Improving Business Travel at the U.S. Border

Background: Global business travel is dependent on the efficient movement of international travelers from country to country, of which the United States (U.S.) remains a priority global destination. Allowing an environment that decreases that efficiency within the U.S. means a loss of revenue for U.S.-based companies and a decrease in the number of face-to-face meetings. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), through Customs and Border Protection (CBP), has worked to fulfill its mission 'to secure the nation's borders and protect the American people and economy while facilitating legitimate trade and travel since its creation. As a part of its mission, CBP has used a variety of tools to assist with the verification of travelers, both domestically and internationally. Although these tools have evolved over time, and especially since the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks, it focuses on the deployment of enhanced software screening technologies to verify that a traveler is who they say they are. In 2001, a biometric requirement was added to the verification process in order to collect the noncitizen arrival and departure of travelers.

Issue: Business travelers want a safe and efficient aviation security network - time savings, efficiency, increased productivity and cost savings all factor into the shared desired outcome. Congress can improve the cross-border traveler experience.

Additional CBP officers at the airport: Current estimates demonstrate how CBP is short 6,000 officers across the system. This shortage results in a reduced number of agents at airport Customs checkpoints, which subsequently causes longer lines and a less efficient experience for U.S. and global business travelers.

End diversion of the 9//11 Security fee: The TSA's 9/11 Passenger Security Fee, implemented to fund TSA operations, has a partial diversion. The diversion of the 9/11 Passenger Security Fee funds—approximately $1.3 billion per year—diverts dedicated funding away from TSA to the U.S. Treasury General Fund, theoretically for deficit reduction. This dedicated fee diversion significantly impacts airport operations. TSA has less discretionary funding to hire staff, modernize screening equipment, and adapt to seasonal travel spikes, resulting in reduced flexibility 1. Many airports continue using older technology instead of faster and more advanced Computed Tomography (CT) machines. Budget constraints have slowed the progress of TSA pilot programs and upgrades to streamline security, such as touchless screening and AI-based scanning. Consequently, fewer Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) are available during peak hours, leading to longer security lines and more traveler complaints. TSA often requests emergency funding or relies on airports to supplement staffing at checkpoints. These actions impact TSA's

ability to upgrade its baggage screening machines, again leading to longer wait times. The diversion of the 9/11 Passenger Security Fee is to expire in Fiscal Year 2027, ensuring the money collected will be fully invested into security improvements.

Fully implement U.S. Entry/Exit system: The U.S. also needs to fully implement its Border Exit program.   The biometric entry system was fully implemented in 2006 for foreign nationals. The biometric exit system, unlike entry, is not completely operational and facial recognition technology Traveler Verification Service (TVS) captures about 60% of foreign nationals departing the United States through commercial air carriers.

GBTA believes Congress should continue to work towards the successful implementation of CBP's Biometric Entry-Exit Program in order to ensure the safe and efficient arrival and departure of travelers at our nation's air, land and sea POE's.

In order for Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries to remain in the program, countries are required to have an overstay rate of 2% or less for the previous fiscal year. Additionally, for countries not in the VWP, travelers applying for a visa can be impacted by a country's overstay number. For travelers applying for a Visa, having stronger data would enhance their arguments for entry into the U.S. for business travel.

Solution: As Congress debates the Reconciliation bill, language should be kept that does the following:
1. Supports funding for the hiring of 5,000 additional CBP officers
2. Rejects efforts to extend the diversion of the 9/11 Passenger Security Fee
3. Supports additional resources for CBP's implementation of the Entry and Exit Program in order to speed the safe facilitation of business travelers at our nation's POE's.

Additionally, please support S. 1678, the Securing America's Ports of Entry Act, introduced by Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) and Senator Gary Peters (D-MI). The bill would seek to address personnel shortages at U.S. ports-of-entry by requiring CBP to hire no less than 1,000 additional officers annually until the agency's staffing needs are fully met. Current estimates show CBP short nearly 6,000 officers across its system.