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| cid:image001.jpg@01D2A958.8799B760   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** [Megan Taylor](mailto:Megan_Taylor@heller.senate.gov) | | March 30, 2017 | 202-224-6244 |   **Heller Urges DHS to Strengthen Travel Security to Protect Nevada Tourism**  **Washington, D.C.** – Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) today sent a letter to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary John Kelly urging him to bolster safety and security operations at the agency, highlighting the importance of providing the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) with the resources it needs to maintain safe and efficient aviation travel in order to protect the Nevada tourism industry. Heller’s letter [coincides](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/03/29/trumps-travel-ban-could-cost-18b-us-tourism-travel-analysts-say/99708758/) with reports that the Administration’s executive order restricting temporary travel from six countries could cost the U.S. $18 billion in tourism.  In the letter, Heller expresses concern that DHS is redirecting its resources away from critical components of the travel system, which would have a direct negative impact on the Nevada tourism economy and its ability to compete. Heller points to recent administrative actions at the McCarran International Airport (LAS) in Las Vegas, where the airport is effectively losing six agents at the port of entry despite steady increases in international travel traffic.  ***The letter reads in full***:  Dear Secretary Kelly:  As the Department of Homeland Security develops more specific proposals that align with the initial Fiscal Year 2018 budget request released on March 16th, I respectfully request that you work with Congress on measures that bolster the operations and the security of the U.S. travel system.  Any effective budget must afford the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) the resources necessary to maintain a safe and efficient aviation and surface transportation system, bolster U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) efforts to secure our nation’s borders while improving international traveler and consumer goods processing, and provide at-risk communities the resources and support necessary to combat terror threats.  I am concerned that the Department is already shifting resources away from critical components of the travel system to meet other objectives within its mission.  The President’s topline budget request for each executive branch agency is an important step in the annual budget process, and I recognize each agency is tasked with difficult fiscal decisions.  It is important that the Administration and Congress work together to reduce federal spending, decrease the deficit, and implement efficiency measures to ensure your department accomplishes its mission effectively.  Implementing common-sense policies that enhance U.S. national security while supporting tourism and improving the consumer experience is a delicate balance.  As we have previously discussed in person, an effective Department of Homeland Security is essential to Nevada’s economic competitiveness.  Tourism plays a central role in our local economy, and your agency’s integral role in the travel system is important to its success.   In 2015, over 55 million people visited Nevada, totaling over $64 billion in travel spending and generating $3.2 billion in tax revenue for state and local coffers.  The tourism industry employs nearly half a million people, roughly 30 percent of our workforce, and its impact is only growing.  Efficient security screenings, conducted by both the TSA and the CBP on domestic and international travelers respectively, are essential to travel.  Concurrently, unnecessary disruptions to the travel system significantly impact the consumer experience, and studies show those negative feelings disproportionately damage communities that rely on tourism.  It is my understanding that administrative actions are already being taken that could result in disruptions to the Las Vegas tourism economy.  Three CBP vacancies were recently eliminated and three officers previously stationed at the port of entry at the McCarran International Airport (LAS) were reassigned.  This is a troubling development given that Las Vegas drew a record 42.9 million visitors, last year, which included an uptick of 2.2 percent in international travel.  That momentum was carried into 2017, with international travelers increasing 5.8 percent in the year-to-year comparisons, from almost 254,000 in January 2016 to a little more than 268,000 this January.  Given my commitment to fiscal conservatism, I am fighting to ensure the federal government lives within its means, and I applaud this Administration for its efforts to this end.  Reducing wasteful spending and deficits are important to our nation’s economic competitiveness. With that said, responsible budgeting does not and should not disrupt our nation’s travel system.  In my role as a senior member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, I have long prioritized federal policies that improve travel security while boosting our tourism economy.  I stand ready to partner with you to reduce federal spending in a manner that ensures your Department has the resources it needs to protect our nation, support a robust tourism economy, and facilitate commerce.  Thank you for your consideration.  Please feel free to contact me with any questions.  Sincerely,    DEAN HELLER  U.S. Senator  ###  [cid:image002.png@01D2A958.8799B760](http://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Senator-Dean-Heller/325751330177)[cid:image003.png@01D2A958.8799B760](http://twitter.com/SenDeanHeller)[cid:image004.png@01D2A958.8799B760](http://www.youtube.com/user/SenDeanHeller) |