

# Remarks at Travel and Tourism Advisory Board Meeting in Dearborn, Michigan

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## **Acting Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank Remarks at Travel and Tourism Advisory Board Meeting in Dearborn, Michigan**

Thank you, Todd. Thank you for all the work that you have done and will be doing to help increase travel and tourism in the U.S. I know you are serving on this Advisory Board solely because you care about this issue. I also want to thank Congressman Dingell. It's an honor to have you with us. We all know that you're a long-time advocate for Michigan's travel and tourism industry.

It's great to be in Dearborn—home to the Henry Ford Museum, the Arab American National Museum, a thriving downtown, and much more. Dearborn is one of the reasons that tourists come to Michigan from all over America and throughout the world. You have a full agenda with subcommittee reports as well as reports from my colleagues in the Administration, so I'll be brief. And I'm going to apologize in advance for having to leave a little early for the opening of our new satellite location of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office in Detroit.

As you know, strengthening our economy and creating more jobs remains the number one priority for President Obama and all of us in the administration. We've had 28 straight months of private sector job growth, totaling 4.4 million jobs. Of course, we have much more work to do before the economy is back to the levels of growth and activity that we all want to see.

As one of our strongest sectors, we're counting on the travel and tourism industry to play a key role in helping increase economic growth and job creation. And the good news is, we're already seeing this happen.

In fact, today, I'm pleased to announce that, in May, international visitors spent nearly \$14 billion in travel to, and tourism-related activities within, the U.S. That's one billion dollars (8 percent) more than May of last year, and it marks 29 straight months of growth. This also means that we are on pace for a record-setting year with international visitors having spent over \$68 billion so far—up 12 percent compared to last year. We also recently announced that the number of actual visitors to the U.S. is also up from last year. And the gains are widespread. Eastern European visitors are up 13 percent, African visitors are up 20 percent, and Asian visitors jumped 27 percent.

At a time when many U.S. industries are growing more slowly, it's good to see tourism as a high-growth bright spot in our economy. It's clearer than ever that this industry is one of our key national strengths. So, we must build on that strength in order to help businesses create more jobs.

Therefore, the work we are doing here today has never been more important.

I hope that all of you are as excited as I am about the potential of the National Travel and Tourism Strategy. President Obama has charged all of us with achieving a goal that is both ambitious and reachable: 100 million annual visitors spending \$250 billion in the U.S. by 2021.

There are five core elements, of the Strategy:

- Promoting the U.S. by encouraging travel and tourism from abroad as well as urging Americans to travel within the country;
- Enabling and enhancing travel and tourism by reducing barriers and increasing the ease with which visitors can enter the U.S. and its territories;
- Offering great customer service and visitor experiences to achieve high customer satisfaction and to inspire repeat visits;
- Coordinating across agencies to make the most of the federal government's resources and organization; and,
- Conducting research and measuring results, which will empower leaders in both the public and private sectors—including all of us—to make the best possible decisions, while also allowing us to track our progress over time.

Before I turn the floor over to Ken and others, I want to hone in on that first element of promoting exports. You all know what most average citizens don't often realize that foreign visitors increase America's exports because they involve foreigners buying U.S. goods and services. So, more foreign tourists translates to a reduced trade deficit and stronger U.S. economic growth.

One of our priorities at the Commerce Department is to push forward with the President's National Export Initiative. The goal is to double exports by the end of 2014, and we've already made strong progress. For example, last year we had an all-time record of \$2.1 trillion in U.S. exports. Our services exports reached \$606 billion – with travel and tourism-related exports representing over one-fourth of that.

Most important, we've seen the number of export-supported jobs increase by 1.2 million from 2009 to 2011. Given the economic slowdown in Europe and elsewhere, it will be challenging to keep our manufacturing exports growing strongly in the near term. This is one reason to put time and energy into the National Strategy, because we believe that we can continue to increase foreign tourism even in the face of challenges such as the Eurocrisis.

In addition, the work that we're doing here with TTAB will be critical to the efforts of the Tourism Policy Council. As you know, the council brings together the resources across the federal government.

Next week I will be chairing a meeting of the council, where the council's agencies will present updates on their progress in implementing the National Strategy. They will then organize into working groups that will focus on the elements within the Strategy. And we will start to pin down specific commitments from agencies that will help to achieve our goals.

By September, each agency will prepare an action plan—complete with deadlines and defined metrics—that will take us through the end of next fiscal year.

It's critical that those working groups and the subcommittees of this board work closely together, and I want to thank you in advance for your contributions.

Again, thank you for being here in Dearborn. We all know how important travel and tourism is to our economy. I look forward to our discussion.