

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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U.S. TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

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MEETING

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TUESDAY
DECEMBER 12, 2023

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The Board met in person and via Video-
Teleconference, at 11:00 a.m. EST, Bill
Hornbuckle, Chair, presiding.

PRESENT

BILL HORNBUCKLE, MGM Resorts, Chair
BRAD DEAN, Discover Puerto Rico, Vice Chair
REGGIE AGGARWAL, Cvent
ADAM BURKE, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention
Board
JULIE COKER, San Diego Tourism Authority*
CHRISTINE DUFFY, Carnival Cruise Line*
FRED FELLEMAN, Port of Seattle
LIZ FITZSIMMONS, Maryland Department of
Commerce
MATT GOLDBERG, Tripadvisor, Inc.
MUFI HANNEMANN, Hawaii Lodging & Tourism
Association*
PETER INGRAM, Hawaiian Airlines*
STEPHANIE JONES, Cultural Heritage Economic
Alliance

ANDREW LEARY, Sustainable Tourism and
Partnerships, Leave No Trace
ERIC LIPP, Open Doors Organization
CASANDRA MATEJ, Visit Orlando*
WILL MOREY, The Morey Organization
LANA RAMOS, Locally Grown Restaurants*
CARROLL RHEEM, Iolite Group

DAN RICHARDS, The Global Rescue Companies
JOHN SAGE, Accessible Travel Solutions
GREG SCHULZE, Strategic Travel Partners,
Expedia
MONICA SMITH, Southeast Tourism Society*
JERRY TAN, Tan Holdings*
D. TAYLOR, UNITE HERE*

ALSO PRESENT

GINA RAIMONDO, Secretary of Commerce
GRANT HARRIS, Assistant Secretary for Industry
and Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce
ALEX LASRY, Deputy Assistant Secretary,
National Travel and Tourism Office, U.S.
Department
of Commerce
BRIAN BEALL, Director, National Travel and
Tourism Office, U.S. Department of
Commerce
JENNIFER AGUINAGA, Designated Federal Officer
JULIE STUFFT, Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Visa Services, U.S. Department of State
MORGAN O'BRIEN, Industry Liaison, U.S.
Department of State
JAMIE LAWRENCE, Deputy Assistant Secretary,
Private Sector Office, U.S. Department of
Homeland Security
PATRICK SCHMIDT, Principal Director, Private
Sector Office, U.S. Department of Homeland
Security
JULIE ABRAHAM, Director, Office of
International Transportation and Trade,
U.S. Department of Transportation
DAVID HUETHER, Deputy Director of Research,
National Travel and Tourism Office, U.S.
Department of Commerce

CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON, President and CEO, Brand
USA

THOMAS S. ENGLE, U.S. Department of State

MATT HAYDEN, U.S. Department of Homeland
Security

JOE HOLECKO, U.S. Department of Commerce

CLAIRE KELLY, U.S. Department of State

TIMOTHY WILLIAMS, U.S. Department of the
Interior

*Via video-teleconference

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1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 (11:07 a.m.)

3 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Okay, so good
4 morning, good afternoon, everybody, and
5 welcome. First and foremost, I would like to
6 welcome the Secretary, Gina Raimondo, who has
7 joined us today in her building, today, so
8 thank you. Much appreciated.

9 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: You're welcome.

10 MR.HORNBUCKLE: Grant Harris, the
11 Assistant Secretary of Commerce, thank you for
12 joining. Alex Lasry, thank you for joining.

13 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Alex is new.

14 MR. HORNBUCKLE: I know, we were
15 just chatting. He is back in government.

16 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Exciting. It's
17 going to be great.

18 MR. LASRY: Thank you.

19 MR. HORNBUCKLE: And to the general
20 public and the rest of the Board who joined us
21 both on the screen and ultimately coming to
22 Washington, D.C., I want to thank you for that

1 and thank you obviously for coming and joining
2 us in person.

3 Earlier this year, we provided the
4 Secretary with recommendations on five key
5 areas. I want to thank my Vice Chair Brad Dean
6 for his help with the letters and with the
7 recommendations and with taking everything and
8 the work that we put out and putting it into a
9 concise format that hopefully the Secretary and
10 the team have had a chance to digest. So we
11 thank you for that.

12 I also want to thank the Secretary
13 for her leadership with our industry. It has
14 been a good year for tourism generally, in
15 terms of a rebound, and she and her team have
16 help lead that and some of the initiatives. I
17 think all of you know the Secretary had a
18 chance to join in San Francisco, the President,
19 and ultimately tourism was talked about in
20 China, of note, which is a massive market for
21 many of us, particularly those of us on the
22 West Coast, and so we thank you for that energy

1 and that effort. And, ultimately, I know time
2 is limited, so Secretary Raimondo, I will turn
3 this to you.

4 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Great, yes, we
5 were in San Francisco; it was awesome. It was
6 a great visit. So, let me say a few things.

7 First, welcome, Alex. Hope you all
8 get a chance to get to know him, but we have
9 high hopes for you, we are excited. And we
10 have had a little vacancy for a little while,
11 so it is good that you are here at the start of
12 the New Year.

13 Secondly, thank you to Grant, who is
14 doing a fantastic job. Hopefully you know by
15 now, working with me, we really believe in
16 travel and tourism. You know, when I was the
17 Governor, I really leaned into travel and
18 tourism, I constantly fought back against the
19 somewhat conventional wisdom that these aren't
20 good jobs. And there is still that view, they
21 are not good jobs, they are seasonal jobs, they
22 aren't career jobs. And so, you have my full

1 support, because they are good jobs, they can
2 be good jobs. They can be career jobs. You
3 are living proof, right?

4 (Laughter.)

5 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Not there yet. We
6 are working on it, though.

7 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: You start at
8 that place, wind up running the company, right?
9 Or something in between. So, I am really
10 sincere, and hopefully you feel it from my
11 team, that we want to boost travel and tourism.
12 You know, we still have work to do; I want to
13 hear from you today. Bill and I were just
14 chatting. The good news is travel and tourism
15 is recovering, we are past COVID, thank God.
16 But those were rough years, so there is a lot
17 to make up for. And things have changed, and
18 buying patterns have changed. But more than 50
19 million international visitors spent 165
20 billion dollars in the U.S., last year in 2022.
21 And through October of this year, international
22 visitors have spent 174 billion, which is an

1 increase of 30 percent.

2 So that is all good, and hopefully
3 you are feeling that and seeing that in your
4 businesses, but overall visitation to the U.S.
5 is still down compared to 2019. So that is
6 what I am saying. We have made up a lot, but
7 we really haven't made up the whole way, and so
8 there is a lot more work to be done. We
9 appreciate your recommendations, which we have
10 reviewed, which I appreciate. Always looking
11 for more feedback, especially as it relates to
12 the interagency, especially still struggling
13 with visas and visa time, so any concrete
14 suggestions you have for work that we can do or
15 work that we can do with the State Department
16 or other departments, please let us know.

17 A couple of other points, one is
18 China. We were chatting about this on the way
19 in. I was in China just before Labor Day, I
20 made it a point to meet with the Minister of
21 Culture and Tourism, Minister Hu. It was an
22 excellent meeting, one of my best meetings,

1 because it fits with our overall message, which
2 is U.S. and China have the \$700 billion trading
3 relationship. That is a good thing, creates
4 jobs in America, creates jobs in China, both
5 good things, has nothing to do with national
6 security.

7 So, I would love for you to think
8 about how you would expand in China and how we
9 can assist in doing that. When I was there, we
10 announced the 14th China U.S. tourism
11 leadership summit, which will be held in China
12 in the first half of next year, we are trying
13 to target spring. So, that is good, right?
14 And, hopefully, we will start to see even more
15 Chinese visitors to the U.S. as they still have
16 an overhang with COVID. So that is one big
17 opportunity that we should work on together.

18 The other is Japan. We launched the
19 2024 U.S.-Japan tourism year. So that is again
20 a fantastic opportunity for us to work with you
21 and your industry to promote travel, tourism,
22 and cultural exchanges between the U.S. and

1 Japan. I can tell you broadly, we have worked
2 so hard at deepening our bilateral relationship
3 with Japan. They sent a huge delegation to
4 APAC, I have been a couple times, the President
5 has gone there a couple times, so, you know,
6 let's lean into that and help your businesses
7 with that.

8 Finally, we are working as I said,
9 with the rest of the interagency to implement
10 the travel and tourism strategy, and I would
11 just say, again, I know there is so many places
12 that Government gets in your way, and it can't
13 all be fixed overnight, but any ideas you have,
14 or if you want us to lift your voice to DHS,
15 State Department, the White House, et cetera,
16 that is what we are here to do.

17 So, thank you for having me, happy
18 holidays. I hope you have an awesome holiday
19 season, and thanks for all you do.

20 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you. Do you
21 have questions, Secretary?

22 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: I don't, but I

1 am here, so if anyone has anything for me.

2 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Maybe if I could
3 kick this off for a second, a couple of things
4 that I think the letters drought, you actually
5 touched on both of them, but overall
6 international visitation, anything and
7 everything we can continue to do to move that
8 traction, that position, that process, I think
9 it is critical.

10 Visas, you mentioned, air travel, of
11 note, helping with the Department of
12 Transportation or others becomes important to
13 us, and I think just the general perception --
14 and it continues to be a challenge, because I,
15 like you, travel. I was in China, of note.
16 Getting people to think that the U.S. is safe
17 again. I shouldn't say again, but I will say
18 that, because I think there is some messaging
19 and some things that need to happen and need to
20 continue.

21 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: You mean
22 because of gun violence?

1 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Yes, exactly.

2 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: I heard that
3 when I was in China.

4 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Yeah. They are --
5 and I go to Japan all the time, and Japan had
6 like four or five people die of gun deaths last
7 year. I mean, the idea that we even have guns
8 is a whole different discussion to them
9 politically, but the point is, they see the
10 news, they hear the news, and they think that
11 it is not safe at times. And so I think --
12 that is as much messaging as anything else, and
13 so to the extent, I think we could all lean in
14 on that, I think it is important.

15 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: That is really
16 important.

17 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Yeah, and then the
18 second piece, and again, you know it, you
19 mentioned it. Just workforce, workforce
20 development, educating folks that this is a
21 great industry, educating everyone up on this
22 Hill that it is 10% of the U.S. economy,

1 generally, in terms of people that work, touch
2 this industry in some way, shape, or form; we
3 think it is all relevant. We are still short
4 workers, whether it is Las Vegas or any one of
5 these other destinations. You know, whatever
6 number you want to believe, a million to a half
7 a million jobs, and by the way we have always
8 run a half a million short, that is not
9 unusual, but the principle point is educating
10 and ultimately helping just get international
11 workforce in.

12 I think we mentioned last time,
13 whether I am heading up -- I have the fortune
14 of a second home at a ski resort. It's great,
15 other than one exception: I cannot get workers.
16 And so that whole experience isn't so great.
17 And so, to the extent we can help with that,
18 whether it is work visas for seasonal workers,
19 et cetera, continues to be I think a push for
20 the industry, of note, and so if could draw
21 attention to any two things, that from my
22 perspective, maybe I will open it up to the

1 rest of the committee, or ultimately --

2 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Are you
3 noticing any improvement? Because that started
4 acutely in COVID.

5 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Yes, the answer is
6 yes, but I will give you a simple example. We
7 just hosted Formula One, and Formula One brings
8 with it -- what they do in every other city,
9 ours happened to buy the race, but every other
10 city sponsors the race, and so it comes as a
11 kit. As a part of that kit comes literally
12 about 1,000 employees who need work visas.
13 They couldn't get them. Luckily, Las Vegas is
14 a hospitality town, and so we were able to
15 underwrite, underline, support the
16 infrastructure and make it work, but it just,
17 between the time, the energy -- not that they
18 are not focused on it, they travel all over the
19 world, they know what to do, and it didn't
20 happen. It didn't happen in time, and they
21 were 1,000 people short. So we just got to
22 think about that.

1 That is a real-life example of how
2 to make it better. And so, and I know there
3 are two sides to that politically, because
4 obviously we filled the void, but having said
5 that, this was a great opportunity to exercise
6 into something that was open and come on in,
7 because that even drew -- 20 percent of it was
8 international visitation at a very high level,
9 and we just struggled in that respect.

10 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: I do have a
11 question, sorry, just to ask this. I have
12 heard, from numerous people, that travel and
13 tourism at the high end is doing great, very
14 strong, where it was, if not better, but at the
15 medium-to-low end, there is a lot of people,
16 you have said this, but I have heard it through
17 other CEOs who operate hotels, you know, for
18 maybe the budget traveler, it is just not where
19 it was. Are you guys seeing that in your
20 businesses? You said you were.

21 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Yes, I will point
22 to China, again, as a good example. Like, Las

1 Vegas enjoyed, I don't know, 300,000 Chinese
2 back in '18. We are probably down to 100,000
3 now. And by the way, those are affluent, of
4 course, no surprise.

5 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: That is who is
6 coming back.

7 MR. HORNBuckle: So the tourists
8 that come to the West Coast, they get on a bus,
9 they go to San Francisco, Grand Canyon, Las
10 Vegas; that has subsided or almost disappeared
11 in its entirety.

12 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Is everyone
13 else seeing that?

14 MR. FELLEMAN: Fred Felleman. In
15 both the airport and the seaport, we are up to
16 pre-2019 numbers of 50 million passengers using
17 airport, although the international travelers
18 are slightly lagging. But the cruise terminal
19 is exceeding 2019 numbers, so that number is
20 really growing significantly.

21 One of the messages that I really
22 appreciate the administration speaking louder

1 all over government is this Building Back
2 Better. And we have the fact that, in the
3 cruise industry, that means an ability -- this
4 is becoming a greater and greater draw for the
5 international traveler. And certainly in
6 Washington state, where we have these riches of
7 natural beauty, that this is something that our
8 national parks are really a beacon to draw
9 people in, for the international travel in
10 particular, and they don't just spend a week to
11 go to Alaska on a cruise ship, they may spend a
12 month in a state or in a region, and so we
13 really want to target that area.

14 And we are a sister city
15 relationship with the city of Kobe, the port of
16 Kobe, so I am very interested to know more
17 about that.

18 And finally, with regards to visas,
19 we have FIFA coming to town, the World Cup in
20 the Northwest, and this is going to be an
21 international spotlight on our region. And
22 crossing that border, I think the Northwest

1 might be able to motivate its sectors to
2 improve that transition.

3 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: All right,
4 thank you.

5 MR. BURKE: Chair Raimondo, Adam
6 Burke, Madam Secretary, from Los Angeles
7 tourism. First of all, thank you for your
8 support, I agree you have been a tremendous
9 advocate for the industry.

10 Kind of related to this, it's
11 exactly what we have seen, is the well of
12 domestic leisure is fully recovered. As a
13 gateway destination, overseas business is still
14 going to take another 24 to 36 months.

15 Right now, our top performing
16 overseas market is Australia and New Zealand,
17 at about 85 percent recovery, U.K./Ireland
18 right behind that. But one thing I would like
19 to advocate for is really revisiting Brand
20 USA's funding model, because the 100 million
21 cap we have has never really been adjusted, and
22 if you are looking at inflation, their 100

1 million is probably worth about 85 million
2 today, and I can tell you we are seeing
3 significant competition and significantly
4 greater contest from countries like Saudi, UAE,
5 Canada, and Australia. They are ramping up
6 their spending at a time when maybe the USA is
7 actually looking at declining.

8 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: That is an
9 awesome point, and I appreciate it.

10 PARTICIPANT: So, within the student
11 and youth travel segment, we are finding
12 geographic weakness. So overall, the inbound
13 student and youth travel segment is down about
14 10%, largely because of weakness on the west
15 coast, and the Pacific Rim. Generally speaking,
16 the average stay is down by about 15 percent in
17 terms of a stay within the United States, and
18 overall, we are finding that while students
19 have concerns about the length of time, in
20 terms of securing their visa, generally they
21 are satisfied with the reception of the local
22 embassy in terms of visa processing.

1 What we are seeing in terms of visa
2 denials, some problem with the global south,
3 getting African young people, in particular, in
4 at numbers that we are seeing from other parts
5 of the world.

6 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Thank you,
7 thank you.

8 MR. HANNEMANN: Madame Secretary, I
9 am Mufi Hannemann from Hawaii. Can you hear me?

10 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes, I can.

11 MR. HANNEMANN: From Hawaii, we are
12 very dependent on Japanese travel. When we had
13 a record amount of 10 million visitors, 1.5 of
14 them were from Japan. We are not going to get
15 to 1.5 anytime soon. Our governor has taken
16 two trips to Japan to encourage travel back
17 there; we are putting more money into
18 marketing, but we are going to try to do things
19 like pre-clear the Japanese at the airports in
20 Japan before they come to Hawaii. This will
21 require interaction and support with the
22 federal government. We think that that would

1 help.

2 Again, that point that you made, is
3 that the high-end visitors are coming from
4 Japan, but we are not seeing critical masses
5 middle class and beyond, so that is a very
6 important market for us. Anything you can do
7 to help in that regard, I'd like to hear, this
8 year in Japan, in 2024, we hope to jump on that
9 bandwagon and see the Japanese visitors come
10 back.

11 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Okay. Yes, and
12 the by the way, we know it has been an
13 especially hard time for you, after the fires.
14 How is the recovery going?

15 MR. HANNEMANN: Well, we are
16 struggling, we have definitely seen decreases
17 across the board. A lot of it has to do with
18 messaging. Initially, people thought this was
19 not the time to visit Maui, we are still
20 struggling with that now that we want them to
21 come back. Even where Lahaina is located in
22 West Maui, the rest of that area is open.

1 So that is a major part of what we
2 are doing, we are also putting some monies and
3 doing a special campaign to get West Coast
4 travel back to Hawaii; that is our bread and
5 butter market.

6 So, as we try to navigate ourselves
7 through this, any help we can receive from the
8 federal government, whether it is in marketing,
9 whether it is in messaging, and the message is
10 Hawaii is open for travel, and we want people
11 to come and visit our state. Maui is just an
12 isolated part of it, and even with Maui, it is
13 open.

14 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yes. Hang in
15 there, be resilient, and we will do all we can.

16 MR. HANNEMANN: Thank you, Madam
17 Secretary.

18 MR. SAGE: Madam Secretary, John
19 Sage with Accessible Travel Solutions. Thank
20 you for having the Accessibility Committee this
21 year, we are really excited about that. The
22 biggest untapped demographic is disabled

1 travelers, 20 percent of the population has a
2 disability. I will give you an anecdote, I am a
3 manual wheelchair user, I am CEO of three
4 accessible travel companies, and I receive zero
5 targeted accessible travel ads from any
6 destination, any business. And so it is just
7 this huge opportunity that we can focus on.

8 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: That is
9 interesting.

10 MR. HORNBUCKLE: We could have a
11 conversation about that.

12 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: That is an
13 excellent point. You know, I love the -- Brand
14 USA has a good idea. I've tried in the past to
15 work with Congress on that, but I think this is
16 a good time to do it, for all the reasons you
17 said, so we will go back at that. But anything
18 we can work on together, like these big events,
19 the FIFA or the Olympics, or leaning into
20 Hawaii; I know it doesn't solve everything in
21 the industry, but that is really good,
22 actionable things. Help us with visas for this

1 big event.

2 MR. HORNBUCKLE: With deadlines.

3 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yeah, with a
4 deadline, right. Like, we are hosting this
5 many visitors for soccer; this is what we need.
6 Let us know that. That is like a ball we can
7 catch, or try to catch. You know, Japan and
8 Hawaii, I thought that was an excellent point.

9 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Julie?

10 MS. COKER: Hi, good morning, Madam
11 Secretary. Thank you so much. I said good
12 morning because I am in San Diego. It is still
13 8:26 a.m. Thank you so much for hosting us.

14 So as we are talking about visa
15 waiver, I just wanted to bring to the attention
16 that the extension is needed for the Interview
17 Waiver Program which is to expire on December
18 31st. And so that is a concern right now.

19 Obviously, without the extension,
20 then the visa interview waiver authority, it is
21 a tool that is used to admit lower-risk
22 international travelers to the United States,

1 and right now that is expected to expire on the
2 31ST. So if there is any support or influence
3 that you would be able to help with, that would
4 be fantastic.

5 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Yeah. We have
6 Julie here from the State Department. Can you
7 address that?

8 MS. ABRAHAM: Thank you, Madam
9 Secretary. Hi, Julie. We actually have really
10 good news on that, that I can't completely
11 share, but we have worked out an agreement.

12 MS. COKER: We get the idea.

13 MS. ABRAHAM: And thank you to the
14 Department of Commerce, who has been so helpful
15 in working with the White House on this. And
16 thank you to everyone in this room who has
17 advocated for what Julie is saying, we are
18 going to have a really good year with interview
19 waiver capability this year. In '24.

20 (Simultaneous speaking.)

21 MS. COKER: Thank you, Julie.

22 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Anyone have any

1 last things they need to say?

2 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you for
3 everything you're doing.

4 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Happy Holidays.
5 We are making progress.

6 MR. HORNBUCKLE: We are, we are.

7 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: So thanks for
8 coming, and digging in and being specific, and
9 let's make it a great 2024.

10 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you, Madam
11 Secretary.

12 (Simultaneous speaking.)

13 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Put Alex to
14 work.

15 (Off-microphone comments.)

16 MR. HORNBUCKE: I think, then, if we
17 could push on, Grant, if I could turn this over
18 to you, report on Prior Recommendations, and
19 then go from there.

20 MR. HARRIS: Thank you. It's a
21 perfect segue, because a lot of these issues
22 came up, and we wanted to add some more color

1 to what we have been doing with our partners
2 across the government on these great
3 recommendations that we have been receiving.

4 First, though, good morning. Thank
5 you so much Bill and Brad for your ongoing
6 leadership here. Thank you to everyone who has
7 been putting so much time and thought into
8 these recommendations, which, as the Secretary
9 said, not only does she personally review them
10 and give us marching orders as soon as she
11 receives them, but we also share them with our
12 colleagues across the government, some of whom
13 you will hear from later today.

14 I wanted to just provide a quick
15 overview on some of the recommendations. They
16 are of such breadth and of such depth that I
17 will do them injustice and not be able to
18 respond to everything, but we just want to call
19 out a few, just as illustrative of the kind of
20 work that we are doing to try to breathe life
21 into these great thoughts and recommendations
22 that you have put forward to us.

1 A few in particular. First, on the
2 topic of sustainability in areas of high
3 concentration of visitors, this came up also in
4 the question and answer just now. Our
5 colleagues in the National Travel and Tourism
6 Office, which is now ably lead by Alex Lasry,
7 the new Deputy Assistant Secretary and Brian
8 Beall, and you know our colleague Jennifer,
9 Kurt, others around the room, Dave; a lot of
10 familiar faces in the NTTO universe because
11 these have been strong partners over many
12 years. They have been working on sustainability
13 in particular, in working to create a toolkit
14 for the website, which we are very excited to
15 be putting out.

16 It is going to contain definitions,
17 standards, best practices, and other resources
18 so that destinations, businesses, and industry
19 organizations can benefit from these best
20 practices and lessons learned to make sure that
21 destinations can be as supported and as
22 sustainable as possible.

1 With recreation.gov, the U.S.
2 Government is maintaining a list of federal
3 cultural and heritage tourism sites. They are
4 also reaching out to state tourism directors
5 too, to encourage similar efforts on the
6 private sector side, we think that can have a
7 great effect.

8 And NTTO is also working with other
9 colleagues in the Department of Commerce,
10 including in the Minority Business Development
11 Agency, to explain ways where we might increase
12 connections between them and stakeholders in
13 industry across, that would benefit from
14 greater economic benefits from tourism.

15 When it comes to attracting talent
16 to the tourism workforce, this is a theme that
17 we have been discussing, and we know that it is
18 a long standing challenge and we want to
19 continue to do as much as we can. We plan,
20 particularly under the Secretary's direction,
21 in trying to do all that we can from Commerce,
22 to host a roundtable in the near future too, to

1 go deeper with public and private stakeholders
2 to try to game out more specifics on the
3 recommendations that you have made, and try to
4 concretize additional steps that we can be
5 taking as well.

6 And we also are looking to connect
7 with private sector partners to think about
8 opportunities where there might be more public
9 private collaboration, to attract youth to the
10 travel and tourism sector. It seems like a
11 place that we won't have a lot of time on
12 today's agenda, but it seems particularly
13 promising to think about how we can strengthen
14 this pipeline and how we can make these jobs as
15 attractive as possible to youth across the
16 country.

17 I wanted to discuss as well how we
18 are advancing seamless travel, and improving
19 the infrastructure to support it. The
20 Department of Transportation, who you are going
21 to be hearing from more as well, is in the
22 process of creating its travel and tourism

1 infrastructure plan, which is going to align
2 very closely with the National Travel and
3 Tourism strategy that we are working together
4 with you to implement. And NTTO is working
5 with them in finalizing the plan.

6 The Department of Homeland Security
7 is also doing a lot in this space. They are
8 making great strides in modernizing the travel
9 experience. NTTO is working with them on the
10 commitments that they made in the National
11 Travel and Tourism strategy as well.

12 And then Commerce is going to
13 continue to work the Department of State, with
14 Julie Stuftt, with the entire team at State, as
15 they are working to reduce visa wait times and
16 interview times in key markets, and that is
17 ongoing work that you are going to be hearing
18 more about in just a few moments.

19 I also wanted to talk about how we
20 are looking to improve, Communicating the
21 Welcome, quote-unquote, as some of these
22 recommendations were really speaking about how

1 we can do a better job in that regard. Here
2 again, with the Department of Homeland Security
3 and the Department of State, we have got a lot
4 of recommendations that we are looking to
5 implement here and now, and from the National
6 Travel and Tourism strategy that we published
7 and are holding ourselves to account under as
8 well.

9 Just to give a couple of examples,
10 and Deputy Secretary Stuftt will be talking
11 more about this and giving more of a detailed
12 update on her efforts, but the State Department
13 is processing a record number of visas, and
14 they have been working to address visa wait
15 times across key markets. That, we think, is
16 really important as part of the welcome and the
17 experience for travelers.

18 We are also focusing our effort on
19 welcoming more visitors from critical markets
20 as travel and tourism further recovers. The
21 Secretary said that more eloquently than I can,
22 her work in China and our follow on -- and we

1 are looking forward to a great summit in the
2 first half of 2024 which we think will be an
3 excellent and strong delegation. We have also
4 been working -- we had members of our team just
5 return from Japan, working with them in
6 launching the 2024 U.S.-Japan tourism year, to
7 promote travel, tourism and business in both
8 directions.

9 Both China and Japan, I don't need
10 to tell this group how critical these markets
11 are and what the potential is. And Bill, you
12 had spoken to that too. If we could get back to
13 the 2019 levels of Chinese visitation, that
14 could support 50,000 jobs across the United
15 States. It is really a striking economic impact
16 to have the increased visitation, and it is a
17 market we are putting a lot of effort into.

18 We are also trying to think very
19 critically, internally, about how we can do a
20 better job. We are looking also with doing a
21 competitiveness study, that is going to provide
22 insights into how the United States stands

1 among other countries regarding its
2 competitiveness as a travel destination. And so
3 we are trying to get some candid insights there
4 and think about additional steps and policy
5 recommendations that we can undertake.

6 And then, finally, I wanted to
7 update you on how we are looking to support
8 accessible travel as well. And this was made to
9 great effect, including the statistics given
10 about the size of this population. And I think
11 from a travel and tourism standpoint, we need
12 to be doing more to reach out and to make
13 travel as accessible as possible.

14 A few examples is that we want to
15 make sure that we are facilitating travel
16 opportunities for people with disabilities,
17 including by better communicating accessibility
18 information to the public, for instance, so
19 that more travelers can enjoy national parks.
20 We have provided some information just in a
21 blog post yesterday about some of the work that
22 the National Parks Service is doing in this

1 regard, to put out new resources to help
2 travelers plan trips by providing information
3 on accessible features and services at national
4 parks, including within the Commerce
5 Department.

6 The National Oceanic and Atmospheric
7 Administration, NOAA, they have been making
8 their national marine sanctuaries more
9 accessible and installing more accessible
10 exhibits on local marine life. Again, hard to
11 do justice to the work that is going on in a
12 short amount of time, but we just wanted to
13 illustrate, this is something that is a
14 priority for us and that we want to continue to
15 do more on.

16 We benefitted from an excellent
17 roundtable earlier in the year, where we got
18 other ideas, which we continue to be working on
19 as well. It is also a topic we are working on
20 with Brand USA and with our General Services
21 Administration, to think about how government
22 policies related to travel procurement and

1 accessibility standards can help government and
2 industry on this topic.

3 I think going forward we have a lot
4 of work to do as the Secretary has said. She is
5 not shy in asking us to do a lot of follow up
6 on what this group recommends, and so I think
7 we will be back around with greater updates as
8 well.

9 And I wanted to take one last moment
10 as well, as the Secretary introduced DAS, the
11 Deputy Assistant Secretary Lasry. He brings a
12 really interesting background about the public
13 and the private sector, with former service at
14 the White House, but also having been co-owner
15 and Senior Vice President of the Milwaukee
16 Bucks, and been a community leader as well in
17 Milwaukee, in creating the Deer District, which
18 is one of their premiere public private
19 partnerships, and created thousands of jobs as
20 well. And so we are excited to have his skills
21 and background as part of this team, and we are
22 really anxious in working with you in following

1 up with these recommendations. Again, thank you
2 for your public service in creating this and
3 continuing to work with us.

4 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you,
5 Assistant Secretary Harris. We appreciate
6 everyone paying attention to all the work that
7 went on here. Having said that, if we could
8 move on, I think first we are going to hear
9 from the three agencies. First, Assistant
10 Secretary Julie Stufft from the Department of
11 State. Julie?

12 MS. STUFFT: Thanks, Bill. Hi
13 everybody, thanks very much for having us.
14 Thank you, Grant, for that introduction to
15 really all the faces on the screen in this
16 room, I mean so many of you have given direct
17 feedback to us as to what you are seeing and
18 how we can improve things. And I am just so
19 grateful in a job that I am not always grateful
20 to be in, every partnership that you have given
21 has been really inspiring.

22 We are going to pass out a fact

1 sheet soon that outlines sort of visa
2 operations in the last fiscal year, federal
3 fiscal year, which just ended on October first,
4 and we are going to look at more for the
5 calendar year as well. But let me go through
6 some of the main ideas of what we have seen
7 this fiscal year. Going back to '22, just some
8 background, we issued about 6.4 million visas
9 in '22, and for '23, we have set a goal of
10 getting back to 8.4 million visas. That is what
11 we did pre-pandemic, pretty consistently per
12 year. And that was a really ambitious goal last
13 September, it was not clear at all that we
14 would be able to achieve that. I know a lot of
15 you have seen our press releases, but when we
16 clocked the numbers at the end of our fiscal
17 year, we had issued 10.5 million visas. Eight
18 million of those were visitor visas, that is 10
19 percent higher than any previous year, except
20 for 2016, that was a big, big year. This year
21 we are going to beat 2016.

22 These are huge numbers, setting all-

1 time records in things like students --
2 including African students -- was the highest
3 number we issued this year, ever, worldwide
4 students, the highest ever. Workers, including
5 H-2s, H-2As and Bs, were the highest ever. But
6 to your point, Bill, you know, there is a
7 petition process that goes in front of that,
8 that makes it something that we as a government
9 need to work more seamlessly on. For the
10 western hemisphere, we broke all-time visa
11 number adjudications; half of our overseas
12 posts issued more visas than ever before in
13 that country, including in Brazil, Colombia and
14 Mexico.

15 So, the takeaway is that more people
16 can jump on a plane today, to come to the
17 United States from anywhere in the world,
18 either on their visa or on ESTA travel, than
19 ever before in our history, and I am glad to
20 see that is being reflected in an increased
21 travel. But the real and perceived obstacles of
22 travel are what we need to work on this year.

1 That is our work, that is what we have been
2 working on, that is our dragon to slay this
3 year. What that means is wait times. So wait
4 times for first-time visitors -- every other
5 category is low worldwide -- started last year,
6 it was about 200 days, as the average,
7 worldwide average, we have about 230 posts, and
8 that went down today to about 140 days. So
9 significant decrease, not nearly decreased
10 enough. I mean, this has to come way below 100
11 days as an average.

12 One interesting thing we have seen,
13 is that the places where we have done the most
14 visas are also places where we have the highest
15 wait times. Places like Colombia, for sure, and
16 India, and Mexico. This demand is something
17 beyond COVID, sort of hangover stuff, this is
18 new demand that we haven't previously seen in
19 these countries. And we need to tackle that
20 demand, not just what we thought we had before
21 the pandemic. Because it is different, it is
22 much higher.

1 Some innovations that you have heard
2 about and that we are working on, thank you
3 Julie, the interview waivers. So many people in
4 this room have advocated for that. Grant, you
5 played a huge role in this, too. We are now
6 about to finalize an agreement that will give a
7 lot of flexibility to our counselor sections
8 next year to do interview waivers for previous
9 travelers who may not need to be seen again.
10 And that is, I think, what we have all realized
11 is a commonsense approach to this. It makes it
12 much easier for the traveler, and makes it much
13 easier for us. In fact, when we look at China,
14 and the 10-year visas that are expiring in the
15 next couple of years, I know everybody is aware
16 of that, it is because we will have these
17 expanded interview waiver authorities that we
18 will be able to do these from anywhere in the
19 world, and we are very confident that we are
20 going to be able to handle that.

21 By the way, the group that I just
22 talked about is with China, being largely

1 offline, we have the staff there to do visas,
2 but the demand pattern there is still about 20
3 percent of what we saw even in 2019, to your
4 point. We are just not seeing the demand,
5 there. But when it comes, we are ready for it,
6 and we look forward to an expansion of China
7 operations this year.

8 Starting in January, we will be
9 doing domestic visa renewals. That is for long-
10 term workers who are living and working in the
11 U.S., H visas and some others. We had that
12 program 20 years ago, stopped it, this is the
13 first time we are restarting it. What this
14 means for visitors is that visitors who are
15 seeking a visa for the first time to come to
16 the US, will be co-opted -- their spots won't
17 be co-opted overseas by folks who really we
18 don't need to see, who are living in the United
19 States. They can do their work here. We will
20 have those appointments, especially in India,
21 available for those that are coming through to
22 get a visa.

1 We are working on paperless visas
2 and the ability to, basically, electronically
3 issue -- kind of like ESTA -- a visa, and so
4 people can just have an app that shows them
5 when they have a visa ready. And, of course,
6 you know about our business visa center, the
7 work that Morgan O'Brian and our team have
8 done. And the MICE database and group
9 appointments for those coming through, I have
10 heard a lot about this from you. The idea that
11 groups should be able to have group
12 appointments at the same time, and not schedule
13 individually, and also that we can really
14 effect those sort of big events that you
15 mentioned. I think we are working pretty
16 effectively now to do that.

17 We have heard a lot about big events
18 or making sure that our accounts officers give
19 priority to those events, but we still have
20 work to do, with your help, in making sure that
21 that process is streamlined more. And we look
22 forward to that in 2024. Thank you.

1 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Julie, how do we
2 think about first-time visas -- pick any place
3 you want to -- first-time visas versus ongoing,
4 percentage-wise. How do I think about that?

5 MS. STUFFT: Yeah, so the biggest
6 category of visas, about eight percent, is
7 visitors. Probably about a third of those are
8 returning visitors, and two thirds are folks
9 who are coming for the first time. The first-
10 timers, by law, we have to see in person.
11 Anyone coming back, we don't have to see, and
12 that is much easier for us. That reflects in
13 wait times, right? The wait times for a first
14 timer are much higher than for somebody coming
15 back.

16 MR. BURKE: Julie, the conversation
17 we had, and just to illustrate your point.
18 When we were in India about six months ago, we
19 met honest folk. It was good news, bad news,
20 and you have heard this, so this is not new
21 news. Honest folk have the largest share, and
22 they basically said the good news is, there is

1 tremendous demand, and growing interest.

2 The not-so-good news is they have
3 instructed their travel advisors that if it is
4 a first-time applicant, don't recommend the
5 U.S. So they are literally turning away
6 demand. In fairness, you and your team have
7 done, I think, a novel job at trying to make up
8 for significant vacancies over the last six
9 years. So one of the things I would like to
10 explore is, is there the possibility to bring
11 some of the temporary workers you are looking
12 to bring in to these hot spots, whether it be a
13 private public partnership model, because that
14 ultimately was the gateway destination, we'd
15 certainly be willing to have skin in the game
16 and contribute financially if it meant that we
17 could significantly expedite those first time
18 applicants, especially from those major
19 international markets, but right now we are
20 turning business away.

21 MS. STUFFT: Thanks, Adam. Greg?

22 MR. SCHULZE: And I just--in terms

1 of for example, India, if there is something--I
2 mean look at the entire base of people coming,
3 for example, corporations. So we bring about
4 50 of our employees, our leaders from India to
5 do instructor meetings every year. They have
6 come, some of them, 10 times, always through
7 company sponsorship, but they have to go
8 through the same process again and again, so is
9 there something we can bifurcate backward via
10 corporate sponsor, if they are a return, it's
11 not their first time. Just as you start
12 slicing it, is there a way you can do different
13 things for different groups, and just to make
14 it easier, the processing, because of returning
15 as well as having their corporate sponsor.

16 And the thing that Adam mentioned
17 about the public private partnership, we would
18 be happy to pay three times the amount of money
19 to process their visa. Like it really doesn't-
20 -it's an irrelevant cost to a lot of
21 corporations, and to do something where they
22 can expedite it, corporations in particular, or

1 people say, who have to come for a wedding for
2 a sibling or something, whatever it may be, is
3 there something that is going on with
4 expedition, to expedite it, to pay more. Just
5 different approaches that may not be how the
6 government does it, but from a commercial view,
7 people are willing to pay it. I don't know if
8 anything like that is--

9 MS. STUFFT: That is a great idea.
10 We are prohibited by law at this point from
11 collecting more than the actual fee for a visa,
12 and having sort of an expedite fee, like some
13 other agencies do, but there are two things I
14 would say to your point. If someone is
15 returning to the United States in any capacity,
16 they should never have to come for a visa
17 interview. It is a one-time shot. You should
18 only have one visa interview ever, and that is
19 it. We don't need to see you more than once in
20 your life. So no one should be going back in
21 for an interview who is coming back for
22 something. The other thing is, we do have a

1 corporate expedite process, and I know a lot of
2 folks here have benefitted from that. Anyone
3 who is coming with a corporation goes into a
4 faster line for an expedited appointment if
5 this is the first time for them, and we make
6 sure that that happens. But, I am very aware
7 that for this group in particular, saying that
8 first-time visitors are not a priority is not
9 possible. First-time visitors are a priority.
10 Right? So, we are done with saying okay, we are
11 going to see these guys and do all the
12 students, and then we will see a visitor. We
13 are really making sure that the visitors are
14 coming in now, and that is why the numbers have
15 been so big. And I think that this year, well,
16 hopefully in the next few months, we will see
17 big drops in the wait times.

18 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you for your
19 work on this. Thank you, Julie. If I could
20 push forward and now turn the floor over to
21 Deputy Assistant Secretary Jamie Lawrence,
22 Department of Homeland Security, for an update.

1 MS. LAWRENCE: Hi, Mr. Hornbuckle.
2 First, look, I am just glad you survived the
3 grand prix. The last time we saw you was in
4 August, and you were gearing up, and I would
5 just like to say your SEAR rating did get
6 better, so.

7 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you, I am
8 well aware of that, thank you.

9 MS. LAWRENCE: On behalf of
10 Secretary Mayorkas, I just really appreciate
11 everyone being here today, a lot of you are
12 familiar faces. You know, travel, the
13 efficiency of travel, is something that the
14 Secretary talks about often, in fact, we were
15 just on the west coast, and in Seattle
16 yesterday meeting with Satya Nadella and Adam
17 Selipsky about how we are going to harness AI
18 within the Department to make the travel
19 experience, among other things, better for
20 everyone, and this is something that we are
21 really committed to, is harnessing the use of
22 AI, so how can we work with our partners? We've

1 met with Mr. Altman, and we've met with Mr.
2 Amodei, and a lot of these guys in the Bay Area
3 again, a commitment from him to say, you know,
4 we know that we can use these tools in a safe,
5 ethical, way, to really help our customers.
6 And as the largest consumer, public-facing
7 federal agency, we take that responsibility
8 really seriously.

9 So, very happy to be here with you
10 today. I am going to turn over our actual
11 updates to my colleague Patrick, who is behind
12 me, who does a lot more of this work. We stole
13 him from CBP about a year ago, and again, just
14 want to say to everyone, this is top of mind
15 for the Secretary. He very much enjoys the
16 partnerships with many of you around this table
17 and please continue to pester us with your
18 concerns, what you are seeing in real time, at
19 airports or at ports.

20 In fact, we just came, Patrick and
21 I, we just announced our Supply Chain
22 Resilience Center, which we kicked off today.

1 We had all of our logistics partners, our
2 truckers, our railroads, our shippers, all of
3 our retail partners across the street at CBP,
4 talking about how we can improve the supply
5 chain, and I think that is very reminiscent of
6 some of things that we are trying to do in the
7 travel and tourism space. So with that, can I
8 give you this seat?

9 MR. SCHMIDT: I am happy to update
10 on that from here. I will try to keep this
11 relatively brief, thank you Jamie.

12 So as Jamie indicated, the Secretary
13 is very focused on the customer and traveler
14 facing experience, and certainly I have read
15 the TTAB recommendations, understand some of
16 the concerns and some of the priorities here.
17 I think where the Secretary's leadership has
18 really been focused is transitioning the
19 Department's kind of initial security focused,
20 security at all costs posture that has been
21 part and parcel of the Department for the last
22 20 years, and really balancing that with the

1 facilitative aspects of what we do.

2 Certainly that is easier said than
3 done, I don't mean to suggest we have solved
4 all of those problems, I have had serious
5 questions about that, but to the extent that we
6 are ejecting, as Jamie alluded, trying to find
7 technological solutions to some of these
8 traveler flow and travel experience problems,
9 we are certainly prioritizing that. AI, I
10 think, is key. I think a lot of what CBP and
11 TSA are trying to understand, and what the
12 Secretary is trying to lead with, is
13 understanding where tools like AI can be
14 useful, separating what may be kind of pie-in-
15 the-sky promises from the AI companies, and
16 really figuring out where the rubber meets the
17 road, how can that help us both manage
18 passenger data more effectively, identify
19 potentially bad actors more quickly, put the
20 data in the hands of our front line officers
21 and agents more immediately, allowing them to
22 adjudicate a traveler as rapidly as possible,

1 kind of taking as much of the back end and data
2 analysis work out of their work stream and
3 letting them focus on the passenger.

4 Hopefully that results in some kind
5 of positive interactions in overall customer
6 service, the beaming personalities that you all
7 hope for and expect from our CBP officers and
8 TSA agents, but overall -- please don't quote
9 me.

10 (Laughter.)

11 MR. SCHMIDT: Certainly, that is the
12 goal, again, really arming them with the tools
13 to enable them to do their jobs more quickly.
14 I think that is part of it.

15 The other piece is really on the
16 facial biometrics, for example. Enabling a
17 touchless, secure travel experience for
18 passengers. Essentially upon arrival, your
19 interactions with a CBP officer or a TSA agent
20 are relatively minimal, to the extent that you
21 are certainly required by law to interact with
22 these passengers to screen and clear them into

1 the United States or onto a domestic flight,
2 but in short, really trying to inject those
3 technologies where they make sense.

4 You probably, some of you,
5 experienced the TSA facial match-up. Hopefully
6 some of you in an international environment
7 have experienced mobile passport, using the app
8 to input your passport information using facial
9 comparison in Global Entry or at one of the
10 kiosks. Those are types of technologies that
11 have been around for a couple of years, but
12 really injecting them into all of the possible
13 channels, to these events where we are
14 certainly focused. Again, I don't mean to
15 suggest that we have achieved nirvana in this
16 space, but we are certainly trying to expand
17 this technological availability every way we
18 can, and looking to new tools like AI to inject
19 into that work stream.

20 The other piece I will briefly hit
21 on is staffing. From the hospitality industry,
22 airlines, et cetera, we have heard that

1 concern, we recognize that it is not specific
2 to the hospitality and travel industry, but we
3 have certainly heard it loud and clear from a
4 lot of our stakeholders and many of you as
5 well. I think the Secretary recognizes that
6 there are certainly a number of limitations in
7 the immigration sphere that I won't get into,
8 that I think you can understand on the
9 legislation side, but the Secretary is very
10 focused on looking for lawful pathways, and
11 maximizing those lawful pathways to the extent
12 we can.

13 Hopefully all of you saw on November
14 17th we announced expansion of the additional
15 H2-B visas. So, nearly 65,000 available for
16 the remainder of FY '24. Again, the goal of
17 getting that announcement out, I know there are
18 a lot of folks hammering at our door, knocking
19 at our door, trying to find out when that was
20 coming. The Secretary was very keen to push
21 that out as early in the cycle as possible so
22 that employers could put out those hiring

1 notices and start to recruit. I think the
2 Secretary, again, is using the limits of his
3 authority and finding what flexibilities where
4 possible to really push labor availability,
5 recognizing that it is (audio interference).

6 So, those are the two things on my
7 list, clearly high-level, but just wanted to
8 clarify where I think the Secretary is very
9 focused, and where Jamie and I are working very
10 closely, trying to, with our CBP and TSA
11 colleagues, we are trying. Certainly open to
12 criticisms, concerns, questions, it is our job,
13 I think, to take those and try and adjudicate
14 to the extent we can, but--

15 MS. LAWRENCE: We never get anything
16 good at these--

17 MR. SCHMIDT: Or, if you want to
18 offer your compliments, we'll take those. But
19 until then, I will stop for now.

20 MR. HORNBUCKLE: If I may, I do want
21 to sincerely thank the Secretary for calling.
22 Some of you may have heard, we had a little

1 cyberattack, and that first day I got a call
2 from the Secretary offering his assistance. So
3 pats on -- thank you for that, he's paying
4 attention, and it was well regarded. As well
5 as the upgrades, and certainly there was a
6 great presence for Formula One, people felt
7 safe, so given my commentary earlier, I thought
8 it was great.

9 Question, you mentioned staffing, as
10 a percentage, you back 90%, 80%? How do we
11 think about that?

12 MR. SCHMIDT: Well, I think it
13 differs, TSA and CBP. So, TSA, last I heard,
14 we were in the 90s, we are not completely
15 there. I think one of the priorities that the
16 Secretary often talks about from the
17 recruitment side, the challenge we have had,
18 and one that we resolved, fortunately this past
19 year, is pay equity for TSA agents. We got
20 them a pay raise. A long overdue one.

21 I think the Secretary is hoping that
22 helps with a few things, as you might imagine,

1 recruitment and retention chief among them, but
2 also I think the overall quality of the agent
3 we are able to recruit and maintain on board, I
4 think that is a key part of what I jokingly
5 referenced earlier, about ensuring that our
6 managers on the ground at airports, the folks
7 interacting with the traveling public, we are
8 getting a high-caliber individual. So I think,
9 again, we are trying to make sure we have the
10 right levels of staffing, but then the second
11 tier priority is to make sure that staff are
12 well prepared.

13 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you. Any
14 other questions from the room, or from the
15 screen?

16 MR. LIPP: It is encouraging to hear
17 that y'all are making progress on the
18 touchless, seamless travel, and that will be an
19 antidote to the staffing problems as well. So,
20 thank you.

21 MR. SCHMIDT: Yeah, that is our
22 hope. Certainly there are a lot of

1 requirements and statutes of TSA and CBP Agents
2 and officers doing law enforcement functions,
3 screening, et cetera, but the goal is to
4 minimize that to the extent.

5 MR. LIPP: Can I add something? I am
6 a member of the ASAC at the TSA, they all like
7 we are doing here, also looking at
8 accessibility and disability at the
9 checkpoints. We have a working group that has
10 put together recommendations similar to what we
11 did here. We present them on the 22nd, I
12 think, of February, so there is other inter
13 agencies that are working, that we can work
14 with the TSA, because it is all part of the
15 travel experience of someone with a disability.

16 MS. LAWRENCE: Absolutely, thank
17 you.

18 MR. FELLEMAN: Thank you. In the
19 spirit of not being complimentary--

20 MS. LAWRENCE: Please, the fact
21 that I haven't gotten a "gotcha" question yet
22 shocks me.

1 MR. FELLEMAN: I represent the Port
2 of Seattle, I am a part of the Sea Port
3 Alliance, where we deal with both the ships and
4 the planes. It has been a source of
5 consternation associated with the fact that we
6 have to pay structure for CBP to be at the
7 airport and the seaport, and it is an
8 inordinate expense.

9 MS. LAWRENCE: It's funny--it's not
10 funny, but the meeting that we just hosted, we
11 had a PA, we had the ports of Tampa and New
12 York, New Jersey, and Beth Ann, the New York,
13 New Jersey really focused in on that
14 infrastructure piece, the cost of it and the
15 need to both focus on U.S. manufacturing,
16 carbon neutral manufacturing, and that was a
17 big takeaway for the Secretary, that he wants
18 us to pull together, convening after. So,
19 happy to loop you in as we get moving on that.

20 MR. FELLEMAN: Thank you.

21 MS. LAWRENCE: Absolutely.

22 MR. HORNBuckle: Okay, I thank you.

1 If we could push on, now from the Department of
2 Transportation, Julie Abraham. Julie?

3 MS. ABRAHAM: Thank you very much to
4 the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board and
5 Secretary Raimondo and Chair Hornbuckle for
6 inviting me here today to share the Department
7 of Transportation's activity. In particular,
8 our update on the National Travel and Tourism
9 Infrastructure Strategic Plan, what we call
10 NTTISP. Assistant Secretary Peterson had a
11 testimony earlier before the Senate Tourism,
12 Trade and Export Promotions Subcommittee, and
13 during that, she recognized that this was an
14 industry that was incredibly impacted by the
15 pandemic, and that transportation
16 infrastructure will play an important role in
17 its revival and long term vitality.

18 And since January of this year, the
19 Secretary asked me and my team to lead the
20 effort on travel and tourism within the
21 department, so we have been hard at work,
22 working with RIND (phonetic) office and

1 Department of Commerce, and the interagency,
2 trying to get up to speed and make sure we
3 achieve our goals for the year. So within the
4 Department, we established a steering committee
5 comprised of all the operating administrations,
6 trying to get input from all of our modes of
7 transport on ways that we can improve and
8 inform the strategic plan.

9 And also we issued a request for
10 comment, many of you submitted comments earlier
11 to facilitate stakeholder input. In reviewing
12 this comment, we look at the national travel
13 and tourism strategy for us to inform the
14 structure of our upcoming NTTISP, specifically
15 aiming to facilitate travel to and within the
16 United States, ensure equitable, inclusive and
17 successful travel and tourism, and foster a
18 resilient, sustainable travel and tourism.

19 We are also incorporating many
20 aspects of the TOT strategic plan, Department's
21 submission, in terms of supporting mobility, by
22 extension, also supports travel and tourism.

1 And of course we are very grateful
2 to the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board for
3 the recommendations provided to Secretary
4 Raimondo and the Tourism Policy Council,
5 relating to the importance of multimodal
6 connections, addressing intelligent
7 transportation technologies, to address
8 congestion, addressing accessibility and
9 addressing transportation's impact on climate.

10 Which, I just came back from COP, and, you
11 know, the United States, it is the biggest
12 contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. And
13 as we looked at all of the input that we got
14 from our stakeholders, one common theme was
15 data, and the limitation on data and how
16 critical it is when it comes to long distance
17 travel and tourism. So, we will be looking at
18 that as we develop our NTTISP and identifying
19 the gaps that are there, and look forward to
20 your input and recommendations in this regard.

21 The American Travel Survey was
22 conducted back in 1995, and it was a major

1 undertaking then for the Department, but since
2 then we have not had the resources to update it
3 or its expensive data set, so we have been
4 working within DoT, with our Bureau of
5 Transportation Statistics, as well as with our
6 Commerce Department colleagues, so we can
7 identify resources to try to improve the
8 collection of data to address long-distance
9 travel and tourism. That is top of mind for
10 us.

11 And we are also, in the NTTISP, we
12 will be highlighting ways that DoT can utilize
13 the historic investments that we are seeing in
14 bipartisan infrastructure law, to improve
15 transportation infrastructure. And with that,
16 as you know, bill provided 670 billion in
17 funding to transportation infrastructure for
18 five years. This includes highways, transit,
19 rail, aviation, and also looking at pedestrian
20 and bicycle improvements. 7.5 billion from the
21 bill is supporting EV charging and 5 billion of
22 which is for building a network of high speed

1 chargers spaced no less than every 15 miles
2 along America's major roads and freeways and
3 interstates along the National Electric Vehicle
4 Infrastructure Program, which we call NEVIP.
5 40,000 projects from the bill are underway, and
6 just last week we saw in Ohio open the first
7 NEVIP funded electric vehicle charger, on the
8 path to making the great American road trip
9 electric.

10 Also, many of you saw on Friday,
11 President Biden, as part of the 36 billion,
12 through the federal state partnership, or
13 inner-city bill, announce equally two billion
14 awarded for 10 major inner-city passenger rail
15 projects across the country, including the
16 first world class high speed rail project in
17 U.S. history. This includes 3 billion for
18 Brightline West, developing a high-speed rail
19 system between Las Vegas, Nevada and Southern
20 California, and this 418 mile route is expected
21 to serve more than 11 million passengers
22 annually, taking millions of cars off the road,

1 and removing an estimated 400,000 tons of
2 carbon dioxide annually.

3 We also saw a record breaking
4 passenger throughput over Thanksgiving weekend.
5 Sunday, November 26th was the busiest day on
6 record for U.S. airports, according to our
7 colleagues at TSA. They screened over 2.9
8 million passengers. And our Federal Transit
9 Administration, on December 1, announced the
10 availability of 343 million of the 1.75 billion
11 that will be available in 2024 to make it
12 easier for people with disability and mobility
13 needs to access some of the nation's oldest and
14 busiest rail transit systems. So the
15 investment from the bipartisan infrastructure
16 law and also the Inflation Reduction Act will
17 enable, will continue travel and tourism both,
18 while ensuring safe, equitable, efficient and
19 sustainable transport.

20 So with that, we are nearing
21 completion of our National Travel and Tourism
22 Infrastructure Plan, and we hope to be sharing

1 it very soon in the new year. I look forward
2 to working with this committee, we are very new
3 to this, and appreciate being here today.

4 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Julie, thank you.
5 You know, I have been on a pitch, and it came
6 through in some of the letters that we wrote
7 about the whole of government, and to the
8 Secretary, the idea that you all would be here
9 today, and representing all the various groups
10 which are hard to get together, I thank you for
11 that.

12 I had an opportunity through this
13 committee to meet with the Secretary of
14 Transportation earlier in the year to follow up
15 on some of the recommendations that had been
16 made in '19, pre-pandemic. Obviously had a
17 pitch in for Brightline and the whole SE thing
18 (phonetic), and they listened and they heard,
19 and so I want to make sure the Secretary,
20 particularly from the Las Vegas perspective, we
21 say thank you. We are excited by that project
22 for obvious reasons, and we look forward to

1 understanding what the focus is going to be
2 coming out of the report, as it relates to
3 other tourism destinations, because there are
4 many of them with great needs, as we know, as
5 the report clearly indicated, but thank you for
6 that.

7 I have no questions, does anybody
8 else? I got what I need. Anybody else?

9 MR. BURKE: Julie, again thank you
10 for the really detailed report. One thing I am
11 curious about, submitting these inflations,
12 revisiting the DFC (phonetic), from an LA
13 perspective, we are fine. We are investing 30
14 billion in our airport. But I am very
15 concerned about not just the hubs but the
16 spokes. All the legacy carriers are investing
17 heavily in the hubs. Increasing the DFC I
18 think would be probably the easiest way forward
19 to shore up structure. Do you have any ongoing
20 discussion about that?

21 MS. ABRAHAM: We have been
22 discussing that.

1 MR. BURKE: One quick question--it
2 is encouraging to hear the alignment between
3 the National Travel and Tourism strategy, now,
4 I don't recall that, maybe it has been done
5 before, but I think this is going to move us
6 much, much farther forward. One question, once
7 your plan is final and released, is there a
8 formal communication effort with regional
9 transportation groups and state transportation
10 groups, because ultimately that is where the
11 impact is often felt with travel and tourism,
12 and you are setting a great example, but is
13 that part of the process to quote?

14 MS. ABRAHAM: We are, as I
15 mentioned, this is new to us, but part of our
16 plan is to do a lot more engagement with all
17 the states, and we are going to be working very
18 closely with Brian and his team as well, and
19 hope to be building longevity.

20 MR. BURKE: Certainly you can count
21 on the state and regional and local groups to
22 embrace that and help advocate for that at the

1 local level, you are opening the door for that.

2 MS. ABRAHAM: Yeah, We will also be
3 using our regional teams and regional offices
4 to push and advance that.

5 MR. HORNBuckle: Any other
6 questions? Okay, hearing none, if we could move
7 on then, to public comment. I think Chris
8 Thompson, you would like to say something? If
9 you are there, Chris?

10 MR. THOMPSON: Good afternoon, Mr.
11 Chair, thank you for your leadership. Thank
12 you to Brad, also. Appreciate the support from
13 Secretary Raimondo, Assistant Secretary Grant,
14 welcome to Deputy Assistant Secretary Lasry,
15 and also to Adam, our ongoing advocate for
16 access to our funding. But I will remind and
17 thank the TTAB for their support. Over COVID
18 we put together 250 million dollar
19 extraordinary request for funding and it was
20 granted. So, happy to say in this fiscal year
21 that began October 1st, we are deploying more
22 resource than we have ever been able to put

1 into market, nearly 2x, to the tune of 270
2 million dollars, which is a large, huge
3 increase direct to consumers, to try to drive
4 that demand that has always been there and get
5 them back to traveling again.

6 In doing so, we promote 50 states,
7 five territories, the District of Columbia,
8 urban and rural equally, and certainly
9 underrepresented markets as was discussed, like
10 accessible travel, inclusive travel, so really,
11 really appreciate it. No better demonstration
12 of the public-private partnership our industry
13 has than this representation and support from
14 Department of State, Homeland Security, and
15 DoT. Really, really appreciate all of your
16 commitments to helping us.

17 And then, lastly, I will say, we
18 look forward to facilitating the China Tourism
19 Leadership Summit, as it was represented, the
20 tourism year with Japan, and then certainly
21 over the next four years, we have major events
22 coming up. World Pride in D.C. in 2025, just

1 in 2026 we have America 250, Route 66
2 centennial, FIFA World Cup, and then,
3 certainly, Adam and LA are hosting the Olympics
4 in 2028. So, a lot going on already, and a lot
5 still to come, and I appreciate the ongoing
6 support. Thank you very much.

7 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thanks, Chris. Any
8 other public comments? I know there was nothing
9 that was written in.

10 MR. LEARY: I would just like to
11 say--Andrew Leary from Leave No Trace, really
12 nice to meet all of you in person and see some
13 familiar faces as well. Leave No Trace has
14 been really excited to follow along with what
15 Commerce, Secretary Raimondo, and the entire
16 team has put together for the efforts in China,
17 the emerging efforts with Japan and the year of
18 focus on Japan. Connecting back to
19 recommendations about adopting, promoting and
20 supporting this consistent message of what
21 responsible visitation looks like, when we
22 invite people to come to the U.S. and

1 destinations here, to help protect our assets,
2 to help uplift our communities without causing
3 unintentional harm, both to the environment as
4 well as those communities themselves.

5 We have been excited about this work
6 because Leave No Trace and GSTC, for example,
7 are working on a sustainable tourism symposium
8 in China for next spring, that is going to work
9 to talk about what responsible travel looks
10 like. And so that, in combination with China
11 attempting to get its national park system off
12 the ground, is a great opportunity to reinforce
13 what responsible travel messaging can look
14 like, not only in China, but when people come
15 to the United States, and that is where Leave
16 No Trace's crossover exists.

17 On the efforts with Japan, we
18 actually have a chapter of Leave No Trace that
19 operates in Japan, working closely with their
20 tourism industry as well, and so we are
21 thrilled to see that there is this year of
22 focus. And Mufi, as you pointed out, that

1 Hawaii really relies on Japanese visitors to
2 come and experience Hawaii and contribute, and
3 there is so much power in this uplifting
4 responsible visitation messaging. We don't
5 have to reinvent the wheel.

6 So Leave No Trace is an example, but
7 so is Hawaii. Which, Native Hawaiian voices
8 talking about what responsible travel is, is
9 the most appropriate way to convey that to a
10 Japanese traveler, and so there are already
11 resources that exist in my toolkit, that the
12 NHHA and the Hawaiian Travel Association have
13 put together, and so what an opportunity to
14 have consistent, reliable messaging that leads
15 back to communities and these opportunities
16 both in China and Japan over the next year plus
17 are really exciting to the Leave No Trace
18 Organization.

19 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you.
20 Stephanie, I see your hand. You are on mute,
21 Stephanie.

22 MS. JONES: Hello everyone. Thank

1 you. I just wanted to address something that
2 you brought up, Bill, about safety, and as we
3 are, as an industry, really thinking about how
4 we can work on addressing messaging around
5 safety to ensure visitors that the U.S. is a
6 safe destination, I would also like to suggest
7 that when we start working on a strategy, that
8 we consider engaging some of the smaller
9 stakeholders in destinations, specifically
10 small suppliers that do tours in local
11 destinations and local communities and
12 neighborhoods, you know, where there may be
13 some issues around safety. They are the, I
14 guess, the ambassadors, grassroots ambassadors
15 for our industry, in being able to provide
16 those local, immersive experiences to really
17 help people understand that local communities
18 in the U.S., while there are challenges, but
19 that is not the norm or it is not the majority
20 of destinations or communities within
21 destinations.

22 So, it would be great if we could

1 consider how we could also leverage those
2 smaller suppliers that represent marginalized
3 communities who are the ambassadors or telling
4 stories within their destinations who also can
5 spotlight the positive things that are
6 happening in local communities, you know, to
7 kind of offset some of the negative messaging
8 or those issues around safety as well as
9 addressing some of those misconceptions (audio
10 interference) safety that we have an
11 opportunity to engage some of the smaller
12 stakeholders and suppliers who are doing work
13 and spotlighting and telling stories in
14 different parts of destinations throughout the
15 U.S., to also service ambassadors to help
16 spotlight the positive things about local
17 communities in the U.S.

18 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you,
19 Stephanie.

20 MS. RHEEM: If I may.

21 MR. HORNBUCKLE: You may.

22 MS. RHEEM: I am Carroll, founder

1 and CEO of Iolite group, we are a strategy and
2 insights firm, and very focused on consumer
3 insights, particularly in the international
4 space, and for a long time, I have been doing
5 research, specifically on this issue of safety.
6 And while it is one that continues to come up
7 and an area where the United States does have a
8 challenge, I do think there is a difference
9 between that perception and actual decision
10 making, and travel decision making.

11 And in the past, like politics, we
12 have seen ups and downs in perceptions on these
13 issues around safety, but they very often don't
14 impact actual travel decision making.

15 And so while we need to pay
16 attention to the topic, I do think, especially
17 as we think about messaging and action items,
18 that we do take a deeper look at the difference
19 between perceptions in general, and those
20 perceptions that actually impact travel
21 behavior.

22 MR. HORNBUCKLE: How do we do that,

1 Carroll?

2 MS. RHEEM: Independent research. I
3 would be happy to dive into the topic with the
4 committee, as well as with the NTTD research
5 team, and certainly my former position was at
6 Brand USA, and I am pretty well familiar with
7 the research done there, and I think there are
8 a lot of great resources that we can draw upon
9 to help us on that.

10 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Because, perception
11 is reality, and so that would be important.
12 Thank you.

13 MR. BURKE: Mr. Chair, if I could
14 piggyback off of a couple of comments that were
15 made, specifically as it relates to
16 sustainability and equity and inclusion.

17 One concern I have, and I think we
18 have all started to see this, is after the
19 murder of George Floyd there was a lot of
20 emphasis in our industry on it, and that has
21 started to wane, and especially as we start
22 leaning on a stability plan, I think we need to

1 think of those two things as not being additive
2 to our work, but a through line through
3 everything we do, because whether we are
4 talking about work force, whether we are
5 talking about visitor dispersion, whether we
6 are talking about the impacts to stability, I
7 think the way that we avoid fatigue and really
8 get a whole industry approach, is to use those
9 as foundational pillars to everything that we
10 do.

11 Then the only other comment that I
12 would make is as we do really embark on more
13 serious journey around sustainability, I would
14 encourage us to try to embrace the UNSDG's, and
15 hopefully something like the GSTC framework,
16 because for the U.S. to really join the global
17 community on climate change and sustainability,
18 I think we need to use the globally accepted
19 methods.

20 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Any other comments?
21 Okay, if we could push on and Alex Lasry, I am
22 going to turn this over to you to talk about

1 new charges from the Secretary.

2 Awesome. Well, thank you Bill and
3 Brad for all the work that you have done. Also
4 I just want to thank Jen and Brian for all the
5 work that they have done in ensuring that our
6 office has been as successful as it has been so
7 far, and I got some big shoes to fill, but I am
8 excited to be able to hit the ground running.

9 So, with that I do want to be able
10 to provide some information on the next steps
11 for the TTAB. As the Secretary and Assistant
12 Secretary have mentioned, your recommendations
13 have been instrumental in the progress that we
14 have been able to make in ensuring that tourism
15 is back in the United States. We still have a
16 ways to go, but your recommendations have
17 really been instrumental in making sure that we
18 have been able to make the progress that we
19 have, which is why we are carefully reviewing
20 them, and also why, though, we have several
21 additional areas in which we would like to ask
22 for your input.

1 And so, to start, as most of you
2 know, the NTTTO is the official government
3 source for travel and tourism data, and as part
4 of that ongoing research effort, the NTTTO
5 collects information through the Survey of
6 International Air Travelers, or, as the
7 government loves our acronym, SIAT, on traveler
8 characteristics, which we match with other data
9 sources to provide information for the
10 industry. So we are currently looking at
11 opportunities to revise and improve the SIAT
12 and other data in the future.

13 So, for this charge, what we are
14 asking is that you provide recommendations on
15 the NTTTO's current collection of travel and
16 tourism data, and in what new areas the
17 government could provide information that would
18 be beneficial to the private sector decision
19 making. This is going to include a look at
20 current information collected by the SIAT and
21 providing recommendations on which data is no
22 longer needed or is outdated, and what new data

1 could be collected to enhance the industry's
2 ability to make informed decisions.

3 Second, travel and tourism has been
4 changing over the past decade, and due to
5 various factors, including varying traveler
6 preferences, new and emerging markets, shifting
7 infrastructure requirements, the need for
8 greater resiliency to climate change, labor
9 shortages in the sector, and the lingering
10 effects of the pandemic. So for this charge,
11 what we are asking is that you provide
12 recommendations on how the U.S. government in
13 collaboration with the private sector can plan
14 for any anticipated changes to the travel and
15 tourism landscape. We are asking that you look
16 at how travel and tourism might look in five
17 years from now based on current and future
18 trends, such as new destinations, AI and
19 technology, sustainable travel, booking
20 preferences and so on, and provide
21 recommendations on what types of data and
22 analysis from the U.S. government would be

1 helpful for that planning. Another key part of
2 this is going to be looking at what the US
3 Government can do to make sure that small
4 travel and tourism businesses in underserved
5 populations don't get left behind in this
6 transition.

7 And finally, as you all know, the
8 U.S. will soon be hosting several large scale
9 sporting events, including the 2026 FIFA World
10 Cup and the 2028 Olympics, and U.S. cities
11 continue to bid on hosting events.
12 Additionally, many of the professional sports
13 leagues in the U.S. are promoting games
14 overseas to attract an international audience.
15 So this charge is not asking for tickets or VIP
16 access, but instead what we are asking is for
17 recommendations on how the U.S. government in
18 collaboration with the private sector can
19 amplify travel and tourism around international
20 sporting events to highlight the U.S. as a
21 destination, collaborate with state, local and
22 tribal efforts to bid for international

1 sporting events, and use sporting events to
2 fully represent the diversity of the U.S.,
3 ensuring that more communities and underserved
4 populations can participate in the benefits of
5 these events.

6 Following this meeting, Jim will
7 follow up with all of you to communicate these
8 charges, provide a timeline for TTAB to work in
9 the months ahead, and ask you to self-select
10 into one of three subcommittees that will
11 develop recommendations in these areas. Really
12 looking forward to being able to continue to
13 get working on this, and to working with all of
14 you.

15 Again, you guys have been
16 instrumental in all of the progress that we
17 have been having, and I am looking forward to
18 getting to know each and every one of you. And
19 I just want you all to know my door is always
20 going to be open, anything you guys ever need,
21 don't hesitate to reach out, we are going to be
22 as transparent and collaborate as much as

1 possible. So just want to say thank you and
2 also thank you to Julie, Julie and Jamie for
3 coming here today. We really appreciate it.

4 (Laughter.)

5 MR. LASRY: So, thank you guys, and
6 Bill, I'll turn it back over to you.

7 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you, Alex, we
8 are excited to hopefully move forward, I know
9 which one catches my attention already. But as
10 Alex said, Jennifer will reach out, and we will
11 talk about those.

12 Again, I want to thank you Jennifer
13 for your help and your assistance through all
14 of this. You put stuff in front of me, and I
15 can read it, it is easy. But, no, look, I
16 think we have made some progress, so I am
17 excited, just in general by where we are going.
18 There is massive amounts of things to do, but
19 if you take a step back and you think about
20 some of the things that are out there, between
21 funding that the administration has provided,
22 between focus, between openly the Secretary's

1 focus here with us, hopefully reopening, and I
2 know she is focus on this keyword, China, I
3 think is a big deal for all of us, particularly
4 in the Southwest, and so we are excited about
5 the whole direction here.

6 So thank you for your work. Never
7 easy, particularly in the worlds in which you
8 live. I get to say please do this, and people
9 pay attention. Sometimes in government it is
10 harder, so we respect that and appreciate that.

11 Brad, I don't know if you have any?

12 MR. DEAN: Thank you for all the
13 great work, welcome, and again, thank you to
14 all the other agencies for being so supportive
15 and engaged.

16 MR. HORNBUCKLE: Thank you.

17 SECRETARY RAIMONDO: Thank you.

18 (Whereupon, the above-entitled
19 matter went off the record at 12:24 p.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the foregoing transcript


In the matter of: U.S. TTAB Meeting

Before: Department of Commerce

Date: 12-12-23

Place: teleconference

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