

Cyrus Webb (host): It does seem as though America's share of global travel has declined, and this is not only affecting our revenue but also jobs as well. One of the organizations that has been working to be able to work with the travel industry is Brand USA. They not only have tried to maximize the economic and social benefits of travel, but also, of course, have been able to be very involved as far as jobs as well. Well unfortunately, they may be at risk. But to talk to us about what they do, and also how they can be saved, is Roger Dow. We're excited to welcome the president and CEO of the US Travel Association to our program to talk to us more about Brand USA, as well as of course what you guys should know about the work that they're doing. Mr. Dow hello to you and welcome to the program.

Roger Dow: Hi Cyrus, great speaking with you.

Webb: The pleasure is definitely all mine. In prepping for this segment probably many people would be surprised as I was, I did not realize you guys have been around for a decade. And doing the work that you guys have been able to do, so why don't we start there. Why don't you tell us what Brand USA is?

Dow: Sure, Brand USA started 10 years ago. The rest of the world had promotional arms to promote their countries. Come to China, come to Thailand, come to the Caribbean, all funded by their government. As a travel industry we stepped back and said, hey we could probably do this on our own. So, what we did is we got passed by Congress something where visitors pay every two years, \$14, and it goes into a big pot, but no money can come out of the pot until the travel industry puts dollar-for-dollar in. So that's grown into a \$200 million fund, and Congress had to authorize it. But it's been going on for 10 years so it's basically the industry and our visitors selling America to future visitors. So, it's a brilliant thing but it has to be reauthorized or it expires in 2020 which would be a shame. It would kill international business, and be really harmful to places like Mississippi, and smaller places around the country that really depend on international travel but don't have the money to go budget as much as they can to get international travelers.

Webb: And Mr. Dow I noticed also on the website, and we're going to be getting to that a little later, one of the things Brand USA uses a lot is the hashtag of VisitTheUSA, another one is SeeTheUSA. So why is this international tourism so important to the economy here in the United States?

Dow: International tourism is phenomenally important because of several things. One, they stay a long time. Visitors that come from outside the United States stay an average of 16 nights. Two, they spend a lot of money. They spend \$4,300 per person per trip, and the Chinese spend like \$7,000 per person. So that's why it's so important, it reduces our trade deficit. We've got a \$69 billion positive trade deficit from travel, which is very helpful to the economy. And lastly, they come here, they leave their money, they go home, we don't have to fill their potholes, educate their kids, or give them healthcare, and they go home and tell all their friends come to America it's a really great place. So, it's public diplomacy, it's money, and it's jobs.

Webb: So, I think that really shows the importance of travel of course internationally, but also what Brand USA has been doing. So, I guess the question would be why is the program at risk, if it is seen as so important than why is there a risk of it expiring?

Dow: Well it is authorized five years at a time, and even though it's not one penny from taxpayers, the government collects it, so they see it as their money. A year or two ago in a budget caps bill, too technical to get into for your listeners, bottom-line they were trying to find a bunch of things to make up for the budget. And they threw Brand USA in the basket of cost-savings. And we said, now that's silly, why would you want to cut something out that you don't pay a penny for that brings billions of dollars? Since 2013 Brand USA has brought \$47 billion and 52,000 jobs to the US. It would be silly to lose \$100 million. The problem is it's so small, it's big to industry and big to America, but it's so small the government we've got to get it on some vehicle where Congress would say, yup we made a mistake, let's reauthorize it again for the next five years because it adds so much to our economy. And I said earlier, it's so important to places beyond New York City, Orlando, Las Vegas, the traditional places. But it levels the playing field so everybody can be in the game in this great thing called international travel.

Webb: I definitely want to end this on an optimistic tone. So how can Brand USA then, as I mentioned in my introduction, we're not only talking about travel we are talking about revenue and jobs, I mean how then can Brand USA be saved?

Dow: It's really simple, when Congress comes back, and they're coming back next week, they just have to put it in a vehicle to vote for it. We have 50 members of Senate, Democrats and Republicans all say we're all for it. We've got over 100 members of Congress saying we're all for it. So, it's just a matter of getting it on the docket. The challenge is government thinks that hey if we reauthorize it the night before it expires that's cool. The problem is, we need it now because that's how people set their budgets. And so, we've got to get it reauthorized and it's really simple. Congress just has to come back, put it on the docket, attach it to something and it's done. It's a no-brainer as I said, we just have to get Congress to step-up and act, but a lot of acting doesn't happen in Congress these days.

Webb: And as you mentioned, next week is actually a big week not only of course for Congress coming back, but also Brand USA has Travel Week in Europe. I saw that when I visited the website, for our audience out there Mr. Dow, I definitely want to encourage them to visit the website it's www.TheBrandUSA.com, there you can also find them all over social media as well. To be able to keep up with the work that they're doing. But also, the hashtags that I mentioned there, VisitTheUSA, SeeTheUSA, definitely going to be able to use those to show the importance and the impact of course of the American economy when it comes to international tourism. Mr. Dow thank you so much for taking out this time I really appreciate it and I hope you'll come back again.

Dow: Anytime Cyrus, good speaking with you.

