

**Mitch Carr (host):** Let me start you with a very basic question. What is Brand USA?

**Roger Dow:** Brand USA is, very simply, the promotional arm that promotes America around the world and it's an entity that's paid for by visitors who come here, and the travel industry. Not a penny to the US taxpayers but has a great benefit by telling people to come here and they spend \$250 billion when they visit the US.

**Carr:** How important is international travel?

**Dow:** International travel is huge. One, spend \$250 billion here, more important it's \$69 billion pause or bounce of trade. It's huge when it comes to jobs. International travelers stay an average of 16 nights, they spend \$4,300 per person, and the best thing is they go home after leaving all their money here and say good things about America and tell their friends to come here. It's a gift that keeps on giving.

**Carr:** Now it is a gift though that, at least according to some of the headlines and anecdotal reports we've seen, is not paying off as well the past few years. We've seen reports that international travel is down because of the political climate around the world, and the global economy for that matter. What's the situation?

**Dow:** Yeah what's happening is we're actually flat at the moment. But the problem is the rest of the world is up 6-8 percent. So, we're losing share, when you think of the share of the long-haul travelers. To put it in perspective, in 2015 we had 13.7% of all international visitors come to the US. Last year was 11.7% and you might say, hey 2% that's not bad. Well that 2% is equal to almost \$60 billion and 120,000 jobs. So that's the challenge, and it's not just the political climate. That's a small factor, the big factor is we're so successful from a dollar standpoint that it's more expensive to come here. So, we've got to overcome that by making it more attractive and more exciting to come to America and Brand USA does that.

**Carr:** Well Brand USA is also, as I understand it, facing a budget issue. What is it next year, Congress has to come up with more funding?

**Dow:** What basically happens is, Brand USA is authorized, and that's a keyword, authorized, every five years. It doesn't take a penny from congress. It's brilliant the way the thing was put together, the visitors who come here every two years pay \$14, and the industry has to put dollar-for-dollar to get it out so it's just a matter of Congress reauthorizing the collection of the money. It's not a nickel from Congress, and it has a positive benefit as they say of billions and billions of dollars without having to spend a penny. And this is a competitive world Mitch, I'll tell you. The rest of the world is saying come to China, come to Mexico, come to Thailand, and if we're silent we're going to lose even more. It's so important to get Brand USA reauthorized.

**Carr:** Now I remember that Brand USA was created a few years ago. But was it last year that the Visit US coalition was also set up, your US Travel Association was involved, as well as the Gaming Association and others?

**Dow:** Yeah, a whole bunch of groups that depend on travel started looking. The Restaurant Association, the US Chamber, The Retail Federation, when people come here what do they do? They shop, they eat. All those people, the American Hotel and Lodging Association. So, we put something together called the Visit US Coalition, Franchise Association, McDonalds, places like that, all saying to the government "Hey, we've got to get international travel." It is so important to our economy. Just reauthorize the thing it's no skin off your nose, and the bottom line is when it's reauthorized, it keeps bringing more business. Without Brand USA we'd probably be losing \$70 billion over the next five years.

**Carr:** I guess that brings up the question, why wouldn't they, if it doesn't cost taxpayers a dime, why wouldn't this happen?

**Dow:** It's the ultimate no-brainer. It's got bipartisan support. We've got 50 members of the Senate who've said reauthorize it now. We've got over 100 members of congress. So, it's a matter of just getting it on the docket for someone, for the Congress to vote, and the Senate to vote. It's just a matter of getting it on a vehicle, and the government is moving slowly these days. This is one of those things, Democrat, Republican, it doesn't matter it's good for America.

**Carr:** Roger thank you very much

**Dow:** Thank you, always a pleasure Mitch, thanks.