediate and long-term plans to help the travel and tourism industry recover, particularly regarding domestic and international travel?
2. Is the Department of Commerce planning to coordinate with other agencies, states, and private stakeholders to ensure that all key perspectives throughout the travel and tourism industry are considered in developing measures to help these industries recover? If so, please describe these plans.
3. What data has the Department of Commerce collected on how the pandemic has affected small businesses that rely on travel and tourism, including in local and rural communities?
4. Does the Department of Commerce need additional resources to promote and assist the travel and tourism industry? If so, please describe these resource needs in detail.

We look forward to working with you to bolster the recovery of the travel and tourism industry.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Roy Blunt
United States Senator

⁶ Brand USA. (3 March 2021). *Brand USA Fiscal Year 2020 ROI Study* by Oxford Economics. Retrieved from <https://www.thebrandusa.com/resources/roi-study>.



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator