

Chip Rogers: Brand USA, the best way I can describe it is like the program you know there in Texas called Travel Texas, where Texas markets itself to the rest of the U.S. to have visitors come to Texas. Well Brand USA does that to the United States of America around the world. So, we market all the great things about the U.S. and encourage people around the world to come to our country and enjoy their time, realize how great America is, and spend a lot of money.

Celinda Hawkins: Give us an idea of some of the places that you feature, that you push.

Rogers: Well really Brand USA markets the entire country, and you can think about the U.S. Obviously, it's an amazing place but you know a lot of international visitors kind of view America as New York, or maybe Hollywood and Los Angeles. But there's a lot of great places, right there in Abilene, Texas is a great place. All across the country there are so many interesting things to do and what we find is that when visitors come here the first time they want to come back again because there's so much there to explore. But the challenge we are seeing is globally, more and more people are traveling and that is a wonderful thing, but America's market share has begun to decline. Back in 2015 we were at 13.7% of global market share, and at 2018 we were at 11.7%. So, we really need to turn that around because the economic impact of that is, frankly it's enormous. That 2% drop represents about 59 billion dollars of economic activity and about 120,000 jobs right here in the U.S. So, we need to market how great the U.S. is, encourage people to come here. When they come here and spend money jobs are created and it's wonderful for everybody.

James Williams: Does your data show where people are going? Who we're losing to?

Rogers: Well a lot is happening in Europe, as you might expect and there's reasons for that. One problem is, the U.S. dollar is so strong internationally it's a little more expensive to come to the U.S. than to other places. So, there are good parts and bad parts when it comes to a strong dollar, but travel into the U.S. when you have a strong dollar is a little more difficult. The second thing is, in and around Europe it's very easy to travel now. You have the European zone and these low-cost carriers, so it makes it much less expensive. But I think the third thing, and it's the problem in what Brand USA does is that frankly up into the last few years we've just not done a good job in marketing the U.S. As I mentioned earlier with Travel Texas, we know that works when you market Texas to everybody else in the U.S., guess what, more people show up in Texas. It's good for the Texas economy, we've only begun doing that the last few years with Brand USA. And right now, Brand USA funding has not yet been reauthorized, it needs to be reauthorized by 2020. What we really need to do is make sure our members of Congress understand that this is a marketing tool that has a huge return on investment. When we market the U.S. to the rest of the world, people show up and the returns are amazing. And by the way, these are not public dollars, these are private dollars. The way the program works is when someone comes to the U.S. they pay a small fee on their travel VISA to come to the U.S. and then private sector companies here in the U.S. match that money dollar for dollar, and then that fund is used to market the U.S.

Hawkins: If Brand USA loses funding, then what happens?

Rogers: Well the interesting thing is, the fees will still be collected. It'll just be money that goes into the government, I guess used or some may say wasted in other places. What we think is, this needs to be reauthorized. If it doesn't get reauthorized, there will be no more marketing of the U.S. And what that is going to mean, all across the country, not just New York and L.A., but places in Texas. Fewer people are

going to come to the U.S., there will be fewer jobs in tourism and hospitality, and there will be less economic activity. And by the way, just to remind people, anytime a visitor comes to the U.S. and spends money, and the average international visitor spends about \$4,000, that is calculated as an export. So, when people come to the U.S. it is also helping our trade imbalance as well. So, this is really a win win win program across the board. It's no cost whatsoever to the taxpayers, it creates jobs, it creates tax revenue to the U.S., and helps our trade imbalance.

Hawkins: Chip, where can our listeners go for more information on this?

Rogers: You can always go to our website AHLA.com you can also go to the Brand USA website which is TheBrandUSA.com, and they'll find all sorts of information there. Congress sometimes doesn't even do the things that are painfully obvious to everybody like the commonsense things. And this is one of those things they really need to do. Set aside partisan differences, republicans support this, democrats support this. So, let's get this done, let's continue bringing people to the U.S. One thing I forgot to mention is, when people come to the U.S., studies show they go home to their home country with a much more favorable view of our country. So, if we're trying to export the goodness of the U.S. let's bring people here and let them experience how great our country is and they'll go home with a good story to tell.