

Travel industry praises lawmakers for adopting measures to improve US image

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The **Travel Business Roundtable** (TBR) and **Travel Industry Association** (TIA) praised leaders in Congress for passing legislation focused on improving America's welcome to overseas travelers. The Senate passed the Fiscal Year 2008 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (S. 1644). According to TIA, the legislation includes measures that strengthen United States security while making the entry process for international travelers more welcoming.

An amendment offered by Senators Mel Martinez (R-FL) and Susan Collins (R-ME), SA 2404, authorizes an International Registered Traveler (IRT) Program. The program would expedite the inspection of frequent U.S. and international travelers arriving by air into the United States, thereby enhancing security by placing more attention on lesser-known travelers.

An amendment offered by Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK), SA 2475, provides \$40 million to create a model airports program at the 20 U.S. airports receiving the most overseas inbound travelers, including additional U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers at those ports. The program's goal would be to create a more efficient and welcoming arrival process for international visitors and returning U.S. citizens in an effort to promote increased travel to the U.S. while enhancing security. This funding would also provide necessary resources to hire and deploy 200 more CBP officers at these high-volume international arrivals airports in order to alleviate wait times at those facilities.

"Senators Stevens, Martinez and Collins are true champions of the travel and tourism industry, recognizing that investments can enhance security and present a welcoming environment to our guests and returning citizens. The industry is also grateful to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) for their steadfast support of the industry and for securing our amendments in the final passage of the bill," said **Jonathan M. Tisch**, chairman of the Travel Business Roundtable and chairman and CEO of Loews Hotels.

The bill, authored by Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Ranking Member Thad Cochran (R-MS), will now be reconciled with a House version of the DHS Appropriations bill.

"Travel and tourism is so closely tied to our nation's homeland security. We applaud our nation's policymakers for recognizing the importance of international travel to our economic security, our diplomatic efforts and national security," said **Roger J. Dow**, president and CEO of the Travel Industry Association.