

AH&LA Applauds Inclusion Of Travel And Tourism Funding In FY 2008 Omnibus Appropriations Bill

2007-12-20

The American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA) commends Congress today for inclusion of funding for initiatives important to the travel and tourism industry in the fiscal year 2008 omnibus appropriations bill (H.R. 2764), which passed the House by a vote of 272-142. This action comes one day after the Senate passed the legislation by a vote of 76-17.

'We are extremely pleased that the House and Senate have included important provisions in the omnibus bill, which have a significant impact on the travel and tourism industry,' said Joseph A. McInerney, CHA, AH&LA president and chief executive officer. 'In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the resulting sharp decrease in the number of foreign visitors to the United States, this is another proactive way businesses involved in travel and tourism have worked to develop a way to make this country more appealing as a travel destination for overseas visitors.

'In order to make this effort truly effective, there must be funding in place that will allow for faster visa processing, greater security, and a more welcoming and efficient entry into this country,' said McInerney. 'The funding this bill provides will help us to achieve all three, and to once again make the United States a top tourist destination.'

The most important provisions of H.R. 2764 include:

\$40 million in funding for the development of a 'model ports' program at the top 20 of the country's inbound international airports, which will be used to create a more welcoming environment for foreign visitors and allow for more efficient processing of their entry into the United States,

Funding for the hiring of 200 additional Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers, who will be crucial in reducing processing times for international visitors at these airports,

Establishment of an International Registered Traveler (IRT) program, which will reduce processing time for frequent United States and international travelers and allow CBP officers concentrate security efforts on those who travel less frequently,

\$26 million for the development of an Electronic Traveler Authorization (ETA) program, which will be used to collect information from potential travelers and assist in determining their eligibility to enter this country through the Visa Waiver Program (VWP),

\$5 million for the development of mobile consular teams, which will allow access to consular services for millions of international travelers who do not live near a consulate or embassy, and

\$225 million for the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI).

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