

EXAMINING DHS'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE PROCESSING FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

FIELD HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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EXAMINING DHS'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE PROCESSING FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
Las Vegas, NV.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 12:04 p.m., Commissioners Meeting Room, Harry Reid International Airport, Hon. Bennie G. Thompson [Chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Thompson, Jackson Lee, Correa, Cleaver, Titus, Watson Coleman, Demings, and Langevin.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Committee on Homeland Security will be in order.

The committee is meeting today to receive testimony on examining DHS's efforts to improve processing for international visitors.

Without objection the Chair is authorized to declare the committee in recess at any point.

Good morning. I want to begin this hearing by thanking Congresswoman Dina Titus for bringing the committee to Las Vegas to examine how the Department of Homeland Security can improve visitor processing. Congresswoman Titus is a leader in Congress on this issue and a champion for Las Vegas tourism because she knows how critical it is to this community and its economy.

Las Vegas received over 42 million visitors in 2019. After dropping off due to the pandemic, the numbers of visitors is on the upswing. Harry Reid International Airport saw a 66 percent increase in passenger volume from March 2021 to March of this year. The number of international passengers increased 800 percent during that time, though it remains below pre-pandemic numbers.

As travel continues to resume, it is essential to let visitors know that America is ready and welcomes their return.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to see first-hand some of the good work TSA is doing here at Harry Reid International Airport to develop new innovative technologies for its checkpoints. I also observed some of the engagement CBP has made in recent years to strengthen and facilitate international visitor processing. Improvements like these are essential to not only strengthening security and serving as a force multiplier for TSA and CBP personnel, but also improving the passenger experience. A good experience at the airport gets a visitor's trip off on the right foot and makes them more likely to want to return.

I hope to hear from our TSA and CBP witnesses today about the progress they have made and what more can be done as travel rebounds from the pandemic. I also look forward to hearing from our

airport and Las Vegas and Convention and Visitors Authority witnesses about what the Federal Government can do to help.

Finally, I want to commend the men and women of TSA and CBP, Harry Reid International Airport, and all those who have worked tirelessly under extraordinarily difficult conditions while during the pandemic to keep the traveling public safe and secure. We appreciate your hard work today and every day and recognize that without you American travel and tourism would not be possible.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

MAY 24, 2022

I want to begin the hearing by thanking Congresswoman Dina Titus for bringing the committee to Las Vegas to examine how the Department of Homeland Security can improve visitor processing. Congresswoman Titus is a leader in Congress on this issue and a champion for Las Vegas tourism because she knows how critical it is to this community and its economy.

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Chairman THOMPSON. With that, I thank the airport for hosting us today and recognize the gentlewoman from Nevada, Ms. Titus, a tireless advocate for the people of Las Vegas on this committee and in Congress, for any opening remarks she may have.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for bringing your committee here. I know you have a lot to do with the other committee that you are chairing where we always see you on TV, but we know also you are quite a champion for TSA and what goes on in homeland security.

Thank you, Reverend Cleaver, for coming from St. Louis, Missouri and that part of—central part of the country to join us today in Las Vegas. I really appreciate it. I am glad to have you here because you will get to hear directly from the people at the airport and know that what I have been telling you all this time is really true, because you will hear it straight from them. The work that they do here to help our hospitality industry is just incredible. I was glad you got to have that behind the scenes tour of the new

security system here at the airport because we are really leading the way with that technology.

You know, when I used to go through this airport to Washington on the weekends, every 3 or 4 people on the plane, it was just very eerie. Now air travel is really making a comeback. But we still have a way to go. With the 191 international passengers just last month, we want to be able to meet the challenge. So that is why we want to be sure we have enough people, enough technology, and are ready to say welcome.

In 2020 CBP introduced simplified arrival processing with biometric technology. That is one of the ways that we are kind-of leading in the field. But unfortunately when travelers get here and the numbers spike, CBP we realized lacks the personnel needed. We believe there is a shortage of about 900 CBP officers across ports of entry. So we need to do everything we can to strengthen the work force by hiring more personnel and working to mitigate these shortfalls.

As you will hear from our witnesses, as the trend increases and more tourists come to our city, their trip does begin at the airport. If you have a bad experience there, it kind-of tempers the way you feel about the rest of the trip. So we are proud to host the Nation's only TSA innovation checkpoint, and that has again got the latest technology. So we are doing all the right things, but we know we need to do more, and so that is why we are having this hearing.

The President has recognized this increasing demand, and you see that reflected in his new budget. I am also pleased that there is a great increase from last year of \$1.4 billion. So that will certainly be helpful. That includes \$105 million for checkpoint property screening systems and \$19 million for own-person screening algorithm development—whatever that is. I am sure we will find out.

In Congress this past month I was proud to vote in favor of a TSA work force bill led by our Chairman recognizing all the service that we get from TSA and improving their conditions and pay and benefits. So I think we have a great partnership here. I want the committee to hear about it, and we want to learn from you ways that we can make it even better.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield back.

[The statement of Honorable Titus follows:]

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSWOMAN DINA TITUS

MAY 24, 2022

Thank you to Chairman Thompson and to all the committee staff for ensuring this important field hearing could take place. I am so pleased to have you all in my district to discuss the important work Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) are doing to encourage international travel to and from the United States while bolstering the security of aviation travel.

This field hearing is a great opportunity for our members to get a behind-the-scenes look at the exciting new security technologies these travel agencies are using to facilitate seamless processing. As we bounce back from the economic downturn of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that we ensure no tourist or visitor is discouraged from traveling to our country because of processing delays or long wait times.

Despite low travel rates due to the pandemic, air travel is making a significant comeback, particularly as we approach the summer months. Visitation trajectories

from March of this year are 50 percent above what they were in March 2021, bringing the number travelers and tourists to over 3 million in March of this year. Just last month, the Las Vegas Airport had nearly 191,000 international air passengers.

CBP officers ensure that international travelers coming into the United States are screened properly before enjoying the many attractions Las Vegas has to offer. In 2020, CBP introduced Simplified Arrival processing using biometric technology—a privacy-protective, efficient, and secure way to utilize new technologies for enhanced screening. Initiatives like these are what will catapult our airport security efforts into the future while meeting increased travel demands.

Unfortunately, as travel numbers spike, CBP still lacks the personnel needed to meet this demand, with a shortage of at least 900 CBP officers across ports of entry. CBP should do everything possible to strengthen its workforce by hiring more personnel and working to mitigate these shortfalls with automated technologies. We now have an optimistic traveler forecast as we move toward the next phase of this pandemic—let's take that opportunity to augment CBP capabilities and meet the need.

As the witnesses from our tourism authorities will tell you today, this positive trend is expected to increase. We must continue to support our travel agencies so that tourists come to our city with positive travel experiences, a sense of trust in our security processing, and a desire to come visit again.

Here at Las Vegas Airport, we are proud to host the Nation's only TSA Innovation Checkpoint, which features the latest upgrades in technology to improve security and the passenger screening experience. I understand Chairman Thompson was able to tour the Innovation Checkpoint yesterday and I hope some of you will be able to take a walk through before you head home back to your districts.

Since its establishment in 2019, the Innovation Checkpoint at Terminal 3 has allowed TSA employees to observe and evaluate new technologies in a real-time, lab-like environment. It includes four Automated Screening Lanes integrated with Computed Tomography scanners, allowing for uninterrupted screening of carry-on luggage. TSA is also testing a CT scan unit designed to recognize coding and divert bags that need follow-up screening.

Given our diverse and varied passenger profile utilizing our airport, the Innovation Checkpoint serves as the perfect opportunity to pilot new security technologies without sacrificing reliability or efficiency.

In the 9 years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Las Vegas set a record for annual passenger volume, with 51.5 million travelers visiting our city in 2019 via the airport. In recognizing increasing demand, President Biden has laid out a fiscal year 2023 budget to improve TSA security capabilities and ensure employees are better paid, valued, and eligible for well-deserved benefits.

I am pleased that the President's fiscal year 2023 budget requests \$9.7 billion for TSA, a \$1.4 billion increase from last year's funding level. This number includes \$105 million for the Checkpoint Property Screening System program and \$19 million for On-Person Screening Algorithm Development to improve screening capabilities, intended to improve detection of threats in an ever-evolving landscape.

In Congress, I was proud to vote this month in favor of a TSA workforce bill which improves conditions, pay, and benefits for all 60,000 employees so that they feel empowered to do their job to keep air travel safe. Supporting this workforce is an essential part of the homeland security goals that this committee has advocated for.

Thank you again to all of you for being here today. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

In my other life, when I used to come to Vegas before I was a Member of Congress, I enjoyed myself. After becoming a Member of Congress, I was given what was called back of the house tour at the casinos to kind-of show me how things operate. So I was privileged yesterday to see the back of the house tour here at Harry Reid International Airport. I must say, not as many bells and whistles at the casino, but you get it right. So I was very impressed with what I saw and obviously I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on exactly what is going on.

So other Members of the committee are reminded that under the committee rules opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Honorable Jackson Lee follows:]

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE SHEILA JACKSON LEE

MAY 24, 2022

Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Katko thank you for this opportunity to hear from the Department of Homeland Security on DHS representatives on initiatives that facilitate travel for international visitors to the United States, as well as steps taken at airports to protect the traveling public and DHS personnel from COVID-19.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses:

PANEL 1:

Mr. Carlos Martel, director of field operations, Los Angeles Field Office, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP);

Ms. Karen Burke, Federal security director for Nevada, Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

PANEL 2:

Ms. Kate Mik, chief marketing officer, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA); and

Ms. Rosemary Vassiliadis, director of aviation, Clark County Department of Aviation.

I view the work of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as vital to our Nation's homeland security.

These agencies share the mission of protecting the Nation's transportation systems and border entry into the United States to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce.

The Committee on Homeland Security provides the needed policy guidance and funding to ensure that the TSA and CBP have what they need to create and sustain the most effective transportation security as a high-performing counterterrorism organization.

This hearing affords Members of the committee the opportunity to hear from DHS representatives on initiatives that facilitate travel for international visitors to the United States, as well as steps taken at airports to protect the traveling public and DHS personnel from COVID-19. Witnesses will also discuss the importance of efficient processing for tourism.

The work of the TSA is a front-line Department of Homeland Security, and it is not easy—it can in fact be very dangerous.

Like many of my colleagues, I recall the shooting incident at LAX that killed Gerardo Hernandez, who became the first TSA officer killed in the line of duty; and the machete attack at the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport that resulted in injuries to Senior Transportation Security Officer Carol Richel.

These incidents only highlight the difficult work that the men and women of the TSA must perform each day to keep our Nation's airports and flights safe.

Following terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there was urgency to have a whole-of-Government response to secure the Nation's commercial aviation.

On that day nearly 3,000 people were killed in a series of coordinated terrorist attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

The attacks resulted in the creation of DHS, which was designed to prevent similar attacks in the future by removing the responsibility for transportation and border security from private entities.

The work of DHS has evolved to include other threats such as the global pandemic caused by COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic and various travel restrictions resulted in significantly decreased air passenger volume Nation-wide.

CBP processed more than 44 million travelers in fiscal year 2021, which is a decrease from 62.1 million in fiscal year 2020 and 135.7 million fiscal year 2019.

Despite the decline in air travel, DHS has expedited the inspection process for millions of international travelers during the pandemic.

As COVID-19 restrictions ease, the Harry Reid International Airport is seeing significant passenger growth.

In March 2022, the airport recorded more than 4.2 million passengers, which is a 66 percent increase from March 2021.

With respect to international passengers, the airport recorded more than 154,000 international passengers in March 2022, which is an 800 percent increase from March 2021.

However, numbers are still well below March 2019, when the airport recorded 305,000 international travelers.

According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority Research Center, Las Vegas received more than 42 million visitors in 2019; 19 million visitors in 2020; and 32 million visitors in 2021.

International visitors comprise about 3 percent of Las Vegas's visitors.

DHS uses biometric technology, automated kiosks, preclearance, and trusted traveler programs to streamline the processing of international travelers.

CBP has enhanced the traditional inspection process to expedite processing and reduce airport wait times.

An airport's infrastructure, size, and layout determine which travel initiatives can be implemented.

Some travel initiatives, like preclearance and biometric exit, are implemented via private-public partnerships, and these also depend on the airport stakeholders' ability to fund the initiatives. CBP's initiatives include:

- *Simplified Arrival*.—CBP uses biometric facial comparison technology to complete their inspection process in seconds.
- *Global Entry*.—Global Entry allows expedited inspection for pre-approved, low-risk travelers to the United States.

U.S. citizens, along with citizens of 12 countries, are eligible for membership if they pass a rigorous background check process.

Members use Global Entry kiosks, submit their fingerprints for scanning, and complete a customs declaration. Global Entry kiosks are available at 14 preclearance locations and 61 U.S. airports, including the Harry Reid International Airport.

In fiscal year 2021, Global Entry membership grew by 4.1 percent making total membership to 7.4 million people.

To keep up with growing membership, CBP launched facial comparison pilots at Dallas and Los Angeles airports to reduce the time needed for processing at Global Entry kiosks.

The facial comparison transaction takes 5 seconds versus the 40–45 seconds at legacy kiosks.

- *Automated Passport Control (APC)*.—Instead of filling out paper customs forms, international visitors can use APC kiosks to scan their passport, take a photograph, submit biometrics, and answer CBP inspection-related questions.
- *Mobile Passport Control (MPC)*.—The Mobile Passport Control (MPC) application allows U.S. citizens and Canadian travelers to use their smartphone to enter their personal information for inspection.

After travelers submit their passport information, self-photo, and answers CBP's inspection questions, they receive an Encrypted Quick Response (QR) code, which they present to a CBP officer for final inspection. MPC is currently available at 31 U.S. international airports, but not yet available at the Harry Reid International Airport.

- *Preclearance*.—Through CBP's preclearance program, CBP personnel at foreign airports inspect travelers prior to boarding U.S.-bound flights.

Travelers then bypass TSA and CBP inspections upon arriving to the United States and proceed to their destination or connecting flight.

Currently, CBP operates 16 preclearance sites in the Caribbean, Canada, Ireland, and the United Arab Emirates. More than 2.9 million air travelers, representing over 6.5 percent of all commercial air travel to the United States, were precleared in fiscal year 2021.

These advancements in passenger screening and admittance into the United States have requirements that may touch on international cooperation regarding how DHS sufficiently allay E.U. governments concerns regarding their citizens data which is collected, retained, and used for travel purposes.

U.S. citizens participating in Global Entry has been well-received by the business community and frequent international travelers because of the time savings it has brought to their travel.

However, Global Entry has presented challenges especially when the credential is granted and later revoked without explanation to the traveler.

This does present privacy considerations as outlined by the Fair Information Practices guidance that is enacted by the Federal Privacy Act, and the Administrative Procedures Act that require an agency to provide due process to citizens when a benefit is revoked or denied.

This should be especially true because the FBI decided in 2004 to not pursue accuracy as a requirement for the National Crime Information Center database.

Today's hearing is important, and we should focus attention on the issue of database accuracy especially for systems of record intended to approve or disapprove persons for special considerations in public travel.

Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. Members are also reminded that the committee will operate according to the guidelines laid out by the Chairman and Ranking Member in our February 3, 2021 colloquy regarding remote procedures.

I now welcome our first panel of witnesses.

Mr. Carlos Martel is the director of field operations for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Los Angeles field office. In that capacity he oversees all CBP operations in the greater Los Angeles and Las Vegas area, including here at Harry Reid International Airport.

Ms. Karen Burke is a Transportation Security Administration's Federal security director for Nevada. In that role she is responsible for ensuring the deployment, management, and oversight of people, processes, and technology to improve security operations, including here at Harry Reid International.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted in the record.

I now ask Mr. Martel to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CARLOS MARTEL, DIRECTOR OF FIELD OPERATIONS, LOS ANGELES FIELD OFFICE, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. MARTEL. Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection's efforts to facilitate international traveler processing.

Facilitating safe and legitimate travel is one of CBP's core mission objectives and is carried out by CBP's office of field operations. At 328 ports of entry Nation-wide and 16 preclearance locations internationally, our role is not only a critical component of National security, but also a significant driving force of the country's economic prosperity.

The global pandemic caused significant damage to multiple private and Government entities that depend on international travel. Travel restrictions to minimize transmission along with traveler fears caused by the pandemic resulted in 2 consecutive years of international travel decline. Today, both commercial and personal travel across our southwest land border have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Travel across the northern land border continues to increase, but is still only about half of pre-pandemic levels. In the air environment, as of May 1, international travel remains 29 percent lower than this time in 2019.

The pandemic's impact on CBP operations has been substantial. Limited travel sharply reduced our collection of user fees, a key resource supporting the cost of CBP personnel. Thanks to the funds provided by Congress in fiscal year 2021 and 2022, CBP has been able to sustain our critical travel operations.

U.S. COVID-19 travel restrictions have been replaced with a vaccination requirement for non-U.S. citizens and non-immigrant travelers, an action that is contributing to increasing international travel. As this trend continues, CBP stands ready to welcome visitors back to the United States.

As part of our preparation efforts, CBP has been accelerating the implementation of several initiatives to maintain the highest standards of security while transforming the international arrivals process to attract visitors, increased travel confidence and safety, and provide a streamlined travel experience. I would like to highlight some of these efforts for you today.

First, CBP continues to leverage pre-departure screening capabilities and programs. Traveler screening at the earliest moments of potential travel is important for CBP to identify and prevent inadmissible individuals or persons who pose a risk to the United States from reaching our physical border.

Second, the ability to identify and separate low-risk travelers from those who may require additional scrutiny is a key element in CBP's effort to facilitate and secure international travel. CBP's Trusted Travel programs, namely NEXUS, SENTRI, FAST, and Global Entry, provide expedited processing upon arrival into the United States for pre-approved low-risk participants through secure technology, exclusive lines, and automated kiosks. CBP's Trusted Traveler membership topped 10 million in March of this year, with nearly 8 million enrolled in Global Entry. To support growing membership, CBP continues to improve the enrollment process and member experience. We have recently implemented remote interviews for renewal of Global Entry membership and expanded enrollment on arrival.

Since October 1 of 2021 CBP has completed 52,000 remote interviews and 160,000 enrollment on arrival interviews and is working to accommodate increased demand for these options.

Third, CBP has been integrating biometric facial comparison, touchless and mobile technologies into its entry processes, including Global Entry kiosks and simplified arrival to verify identity and streamline processing, mitigate pathogen transmission, enhance security, and protect the privacy of all travelers. CBP also offers automated passport control and mobile passport control that allow travelers to enter their biographic and travel-related information prior to inspection, either via a kiosk or mobile app to streamline processing.

Additionally, the CBP One mobile application enables foreign travelers entering the United States by land to apply for a 984 prior to arrival, review their travel history, and check their I94 expiration date on a mobile device. In the air environment, a new CBP One feature offers air travelers the ability to provide advanced information regarding hand-carry of biological materials and/or live pets, streamlining required document and inspection processes.

Finally, CBP continues to strengthen our partnerships with industry. For example, in 2020 CBP at Harry Reid International partnered with Clark County Department of Aviation to establish and promote the Tussle Initiative, aimed at providing a faster more secure travel experience and restoring public confidence in air travel.

Together these initiatives, processes, partnerships, and technological innovation streamline the arrival experience and promote the public health of travelers while simultaneously advancing

CBP's ability to facilitate legitimate trade and travel and identify those individuals who might present a risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Martel follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CARLOS MARTEL

MAY 24, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) efforts to facilitate post-pandemic international travel.

CBP's mission of protecting the borders of the United States and facilitating safe and legitimate trade and travel is not only a critical component of National security, but also a significant driving force of the country's economic prosperity. The Office of Field Operations (OFO) is the law enforcement entity within CBP responsible for carrying out CBP's complex and demanding mission at 328 ports of entry (POE) Nation-wide and 16 preclearance locations internationally.

The global coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) caused significant damage to multiple private industries and Government entities that depend on international travel. The United States and other countries around the world took swift and deliberate actions to limit travel. These actions were essential to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission; however, because of these restrictions along with traveler fears caused by the pandemic, international travel volume decreased for 2 consecutive years. In fiscal year 2020, international travel to the United States in all modes decreased 42 percent from fiscal year 2019 levels. In the air environment, the decrease was 54 percent compared to the previous year.¹ In fiscal year 2021, international travel to the United States decreased 25 percent overall, and decreased 29 percent in the air environment, compared to the previous fiscal year.² As of May 1, 2022, travel in the air environment remains 29 percent lower than this same time in 2019.

Revenue from user fees, 94 percent of which are paid for by international air passengers, support budgets for multiple offices across CBP. The pandemic caused a reduction of more than a \$1.5 billion in CBP user fee collections for fiscal year 2021 and a projected \$669 million reduction for fiscal year 2022, impacting multiple offices across CBP. This had a significant impact on OFO, for which user fees make up 40 percent of its \$6.5 billion budget. Travel and associated user fee collections are gradually recovering but are not projected to return to pre-pandemic levels in fiscal year 2023. CBP is closely monitoring travel and its impact on fee collections as traveler volumes continue to increase.

In October 2021, President Biden ended the United States' country-based travel restrictions³ and replaced them with a global vaccination requirement for non-U.S. citizen, nonimmigrant travelers. Today, as vaccines are more widely available and travel restrictions continue to ease, CBP stands ready to welcome visitors back to the United States. As part of our preparation efforts, CBP has been accelerating the implementation of several initiatives to maintain the highest standards of security while transforming the international arrivals process to attract visitors, increase traveler confidence and safety, and provide a streamlined travel experience.

In anticipation of increased travel, CBP is leveraging pre-departure travel programs, expanding Trusted Traveler Programs, streamlining processes, and integrating advanced technologies that support CBP's dual responsibilities of moving low-risk, vetted travelers through the arrivals inspection process quickly while increasing security measures.

¹ <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Feb/CBP-FY2020-Trade-and-Travel-Report.pdf>.

² <https://www.cbp.gov/document/annual-report/cbp-trade-and-travel-fiscal-year-2021-report>.

³ On October 25, 2021, President Biden announced PP 10294, effective November 8, 2021, ending the travel restrictions under Presidential Proclamations 9984, 9992, 10143, and 10199 as they relate to the suspension of entry into the United States of persons recently physically present in Brazil, China, India, Iran, Ireland, the Schengen Area, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.

PRE-DEPARTURE TRAVEL OPERATIONS

For CBP, the activities involved with international air traveler screening and processing often begin long before the traveler physically arrives at a POE. They start when an individual applies for U.S. travel documents and continue as the individual reserves or purchases an airline ticket, checks in at an airport, and is en route to their destination. Traveler screening at the earliest moments of potential travel is important for CBP to identify and prevent dangerous persons from obtaining visas, travel authorizations, and boarding passes.

Visas and Travel Authorization Security

Before boarding a flight destined for the United States, most foreign nationals must obtain a visa issued by a U.S. embassy or consulate, or, if they are eligible to travel under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP),⁴ they must apply for a travel authorization through CBP's Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA).

Through ESTA, CBP conducts advance screening of VWP applicants to determine their eligibility to travel to the United States without a visa. This includes screening through the National Vetting Center (NVC) against Classified and Sensitive information from intelligence community and law enforcement partners. ESTA denies tens of thousands of applications every year—an average of 0.85 percent over the past 3 years⁵—demonstrating the importance of advance traveler data and ESTA's valuable role in CBP's travel security operations. As expected with the overall decrease in travel, CBP processed 6.4 million ESTA applications in fiscal year 2020 and 1.3 million applications in fiscal year 2021, a more than 91 percent decrease from the nearly 15.3 million applications processed in fiscal year 2019.

Through the publication of an interim rule, CBP is expanding the requirement for an approved ESTA to land POEs.⁶ Specifically, it extends the electronic collection of the information requested on paper Form I-94W to VWP travelers who intend to travel to the United States by land. CBP is currently in the process of implementing this requirement.

ESTA personnel work closely with the National Targeting Center (NTC) and other CBP personnel to conduct screening of travelers before they depart for the United States.

Pre-Departure Targeting

When a traveler purchases a ticket for travel to, from, or through the United States, a Passenger Name Record (PNR)⁷ is generated in the airline's reservation system, which includes information on itineraries, co-travelers, changes to the reservation, and payment information. CBP receives PNR data from commercial air carriers at operationally-determined intervals from 96 hours prior to departure to scheduled departure time to prevent, detect, investigate, and prosecute terrorist offenses and related crimes and certain other transnational crimes.

Further, Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) regulations require commercial air carriers to transmit all required passenger and crew manifest information before departure prior to securing the aircraft doors. CBP vets APIS information, which includes passenger biographic data and travel document information, on all international flights to and from the United States against terrorist screening information, criminal history information, records of lost or stolen passports, and prior immigration or customs violations and visa refusals. CBP uses APIS and PNR data to identify known or suspected threats before they arrive at U.S. POEs.

Using advance information from the NTC, CBP plainclothes officers assigned to the Immigration Advisory Program (IAP) and Joint Security Program (JSP) partner with host country law enforcement agencies at major airports to identify passengers likely to be inadmissible upon arrival in United States.⁸ Using mobile technology, IAP and JSP officers conduct database queries and coordinate with the NTC to confirm whether or not a traveler presents a risk.

⁴The VWP allows citizens from 40 designated countries to travel to the United States for business or pleasure for 90 days or less without obtaining a visa.

⁵In fiscal year 2018, CBP denied .56 percent of ESTA applications; in fiscal year 2019, CBP denied .80 percent of ESTA applications; in fiscal year 2020, CBP denied 1.18 percent of ESTA applications. The increase in denial rate can potentially be attributed to the decrease in total number of applications.

⁶<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/04/01/2022-06366/implementation-of-the-electronic-system-for-travel-authorization-esta-at-us-land-borders>.

⁷Collection of PNR information from air carriers is authorized by 49 U.S.C. § 44909(c)(3) and its implementing regulations at 19 C.F.R. § 122.49d.

⁸IAP officers are posted in Western Europe and the Middle East. JSP officers are posted in Mexico, South and Central America.

The IAP and JSP programs are based on the cooperation of the airlines and the host government. IAP and JSP officers do not have the legal authority that CBP officers have at U.S. POEs to compel air carrier or traveler compliance. Nevertheless, an IAP or JSP officer's no-board recommendations to an air carrier regarding inadmissible travelers are generally accepted and followed by airlines. Providing coverage of non-IAP airports, Regional Carrier Liaison Groups (RCLGs) are staffed by CBP officers and use established relationships with the commercial airlines to prevent passengers who may pose a security threat, have fraudulent documents, or are otherwise inadmissible from boarding flights to the United States.

CBP's use of advance information, our pre-departure targeting operations, and our overseas programs are critical parts of CBP's multi-layered security strategy to address many concerns long before inadmissible individuals, or individuals who pose a risk to the United States, reach our physical border. Upon arrival in the United States or to a preclearance facility, all travelers are subject to inspection by CBP officers. CBP officers review entry documents, query CBP and other law enforcement databases for derogatory information, collect biometrics,⁹ and interview each traveler to determine the purpose and intent of their travel, and whether any further inspection is necessary based on, among other things, National security, admissibility, customs, or agriculture concerns.

Uniting for Ukraine—Seeking Parole at the Port of Entry

On April 21, 2022, President Biden announced Uniting for Ukraine,¹⁰ a new streamlined process to provide certain Ukrainian citizens who have fled Russia's unprovoked war of aggression opportunities to travel to the United States. Uniting for Ukraine provides a pathway for Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members who are outside the United States and have a U.S.-based financial supporter to apply for advance authorization to travel to the United States and seek parole, generally for a period of up to 2 years. After eligibility is determined by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS),¹¹ Ukrainians undergo additional screening, to include biographic vetting with the NVC. Upon their arrival at a POE, each individual is inspected by CBP. Anyone determined to pose a National security or public safety threat is referred to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. If parole is determined to be appropriate, the individual will generally be paroled for a period of up to 2 years and may have conditions placed on their parole.¹² All individuals 2 years of age or older will need to complete a medical screening for tuberculosis, including an Interferon-Gamma Release Assays (IGRA) test, within 2 weeks of arrival to the United States. Currently, Ukrainians who present at U.S. land POEs without a valid visa or without pre-authorization to travel to the United States through Uniting for Ukraine may be denied entry and referred to apply through this program.

As new requirements are added, the processing of a traveler requires an increasing amount of data entry and verifications. To balance our important safety and security mission with the facilitation of legitimate travel and trade that feed our Nation's economy, CBP is exploring ways that we can work with the public and our travel industry stakeholders to modernize and improve our processes by expanding Trusted Traveler Programs and investing in automated and mobile processing technology that streamlines the arrival experience.

PROGRAMS TO FACILITATE LEGITIMATE TRAVEL

Identifying and separating low-risk travelers from those who may require additional scrutiny is a key element in CBP's efforts to facilitate and secure international travel. CBP's Trusted Traveler Programs—NEXUS, SENTRI, FAST, and Global Entry—provide expedited processing upon arrival in the United States for pre-approved, low-risk participants through secure technology, exclusive lines, and

⁹The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (Pub. L. 104–208) authorized the U.S. Government to use an automated system to record arrivals and departures of non-U.S. citizens at all air, sea, and land ports of entry. CBP is also authorized to collect biometric entry and exit information pursuant to numerous laws, including the 2002 Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act (Pub. L. 107–173), the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (Pub. L. 108–458), and the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (Pub. L. 110–53).

¹⁰<https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/04/21/president-biden-announce-uniting-ukraine-new-streamlined-process-welcome-ukrainians>.

¹¹<https://www.dhs.gov/ukraine>.

¹²<https://www.dhs.gov/ukraine>.

automated kiosks.¹³ Membership requires travelers complete an application, submit to a screening process, and complete an interview.

CBP's Trusted Traveler Programs membership topped 10 million in March 2022. Global Entry is CBP's largest Trusted Traveler Program with 7.7 million members and availability at 62 U.S. airports and 14 international preclearance locations. CBP also has full partnership agreements with 13 countries that allow their citizens to apply for Global Entry and experience the expedited travel benefits.¹⁴ Global Entry members can also receive reciprocal benefits with several countries including Australia, Germany, New Zealand, Panama, South Korea, and Taiwan. In addition, Global Entry membership includes access to TSA PreCheck®, a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Trusted Traveler Program that allows low-risk passengers to access expedited screening for domestic air travel.

Improving Access to Enrollment Options

As part of CBP's commitment to increase traveler confidence and promote visitation to the United States, CBP continues to invest in innovative efforts to improve the Global Entry membership enrollment process and member experience. Most recent enhancements include the implementation of remote interviews for renewal of Global Entry memberships and the expansion of enrollment on arrival. The Global Entry remote interview process enables certain qualified renewal applicants to complete their interview virtually with a CBP officer using a secure video connection. The enrollment on arrival processing enables conditionally-approved applicants to complete the interview process with an officer upon arrival at one of 66 participating airports. Since October 1, 2021, CBP has completed 52,000 remote interviews and 160,000 enrollments on arrival interviews and is working to accommodate increased demand for these options.

Biometric Facial Comparison Technology

To better facilitate the growing volume of Global Entry travelers, and in anticipation of increasing travel volumes generally, CBP has been integrating biometric facial comparison technology into its entry and exit processes to verify identity, mitigate pathogen transmission, enhance security, and protect the privacy of all travelers.

Furthermore, CBP is leading efforts, consistent with U.S. law, to streamline the travel process by providing industry stakeholders with biometric facial comparison technology to better identify and match travelers to the gallery of biometric identifiers. This biometric technology transforms how travelers interact with CBP, airports, airlines, cruise lines, and other Government agencies with security functions such as TSA, creating a seamless travel process that is both reliable and secure.

CBP is committed to its privacy obligations and has taken all available steps to safeguard the privacy of all travelers.¹⁵ CBP utilizes strong technical security safeguards and reduces the amount of personally identifiable information required in the facial biometric identification process. U.S. citizens who do not wish to submit to facial photo capture pursuant to these processes may request alternative processing, which typically involves a manual review of their travel documents. Furthermore, if a traveler cannot be matched by the facial comparison process, the individual must present the appropriate travel documents to a CBP officer or airline representative for manual review or inspection.

The pandemic quickly revealed the health and safety benefits of touchless identity verification processes in the travel industry. Starting in fiscal year 2021, CBP began accelerating the deployment of Simplified Arrival, an enhanced international arrival process that quickly and reliably verifies a traveler's identity biometrically and retrieves traveler data from CBP systems, providing a touchless experience. This process reduces multiple touch points for Trusted Traveler Program members and saves time during the traditional inspection process. To date, CBP has deployed Simplified Arrival to 199 airports, including 14 preclearance locations.

¹³CBP operates four risk-based Trusted Traveler Programs that facilitate the entry of pre-approved travelers in the United States. The programs are Global Entry, NEXUS, SENTRI, and FAST. All of the programs improve security and provide streamlined member processing, but each program is unique in its location and mode of transportation for the traveler.

¹⁴Additionally, there are four countries [names?] participating in pilot programs with the goal of reaching full partnership agreements.

¹⁵For additional information on CBP's privacy protection efforts, see the Traveler Verification Service Privacy Impact Assessment, available at: <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/dhscbpia-056-traveler-verification-service>.

CBP's biometric facial comparison technology has also been integrated in all CBP's legacy Global Entry kiosks, reducing kiosk processing time by 85 percent.¹⁶ Furthermore, after successful testing at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), CBP plans to deploy its new Global Entry Touchless Portals at other locations around the country. These new kiosks utilize secure biometric facial comparison technology, are completely touch-free, and decrease processing time by 94 percent to approximately 3.5 seconds per traveler.¹⁷

Automated and Mobile Technology

Trusted Traveler Program membership and Simplified Arrival are only two of the ways travelers can streamline CBP processes upon entry in the United States. CBP also offers Automated Passport Control (APC) and Mobile Passport Control (MPC) that allow travelers to enter their biographic information and answer travel-related questions needed prior to inspection either via a kiosk or mobile app. APC kiosks are available for use at 22 locations, including most major U.S. international airports and preclearance locations. The MPC mobile app is available to U.S. citizens and Canadian visitors at 34 POEs (30 airports and 4 seaports). In fiscal year 2021, more than 3 million travelers used APC kiosks and approximately 1.1 million trips were processed using MPC, accounting for almost 2.8 percent of all air travelers entering the United States.

Since its release in October 2020, the CBP One mobile application has offered several benefits for travelers. While the use of CBP One was limited while travel was limited during the pandemic, the app enables foreign travelers entering the United States via land to apply for an I-94 prior to arrival, review their past travel history, and check their I-94 expiration date on their mobile device. When travelers who use the I-94 feature arrive at most POEs, they no longer need to be referred to a secondary processing area for processing. Since the resumption of travel in the land environment in November 2021, there have been more than 140,000 provisional I-94s processed through CBP One. Additionally, CBP recently developed a bus manifest functionality that allows bus companies to submit their travel manifest to CBP electronically through the CBP One app, streamlining the entry process. In the air environment, CBP recently announced a new capability that offers air travelers the ability to provide advance information regarding the hand-carry of biological materials or live pets that require the review of permits and other documentation, as well as the need for their footwear to be sanitized. When they arrive, CBP agriculture specialists are alerted of their arrival, have already completed their review of the documentation, prepared sanitization procedures, if necessary, and can expedite their clearance.

With all traveler processing technology, CBP is committed to its privacy obligations and protecting the privacy of all travelers.¹⁸ These innovations streamline the arrival experience and promote the public health of travelers by decreasing touch points in the travel continuum. These technological capabilities simultaneously advance CBP's ability to quickly and reliably identify those who may be inadmissible for entry or ineligible for expedited processing.

CBP STAFFING TO FACILITATE AND SECURE INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Reduced travel due to COVID-19 sharply decreased CBP's collection of user fees, a key resource supporting the cost of CBP personnel at our Nation's 328 POEs. Thanks to the funds provided by Congress in fiscal year 2021 and 2022, CBP has been able to sustain our security and facilitation postures at POEs across the Nation and beyond at preclearance facilities, ensuring international travel processing at the highest levels of safety and security. Your support helped avoid significant damage to the U.S. economy and ensured that CBP will have adequate personnel in place to facilitate increasing volumes of international travel.

OFO's Workload Staffing Model (WSM) is a valuable data analysis tool to help calculate the estimated number of CBP officers needed to optimally carry out the CBP mission at each air, land, and sea POE in the United States, to include each

¹⁶When compared to CBP legacy Global Entry kiosks without biometric facial comparison technology.

¹⁷When compared to CBP legacy Global Entry kiosks without biometric facial comparison technology.

¹⁸For additional information on CBP's privacy protection efforts, see the APC and MPC Privacy Impact Assessments, available at: <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/dhscbppia-051-automated-passport-control-apc-and-mobile-passport-control-mpc>, and CBP One Privacy Impact Assessment at <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/dhscbppia-068-cbp-one-mobile-application>.

preclearance location.¹⁹ The methodology captures future staffing requirements for new or enhanced facilities, technology deployments, and anticipated growth in trade and travel, and it can be adjusted according to changing priorities, risks, and threats. CBP continues to evaluate and optimize its workforce requirements and business processes and will continue to explore innovative transformation initiatives to assist our workforce in accomplishing our mission more effectively and efficiently.

CONCLUSION

As international travel continues to return to normal, travelers will encounter new and updated technology and will be offered new opportunities to streamline and simplify their travel experience entering and exiting the United States. CBP is committed to educating the public about its new innovative technologies and initiatives so that all travelers can benefit from the multitude of ways we make the international travel experience simple, fast, and safe. CBP hosted four virtual roundtables with media partners earlier this year and continues to share programmatic and operational updates through the web, social media, and our invaluable travel industry partners. For travelers who are interested in Trusted Traveler Programs, our website has interactive tools that guide applicants to the best program for their travel needs.

CBP's biometric facial comparison technology will be a key aspect of the travel industry's ability to restore consumer confidence in the safety of travel. Through appropriate use of biometric technology, air and sea partners can streamline check-in, security, and boarding processes that involve long lines, heavy personal interaction, and the handling of travel documents. Facial biometric technology encourages contactless travel that involves minimal physical contact, which increases the safety of travelers, CBP officers, and port personnel.

Security is our core mission at CBP. CBP's extensive screening standards and facial comparison technologies enhance officer ability to identify and respond to threats, while protecting traveler privacy. We leverage these initiatives to the greatest extent possible to facilitate legitimate travel while identifying those individuals who might present a risk.

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

I now ask Ms. Burke to summarize her statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF KAREN R. BURKE, FEDERAL SECURITY DIRECTOR, NEVADA, TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Ms. BURKE [Audio malfunction]. Transportation Security Administration has taken and continues to take in three key areas.

No. 1, to improve the passenger experience, No. 2, to enhance security while travel volumes are increasing, and No. 3, to foster collaboration, innovation, and acceleration of action through the innovation checkpoint here in Las Vegas.

As you all know, airports throughout the United States are often the engines that drive tourism, business activity, and the local economy. That fact makes ensuring airports function effectively and efficiently and securely all the more essential.

To be successful in that endeavor requires strong partnerships with our public and private stakeholders. Our panels today are representative of those very partners and we are proud of the work we have done together to make this airport successful in serving the traveling public.

During the calendar year 2021 TSA screened 858 million travelers, about 1.6 million per day, which represented 69 percent of

¹⁹The DHS Office of Inspector General audited the WSM in 2013/2014. The audit concluded that the model has a "sound methodology" for determining staffing needs and identifying staffing shortages.

the pre-COVID pandemic levels. Las Vegas has recovered even faster, at 78 percent. As those volumes return, enhancing security and the passenger experience is really essential. TSA is focused on strengthening checkpoint operations through ensuring we have both the personnel and the technology needed to counter the ever-changing threat landscape.

TSA is grateful for Congressional support, for its investment in personnel and innovative technologies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its operations while improving the passenger experience. Some examples of key technology that helped achieve this: First, computer topography, or CTs, which produce high-quality 3D images that can be rotated 360 degrees for a more thorough visual analysis of a carry-on bag content. These CTs are frequently housed within automated screening lanes, or ASLs. They provide key process automation capabilities that enhance the security checkpoint experience. These features allow for higher throughput and fewer bag jams and improved passenger experience.

Second, advanced imaging technology, or AIT. This equipment safely screens passengers for both metallic and non-metallic threats, such as weapons and explosives, without physical contact. Enhancements to the threat detection algorithms lower the false alarm rate, which is exciting because it means fewer passengers are going to have pat-downs and there will be less false alarm rates, which will improve throughput and the customer experience.

Next, credential authentication technology, or the CAT machine. Many of you probably experienced that already. It automatically verifies identification documents presented by the passenger and confirms the passenger's flight information without having to look at the boarding pass.

All these pieces of equipment, and more, are housed in the innovation checkpoint. The innovation checkpoint was established in September 2019 and unveiled in Terminal 3 here at Las Vegas. The innovation checkpoint, which some of you had the opportunity to visit yesterday, is an excellent example of public and private sectors working together in tandem. Partnerships with our airport director and the Clark County Department of Aviation, as well as local industry, continued to make this checkpoint one of TSA's best options for continuously improving screening technology and procedures to advance both the passenger experience and security effectiveness.

The innovation checkpoint is a one-of-a-kind checkpoint that serves as the demonstration site for TSA to assess multiple processes and technology requirements within a live checkpoint environment. It truly is one-of-a-kind I think in the United States and maybe even the world.

In closing, we are grateful for the support of Congress that has enabled us to continue to advance and improve technology and the tools that we are able to provide to our TSOs and the work force that ensures the secure and efficient screening of passengers.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Burke follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KAREN R. BURKE

MAY 24, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and distinguished Members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and to provide updates on steps the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is taking to enhance security while travel volumes increase, our plans to improve the passenger experience, and on-going initiatives being carried out at our innovation checkpoint.

Within the aviation network, TSA is responsible for the security of more than 430 Federalized airports with screening services forecasted this summer servicing over 24,000 domestic flights and nearly 3,300 outbound international flights per day. Nation-wide, TSA routinely screens more than 2 million passengers and 1.4 million checked items daily for explosives and other dangerous items. During calendar year 2021, TSA screened 585.3 million travelers, an average of about 1.6 million passengers per day, which represents 69 percent of pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels in 2019. On average, 97.6 percent of non-TSA PreCheck® passengers waited less than 20 minutes at airport security checkpoints, while 96.2 percent of TSA PreCheck® passengers waited less than 5 minutes in those lanes. We enrolled 7 new airlines and 1.8 million individuals in the TSA PreCheck® expedited screening program, bringing the total number of Known Traveler Number holders to more than 27 million.

Locally, during calendar year 2021, TSA Harry Reid International Airport (LAS) screened 18.6 million travelers, or about 51,000 each day, which represents 78 percent of pre-COVID pandemic levels in 2019. On average, 98.2 percent of non-TSA PreCheck® passengers waited less than 20 minutes at airport security checkpoints, while 99.9 percent of TSA PreCheck® passengers waited less than 5 minutes in those lanes.

During the period of January 1 to May 1, 2022, TSA personnel have prevented more than 1,900 firearms (85 percent were loaded) from being carried into airplane passenger cabins or the secure area of airports. Since July 2021, TSA has trained almost 1,500 flight crew members in Crew Member Self-Defense training to address increasing trends in unruly passengers. TSA also partnered with the Federal Aviation Administration to rescind TSA PreCheck® eligibility for passengers who are disruptive aboard flights or during security screening process.

TSA has continued deployment of Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) with 101 additional units (total 1,621 in the field) and deployed an additional 52 (total of 357 in the field) Computed Tomography (CT) scanners, which significantly improves detection while also allowing travelers to proceed through security screening with reduced physical contact. TSA is also very focused on strengthening checkpoint operations through the development and acquisition of new technology in order to counter the ever-changing threat. The fiscal year 2023 President's budget request, if enacted, will enable TSA to continue investing in innovative technologies and processes to improve the effectiveness of its operations. This includes requesting funding for the Checkpoint Property Screening System (CPSS) program for checkpoint CT investments and the On-Person Screening (OPS) Algorithm Development to reduce false alarms.

TSA continues to evaluate new and emerging technologies that increase security while improving the customer experience for all travelers. Technology that we are currently deploying to checkpoints includes CTs, which enables 3D imaging for enhanced visual interpretation of a carry-on bag. This imaging technology allows Transportation Security Officers to get a better view of the contents of the bag without having to physically open it to determine if there is a threat. As the checkpoint CT algorithms improve, not only will there be better detection but also fewer false alarms, ultimately providing improved checkpoint operations.

Checkpoint CT systems with Automated Screening Lanes, or ASLs, provide key process automation capabilities that enhance the security checkpoint experience. Allowing multiple locations for travelers to place their items and automated return of bins back to the front of the lane. ASLs have integrated sensors throughout the system to maintain positive bag control, allowing the officer to remain focused on screening. The ASL also makes diverting bags for secondary search easier and smoother. These features will allow for higher throughput, fewer bag jams, and overall improved passenger experience.

Advanced Imaging Technology, or AIT, safely screens passengers for both metallic and non-metallic threats such as weapons and explosives without physical contact. As far as next generation equipment for on-person screening, TSA is pushing the envelope on algorithm development, lowering the false alarm rates, developing gen-

der-neutral algorithms, and making progress on deploying Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) systems with new capabilities that offer a more natural hands-down experience. The improved threat detection algorithms coupled with lower false alarm rates means fewer passenger pat-downs, which improves throughput and the overall customer experience.

TSA is also technologically improving the entry point to the checkpoint, referred to as the Travel Document Checker (TDC). These investments look to enhance CAT machines with biometric, digital identity, and self-service capabilities in response to COVID-19 and the growing availability of identity solutions in the market. These upgrades to CAT include biometric 1:1 (one to one) facial matching capabilities that compares a live image capture against the image on a credential (e.g., passport or ID photo). TSA is also evaluating a biometric electronic gate form factor, AutoCAT, that provides additional self-service and queue management capabilities. TSA is currently updating all CAT units in preparation for REAL ID implementation in May 2023.

Other notable advancements include work to establish an overarching checkpoint built on Open Architecture principles of open data formats and open interfaces. TSA sees this as the future to diversify the transportation security marketplace and rapidly respond to emerging threats.

To support these activities, TSA established the Advancing the Checkpoint Environment (ACE) mission to provide an operational lab space that allows new technologies and processes to be assessed concurrently, to drive decision making with data, and showcase the art of the possible. On September 3, 2019, TSA unveiled the ACE Innovation Checkpoint, a collaborative effort between TSA's Innovation Task Force (ITF), LAS, LAS local TSA, and the Clark County Department of Aviation in Las Vegas. The Innovation Checkpoint is an excellent example of the public and private sectors working in tandem to support the travel experience and as of March 2021, Innovation Checkpoint stakeholders have hosted 27 tours with various public and private-sector entities. The Innovation Checkpoint was also the opening event for the Future Travel Experience, one of LAS' largest conferences, where over 250 people were in attendance. The continued partnership with the Clark County Department of Aviation is paramount in the success of TSA's mission at the Innovation Checkpoint.

The Innovation Checkpoint located in Terminal 3 at LAS allows for side-by-side assessment and evaluation of emerging security technologies in a live checkpoint environment. Data collected from these demonstrations is intended to help develop requirements for future innovative capabilities.

The Innovation Checkpoint showcases several technologies that enhance checkpoint security and enhance the passenger experience. There are currently four fully operational security lanes in this one-of-a-kind checkpoint that serves as a demonstration site for TSA to assess multiple people, process, and technology enhancements within a live checkpoint environment. It allows ITF and RCA Capability Managers to test an entire network of unique capabilities at the same time without interrupting airport operations and provides an enhanced professional experience for TSOs. The technologies being tested at the Innovation Checkpoint are designed to work in sync with each other to avoid an inefficient security experience.

Three of the current demonstrations at the Innovation Checkpoint are centered around Customer Movement Analytics. These technologies currently in the queue, on Lane 1 and Lane 3, provide increased visibility into day-to-day checkpoint operations and foster local TSA's ability to optimize the available resources.

TSA is also testing an integrated Ultraviolet-C (UV-C) light sanitization system, which is designed to disinfect bins as they go through the ASL's automated bin return system. Bins pass through an enclosed, metal box where they are exposed to a high-dose of UV-C light proven to inactivate bacteria and viruses, including COVID-19.

The Innovation Checkpoint Lane 3 and 4 host an Enhanced Advanced Imaging Technology (eAIT) scanner which screens travelers with their arms at their side instead of having to lift them over their head while being screened and displays an on-screen prompt if the traveler is improperly positioned, allowing officers to provide corrective feedback.

Finally, LAS is also using digital signage totems at the Innovation Checkpoint. These totems, which are completely programmable and can be populated with any approved information, currently display checkpoint wait times and divestment instructions to enhance both communication and the passenger experience.

TSA's Capital Investment Plan seeks to continue to invest in technology that can increase passenger throughput, meet current detection standards, and connect to a secure network. We will also invest in research and development for next-generation technologies.

TSA is dedicated to enhancing security and improving the passenger experience as travel increases to pre-pandemic levels. Through its consistent assessments of technologies, policies, and processes, TSA is able to ensure that we can effectively carry out our mission of protecting the Nation's transportation systems and ensuring freedom of movement for people and commerce. We are grateful for the support of Congress that has enabled us to continue to advance and improve the technology and tools we provide our front-line workforce to ensure the secure and efficient screening of passengers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman THOMPSON. I thank the witnesses for their testimony.

I will remind each Member that he or she will have 5 minutes to question the witnesses.

I now recognize myself for questions.

Let me say, the tour I had yesterday was quite informative. As I kind-of commented, some of us remember the pat-downs, the puffer, the backscatter, and you know, we have come a long way. The innovation center was wonderful, the seamless processes between the airlines and CBP for passenger border, tremendous. So I compliment the whole team here at Harry Reid for the job you are doing.

So the question is, are there some other things, Ms. Burke, that you think Members of Congress could do to enhance this continued technological development as you see fit?

Ms. BURKE. Yes. I think there are two things. Maybe most important at this point is the issue of pay equity for our employees because of the fact that we are struggling trying to hire. It is very important for us to have a very professional work force that is well-compensated. I would tell you Nevada is probably a good example. Here in Las Vegas we have been able to hire to the number that we have needed, but in Reno I have not been able to hire almost a single person, and we have been working for probably the last 8 months in order to try to recruit. It is because of the competition from companies that have established themselves in Reno that pay \$3 or \$4 more an hour, that have benefits as good as the Government and also—you know, Tesla would be an example—even provide stock options. So to compete against that is very difficult. Across our system I know we are having some of the same problems.

So your bill, H.R. 903, would be excellent for us in order to be able to continue to move forward.

In addition to that, of course yesterday I showed you that we have lots of great technology that we need to continue to fund to be able to be able to roll out and refine. Some of the money that has been approved will allow us to make some of that equipment just be even better than it is right now. With that support I believe there is no stopping. The passenger processing in the airport will be very exciting as opposed to people sometimes not wanting to go through.

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, thank you much. You will be happy to know that all the Members on the panel voted for H.R. 903 so that our TSOs cannot just become a part of the Federal system per se in terms of pay scale, but we need to treat them like we do the majority of other Federal employees. This would be a way to do. They would receive a 30 percent increase in pay right off the bat if that bill passes. That challenge you are having in Reno might

not—your member here, Ms. Titus, has been very, very helpful to us in that situation. But it is the right thing to do. I was impressed with how the TSOs took pride in explaining the technology.

Ms. BURKE. Yes.

Chairman THOMPSON. You know, I felt kind-of bad saying but we really ought to be paying you a little more.

Ms. BURKE. Mm-hmm.

Chairman THOMPSON. So, you know, that is how you really appreciate an employee, you pay them. So I—we all support that.

Mr. Martel, COVID-19 has affected the ability to process international travels. How has CBP addressed those challenges?

Mr. MARTEL. Sir, internally, this CBP has worked very closely with DHS and with HHS to establish protocols in terms of keeping our employees safe, keeping our employees well-informed on social distancing protocols, acquiring personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, that all the employees operating within airports, sea ports, and land/border part have the equipment that they need to not only keep themselves safe but to keep travelers safe. We have also worked with port authorities, with facility managers in disinfecting our work spaces, especially doing more redundant and more frequent disinfections in high-traffic areas, like our secondary admissibility areas.

We have has a robust campaign in educating the staff in terms of keeping themselves safe, not only at work but at home. We continue to do that as we are progressing through the pandemic and as we see the various iterations of the variants that spike, occasionally spike in different cities. But we have a very robust platform, a very robust response for ensuring that we are adhering to all of the recommended guidance from the CDC, keeping our employees safe and ensuring that the general public understand that we are here to protect them as well.

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, thank you very much. Thank both of you for your responses.

I now recognize the gentleman from California for 5 minutes, Mr. Correa.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank my colleague, Ms. Titus, for inviting us to her district.

I must say that there is an allegation that before I got to Congress I also had a life and I may have visited your city way too many times. So I probably—I can imagine a lot of those bricks that built these buildings probably have my name on them.

But I represent southern California—Anaheim Angels, Anaheim Ducks, and Disneyland. Our lifeblood in my district is tourism. Disneyland by itself accounts for about 20,000 direct jobs, 99 percent of them being union. So COVID really devastated our economy.

Mr. Martel, your testimony, you stated the facts, which are we have gone from travel restrictions based on country to global vaccination requirements for non-U.S. citizens coming to the United States. As we move to a possible spike in the summer season of COVID-19, what can we do first of all to keep our employees, our travelers safe in terms of coming into the United States? What else can we do as the Federal Government?

No. 2, how can we get the message out to the rest of the world that we continue to employ very safe standards when it comes to COVID-19 and that we continue to be open for business?

Mr. MARTEL. Sir, thank you for your question.

Again, to reiterate, I think that we—I believe that we have implemented robust protocols internally in concert with CDC in keeping our employees safe. I think that for purposes of communicating that to the public, we will continue to have a messaging campaign to ensure that the public is well aware of what the requirements are. It is an unknown as to how COVID-19 or its variants will affect us in the immediate future, but we do not anticipate any reversal—or I am not aware of any reversal, any change to the current vaccination policy. So I don't see us reverting back to previous travel restrictions.

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Martel, if I can interrupt your answer, the majority—the No. 1 international source of travel through my district is through Mexico. I get a lot of phone calls from people from outside the country saying can we travel, what do we need to do. So there is still a lot of, you know, apprehension about coming to the United States as tourists because folks are not quite sure that even if they have a visa if they are going to be able to get past the border to get into the United States.

So I am trying to figure out how we can help you help our industry, tourist industry, get the message out that if you have your vaccinations you can come to the United States.

Mr. MARTEL. Sir, I believe that that can be done in concert with DHS, CBP, and the Department of State and all of the agencies that are involved in granting visas or in fostering, encouraging travel, getting the message out that essential and non-essential travel is allowable from Mexico so long as—

Mr. CORREA. And other—

Mr. MARTEL [continuing]. Travelers have vaccinations. I think it would be a messaging campaign that we could do internally with the consulates, the affected consulates, but I think there could be a broader messaging campaign that perhaps Members of Congress could support.

Mr. CORREA. Would you say there is a role there too for private entities, like the U.S. Travel Association, Vegas Travel Association, oversea travel to have a coordinated message to makes sense to folks wanting to come to the United States and enjoy what we have to offer?

Mr. MARTEL. Yes, sir. I believe that would be beneficial.

Mr. CORREA. Do I have any time left?

Chairman THOMPSON. One more question.

Mr. CORREA. Ms. Burke, just wanted to thank you very much for putting out the obvious, which is pay equity is important for our employees. I say that because of hiring—not only hiring, but retention. We want the best trained, the most experienced work force taking care of our society and protecting us. Beyond pay equity, is there anything else we can do to make sure you can retain your workers?

Ms. BURKE. I believe some of the technology that we have talked about and we showed off yesterday, if you were able to yesterday hear some of the TSOs speak about the experience that they have

with passengers as they are going through equipment that makes the process easy, quite seamless, they are excited because the passengers are happy. So their environment will be improved significantly in working with our public if the equipment is continued to be procured and able to be distributed. It is a game-changing situation that we have got with the improved technology and it is not going to be that long a period of time before we are able to truly change the experience that the passenger has.

So I think if you had pay equity and you also had what I would call an improved working environment because your passengers are happy, that is probably the very best formula we have.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Ms. Burke.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman yields.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Cleaver, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLEAVER. Well, let me first of all thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing. I am excited about it and I have to control my excitement because I have so many questions I want to raise. I thank our colleague, Ms. Titus, for inviting us here.

I did a wedding in Mexico Friday and I came back yesterday and landed at DFW. But before I left Mexico I had to take a COVID shot—I mean—I am sorry, a COVID exam, but when I landed in Dallas nobody asked me for anything. I just—I walked just right through after I went through Customs. Customs did not ask for anything. Is that—did I miss something or is this—or did somebody mess up? Because there were 7 people in my party and none of us were asked to give the paperwork. I don't—I mean I am—you are not responsible, I am just—I am just trying to find out what is required and what is not.

Mr. MARTEL. Sir, thank you for your question.

I do not believe you missed anything. Our current travel policy, the airlines are responsible for adjudicating vaccinations. So upon your arrival our officers would not necessarily ask you whether or not you have been—if you have had a COVID shot.

Mr. CLEAVER. OK. Thank you. I feel better.

Now, look, I am not Fred Flinstone, I am not troglodytic, but, you know, the biometric technology is amazing when I read about it. Are you hearing any apprehensions about the same thing we heard about taking the COVID shot, that this is an invasion of my privacy, I ought to be able to do what I want to do, and so forth? When somebody—you know, voice recognition, I think visual recognition—and probably something else I can't even remember—are there any concerns or complaints as we move into this biotechnology era? Either one.

Mr. MARTEL. Sir, from the CBP side of the house, not a lot of apprehension or concern. Obviously there are travelers that opt out and decide that they do not want to subject themselves to facial comparison, but for the most part and based on my experience within my field office, the traveling public have been very receptive. In fact they actually like the ease with which they can be processed through facial comparison as opposed to having to go through the administrative process of presenting documents or having to pull identifications out. We have heard nothing but good

things from the traveling public as well as stakeholders and airlines on the efficiency that biometric technology has done to improve air travel.

Mr. CLEAVER. Thank you.

I am wondering—I mean this is obviously a high-traffic airport. We are opening up a new airport in Kansas City hopefully. It seems like we have been working on it for 36 years, but I think we are scheduled to open next year. I am hoping at least that we are thinking futuristically and how can we make this one of the most secure airports in the country. If someone asks you some suggestions on technology that would make it a smoother place through which travelers went, what would you suggest, Ms. Burke?

Ms. BURKE. Well, there have been several airports that have had major renovations or new airports. We are able to really have, for instance, airport directors, come here to visit. We put them through the innovation checkpoint so they can look at all the new technology. Now, it depends upon how big your purse is, but if you have the ability, for instance, to purchase some ASLs to go along with the CTs, or AITs that are more advanced, you can donate those TSA and be able to install them in your airport. We at this point don't have all the funding available to be able to do that in every place, but the airports can take that initiative and many of them have, whether it be at Salt Lake or LaGuardia or other places that have very new facilities. They have been able to develop funding and be able to donate that equipment at the highest technology that we have.

Mr. CLEAVER. Do you happen to know whether KCI has come through?

Ms. BURKE. They have not been through here yet, but I certainly invite them and would love to have anybody who is interested in getting a tour, because I think it is so marvelous to see the kind of progress that we have been able to make and the opportunity that is there.

Mr. CLEAVER. I will make sure to make the request and I will come back with them. Try to get us scheduled at time when the Temptations are going to be in a show.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Langevin from Rhode Island for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony today.

I will begin with Mr. Martel if I could. CBP reported a 97 percent match rate for biometric processing in fiscal year 2021. I wanted to know, what are the false positive and false negative rates of biometric identifications systems used at U.S. airports? Are there certain factors that cause these rates to increase with certain passenger groups?

Thank you for holding this very important hearing, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MARTEL. Sir, with regard to your question, I would have to defer to the subject-matter experts to provide a technical response with match rates and what goes into how people match versus how we have mismatches. We can certainly get back to you at that, sir.

Mr. LANGEVIN. OK. I look forward to those responses. I think understanding those false positive and false negative rates are very important to a confidence that the system is working as it should.

But, Mr. Martel or Ms. Burke, for what duration and with what security controls are in place does DHS store biometric passenger data?

Ms. BURKE. Well, TSA has a policy with regard to any of the information from biometric processing that we, as soon as the passenger leaves, that TDC position, we delete the information. So we do not maintain it at all, which from a privacy standpoint we felt was the best position to be able to take to make sure there was no concern.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I see. So no storing of data whatsoever?

Ms. BURKE. No.

Mr. LANGEVIN. OK. Well, that answers my question. That is something else that is very important. The privacy concerns, as well as—I thought this was going to be a cybersecurity risk here and I wanted to understand the level of risk and that we were taking extraordinary steps to protect the information. But if we are not storing it, all the better.

Mr. Chairman, I think those are my questions for right now, so I will yield back the balance of my time.

Again I thank our witnesses for their testimony today and for the work that they are doing on behalf of the country.

Mr. Chairman, again, thank you for—and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing.

I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

Mr. Martel, did you want to respond to the other half of that?

Mr. MARTEL. Yes, sir. Thank you.

Sir, I would say for U.S. citizens the images that go into the cloud are deleted in short order or immediately, but they are kept no longer than 12 hours by policy. For visitors, it is the same accord, but they are kept no longer than 14 days.

We have protocols in place to ensure that these images are being deleted from our systems. We have audits in place to ensure that that process is being done not only internally but by the carriers that may possess that information, you know, for purposes of boarding people biometrically.

We have conducted and have privacy risk assessments to ensure that we have all the proper encryption, security protocols in place to ensure the privacy of international travelers.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Very good. Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes our host Congress Member, Ms. Titus, for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses.

All this technology is great. I think I am a Luddite. I am not sure about the Reverend, but I am low-tech. So I appreciate what all you all do. But I want to take a step back before you encounter the technology. With international travelers, here at Harry Reid, they often land—these planes land in the middle of the night and then

the people are left on the tarmac because there is nobody to receive them, nobody to check their papers. They wait for hours. This is not a good experience as we try to increase international tourism.

I think that you will from the convention center, they have even offered to pay overtime to get some of the officers there so people could be processed sooner.

Is there any way, I would ask you, Mr. Martel, to have some kind of collaborative agreement so we can get people to be there and check people in? Then they can take advantage of all this technology. But we have got to get them off the plane first to have somebody there to greet them.

Mr. MARTEL. Ma'am, thank you for your question.

Yes, we work very closely with the airlines as well as the convention center to ensure that any air carriers or flights that are coming in not only have approved landing rights, but that we are coordinating the arrival times so that no one is left waiting on board and people are allowed to come into the Federal inspection service area. We historically have adjusted our hours when requested to help accommodate that. But we have also established the Reimbursable Services Program here at Harry Reid so in the event that a flight is arriving well before or well after hours, outside of our normal operating hours, there is a mechanism in which the airline, through the Port Authority, can pay for the staffing that is needed to clear the flight.

Again, we do our best to try to do that on shift or with our own resources, but when—in situations where we need to, we will rely on the RSP program.

Ms. TITUS. Anything to add to that, Ms. Burke?

Ms. BURKE. I believe with arrivals we actually staff 24 hours a day and we look at the flight schedules before-hand so that we know exactly what carrier arrival patterns are so that we are in a position to be able to have people available to do any processing. Perhaps an internal group has a connection and they are going on to another destination, we will always have the staffing available because of the fact that we do staff 24 hours a day. It is far more limited in the wee hours of the morning to have passengers to process, but that is certainly one of the things we take great pride in working with the airlines closely to make sure we know those schedules and if there is any deviation, they notify our coordination centers so that we can adjust and make sure that we have adequate people.

Ms. TITUS. As we try to get more international flights into Las Vegas, I think that will be important. Maybe look at those arrangements, if we can enhance them anyway.

I know that TSA works well with PreCheck and all, but we have heard more complaints about Global Entry. One of the problems seems to be the backlog in the application process. Some of that was COVID, some I don't know. Maybe you can address it.

Mr. Martel, are you trying to do anything about that backlog? Have you gotten it down? How can we help?

Mr. MARTEL. Yes, ma'am. Thank you for the question.

CBP has been working on addressing the backlog. We have done this through remote interviews for Global Entry renewals, we have been advocating enrollment on arrival at over 100 airports. So as

I said earlier, we process roughly 160,000 travelers that way. But we are also expanding our enrollment centers, we are opening up new enrollment centers at different locations. Within my AOR we are opening up two new enrollment centers to help adjudicate and reduce the backlog.

So we are actively involved. That is happening across the Nation at different ports of entry.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

One last question, going back to Mr. Langevin, talking about the privacy and the technology. It is often whack-a-mole, you come up with a new technology and then the criminal elements learn how to take advantage of it and then you have got to keep moving.

Have you had this experience? How do you deal with it? Is it a problem? Both of you.

Ms. BURKE. I was going to say, for TSA we continually test. In fact, an example that we gave yesterday was we had law enforcement come with a bag full of fake credentials, and some of them very sophisticated, and the equipment that we have and the software caught every one of them. So the ability to be accurate has gotten to be very sophisticated and very limited opportunity for people to be able to access with fake credentials.

Mr. MARTEL. Ma'am, on the CBP side I agree with Ms. Burke. Our technology actually has improved our ability to detect imposters, to detect false documents. The facial comparison technology is phenomenal and it rules out the human error part. So I would say, if anything, this technology has been put in place to enhance security and to ensure that we are addressing those very same concerns.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady yields back.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from New Jersey, Ms. Watson Coleman.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you Rep. Titus for inviting us. I wish I were there. I wish I had the opportunity to see all of the things that you are talking about because I don't have that technical vision in my head. So I need to see it for myself.

But I do have a couple of quick questions.

Mr. Martel, when I first got on this committee, Mr. Thompson used to raise this question of biometrics and inaccuracy as related to identifying people of color, as to who they are. Have things changed so that there is less error? Because I haven't heard Mr. Thompson ask about this question today. I am just wondering, has something remarkably improved so that that is not an issue or a complaint?

Mr. Martel.

Mr. MARTEL. Ma'am, I am not entirely informed or knowledgeable on that particular issue. I can certainly look into it and get back to you on if there has been any differences with regard to how the technology works based on color.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you.

What about you, Ms. Burke?

Ms. BURKE. I also would have to refer to the technical issues and the experts and would be glad to get back to you with some information.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Martel, Mr. Cleaver asked you a question, he said that when he returned from Mexico no one queried him as to whether or not he has his COVID vaccines or a COVID test. You commented that people come on international flight have to be vaccinated. But that didn't happen in this case. Is that because he is an American citizen? Or did I misunderstand your answer to his question?

Mr. MARTEL. No, you did not, ma'am. That is correct.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. So if you are an American—

Mr. MARTEL. He is—

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I am sorry. What is correct?

Mr. MARTEL. Ma'am, the vaccination requirement at airports, they are—the responsibility is placed on the airline to ensure that any documents that are required are in order. They do that in consultation with the CDC. So upon arrival in the air environment we would not necessarily ask for that information.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. So even international travelers that you said must be vaccinated in order to come into our country, you don't ask that. By the mere fact that they came in on that airplane, that airline has already taken care of that issue? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. MARTEL. That is correct, ma'am.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. OK. Last kind-of question I have is—and that is for both of you—are you both really under—are you really, really understaffed? If so, to what degree? I want to know how to be helpful.

Mr. MARTEL. Ma'am, from the CBP—

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Are you down 500, are you down 900, are you down—what?

Mr. MARTEL. On the CBP side, ma'am, in terms of the staffing, the actual vacancies, I would have to get back to you with those actual numbers. What I can say is that although we support the President's budget, as international travel resumes and as passenger counts meet or exceed pre-pandemic levels, CBP could certainly or can always use additional staffing.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Burke, could you respond?

Ms. BURKE. Yes. First, I would respond locally to say that, again, what we did was to overhire at McCarran so that we could loan people to Reno.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mm-hmm.

Ms. BURKE. So we have balanced out between our State the resources that we need to be fully staffed.

From a system standpoint, and I could not give you an exact number, but we have many large cities that have had many of the problems others are having in trying to hire. So we are under what would be an ideal amount of manpower and we are doing our best to spread the resources, as I have done in Nevada, across the entire country. So we may have—somebody has an overage, we may share that with another airport in order to bring them up to a higher

level of staffing. That is kind-of our mitigation plan as we go into this summer. But solving that problem——

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Yes, we would have to pay additional costs associated with moving that employee, right?

Ms. BURKE. Yes. You would have an additional cost for that period. It is a short-term solution and hopefully we will find the longer-term solution with the bill that has been proposed by Chairman Thompson.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you. I certainly am within support of that bill.

Thank you. I think my time is up.

I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much. The gentlelady yields back.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Florida, Mrs. Demings, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Well, thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Look, as a former police chief, I won't confirm or deny how many times I have been to Las Vegas, but I do appreciate Ms. Titus for hosting us today and so appreciate our witnesses. Chairman, as always, thank you for your leadership.

I too represent Orlando, Florida, one of the busiest airports. I was also assigned to Orlando International for several years as a police captain. I was assigned during 9/11, so I have certainly had an opportunity to work with CBP as well as involved in the formulation discussions and plans for the TSA. So this subject is of course very, very important to me. You know, we are so excited about the technologies. It certainly has changed the way that we now do business in terms of employees being able to be much more efficient, I think effective, but also in terms of our level of security. But I certainly believe that our most important resource is and always will be the boots on the ground, the men and women who do the job.

Ms. Burke, I have heard you talk about some of the challenges in terms of pay, with some of the private corporations that are much more enticing. I understand that. In Orlando, like Las Vegas and Los Angeles, the cost of living has certainly increased and the general schedule locality pay has failed to reflect local market conditions. So I would think that as persons are looking where they are going to work or where they are going to live, that certainly comes into play.

So I would love to hear from both of you how that has affected your ability to recruit, but I would also like to hear a little bit more about your attrition rates and what are some of the other reasons that the men and women of your various agencies will stay or leave.

Ms. BURKE. [Audio malfunction] California, it is much higher. So sometimes we pull people from California that want to work in Nevada and the advantage—one advantage we have, it doesn't match the California rate, but we don't have State tax here. So every State is unique with what it has to offer in the way of a total compensation package. But we found that most of our workers we hire locally, they are established in Las Vegas, they intend to stay here.

We have with the rates of pay being a challenge found that our turnover rate has been up over 25 percent in a number of months this year. It goes in spurts. But we have been able—we are a service-oriented kind of city, and so we do have a number of workers who are anxious to be hired by the government. We still have very strong benefits to offer compared to some other of the casinos, et cetera, in comparison.

So I think that is why we have been a little more successful here in being able to hire, just because our packages can be quite good. But other cities, that is not true. So, again, the bigger problem, it really has to be addressed in a different way than just the individual situation here in Nevada.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you.

Mr. Martel.

Mr. MARTEL. Thank you for the question, ma'am.

Well, I could tell you from my experience in the Los Angeles field office, you know, we did struggle many years ago with hiring individuals into Los Angeles on these National announcements that recruited people from other States. About 2½–3 years ago we began a local campaign to hire Angelinos, or people who reside in California as opposed to doing National announcements and in addition to that we also began heavy recruiting of veterans through our veteran recruitment announcements. I can say that that really turned our vacancy rate and offset our attrition rates tremendously. We carried an attrition rate years before of 10 percent, sometimes more, based on our inability to hire people because of the cost of living in Los Angeles. I am happy to say that today I am fully staffed, and not only fully staffed because of the local efforts by the men and women of the Los Angeles field office who are involved in our recruitment methods, but we have a very healthy and robust pipeline for, you know, the coming months, the coming year in terms of people who are ready, available, and have passed, you know, our preliminary requirements for employment.

But to your point, ma'am that does continue to be a challenge Nation-wide. I think that each field office does things differently. But from the Los Angeles perspective, we have really taken a local approach to not only recruit people from the greater Los Angeles area, but also capitalize on the men and women who have proudly served our country in our Armed Forces.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman, I believe my time is up. Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady yields.

Let me thank our first panel of witnesses. You have been thoughtful, you have laid it out. Thank you very much for the work you do on a daily basis. As I said, I saw first-hand the good work and I look forward to that good work continuing. Our committee feels very strongly about your missions. Let me say that the question both the last two individuals kind-of asked, and you gave the right answer, but—you know, they said do you have everything you need personnel-wise and money-wise, and you did a two-step, just like we expected you to do. But we understand. But we have to ask the question. I appreciate your answer. The two-step gives us exactly what we need to know. Our commitment to you is to give you

exactly what you need to do your job. I assure you that we will continue to do that.

Thank you very much.

At this time I will excuse you and we will ask our second panel of witnesses to come forward. After they assemble we will get the gentlelady from Nevada, Ms. Titus, an opportunity to introduce them.

Thank you very much.

The gentlelady from Nevada is recognized.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

It is a real pleasure for me to introduce to you these next two witnesses.

First we have Kate Wik, who is the chief marketing officer for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, LVCVA. In this capacity she is responsible for directing and overseeing efforts to promote travel to the world's most desirable city, Las Vegas, for leisure and business travel. Previously Ms. Wik spent nearly a decade with MGM Resorts International to develop their global brand strategy and consumer outreach. So I am eager to hear from her about how the Convention Authority is positioning itself to begin this renewed push for travel internationally and Nationally.

Our other panelist is Rosemary Vassiliadis—you met yesterday—who is the amazing director of aviation for Clark County. This is a role she has held since 2013. She oversees all operations at the airport as well as four general aviation airports in North Las Vegas, Henderson, Jean, and Overton. Notably, she is the first woman to hold this director position. She has been deeply involved in aviation activities in and around Las Vegas for years, including serving as an appointee to Nevada's Homeland Security Commission. As a member of the Homeland Security Commission she has had an inside look at how we do things in Nevada, and especially in the aviation space. So I think it will be very worthwhile for this committee to hear from her.

So I present to you Ms. Wik and Ms. Vassiliadis.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you. Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted in the record.

I now ask Ms. Wik to summarize her statement for 5 minutes.

Ms. WIK. Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. Ms. Wik.

Ms. WIK. Yes. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF KATE WIK, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, LAS VEGAS CONVENTION AND VISITORS AUTHORITY

Ms. WIK. Chairman Thompson, Representative Titus, and distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share relevant information on Las Vegas tourism as an input to your larger review.

I serve as the chief marketing officer for the Convention and Visitors Authority here. Our mission is to attract visitors from all over the globe by promoting Las Vegas as the world's most desirable destination for leisure and business travel.

For context about the size and scale of Las Vegas, of the world's 20 largest hotels, more than half are right here in Las Vegas. Across the entire destination here, there are approximately 150,000

rooms to fill, roughly 20,000 more than Orlando or New York City for context.

Tourism is our No. 1 economic driver. Pre-pandemic, tourism provided \$36.9 billion in direct economic impact and nearly \$64 billion in total economic impact per year to our economy. Las Vegas is more dependent on hospitality employment than any other large metro area in the Nation. This reality was magnified over the past 2 years. In the depths of the pandemic our unemployment rate exceeded twice the National rate at peak. The pandemic crippled our local economy and crippled our community and specifically, when visitation does not flow, it affects the livelihood of the estimated 2.3 million residents.

Managing through the pandemic has been anything but business as usual and I am happy to report that 2021 occupancy levels ended the year roughly 20 points higher than the National average. Visitor volume rebounded in 2021 to 75 percent recovered and as of last month visitation has recovered to roughly 85 percent of 2019 levels.

Compared to the overall picture, however, the international segment has been slower to recover. In 2019 we welcomed 5.7 million international visitors, accounting for 13 percent of our total visitation. Pre-pandemic this resulted in \$4.8 billion in direct economic impact and \$8.3 billion in total impact. Preliminary data suggests that international visitation in 2021 was just over a million travelers. That is about 20 percent less than pre-COVID volumes. Pre-pandemic Las Vegas regularly hosted more overnight international overnight visitors than any U.S. city that is not a major port of entry and ranked as the fifth top U.S. destination for international visitors.

Providing air service access is critical to the overall destination health and to realize the full impact of tourism. As of this June 2022 domestic air service to Las Vegas will be more than fully recovered. In fact, Las Vegas will soon have 12 more direct domestic flights than June 2019. That said, we still have more work to do. International air service to Las Vegas will only be 79 percent recovered in international capacity and will only recover 70 percent of international markets.

This continues to be one of our top priorities and there is a simple reason why. International visitors spend 40 percent more on average than domestic visitors. International visitation supports both business and leisure segments for us. For more than 26 consecutive years Las Vegas hosted the most top U.S. trade shows, and trade shows are global in scale. As one example, CES, the Consumer Electronics Show, typically they welcome over a third of their attendees from international markets. When these large global trade shows are hosted in Las Vegas, the destination has benefited from air carriers scheduling temporary additional flights and larger size aircraft from select international markets. The flexibility in collaboration with our DHS counterparts have been vital to facilitate these flights and accommodate the demand for these large shows.

On the leisure front, the expanding breadth of sports and entertainment will continue to draw visitors from across the globe. In December Las Vegas was awarded and named host city for Super-

bowl LVIII in 2024. In March Las Vegas and Formula One jointly announced a new Las Vegas Grand Prix for the 2023 race season. As as context, each Grand Prix is comparable to the size of a Superbowl. With Vegas, Formula One will now have 23 races in 21 different countries. Our event here is expected to attract over 170,000 visitors from across the globe and drive additional tourism above and beyond race week.

These marquee and high-profile events not only drive incremental visitation, they bring a very affluent traveler to market. These events often drive an increased demand of private aircraft on already peak travel periods.

In summary, Las Vegas is poised to continue to grow with domestic visitation well on its way to pre-COVID volumes. International visitation must be our focus to ensure success and ultimate recovery. This is a team effort. Our job at the LVCVA continues to be to drive demand to this incredible destination and I am thankful that our partners in Congress, including Congresswoman Titus, are actively engaging to ensure resources, staffing, and innovative processes and practices needed allow our Federal partners to keep up with our growing demand.

The LVCVA works in close partnership with Harry Reid International Airport and Director Rosemary Vassiliadis. We are grateful for our partnership and our common goals of not just returning but growing international visitation. As a united team, all of us can build the Las Vegas economy back even better, supporting more visitors, more jobs, and more economic impact.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wik follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KATE WIK

MAY 24, 2022

INTRODUCTION AND LVCVA BACKGROUND

Chairman Thompson, Representative Titus, and distinguished Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to share relevant information on Las Vegas Tourism as an input to your review of the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to improve processing for international visitors.

My name is Kate Wik. I serve as the chief marketing officer for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitor's Authority.

Our mission is to attract visitors from all over the globe by promoting Las Vegas as the world's most desirable destination for leisure and business travel.

TOURISM IMPACT

Tourism is the region's No. 1 economic driver. Pre-pandemic, tourism provided \$36.9 billion in DIRECT economic impact and contributed nearly \$63.6 billion in TOTAL economic impact per year to our economy.

There are many types of jobs impacted by tourism: Direct and indirect including induced jobs. We conservatively estimate that 37 percent of Southern Nevada jobs are supported by tourism, representing more than 376,800 Southern Nevada workers (direct, indirect, and induced).

Las Vegas is more dependent on leisure and hospitality employment than any other large metro area in the Nation. And, this reality was magnified with the pandemic. In the depths of the pandemic, Las Vegas' unemployment rate exceeded 31 percent, more than twice the National rate of 14.7 percent.

The shut-down crippled the local economy and crippled our community. When visitation does not flow, it affects the livelihood of the estimated 2.3 million Clark County residents.

SIZE AND SCALE OF LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas was built to operate in high volume. Of the world's largest 20 hotels, more than half are in Las Vegas alone. And within the United States, that is only further magnified. Of the United States' 20 largest hotels, only 3 are NOT in Las Vegas. Las Vegas has concentrated volume, like no other destination. In a concentrated area of the 5-mile "Las Vegas Strip," there are 36 hotels with over 1,000 rooms.

Across the entire Las Vegas destination, there are approximately 150,000 rooms to fill, 365 days a year. This is roughly 20K more rooms than the nearest domestic competitors of Orlando or New York City. For comparison, the top U.S. cities by number of hotel rooms include:

- Orlando, Florida: 137,000
- New York, New York: 130,000
- Los Angeles, California: 115,000.

And, Las Vegas hotel rooms are occupied at a higher rate than the National average. Las Vegas occupancy, pre-COVID approached 89 percent and the U.S. Domestic Average was 66 percent.

The high volume of hotel rooms combined with high occupancy rates directly translates to high annual visitation. In 2019, Las Vegas welcomed 42.5 million visitors. And, the first 2 months of 2020, prior to the pandemic, visitation was already up 4 percent year-over-year, putting Las Vegas on pace to welcome more than 43 million visitors during the year.

Las Vegas is able to operate and sustain high visitation because of the overall mix of segments of business. In 2019, the segment mix was:

- Total Visitation: 42.5 million visitors
- Leisure: 35.9 million visitors
- Business: 6.6 million convention attendees
- International: 13 percent or 5.7 million visitors; A core segment for future growth.

PANDEMIC RECOVERY & AIR SERVICE

Managing through and out of the pandemic is anything but business as usual. And, Las Vegas leads in pandemic recovery across multiple measures.

I am happy to report that 2021 occupancy levels ended the year roughly 20 points higher than the National average. Visitor volume rebounded to 32.2 million in 2021, 75 percent recovered from the pre-COVID tally of 42.5 million visitors in 2019 and up dramatically from 19 million in 2020. As of last month, visitation has recovered to roughly 85 percent of 2019 pre-COVID levels and May and June will see that recovery trajectory continue to improve.

Compared to the overall picture, however, the international segment has been slower to recover. In 2019, Las Vegas welcomed 5.7 million international visitors—accounting for 13 percent of total visitation. Pre-pandemic, this resulted in \$4.8 billion in DIRECT economic impact and \$8.3 billion in TOTAL impact (direct, indirect & induced).

However, preliminary data suggest international visitation to Las Vegas in 2021 was just over 1.1 million travelers, less than 20 percent of pre-COVID volumes.

Providing air service access to Las Vegas is critical to the overall destination health and the full impact of tourism. Pre-pandemic, visitors accessed Las Vegas almost evenly split between drive and fly access. For international travelers, the mix is closer to 60 percent arriving by air with 40 percent by ground.

Pre-pandemic, Las Vegas regularly hosted more overnight international visitors than any U.S. city that is not a major Port of Entry. Las Vegas ranks as the fifth top U.S. destination for international visitors. And, only New York City, Los Angeles, Orlando, and Miami host more annual international travelers.

As of June 2022, domestic air service to Las Vegas has more than fully recovered, with 127 domestic markets, 110 percent of 2019 service. In fact, Las Vegas will soon have 12 more direct domestic markets than June 2019.

This recovery is supported in large part by the leadership of our Congressional delegation, including Congresswoman Titus. She and other key members of the Nevada delegation worked tirelessly to keep Las Vegas and its workforce at the table during COVID relief negotiations, despite political headwinds from other sectors of our Nation's economy. The Federal funding ultimately provided through the American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA, is helping to build infrastructure vital to Nevada's economic recovery.

That said, we have more work to do. International air service to Las Vegas will be only 79 percent recovered in international capacity. And, will have recovered 70

percent of the international markets from pre-pandemic from 8 out of 10 previous countries.

Las Vegas will enjoy nonstop service from 15 different carriers from 18 international destinations, including those in Canada, Mexico, United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands, Panama, and Switzerland. Beginning in July 2022, Korean Air will resume flights from Seoul, South Korea to Las Vegas with a 3x weekly flight schedule.

International recovery continues to be one of our top priorities, we anticipate being fully recovered by the end of the year and have begun to focus on international growth due to its importance to Southern Nevada. There's a simple reason why this is so important to the Southern Nevada economy: International visitors spend 40 percent on average more than domestic visitors.

From the period of 2010 through 2019, international visitation to Las Vegas grew by 29 percent to nearly 5.7 million annual visitors. Las Vegas continues to be a "bucket list" destination for people world-wide and we expect visitation to continue to grow into the future. Markets of focus for new growth opportunities include:

- *Australia*.—4th largest foreign point of origin (unserved today), grew 33 percent in the same 2010 through 2019 time period.
- *Japan*.—5th largest foreign point of origin (unserved today), grew 8 percent over the period.
- *Brazil*.—9th largest foreign point of origin (unserved today), grew 140 percent over the period.
- *Ireland*.—11th largest foreign point of origin (unserved today), grew 23 percent over the period.

DRIVING FULL RECOVERY AND FUTURE GROWTH

Las Vegas is focused on driving growth over pre-pandemic levels. We drive demand through an unprecedented product (Vegas, baby!), a robust and growing entertainment calendar, and through a growing convention and tradeshow segment. All of which appeal to a global audience.

For more than a quarter century, 26 consecutive years, Las Vegas hosted the most top U.S. trade shows by a wide margin, hosting 42 major shows, well over our closest competitor at 17 shows. And trade shows are global in scale, with many attracting substantial international attendance.

The Consumer Electronics Show, CES, for example, has noted that upwards of a third (35 percent) of their attendees were international in 2019 (pre-COVID). Other examples include:

- *National Assn of Broadcasters*.—26 percent int'l in 2019.
- *SEMA*.—24 percent int'l in 2019.
- *National Hardware*.—29 percent int'l in 2019.

When larger trade shows are hosted in Las Vegas, the destination has benefited from air carriers scheduling temporary added flights and/or larger-size aircraft from select international markets. The flexibility and collaboration with our DHS counterparts have been vital to facilitate these flights.

ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS & EVENTS

Long known as the Entertainment Capital of the World, in recent years Las Vegas is more accurately known as the Greatest Arena on Earth. The expanding breadth of evolving sports and entertainment experiences will continue to draw visitors from across the globe.

With more than 100 showrooms comprising upwards of 130,000 seats and another 27 stadiums and arenas with combined capacity approaching a half a million, Las Vegas has more entertainment venues than any other city in the United States.

With its diversity of venues, Las Vegas can host every type of headliner or event, from an intimate lounge show featuring Lady Gaga to an epic music festival like the Electric Daisy Carnival and its 150,000 nightly attendees.

Las Vegas features residencies by the world's most popular artists, drawn in by our incredible venues, including Allegiant stadium, completed in 2020, which hosted 19 major concerts and sporting events just within the second half of 2021.

And, we continue to pitch and secure new events with global appeal. Three recent examples include:

Concacaf Gold Cup Finals.—Las Vegas was host to the Concacaf Gold Cup Finals in August 2021 at Allegiant Stadium. The international soccer tournament features men's national teams from North America, Central America, and the Caribbean. The tournament is held every 2 years and determines the continental champion and is broadcast across multiple countries. The 62k tickets for the final event in Las Vegas sold out in just 90 minutes—a tournament record.

NFL Super Bowl 58.—In December 2021, Las Vegas was awarded and named host city for the NFL marquee sporting event: Super Bowl 58 to be held February 2024. While hosting the marquee event is prestigious and captures major media attention and is the most watched domestic sporting event, research has shown that the event has created more than \$500 million in total economic impact for the host city, and more than 350,000 room nights.

Formula 1.—In March 2022, Las Vegas and Formula 1 jointly announced a new Las Vegas Grand Prix for the 2023 Formula 1 race season. The Las Vegas Grand Prix will be a marquee event on the Formula 1 calendar and establishes a third race location in the United States, joining Miami and Austin. And, it will be a night race on a street track on the iconic Las Vegas Strip. The race is an ideal partnership, bringing the excitement and intensity of Formula 1 to the Greatest Arena on Earth. Formula 1 is a global sport with a 72-year history. F1 currently races in 21 countries across 5 continents. The Las Vegas event is projected to result in over \$400 million in direct incremental spend, and over \$700 million in total economic impact.

The Las Vegas race will draw a global audience, both in-person and watching broadcasts of the event around the world. The event is expected to attract over 170,000 visitors who will occupy over 400,000 room nights. Globally, the average audience per Grand Prix is 87 million; In 2020 the largest TV audience for a race was 103.7 million. Within the 5 days of the announcement, the news generated an unprecedented amount of media coverage and social buzz, showcasing the global interest and momentum for a global audience.

Marquee and high-profile events not only drive incremental visitation, they also bring a very affluent traveler to market. These events often drive an increased demand of private aircraft to the airport on already peak travel periods.

IN SUMMARY

Tourism is a major economic driver for southern Nevada. Las Vegas is poised to continue to grow coming out of this pandemic. With domestic visitation to Las Vegas well on its way to pre-COVID volumes, international visitors should be our focus to assure Las Vegas' success and ultimate recovery.

This is a team effort. The job of the LVCVA continues to be to drive demand to this incredible destination, and I am thankful that our partners in Congress, including Congresswoman Titus, are actively engaging to provide resources, staffing and the innovative practices needed to allow our Federal partners to keep up with this growing demand.

The LVCVA works in close partnership with Harry Reid International Airport, and Director Rosemary Vassiliadis. We are grateful for our partnership and our common goals including the recovery and growth of international visitation.

I know that as a united team, all of us can build the Las Vegas economy back even better—supporting more visitors, more jobs, and more indirect economic impact.

Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

I now ask Ms. Vassiliadis to summarize her statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ROSEMARY A. VASSILIADIS, DIRECTOR OF AVIATION, CLARK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF AVIATION

Ms. VASSILIADIS. Thank you very much, Chairman Thompson, Representative Titus, and Members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to share my views on how to improve the flow of passengers at U.S. airports.

Given my role as director of aviation at Harry Reid International Airport, or LAS, I will emphasize my experience with travel in Las Vegas. However, my points will generally apply to the needs and challenges at airports across the country.

I also appreciate your willingness to hear testimonies from my colleagues representing U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Transportation Security Administration, and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. Our partnership here in this town is unprecedented and our continued cooperation is critical to the

success of the travel industry and the millions of valued customers we each serve.

This is a great time for air travel. A particularly exciting time for those of us in Las Vegas as so many big attractions return, as you just heard, or join our communities' always busy events calendar. Before the pandemic nonstop international air service was a great success story. To reiterate the Chairman's opening remarks, passengers flying to Las Vegas from outside the country increased every year from 2011 through 2019, peaking at nearly 3.8 million flyers, both in 2018 and 2019. These are remarkable numbers for a point-to-point destination that differs greatly from traditional U.S. gateway airports, such as those in Atlanta, Chicago, LA, or New York.

In 2019 LAS had nonstop service to and from 12 different countries spread across 4 continents. Then came COVID-19 and all of that disappeared almost overnight. Thankfully, our traffic is in recovery. As you heard, we now enjoy non-stops from Canada, Mexico, Panama, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany, and Switzerland. We will also welcome back South Korean flights in a few weeks and hope to add more markets later this year. Last month our final numbers of international passengers at LAS totaled more than 200,000, a huge jump from the 31,000 we reported in April 2021.

We do have high hopes for this summer's travel season, but our success will require active leadership from the Department of Homeland Security to ensure our guests do not experience delays caused by staffing shortages. Despite significant increases to the cost of airfare, traffic at LAS is finally nearing pre-pandemic levels. We need a full complement of CBP and TSA staffing for Las Vegas to both recover and further grow its core economic base.

So to this end I will propose a few specific suggestions.

First, provide funding to increase CBPs staffing levels at U.S. airports in order to meet current and future needs. I urge the Congress to pay for new CBP officers to handle expected growth. Research from the airport's trade association shows CBP's work load staffing model already reveals a shortage of nearly 1,000 officers across the system and we anticipate those staffing shortages can soon worsen.

Separately, LAS is not a 24-hour port. We need CBP to help us ensure new international service can be accommodated. We have recently experienced carriers asking to schedule arrivals outside of CBP's operating hours in order to maximize their connecting opportunities and fill more seats on U.S.-bound flights. As LAS looks at new markets in Asia and the South Pacific, flight patterns into the Western airports suggest we will receive even more requests to arrive outside current port hours. As we recover CBP needs more flexibility to accommodate such requests.

Last, the airports applaud Congressman Titus and the members of Nevada's delegation for their recent bipartisan letter to the President, asking him to fully exempt vaccinated air travelers from pre-flight testing requirements. As already discussed, we know that once the United States eliminates this testing, international traffic will jump instantly. This again begs for CBP officers at U.S. air-

ports and for keeping CBP airport staff at airports and not the Southern Border.

We also need Congress to provide sufficient funding to expand biometric exit solution at airports. Pilot programs are in place at select U.S. airports, as a few of you saw. I am so proud to report LAS is leading the way in this area. But airport facilities were not designed for the needs of a fully biometric exit program, nor does CBP staffing model account for officers to implement 100 percent biometric exit programs.

Also, I ask Congress to provide dedicated funding for CBP to expand and promote Global Entry and NEXUS and related tried and true technologies to improve passenger facilitation and security. Also provide funding for the number of transportation security officers, or TSOs, and the technologies needed to screen passengers and baggage effectively and efficiently. TSA's resource allocation plan demonstrates thousands of additional TSOs are needed to provide adequate staffing at both these critical operational areas.

Also, stop diverting TSA user fees to utilize other Federal programs is called for in the administration's budget request. Nine-eleven passenger security fees now go to the Treasury for other uses. This is money TSA could otherwise use to hire additional TSOs.

Also ensure TSA has the funding to upgrade or replace explosive detection systems, or EDSs. Many airport systems are outdated and must be replaced. Thankfully LAS has already received Federal money to begin these replacements, for which I am grateful. Still, I recommend a prohibition to prevent TSA from redirecting any unused EDS funds toward other programs until all eligible airports receive full reimbursement.

Believe it or not, finally, ensure TSA continues to staff airport exit lanes and meet the obligations to that law enforcement officer, or LEO, reimbursement program, rejecting the administration's attempt to eliminate these programs and shift the full burden to airports. We appreciate Congress' continued effort to ensure TSA abides by the provisions in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013, which specifically directs the agency to monitor exit lanes. Likewise, as security threats in public areas continue to evolve and TSA imposes additional requirements on airport law enforcement officers, we need Congress to fully support and fund LEO reimbursement programs.

So these are just a few suggestions and I appreciate your willingness to travel to Las Vegas to hold this hearing at Harry Reid International. This airport provides a \$35 billion annual economic benefit to the community and supports, directly and indirectly, nearly 25 percent of all jobs in southern Nevada.

My peers and I will continue to work together to provide travelers with the world-class experience each time they fly, but I truly believe my proposals will allow us to continue our recent success.

I thank the committee again for this opportunity to testify.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Vassiliadis follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROSEMARY A. VASSILIADIS

MAY 24, 2022

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, Rep. Titus, and Members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to share my views regarding ways to improve passenger processing at U.S. airports. Whether it involves domestic service or international flights, restoring air travel to pre-pandemic levels and beyond is essential to the growth and well-being of America's economy.

Given my role as director of aviation at Harry Reid International Airport (LAS), my remarks will emphasize my experiences and familiarity with the travel industry here in Las Vegas. However, please know the points I share today generally apply to the needs and challenges at airports both large and small, spread all across the country.

I sincerely appreciate your willingness to hear my thoughts, as well as today's previous testimonies of my colleagues representing U.S. Customs and Border Protection; the Transportation Security Administration; and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. Our continued cooperation and partnership are critical to the success of the U.S. air travel industry and the millions of valued customers our organizations respectively serve.

Prior to the pandemic, nonstop international air service was a wonderful success story for Las Vegas. The number of passengers who came to Las Vegas via foreign-flag air carriers increased each year from 2011 through 2019, topping out at nearly 3.8 million annual passengers in both 2018 and 2019. These were remarkable numbers for a point-to-point destination market such as Las Vegas, which differs greatly from traditional U.S. gateway hub airports such as those in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles or New York.

Over the course of 2019, LAS enjoyed nonstop service to and from 12 different countries spread over 4 continents. Then came COVID-19, and all of that disappeared almost overnight.

Thankfully, our international traffic has begun its recovery. Today at LAS, we enjoy direct non-stop service from Canada, Mexico, Panama, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany, and Switzerland. We'll welcome back South Korean service in a few weeks, and hope to add more international markets later this year.

This April, international air passengers at LAS totaled nearly 191,000—a significant jump from the 31,000 air passengers reported in the same month a year ago. With most of our pre-pandemic markets back on-line, we have high hopes for the coming summer travel season, and our success will require active leadership from the Department of Homeland Security—especially U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—to ensure our international guests do not experience significant delays due to staffing shortages.

First, I want to congratulate the administration for adopting COVID-19 health and safety protocols that enabled the wide return of international passengers beginning last fall. These current targeted, risk-based approaches are a much more effective strategy than the one-size-fits-all tactics under the prior Presidential Proclamation banning nearly all non-essential travel between the United States and specific countries. The need to be vigilant remains; we cannot permit a reemergence of the virus to again decimate travel to Nevada, nor any other States. LAS has invested millions in improvements to the airport to prepare for the safe return of travelers. Notwithstanding the significant increase in the costs for airfare, passenger levels at LAS are finally recovering to their pre-pandemic levels. We need a full complement of CBP and TSA staffing on-site at LAS for Las Vegas to both recover and further grow its core economic base.

To this end, I would like to propose a few specific suggestions to boost the industry.

SUPPORT CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION (CBP) STAFFING, TECHNOLOGY DEPLOYMENT, AND TRUSTED TRAVELER PROGRAMS AS PASSENGER TRAFFIC RETURNS TO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS

- *Provide funding to increase CBP staffing levels at U.S. airports to meet current and future needs.*—We urge the Congress to provide funding for new CBP officers so the agency is prepared to handle an influx of new international passengers, and support those air service opportunities finally returning our airports. CBP's latest workload staffing model, which used data from the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, still reveals a shortage of nearly 1,000 officers across the system. Since the model was most recently run, the pandemic has subsided and international trade and travel volumes are expected to surpass pre-pandemic levels in many locations. Current staffing levels already fail

to address the growing demand of travel and trade at our airports-of-entry, and we anticipate the workload staffing model will indicate drastically higher CBP staffing shortages in subsequent runs.

Providing additional CBP officers during this time of growth among international passengers and cargo will reduce lengthy wait times, and facilitate new economic opportunities in communities throughout the United States. On top of that, CBP is preparing a large redeployment of officers from air and sea ports to the Southern Border, which will further exacerbate staffing and workload shortfalls at airports. Increasing the overall number of CBP officers will allow the agency greater flexibility to maintain its operational capacity at all ports-of-entry.

LAS is not a 24-hour port. We therefore need CBP to work with us as we seek schedules for returning and new service that fit into our port's available hours. We have already experienced international carriers which sought to schedule select LAS arrivals outside of our port's current operating hours, all in order to maximize connecting opportunities to fill more seats on U.S.-bound flights. As LAS looks to new potential markets in Asia and the South Pacific, existing flight patterns into other western U.S. destinations likewise suggest we'll receive more requests for flights to arrive outside of today's port hours.

During a recovery period in which we cannot afford to turn away visitors, flexibility in staffing availability within the ports is critical to both our near-term growth, and future expansions of air service into LAS.

Last, we anticipate when the United States eliminates pre-departure COVID-19 testing requirement for arriving foreign travelers, international traffic will jump instantly. Airlines for America this month shared a survey of its carriers that estimated dropping existing testing rules would bring in an additional 4.3 million international passengers and \$1.7 billion in incremental revenue—and could result in an incremental 1.075 million foreign visitors and \$2.1 billion in visitor spending.

In addition, with the agency's precipitous drop in collected user fees during the COVID-19 pandemic, airports greatly appreciate Congress providing supplemental resources to help CBP maintain its staffing levels and also continue to on-board new officers during this difficult period.

- *Provide sufficient funding to advance biometric-exit solutions at airports.*—CBP has begun biometric-exit pilots at select U.S. airports, and I am proud to report LAS is leading the way. But numerous infrastructure, process, staffing, and funding challenges must still be overcome before a full-scale biometric exit program can be implemented Nation-wide.

Today's airports simply were not designed to accommodate the space, technology, and connectivity needs of a fully biometric exit program, and CBP's workforce staffing model does not account for the number of officers needed to implement fully biometric exit program at airports. Airports support dedicated CBP funding for biometric implementation that accounts for the actual, upfront infrastructure and staffing investments, as well as for the on-going maintenance and staffing support CBP needs to administer these programs with minimal disruptions to the traveling public.

- *Provide dedicated funding for CBP to expand and promote Global Entry and NEXUS and related technology to improve passenger facilitation and security.*—Airports support the Global Entry and NEXUS international trusted traveler programs to expedite the processing of passengers departing from Canadian preclearance airports or arriving at airports in the United States.

These programs are crucial for speeding facilitation, enhancing security, and helping to mitigate the shortage of CBP officers. Expanding the availability of trusted traveler programs to capture more travelers would allow CBP to focus more on passengers who have not been previously vetted, thus enhancing security and processing efficiency. Airports will continue to work with CBP to identify passenger processing technology efficiencies, and to promote the expansion of its international trusted traveler programs.

SUPPORT THE TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION'S (TSA) RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE SECURITY SCREENING, ASSIST LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND DEPLOY NEW TECHNOLOGY

- *Provide funding for the number of Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) and screening technology necessary to screen passengers and baggage effectively and efficiently.*—With passenger volumes next year expected to surpass those of 2019, TSA needs adequate resources to ensure screening checkpoint and baggage operations keep pace with growing passenger volumes and security de-

mands. TSA's resource allocation plan demonstrates that thousands of additional TSOs are necessary to provide adequate staffing at security checkpoints and baggage screening locations. These officers would help mitigate vulnerabilities associated with large groups of passengers waiting in lengthy queues at TSA passenger screening checkpoints, as well as the potential for misconnecting checked baggage and passengers to miss their intended flights. Additionally, deploying adequate technology to screening checkpoints would help TSA increase security efficiency and effectiveness. TSA also should accelerate the on-going testing, enhancement, and procurement of new technology that will increase security, produce significant budget savings, and enhance traveler convenience. Congress could accelerate the testing and deployment of new technology at security checkpoints such as:

- Enhanced Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT)
- Credential Authentication Technology with a camera (CAT-2)
- Computed Tomography (CT) integrated with Automated Screening Lanes (ASLs)
- Explosive Detection Systems (EDS).

In accordance with an Aviation Security Advisory Committee recommendation, establish an airport security-focused grant program at TSA to support the deployment of perimeter control, access control, checkpoint screening systems, automated screening lanes, and other security technology at airports.

- *End the diversion of TSA user fees to subsidize other Federal programs, as called for in the administration's budget request.*—Congress established the 9/11 Passenger Security Fee to fund civil aviation security services, including the salary, benefits, and overtime of Transportation Security Officers, as well as the acquisition, operation, and maintenance of screening equipment. However, over a 14-year period ending in 2027, a total of more than \$18.1 billion in collected TSA user fees will be siphoned off to offset the National debt. In the near term, this diversion will cost the TSA \$1.5 billion in foregone revenue in each of fiscal years 2022 and 2023 alone—funds that TSA could otherwise be using to hire more Transportation Security Officers, invest in emerging checkpoint screening systems that detect more complex threat items while increasing efficiency, upgrade current systems more quickly as new capabilities arise, and replace outdated baggage screening systems.

With wait times increasing at TSA security checkpoints, the entire 9/11 Passenger Security Fee should be used to adequately fund TSA technology procurement and for the TSO staffing levels necessary to screen passengers and their baggage effectively and efficiently.

- *Ensure TSA has the funding necessary to purchase new explosive detection systems (EDS) to replace outdated systems, and to continue to fulfill its obligation to reimburse eligible airports for having installed EDS.*—As many EDS have or are rapidly reaching the end of their useful lives, TSA needs funding to purchase replacement systems. Thankfully, LAS has already received Federal money to begin these replacements, for which I am grateful.

Absent necessary funding to widen this effort, TSA will incur increasing costs to operate and maintain old systems that routinely break and adversely impact security and airport operations. We appreciate the Congress providing funding in the past 3 fiscal years for TSA to reimburse airports for previously-incurred costs associated with the construction and deployment of in-line checked baggage screening systems. Since these airports diverted significant amounts of money from other important aviation security projects in order to purchase and install EDS, we encourage Congress to continue to provide additional funding so TSA can follow through on its commitment to reimburse airports.

We recommend including a prohibition that prevents TSA from redirecting any unused EDS funds to other TSA programs until all eligible airports receive full reimbursement.

- *Ensure TSA continues to staff airport exit lanes, rejecting the administration's attempts to eliminate the program and shift the full burden to airports.*—We appreciate Congress's continued effort to ensure that TSA abides by the provision in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013, which specifically directs the agency to monitor those exit lanes where it performed the function on December 1, 2013. Airports remain concerned about potential security issues and the significant costs associated with TSA instituting an unfunded mandate for airport operators to provide staff to monitor these exit lanes.

In addition, we support TSA installing appropriate exit-lane monitoring technology where feasible and appropriate.

- *Ensure TSA has the funds necessary to fulfill its obligation to reimburse airports under the Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) Reimbursement Program instead of*

shifting the full burden to airports.—We appreciate Congress's continued effort to preserve the LEO Reimbursement Program. TSA created this program to partially reimburse airports for providing law enforcement officer staffing at screening checkpoints because the agency did not have the funding to do so, as required in Federal law. Over time, many airports have entered into reimbursable agreements with TSA to provide law enforcement officers to support TSA screening operations. As security threats in the public areas of airports continue to evolve—and TSA imposes additional requirements on airport law enforcement officers—it is essential for Congress to provide TSA adequate funding to fully support the LEO Reimbursement Program.

Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. I thank the witnesses for their testimony. I will remind each Member that he or she will have 5 minutes to question the witnesses.

I will now recognize myself for questions.

Let me thank both of you ladies for your excitement about the job you do and the fact that you have pretty much said in spite of 2½ years of something, the numbers appear to be going in the right direction and with a little help from Congress we can do even more.

So, Ms. Wik, can you explain to the committee and to the public at large who are viewing this why a good experience at an airport is important to tourism like a city like Las Vegas?

Ms. WIK. Absolutely. Thank you for your question, Chairman.

A trip begins with the moment that you book the trip. It is the excitement that builds inside you, that eager, the looking forward to what is going to happen. It happens the moment you leave your door and you arrive at the airport to come to Las Vegas. Making sure that the process is seamless and frictionless for travel is incredibly important because we want these visitors to return. We want them to have a great experience from the moment they leave their house to the moment they leave their destination. We don't want an amazing trip to be ruined by a bad experience on their way out of the market. We want to make sure that it is, again, seamless and frictionless for every traveler.

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, so we are at the airport. So, Ms. Vassiliadis, can you explain how you work here at the airport to make sure that that is exactly what happens when people come to this airport?

Ms. VASSILIADIS. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the question.

Our motto here at the airport is we are the first and last look of Las Vegas. We are part of that experience that Kate just mentioned. From the time that door opens from the jet bridge to the time it closes back, people are choosing to come to Las Vegas. What we do is we host a discretionary type of customer. We are not a transfer airport, we are not a big hub for the large carriers, we are an origin and destination. They come to Las Vegas, they leave Las Vegas. Most of our visitors are on the leisure side of the categories. So, again, they choose to come here. We want that experience from the very get-go to be the one that they have chosen and strive for, and then they come back. So we want it smooth, we want it seamless, but we want it to be part of Vegas.

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, thank you much.

One of the things we try to do in Congress was to address the pandemic in a responsible manner to work with State and locals

so that those who did travel would be protected and those who worked in travel and the entertainment industry, or just in general, they would be protected also.

So do you think the COVID-19 protocols for Las Vegas proper worked? Is there anything else that you see that we might should have done or could do going forward?

Ms. WIK. Thank you for that, Chairman.

Las Vegas worked closely with local and State government to make sure that we were creating a safe environment to welcome visitors. Everybody had a different level of comfort traveling during the pandemic and we wanted to make sure that we were following CDC guidelines, all scientific recommendations how to provide that safe experience. We did that. We actively communicated that. We came out of the pandemic with a stellar brand reputation of making sure that we were taking all of the facts into consideration and creating experiences that we knew our visitors wanted, but wanted to feel safe about having during this time frame. So it was a challenging 2 years, but we leaned into it. Through partnership we made sure that we are actively developing these guidelines and communicating with them to ensure that our customers knew what to expect when they arrived.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

Ms. Vassiliadis.

Ms. VASSILIADIS. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We also looked at it as—again, it started here and what we started with, being that our town was closed for a period of time, although airports were still open, we still had airline crews go through, we certainly had medical staff being transferred around the country, we had PPE coming through our airport and to our city. We knew we needed to start with our employees. We thought if our employees feel safe, then when we open back up and our visitors come back, they are going to—the visitor is going to feel that. So we had a very, very comprehensive, very visible visual invisible program of cleaning and disinfecting. We actually had our own LAS roadway to recovery and we had it in the different phases of what we needed to do from messaging—and you probably still see some stickers on the floor and throughout the terminal. We did it Vegas style because we knew when people came back they are choosing to come back to Las Vegas and they want Vegas. So we did it with a little bit of flair, poker chips, you know, all the usual identifiable type of things.

But we were ready and I do think that our numbers show that it worked, because our leisure traveler—for us here at the airport our leisure traveler has surpassed 2019 leisure category.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Correa, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, Ms. Titus, thank you for the important hearing. This information applies really well to my district. So, again, thank you very much.

Ms. Wik, in your testimony you mentioned that international travel has lagged behind domestic travel in terms of recovery. Can you tell me any specific reason?

Ms. WIK. International travel has lagged for multiple reasons. No. 1, just different states of COVID outbreaks globally and the roller coaster of the pandemic and where it has hit at different times.

No. 2, the lack of confidence on getting to a destination, being stuck in a destination. Just the pandemic created a lot of unknowns. I think travelers decided to just wait and see and see what was going to happen.

Mr. CORREA. Let me interrupt you.

Ms. WIK. Sure.

Mr. CORREA. That lack of confidence, I have seen that at airports where families are there. For some reason they are stuck because of the test. The test is too late. You know, it is 48 hours, they got in 30 hours and they are stuck. It is a horrible nightmare.

So I am trying to figure out—the prior panel spoke to the fact that we are moving from a test to a vaccination scenario where if you are fully vaccinated it is a different situation altogether. This should help, don't you think?

Ms. WIK. I personally agree with that. I have seen some of our trade shows adopt that as well where you can show—you can pre-register for a trade show, initiate that you have your full vaccination status, and then it is easy for you to come and go within the trade show.

Mr. CORREA. I was here for the Electronics Association a while ago and I thought that was good. It was just sad that the turnout was not what it has been in the past. More important, primarily because of the international participation. But if that is a fact, if we can make a difference there—again, I am going to come back to the same question I asked the prior panel, which is what can we do to get the message out that if you are fully vaccinated then you shouldn't have issues coming or leave.

Ms. WIK. Mm-hmm. Partnering with U.S. Travel Association, partnering with Brand USA, we have international offices that we are reinstating across the globe to help us actively market Las Vegas. It comes down to what many of my colleagues here today have talked about, a messaging campaign. Making sure that international travelers know we are open, we are open for business, we are open safely, and they can access us safely. That is absolutely the message to get across that we are working on.

Mr. CORREA. What are the factors you were going to elaborate on before I interrupted you?

Ms. WIK. I don't remember. Sorry.

Mr. CORREA. Ms. Vassiliadis, the same question. Glad that never happens to me.

Ms. VASSILIADIS. [Audio malfunction] of fully vaccinated—thank you—being the overriding requirement I think will help tremendously. It will be consistent with many other countries that, you know, that we could go to. That will I think also give a veil of ease, like we have seen at conventions when vaccinations are required.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you very much.

Ms. WIK. did you recollect any of those factors yet?

Ms. WIK. I support what my colleague spoke about. I think it is really about identifying what the barriers are for travel—

Mr. CORREA. Consistency.

Ms. WIK [continuing]. And eliminating them.

Mr. CORREA. What rules, so to speak.

Ms. WIK. Correct. Consistently and eliminating barriers and friction. Let us try to make it as seamless as possible for visitors to get here.

Mr. CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

One of the other things is repeat business, as you look at this too. My experiences have been when I run into international visitors, you know, a certain percentage of them have been here before and they enjoyed the experience and they came back. I mean so I think that is part of making the experience positive. We obviously want to make sure that our Government doesn't participate in not making it a positive experience. That is why when they get here, you know, go through, make sure all the protocols for security and other things are met. But it doesn't—it shouldn't take 2–3 hours for me to prove who I am and that I have been vaccinated. So I think that is where technology helps that process so much. So that, you know, you can get through in a matter of minutes. You say, woo, I like this. I think that is the wow factor you want from a visitor.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Cleaver, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLEAVER. Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

I was stunned by your numbers of the world's largest 20 hotels, half of them are in Las Vegas. That is absolutely amazing. I understand it. But do the hotels, realizing that their business begins to take root when people land here at Harry Reid, do they participate in any kind of organization with the airport—or that is probably not the right word—but is there an on-going discussion with or request from the hotel industry and the airport?

Ms. VASSILIADIS. Thank you, Congressman.

You know, the last 2½ years have been very unusual and unique. What we have normally done unfortunately was paused, but it is something that is back on our docket to do, which is we go out and we meet together partnered with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. The airport meets with the major resort people and give them an update. We did a little bit of it, you know, virtually. It was really hard though these past couple of years, but it is something that we are resuming later on this calendar year.

Mr. CLEAVER. This question is probably—the interest probably almost exclusively in Washington, but, you know, we survived, albeit with a lot of bad memories and pain and heartache, but we—I think we are on the other side, although there is reason to be concerned about this new explosion of new cases. But this is more of—some of the information from my colleagues and me, not just this committee, but all over Congress and that do you believe that the people, the business leaders in Las Vegas understand where the Payroll Protection Plan was originated or was it just some—you know, we got some money from the Government or somewhere to—you know, to do something? I mean people—the industry was able to continue even if—even at a lower level because of the PPP pro-

gram. Do you think people have any understanding of how that came about or where the interest in doing something originated?

Ms. WIK. I think they do. Knowing the dependency of tourism on Las Vegas, all of our resort stakeholders worked very closely with State government on understanding what resources were available, how to weather this storm. We are actually funded—the LVCVA is funded partially by a room tax. So we work closely with our resort partners to understand what are those barriers, how do we work together, how do we bring this pipeline of tourism back.

So I know there was a lot of dialog between State and local government, along with the resort corridor on how to maximize all the resources that you guys were fighting for them.

Mr. CLEAVER. Mm-hmm. You asked the question, they have a lot of contact with the State government and probably don't understand that all the money that went into the State government was voted on by the people sitting at this table.

Ms. WIK. Mm-hmm.

Mr. CLEAVER. We find that that is a problem. I chair the housing subcommittee and we send money into the State and then into cities. As a former mayor—I was mayor of Kansas City—millions and millions and millions of dollars were spent every year by cities, including Las Vegas, where they received money as an entitlement city that came through the Federal budget. People have—all the people who benefit, probably less than 1 percent have any idea where the money originated. I mean many of them may—well, the State gave it to us or somebody out there gave it. Then as a mayor I can tell you, mayors call press conferences and announce big projects and get praise for something that they had nothing to do with.

OK. I am not upset. But I am just telling you that—you know, I think the people here saved this country and probably 99 percent of the country has absolutely no idea. So they can feel comfortable in hating the Federal Government.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Yes. But it was the right thing to do, Mr. Cleaver.

Mr. CLEAVER. Yes, it was.

Chairman THOMPSON. So all of us are Americans and clearly our Government has a responsibility, especially in times like the pandemic, to step up and do the right thing. So my conscience is clear that that investment through the PPP program and others was absolutely necessary. The support we gave to the travel industry, especially airlines, I mean, you know, it was—well, it helps them survive. I mean it was tough, so.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Las Vegas for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I agree. It was not just the airlines, it was the restaurants, all the ancillary businesses that we saved. The restaurants we saved, the shuttered venues. We sent all that money. Nevada got an awful lot of money, \$1 billion more than we would have because we included unemployment in the formula, not just population. But I can tell you, there are a lot people out there cutting ribbons and

holding up big checks that they got from us and they forget to invite us to the party.

But I am kind-of inclined to agree with the preacher.

But back to my questions.

I am really glad, Ms. Vassiliadis, you mentioned about Global Entry and about the need for more flexibility to get people there and on off-hours because I thought the answer to my question was a little optimistic or a little rosier than the actual situation is. I think we do need to work on that.

Talking about foreign travelers, not just for business, but we have found here in the west when they stay longer they kind-of do a loop. They come to Las Vegas, they go to the Grand Canyon, they go to San Francisco, and then they go visit Mr. Correa down at Disneyworld. We market—

Mr. CORREA. Disneyland, Disneyland.

Ms. TITUS. We market ourselves as part of that loop. I think that is a way to appeal to foreign travelers. I hope that we are doing some of that.

I want to go to the smaller airports though. Any time there is a big fight or now a big ball game or a big concert, a lot of people fly in here on their private jets. Now you oversee the smaller general aviation airports in addition to Harry Reid. Can you talk to us about the security there? I know that they put out some kind of guidelines several years ago. How does that work? Is it effective? Do we need to take a look at that?

Ms. VASSILIADIS. Thank you, Congresswoman. I appreciate the question.

The general aviation airports do operate under different security rules. So being that they are not commercial airports, it does not have TSA located there. It is a private business type of operation where you can hire a porter share, people have their own planes, you can fly on somebody else's, you know, smaller type of aircraft that is not on a scheduled bases. So there is security in the system overall per se, but it is not the same type of check-in, going through a checkpoint that you see at commercial airports. So the operation is a little bit different.

But, as you mentioned, with special events it is a whole new world for us of what type of activity that we are getting due to special events. So for the Raider games—and really any professional sports—there are a separate type of security rules for a team to, you know, come in as they do. Their aircraft is usually rather large, so they do operate here at LAS.

Ms. TITUS. Those Raiders fans aren't really like your ballet crowd, are they?

Ms. VASSILIADIS. They are very passionate about their team.

Ms. TITUS. So are the guidelines that were put out by TSA several years ago for these smaller airports, are they adequate? Or with the new scene do we need to look at upgrading those or?

Ms. VASSILIADIS. Thus far they seem to be working. I don't have any examples of something that got us into a situation. You know, security is layers. There are all different layers from a time a person, you know, makes a reservation, you know, for commercial versus making a reservation for private. There are measures that

are taken and I am happy to report that we have not had any incidents due to lack of any of those layers.

Ms. TITUS. That is good to hear.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady yields back.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Florida, Mrs. Demings, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Well, thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to both of our witnesses for being with us today.

Ms. Wik, I heard you say loud and clear that you have about 20,000 more hotel rooms than Orlando. I represent Orlando and represent the Orlando International Airport. So what I heard is we have some work to do in Orlando and we are going to be busy doing that work.

I just want to talk about, as we talk about trying to get back to where we once were, and as I heard both of you talk about the experience and how important it is, of course we say that the experience begins, as you indicated, Ms. Wik, once you book your flight. Certainly once you arrive to the Orlando International Airport, the experience begins there. We have certainly done a tremendous amount of work to make that happen.

We are currently about 95 percent of our 2019 passenger volume. So we still have some work to do. I know that, you know, this is occurring all over the Nation, but you mentioned there are different states of COVID outbreaks and people find themselves stuck in particular places. Have you seen, Ms. Wik, any best practices at various localities or airports that could be implemented throughout the Nation? Or anything that you have seen post-COVID.

Ms. WIK. I think the—thank you for that question.

The No. 1 best practice is just communicating up-front, setting out expectations of what is required from the traveler and where and how to meet those requirements. That communication can come directly from air carriers, it can come from the hotels themselves, and it can come from the destination. But it is important to make sure that expectations are clearly communicated in terms of what is required from travelers.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you so much for that.

Ms. Vassiliadis—I hope I didn't mess your name up too badly—but thank you so much for talking about the importance of the law enforcement reimbursement program and how important it is to have sworn law enforcement officers at the checkpoints. I was assigned to Orlando International Airport as a police captain for a number of years and that particular position pre-9/11 and certainly post-9/11 is so very critical. So thank you for that.

But you also talked about the importance of overall staffing with TSA and CBP and trying to get back again to that normal place. Have you also seen any particular issues post-COVID as it pertains to airline staff or airport staff in terms of helping us move back to, or even exceeding our passenger loads and creating that experience kind-of environment that we all need? Any challenges there as well?

Ms. VASSILIADIS. Thank you, Congresswoman.

Well, I guess that is my button.

Mrs. DEMINGS. That is your button, yes, ma'am. Designed just for you.

Ms. VASSILIADIS. Tremendous issues. Starting with the airlines, we read about that every—twice, three times a week from their pilots and crews, now it has gone down to the people who—the trainers for pilots and crew members, to all the ancillary services that airlines must supply. One that comes to my mind here at this airport is wheelchair pushers. So there is an FAA mandate that airlines must provide wheelchair and special needs services and airlines are just not getting people to be able to fill those positions. It has taken a tremendous toll on that experience. It has been very, very hard at an airport—you know, airports, we are essential services, so we were all open. We had to come to work, still had to fulfill all the requirements of staying safe, social distancing, all of that type of thing, but we still had to have some concessions open, airlines had to have ticket agents, airlines had to have baggage handling crews, airlines had to have maintenance. All of that has not recovered yet. You see it with the delays. We saw it last month where airlines responded to the need, the pent-up demand, certainly, you know, to Las Vegas, and then they canceled. But that was a Nation-wide issue. They canceled these flights because they simply did not have the staffing to be able to accommodate all of those flights. That unfortunately is continuing today. Not the cancellations, they finally got their schedules down to a reasonable operating day, but what they are able to offer, the amenities that you get—and I am sure this esteemed committee flies a lot—you get nothing, you know, catering. Every part of that experience is not up to what it used to be. So airports, I know for us because we are part of the Las Vegas experience, we work with our concessionaires tremendously to make sure that that passenger can get a drink, can get something they can bring on the plane. But it is not easy. Our concessionaires are not being able to hire at the same pace.

It is very, very hard with the mentality of telecommuting. You can't telecommute at an airport, you have to have front-line people. You have to have real people at an airport to service that traveler.

Mrs. DEMINGS. OK. Mr. Chairman, I—

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady's—

Mrs. DEMINGS. I think I am out of time. Thank you so much.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you. The gentlelady's time has expired.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee, for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Chairman—

Chairman THOMPSON. Ms. Jackson Lee, you are recognized.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. I am trying to unmute, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so very much.

Let me thank you for this important hearing. I don't think—

Chairman THOMPSON. We are having some—

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Can you hear me? Can you hear me, Mr. Chairman? Hello?

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, not well. Try it again.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I will.

Let me start by thanking the Chairman for this hearing and also Congresswoman Titus for bringing us to this important issue, and

the witnesses that have already spoken, including our witnesses dealing with DHS and particularly in dealing with the procedures that will help international travelers. That is a key element to the economic survival of cities like Las Vegas. This is an important leadership role that Congresswoman Titus is now playing to help this city and as well to bring this attention of how we can address the question of the economic aftermath of the pandemic and how do we ensure the traveling public has the needed documents in a way that can be processed.

So I want to raise a question to both of you. Has Las Vegas seen an increase in international tourism in 2022? Which we hear that that there is an implosion of travel, certainly domestically.

First let me have you answer that question. Have you seen the growth and do you expect that growth to exponentially grow over the next couple of months?

Ms. WIK. Thank you for your question.

We are tracking to be recovered hopefully by end of this year from an international perspective. But from a Convention and Visitors Authority perspective, we are looking the international segment for growth, not just about recovery. So we are working closely to make sure that we are driving demand and that we want to ensure that we can capitalize on the demand and make sure that we can accommodate the demand that we are driving.

Just this year we have hosted net new events to the destination, including NHL All-Star Game, NFL Pro Bowl, NFL Draft, we announced the Superbowl, I mentioned we announced F-1. We are trying to line up our event calendar and our trade show calendar to make sure Las Vegas is the No. 1 destination. So yes, we are on track to recover, but we have our eyes on growth. That is what we appreciate this Congressional delegation has moved hurdles to enable the recovery happen thus far and we look forward to partnering with you to keep that going. We are thankful for those efforts.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. In the course of international travel, do you see the need for continued information about COVID rates and do you foresee further travel restrictions? We do know that there may be an uptick in the fall, and what can we do as Members of Congress to help that the period that may see an uptick, that you continue in growth and economic recovery?

Ms. WIK. I think we have the tools in our toolkit in terms of we know mask-wearing works, we know vaccination works, and we know testing works. So working with the airport and our Congressional delegation on what that correct balance of infrastructure and guidelines are in making sure that my job is to communicate that out, to make sure that visitors know what to expect and how to have the best experience possible here. So it is about figuring out what is the best protocols that then we will communicate out.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Well, clearly I believe that you all are at the forefront of travel and the increase in travel. Cities like Houston that are growing in that area can utilize and model themselves after how you addressed these questions of increased travel, particularly in the midst of what will seem to be a continuing engagement with the pandemic, and maybe even other infectious diseases.

We will try to work in expediting documents, but more importantly in collaborating to ensure that the economic recovery continues.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Thank you very much.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady yields back.

Let me thank our witnesses for their testimony on this panel. Obviously you bring us good news. Las Vegas and surroundings are on the way back. As Members of Congress, we want to be full participants in facilitating that way back. I want to yield time to the gentlelady from Nevada who invited us to come and hear the story about the challenges and how it was met and how we as Members of Congress can be helpful in that process.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I know it is not an easy thing to take a Congressional committee on the road, but this really meant a lot for you to bring us here. The Members who joined us, I thank them too and the airport for hosting us.

You know, I wanted you to hear Las Vegas' story because it is a success story. We are a very resilient community. We came back from the problems with the housing crisis about 10 years ago, now we are coming back from the COVID crisis. So our resilience I think can serve as an example to other communities that are now trying to recover, especially those in the whole tourism realm. We think about tourism often in a secondary way, but it is such an important part of our economy. Every place in the country has something somebody wants to see. It is a historic site or beautiful natural scenery or it is the world's largest ball of twine, like they have somewhere in the Midwest. So tourism really does affect every community. But when your economy is so based on hospitality and tourism, we are hit harder than other places whenever there is a dip in the economy. So hearing the best practices, hearing the challenges we still face, hearing how Government works with the private sector, all of those are really key factors to recovery.

So I am so glad that you all were here to tell us that story and so glad that my colleagues got to hear it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, thank you very much. Let me say you have been a gracious host to the committee. You can invite us back to Las Vegas at any time.

Let me remind the Members of the committee that they might have additional questions for our witnesses and we ask that you respond expeditiously in writing to those questions.

The Chair reminds Members that the committee record shall be kept open for 10 business days.

Without objection, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]