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July 30, 2021

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Madam Secretary:

We have been heartened to hear you say on a number of occasions that international travel is a priority for you and the administration. In one of your recent speaking engagements, you indicated that you would be working with the industries that have been hit the hardest.

To that point, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that the international inbound sector of the travel industry has been hardest hit by the pandemic, and that *hit* continues to be exacerbated by prolonged travel restrictions and entry barriers imposed by the administration in response to the pandemic.

While the entire travel industry was dramatically impacted by Covid-19, some parts of the industry are recovering as domestic travel comes back, but the international inbound sector is still at a dead stop. Inbound tour operators – businesses that are responsible for a significant portion of the positive trade surplus generated by travel and tourism exports - have been 90-100% down from their 2019 revenue since March 2020.

Our sector of the travel industry is made up of a diverse group of small businesses dependent on international travel to the USA, many of which will be without any revenue for two full years due to booking lead times and seasonality. Inbound tour operators are paid when the travel commences, so they will not see meaningful revenue until Spring 2022.

When there is a clear roadmap for the U.S. reopening to inbound travel, international travel bookings through inbound tour operators will resume, however, the ongoing travel restrictions, visa processing complications around the world and uncertainty created by not having a clear timeline may very well cause a break in the inbound travel infrastructure.

If the inbound travel bookings resume at the rate we've seen with domestic travel - and the pent-up demand suggests it will - the U.S. will not be prepared.

Inbound tour operators had to downsize to stay in business, and they will not be able to ramp up with the product and service quality that international visitors have come to appreciate. The industry's knowledgeable and skilled workforce remains displaced, and businesses will be relying on new, less-expensive employees and other employees doing double duty until such time that the revenue reaches their companies.

Many took advantage of the PPP and other SBA loan programs, but those funds are running out. These companies need financial support to bridge the gap to rebuild the infrastructure now.

There appears to be no direct opportunity in the EDA grant program for inbound tour operators, and we'd be interested to hear your thoughts on that. How can we stand up these companies and strengthen the inbound travel infrastructure to quickly restore the #1 services export for the USA?

On a related note, and in line with your workforce development initiative, IITA has an education and training program designed to train destinations and travel suppliers how to build international inbound business. We are doing our part to train the industry and prepare them for the coming wave of international visitors, but we need the inbound tour operators to survive as they in turn drive international business to other travel and hospitality businesses, like hotels, transportation companies, attractions, and restaurants, throughout the country.

We respectfully request that you consider allocating a portion of your economic development funds to put the necessary support in place to ensure a strong and smooth recovery of international inbound travel.

You may reach either of us at headquarters@inboundtravel.org or 859-955-9098. Thank you, Madam Secretary.

Most Respectfully,



Peter van Berkel
Chairman
President, Travalco



Lisa Simon
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cc: Isabel Hill

The inbound tour operators below support this request.

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