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**ICYMI: Heller and Blunt Lead the Charge to Renew Brand USA Program**

*In Opinion Piece, Senators Urge Congress to Act to Sustain Tourism Program that Supports Millions of Jobs, Generates Billions*

**Washington, D.C.** – U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Roy Blunt (R-MO), who serve as co-chairs of the U.S. Senate Travel and Tourism Caucus, are leading the charge in Congress to renewBrand USA, a program established by Congress to encourage travelers from around the world to visit the United States. The tourism industry supports more than 15 million jobs in this country, and last year, the Brand USA program generated $4.1 billion in incremental visitor spending, resulting in a marketing return on investment of 29:1.

In an [opinion piece published in The Hill](http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/economy-budget/405996-congress-must-act-to-continue-attracting-international), the senators, who represent Las Vegas and Branson – two cities that together welcome nearly 50 million visitors annually, urge Congress to act to sustain the program. You may read it below or by clicking [HERE](http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/economy-budget/405996-congress-must-act-to-continue-attracting-international).



**Congress must act to continue attracting international travelers to America**

By U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Roy Blunt (R-MO)

<https://bit.ly/2Qk916p>

As a melting pot, the United States offers one of the most diverse and culturally unique travel experiences in the world with something for every traveler – world-class food and shopping, endless museums, towns both small and large, and every type of scenic landscape imaginable.  One day you can be in Las Vegas, the Entertainment Capital of the World known for its shows, shopping, and exceptional hospitality, and the next you can take a quick flight to amazing parks, outdoor concerts, and one-of-a-kind dining discoveries in Branson, Mo.

Despite all we have to offer, our country is not keeping pace with the global travel boom. More people than ever before are getting on planes to visit places outside their own country—up a whopping [7 percent in 2017 alone to 1.3 billion](https://www.travelweekly.com/Travel-News/Airline-News/Worldwide-tourism-arrivals-increased-7-percent-in-2017). And those globetrotters are some of the most lucrative drivers of economic activity, spending an average of [$4,360 per person](https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Fact-Sheet_US-Travel-Answer-Sheet.pdf), per trip when visiting the U.S. However, our market share of total long-haul travel fell from [13.6 percent in 2015 to 11.9 percent last year](https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/roadwarriorvoices/2018/01/19/number-international-visitors-usa-declines/1047492001/).

That's a missed opportunity of seismic proportions—[7.4 million fewer visitors, $32 billion in missed spending, and 100,000 fewer U.S. jobs](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-05/trump-s-china-tariffs-stoke-travel-industry-concerns-of-decline) than if we'd kept our market share of just two years ago.

Consumer markets don't shift on a whim. Whenever you see a TV commercial inviting you to visit Mexico, or Italy, or Australia—or Las Vegas or Branson, Mo., for that matter—it's because an agency called a destination marketing organization paid for the ad. As you can tell just by watching an afternoon of TV, it's a hyper-competitive marketplace.

But the U.S. didn't have a destination marketing organization for the entire country until 2010, the year [Brand USA](https://www.thebrandusa.com/) was created by Congress. Never heard of it? That's likely because its mission is to entice travelers to come to America from abroad. All of its activities, from advertising to providing information on how to get a U.S. visa to what to expect at U.S. Customs, take place in other countries.

Brand USA has added more than its share of value. In 2017, [Brand USA spent $140 million on its marketing expenses while generating $4.1 billion in incremental visitor spending, resulting in a marketing return on investment of 29:1](https://www.thebrandusa.com/media-events/news/brand-usa%E2%80%99s-marketing-efforts-fiscal-year-2013-responsible-increasing).

Other countries spend what we would consider to be insane amounts of per-capita tax dollars on this kind of activity. Not so for Brand USA, whose funding comes from a fee on foreign travelers entering the U.S. along with matching private-sector funds kicked in by the travel and tourism industry. It is the very model of an effective public-private partnership, a framework increasingly sought after by federal policymakers for many different kinds of programs.

The international travel spurred by Brand USA is more important than ever. Travel, a services export, has a net-positive trade balance of [$77 billion](https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Fact-Sheet_US-Travel-Answer-Sheet.pdf). Travel overall supports [15.6 million jobs](https://www.ustravel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Fact-Sheet_US-Travel-Answer-Sheet.pdf) that cannot be outsourced to other countries.

Brand USA is due to be renewed by Congress. All members should support the renewal so that private-sector supporters have the certainty they need to continue investing in this program. Reauthorizing will also allow BrandUSA to effectively plan its promotion activities over the long-term, as well as to send the message to travel-dependent businesses and communities—not to mention people all over the world—that America is serious about wanting legitimate business and leisure travelers to come here.

Republicans and Democrats in Congress are firmly aligned with each other and with the White House in our desire to see America prosper from coast to coast and everywhere in between. Renewing Brand USA long-term is important for the economy, as well as the perfect opportunity for bipartisan cooperation—something the American people tell us over and over again they crave. We join together in supporting the renewal of Brand USA.

Sens. [*Roy Blunt*](http://thehill.com/people/roy-blunt) and [*Dean Heller*](http://thehill.com/people/dean-heller) are co-chairs of the Senate Travel and Tourism Caucus.

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