

Fred Holland (host): So, to kind of recap this whole Brand USA thing, when foreign visitors come here and they apply for a VISA there is a fee that is paid. And that goes to money that is matched to kind of promote America, right? And now all Congress has to do is reauthorize it. When does it expire?

Chip Rogers: It expires in 2020, but kind of the way Congress does business is not in the real world, so to speak. In the real world, on the private sector, everyone that is looking at their 2020 expenditures; they're budgeting for that right now. They're preparing for it. Congress of course waits for the last minute and that's why we're urging people to call their members of Congress, tell them to reauthorize it, because as I said: this costs no taxpayer dollars, it promotes the entire United States not just your few large markets, and it works it creates jobs. And as you said a moment ago, its other people's money let them come here, enjoy our country, spend a lot of money, create American jobs, and then go home and tell their friends. And that's something I forgot to mention earlier, the studies have shown that when somebody comes here to the U.S. and then they return home their approval rating of the United States jumps to 70% from the mid-20s. It's really an amazing tool to spread the goodness of our country around the world.

Holland: You know and we southerners take pride in the fact that maybe we're friendlier than other places, and maybe it's because I've found this with people I know from Japan. They come here and they're like "wow," and it's so much culturally polite like them. And we have those, Eastern Europe I find the same when I run into people from Eastern Europe. They love us more than probably some of the other folks like England, France, and Germany and that kind of thing.

Rogers: Well there's no question about that, southern hospitality leans around the world. And we want people to come to Huntsville, we want them to visit the space center and enjoy the mountains of North Alabama. And enjoy some barbecue and boil peanuts, which they probably don't get at home.

Holland: Well I don't know if you can take them home, I don't think they'll let you take them on the plane. So, in reality how many dollars are we talking about? This is a big chunk of the economy, right?

Rogers: It really is, and we've tracked what Brand USA has done so far, and if we look just going back to 2013, and tracking the visitors that we know responded to messaging came to the U.S. based on the Brand USA effort. We see about \$47 billion in economic output, and about 52,000 American jobs created by that. And by the way, that also means about \$6.2 billion in federal, state, and local taxes. So, if we're not promoting our country and people are going elsewhere, we're missing out on the jobs, we're missing out on the revenue, and even the tax revenue. This is, like you said big business. It's a no-brainer as they say in politics, Democrats support it, Republicans support it, everybody supports it, but Congress just needs to get off their rear-ends and just make it happen.

Holland: Alright so who are the people, obviously we need to let our own representatives know, but are there people already championing this? You got some people making sure this kind of gets taken along the way or are you really worried that there might be one of these that slips through the cracks kind of thing? And that's why we're talking.

Rogers: Yeah, it's really a priority issue right, and unfortunately what you see happening at least on the house representative side, I mean they're tied up in a lot of investigations and things like that. And frankly, I don't know too many Americans who really care about that. It certainly doesn't help or hurt anyone's lives, it's just almost a waste of time. So, we need to tell our members of Congress that you

know, if you want to do that that's fine, but get this stuff done first. Get the most important stuff done first. On the Senate side you've got a Democrat and a Republican representing Alabama, they both said they support it, but they've got to make it a priority. And so that's really the key here, is not just saying "oh yeah I'm for it," they'll all say I'm for it, but you need to get them to say "I'm for it, I'm gonna get it done," so that's what we're really looking for.

Holland: Alright let's say Congress farts around, they don't get it done, what are the repercussions as far as Brand USA is concerned?

Rogers: Well we'll see fewer people come into the U.S., that number will continue to decline. Because of that there will be less people in hotels, less people eating in restaurants, less people visiting museums and parks and amusement parks, and you know we're going to miss out on these great travelers. Who, by the way, the average international traveler spends on average \$4,000 per person when they come to the U.S. And while we love our domestic travelers, and domestic travel is up significantly in the last few years which is great, but domestic travelers spend about 25% that amount, so yeah. Because the trips are shorter, and sometimes they're just by car, and if you want to invest in coming to the U.S. you want to spend some time here.

Holland: Wow, 4,000, that's awesome, wow. Okay, so where do we go from here with this? I think it's a 25 to 1 return on investment, how many places can you invest like that? I mean, that's it?

Rogers: Hey the stock market's been good, but nothing compared to this. 25 to 1 investment, and so people ask often, "well why is this so urgent?" Because all these private sector businesses that are willing to invest their money right now today, they're doing their budgets and they are doing their budgets right now. So, if we don't get this passed by the end of this year a lot of folks who previously invested into this are just going to come back and say "hey we don't have the money," and so it's going to be delayed yet another year. So, we've really got to get Congress to reauthorize it. When they do, it's an authorization for 5 years. And then, all the private sector businesses can count on this for the next 5 years. Because they're out there willing to invest, they just want the matching dollars so we can really magnify what we're doing globally.

Holland: So, this is big stakes, and again we're talking other people's money that's the key here right?

Rogers: Exactly. It's important to the whole nation's economy. And by the way one thing I didn't mention is that when somebody comes to the U.S., it's counted as an export. So, when they spend their money, the foreign visitor, and those exports last year, we had a huge surplus in travel dollars. And it offset our overall deficit for trade by 11%. So, this helps our trade deficit as well.

Holland: Wow, so even with the dollar being a little strong, this is an opportunity to gain some ground. Look, that's the other thing, people don't mind spending if they see value and we've got some great value here, and we've got some of the greatest natural resources in the world and the people want to come see them, right?

Rogers: Just our national park system. If you took out everything else and people just enjoyed our national park system, they will be amazed, they will come back, they will want more. Think about in your own state on the Robert Trent golf trail. Somebody goes and plays on one of those courses, they want to play all those courses. And that's kind of the theory here for the U.S., they come to the U.S., enjoy one park, and then they look around and think there's a lot more to view here.