

UNITED STATES TRAVEL AND TOURISM ADVISORY BOARD

April 23, 2021

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Madam Secretary:

Thank you for placing your confidence in us to make recommendations regarding the use of technology to aid in the recovery and improve the resilience of the travel and tourism industry. In addition to the previous recommendations made on the use of technology to facilitate travel and security, the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board has developed additional recommendations in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

We have divided our recommendations by timeframe. Our first two recommendations cover the short-term and request that: (i) the U.S. Government provide clear recommended standards for technology providers regarding vaccine, previous infection, and testing verification, and (ii) the U.S. Government make COVID-19 mitigating therapeutics available as soon as possible to the industry.

Our third recommendation covers the next ten years and focuses on how technology can be used to identify and defeat emerging pathogenic threats before they are able to inflict significant damage to our citizens, our industry and our nation. This threat is existential to our industry, primarily because of our inability to rapidly and effectively detect who is infected. Technology can be used to solve this problem if standards are developed and adopted by the U.S. Government and protocols are properly deployed. This will mitigate future threats and dramatically reduce the likelihood of future airborne diseases from propagating through the traveling community and our citizenry undetected.

Recommendation #1: That the U.S Government take a leadership role in recommending secure technology standards where users, rather than centralized organizations, store and control data used for vaccine, previous infection and testing verification for COVID-19 and future disease outbreaks.

We agree with the Administration's current guidance that verification of COVID-19 status should be secure, simple, free, open source and accessible, both digitally and on paper. However, organizations are grappling with efficient methods of establishing individuals' COVID-19 vaccination, prior infection and testing status. We believe the U.S. Government should recommend clear standards for verification technology that addresses interoperability, accessibility, information security, and where users, rather than centralized organizations, have complete control over their personal data and are able to provide proof of their COVID-19 status

without exposing sensitive health information to third parties. Timing is important as the European Union is proceeding with developing standards that rely on centralized methods for storing and verifying this data via their national healthcare systems.

By recommending standards for use domestically and internationally for trusted, reliable and efficient verification procedures, the U.S. Government will ensure friction in the traveler journey is reduced and assist with the return of confidence to the travel marketplace. If required for travel, research shows many travelers support some method of vaccine or prior infection verification, provided data security, privacy and control concerns are properly addressed. This same technology could also be used to support other use cases such as conferences, events, mass gatherings and future disease outbreaks. Without clear leadership to drive standardization and interoperability, these initiatives will likely fail and the recovery of the travel sector, where leisure travel is slowly starting to recover but where international business travel remains down nearly 90%, could be further delayed or permanently impaired as a result.

By assuming a leadership role in the establishment of recommended COVID-19 status verification standards, the U.S. will be able to bring coordination, restored confidence and improved resilience to the traveler marketplace and assist the industry in recovering more quickly.

Recommendation #2: That the U.S. Government invest in the development and distribution of COVID-19 therapeutics in a manner similar to Operation Warp Speed.

We believe that the travel and tourism industry, more than any other, would benefit from the U.S. Government focusing on the development and distribution of therapeutics, in a manner similar to Operation Warp Speed, for use preventatively and by those with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19. By investing in therapeutics such as those being developed by Regeneron, Eli Lilly, Sorrento Therapeutics and others, travelers and our citizens will benefit from a reduction in both the likelihood and severity of COVID-19 infection. Doing so has the potential to render COVID-19 less contagious and less dangerous than the average seasonal flu. This would significantly reduce the risk profile of the disease and allow for greater margins of error at ports of entry and in other environments. Making these therapeutics available to travelers and mass gathering participants will have a significant impact on our industry's recovery and be essential for individuals who lack access or are unable to be vaccinated.

Recommendation #3: That the U.S. Government develop capabilities to identify, detect and respond to COVID-19 and emerging pathogenic threats by leveraging improvements in technology, including technology that detects active infection of COVID-19 (and emerging human vectored diseases) on exhaled breath.

While the COVID-19 pandemic was the first in a century, it will not be the last, and future pandemics have the potential to be much deadlier and more destructive. The danger of this future threat cannot be overstated and the travel and tourism industry is unfortunately the likely delivery mechanism for these future diseases. We need an early warning mechanism, not dissimilar to how the Department of Defense is alerted when one of our adversaries launches a missile, to know when and where an airborne disease capable of killing our citizens, destroying

our industry and damaging our nation has arrived on our shores. To be effective, our top priority as an industry and among the top priorities of our government, should be establishing the resources to prosecute an immediate identification, detection and response (IDR) strategy. We believe the technology and intellectual capital exists to effectively mitigate the next pandemic if we have the political will to implement.

This strategy should include establishing requirements for testing that detect active infection of COVID-19 and emerging human vectored diseases on exhaled breath. Examples of these technologies exist today and are being developed by the private sector in places like Ohio State, Ben Gurion University and other locations. The issuance of government requirements and the creation of public sector demand would undoubtedly speed development. The technology should:

- a. Yield highly accurate results (>98%+)
- b. Process results rapidly (<30 seconds)
- c. Be non-invasive
- d. Be portable
- e. Be available in form factors to operate at scale
- f. Be available in form factors for consumer and commercial use

By supporting the research and development of this technology in a manner not dissimilar to that provided to enhance airport security technology after 9/11, the U.S. Government will enable transformative improvements to the resilience of the travel and tourism industry, industries that rely on mass gatherings, and our national security.

The U.S. Government has a leading role to play in both helping restore our vitally important industry and ensuring that future human vectored pathogens do not cause the same devastating loss of life, economic destruction, and national security degradation that was inflicted by COVID-19. Leveraging existing technology and investing in its continued development is key to ensuring that similar or more severe events are successfully mitigated in the future.

Respectfully submitted,



Kurt Ekert
Chair



Brad Dean
Vice Chair