

Statement for the Record

Senator Mike Lee

The Economic Imperative for Promoting International Travel to the United States

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As our nation's economy continues to take slow steps towards a full recovery, we must explore every option for new revenue streams. With a few simple changes to our visa policies, international tourism can become an attractive source of increased revenue, which will aid in a speedy economic recovery and result in the creation of millions of jobs.

As this hearing will surely demonstrate, the need for changes to our visa policies is clear. Every day that we continue to exclude tourists from our local sites and businesses, we miss out on millions of dollars of potential revenue. Citizens of foreign countries have the financial ability and the desire to vacation in the U.S., but our policies prevent these people from investing in our economy.

The Jobs Originated through Launching Travel (JOLT) Act attempts to ease the process by which visas may be obtained. The validity period of certain visas is increased, allowing a greater number of visits to the U.S. by those who have been screened and approved, avoiding the hassle of the complicated process of frequent visa renewal. The Act also permits the State Department to charge a fee for processing visas on an expedited basis, much like U.S. citizens can pay to have passports approved more quickly.

In addition to expediting visa processing, the Act also encourages visitors to come during certain times of year and during a certain time of life. The Act authorizes the State Department to lower visa application fees for selected countries during off-peak seasons, creating an incentive for travel all-year round. Also, retiring Canadians are encouraged to spend their time and money here by purchasing a home in the U.S.

Utah has been the destination chosen by millions in search of picturesque landscapes or faith-related tours. The importance of international tourism to the economy of our great state cannot be overemphasized. By easing the process by which visas can be obtained and by creating incentives to come to the U.S., the JOLT Act aims to increase revenues and create jobs in Utah and throughout the United States.