

TRAVEL BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE



May 20, 2003

The Honorable Thomas J. Ridge
Secretary

The Honorable Asa Hutchinson
Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security

The Honorable James Loy
Administrator, Transportation Security Administration
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Ridge, Under Secretary Hutchinson and Admiral Loy:

On behalf of the Travel Business Roundtable (TBR), I am writing to you today to express our concerns about the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) recent announcement that it plans to eliminate approximately 6,000 passenger screening positions by the end of fiscal year 2003, with nearly half of those cuts intended to occur by the end of this month. Our industry has greatly appreciated repeated public statements by all of you that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is making every effort to secure our country and our transportation mechanisms in a manner that will still allow for the flow of passengers and commerce. We are also appreciative of the actions TSA and DHS have taken since their formation to try to restore confidence among the traveling public. However, we fear that this recent decision may run counter to those goals.

TBR is a CEO-based organization that represents the broad diversity of the U.S. travel and tourism industry, with more than 80 member corporations, associations and labor groups (membership list attached). You are all aware of the chilling effect that the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks had on our industry. Though increased security measures helped get Americans traveling again, and the full staffing of screeners at many airports helped reduce the "hassle factor" of travel, the slight recovery we saw in some industry sectors and parts of the country over the past 18 months was uneven. Several more recent events, including the war in Iraq, heightened concerns about possible terrorist acts within our borders, the troubling spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and continued economic uncertainty have in many cases slowed or reversed any recovery that was occurring in the industry.

With combat operations in Iraq completed and the national terrorist threat level reduced, the industry is hopeful that travel to and within the United States will pick up this summer. Therefore, we are extremely concerned about the potential consequences of reducing the number of screeners right at the time that airports may become more crowded. We are further troubled about reports that some airports have more screeners than necessary while others have marked shortages. Naturally, the potential difficulties that could arise from these scenarios heighten our industry's fears of another downturn in air travel inspired by passengers' experience or even perception that it is still inconvenient and disruptive to fly.

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TBR and the industry as a whole appreciate the fact that DHS and TSA are very new entities that have been challenged to take on an enormous mission in a relatively short amount of time. We are also mindful of the budget pressures that TSA is currently facing. We understand from recent reports that TSA is re-examining its approach to the cuts and distribution, and that nothing is set in stone at this time. It is our hope that TSA and the Department will make this an informative process and will consider our industry's input as it moves forward. In that regard, we would like to have a meeting with you or the appropriate staff to discuss our concerns and get a better idea of why these cuts should be made and how TSA and the Department intend to ensure that the cuts will not negatively impact the traveling public. We would also like some assurance that as changes are implemented they will be communicated to the public in a manner that will not create the perception that air travel will become more inconvenient.

TBR stands ready to work with you and your Department to further the message that America is open for business and that travel within our country is safe and orderly. We appreciate your consideration and hope that you will call on us if you have any questions or would like any further information on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan M. Tisch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jonathan M. Tisch
Chairman
Travel Business Roundtable

Cc: Mr. Alfonso Martinez-Fonts
Special Assistant to the Secretary for the Private Sector

