

Cyrus Webb (host): Tell them a little bit about what Brand USA is.

Chip Rogers: So, I guess the best way to describe it in a way that probably is familiar to everybody there in Mississippi is, you have a program in Mississippi named Visit Mississippi which is the marketing arm to let people around the United States know about how great it is to come to Mississippi and enjoy all the wonderful things there. Brand USA is really that same type of marketing arm, but to the rest of the world for the United States. So, what we're trying to do, and what Brand USA has successfully done, is market the brand of the United States to the rest of the world and encourage international visitors to come here and enjoy all the wonderful things our country has to offer. By the way, when they enjoy it, they spend about \$4,000 on average per visitor. Which is why it's so important economically for us to not just maintain what our global market share is, but actually grow that market share so more and more people come to our country.

Webb: I'm so glad you make that correlation, because Visit Mississippi has been one of the great things I've enjoyed while traveling around the United States talking about things people don't even know about Mississippi, being able to share it with them. It's great that Brand USA has been able to do that, and the impact it's been able to have. So, since it is so important Chip, people might wonder then if it is a program that is showing that it's had an impact, then why is it now at risk?

Rogers: Well, unfortunately it's just that lawmakers have not made it a priority. I know that it's probably frustrations by everyone as you look to Washington D.C. and scratch your head and say what are they doing? Well I don't know if I can answer that with a great answer, but what I can say, what they're not doing is reauthorizing Brand USA and they really need to get to it. It's certainly not a partisan issue, when an international visitor comes here they aren't asking is it republican business or democrat business, they're spending their money at every business and we know that the numbers bear that out. In fact, if you look at international travel—where we've been and where we are, if you go back to 2015 our global market share was 13.7%. In 2018 that had dropped to 11.7%, so a 2% decline. You may be asking well is that really that big of a deal? Well, 2% represents 59 billion dollars in economic activity and about 120,000 jobs across the U.S. that we didn't get. And some of that certainly would have gone to the great state of Mississippi. So even locally, you just look at Mississippi hotels. And we're not talking about restaurants or theme parks or anything else, just hotels there are over 700 properties in Mississippi, they support over 81,000 jobs today. There will be more properties, there will be more jobs, if we get more international visitors. So, we need to get Congress to focus on things that matter. And this is certainly one of those things that matter, because it is a win for everybody. American taxpayers win, American jobs are created, people that come here have a much better view of the United States. In fact, a study shows that when someone travels to the United States and then they go home, they have a 70% favorable view of the U.S. and that's wonderful for us because they are spreading the good word about the U.S. to their friends and neighbors back at their home country and then more people come to the U.S. so it really works.

Webb: And Chip, to that point, I'm so glad you mentioned that about the lawmakers because one thing that I thought about when I was prepping for this segment is that a lot of times people, one of the big things that always comes up is cost. Can you talk a little bit about, one of the things I found that is so interesting is that it's not a cost for the taxpayer, this is something that is coming from the international visitors fees and from the private sector. Can you talk a little bit about that and why, in that respect, it's

not something that the American people should wonder about, ok is this another thing that we're paying for?

Roger: I'm so glad you brought that up, because that's critically important. You might say oh this is another one of those government programs that is wasting my tax-dollars. In fact, A: it absolutely works the return on investment has been proven. We've seen it again and again, that every dollar invested brings back a lot more than a single dollar. But the best part about it, as you mentioned, is that there are no taxpayer dollars that are being used. The money is collected when someone comes to the U.S., so the visitor coming in pays a small fee, when they get their VISA fee coming to the U.S., and private sector companies and industries here in the U.S. match that money dollar for dollar up to a pool of a hundred million dollars. And that one hundred million dollars is used to market the U.S. to the rest of the world, so there's no taxpayer dollars being used, we're encouraging foreign visitors to come into the U.S. and spend their money, which by the way create more local tax dollars here in the U.S. for us, and we're exporting the good name of the U.S. to the rest of the world. So, I really, when I talk to my lawmaker friends I'm like—guys I'm not sure what you are waiting for but this is a win for everybody.