



Nicholas E. Calio
President and CEO

July 23, 2019

The Honorable Roger F. Wicker
Chairman, Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman, Committee on Homeland
Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member, Committee on
Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland
Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Wicker and Johnson and Ranking Members Cantwell and Peters:

On behalf of Airlines for America, I am writing to urge Congress to prioritize security over marketing. We strongly oppose S. 2134, a bill to increase the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) fee and to extend funding for Brand USA through fiscal year 2027.

In an era of extremely scarce federal resources and an elevated level of security concern, the rationing of federal revenues like those collected from the ESTA fee should be prioritized for securing our nation – not for advertising. Congress originally established the \$14 ESTA fee to be utilized by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to securely process foreign visitors traveling to the U.S. from Visa Waiver countries. However, \$10 of the ESTA fee now is being diverted to subsidize a marketing campaign to encourage travel to the United States. This bill would further increase that inequity by extending the program through 2027 while almost doubling what goes to Brand USA to \$17, for a total fee of \$21. Travelers are already overtaxed and should not be used as piggy banks for “large-scale, multi-itinerary mega-familiarization tours for international travel agents.”

Since 2013, Congress has shown a willingness to increase both Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and CBP security taxes and divert them to other purposes like highways and deficit spending. This must stop.

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Instead of pursuing a solution to a problem that doesn't exist, I urge you to redirect all of the ESTA fees currently being collected to be available for CBP to accomplish the following functions, as originally intended:

- Vetting of travelers and refugees
- Entry and exit process modernization
- Staffing and overtime processing of arrivals and departures from the United States
- Any other CBP activities related to the processing of passengers including, but not limited to, activities of the National Targeting Center

CBP's resources are already stretched thin given the strong growth in international passenger traffic, and we have begun to see excessive wait times at major airports with the increase in summer travel.

This begs the question: why spend scarce resources to enhance a marketing campaign when travel to the U.S. is at record levels? In fact, air travel between the U.S. and other countries reached a record high last year with nearly 80 million foreign visitors coming to the United States. Additionally, the Commerce Department recently projected international visitors to the U.S. will reach another all-time high – 95.5 million visitors by 2023. It does not make sense to pad the pockets of corporate America when there are legitimate security needs.

I am urging you to consider the serious security functions that could be performed with these resources and to please reconsider this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nicholas E. Calio". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nicholas E. Calio