



Remarks at the Strategic Dialogue on Travel and Tourism

Remarks

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Secretary of State

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DEPUTY SECRETARY NIDES: Thank you all very much. I know you did not stand for me, but I'll appreciate that anyways. (Laughter.) I have now the distinct honor to introduce my boss, Secretary Hillary Clinton. When Secretary Clinton kicked off the Economic Statecraft Initiative a year ago, a lot of people wondered what the State Department had to do with economics. Well, after a year of Herculean efforts by the Secretary of State and her wonderful core of civil and Foreign Service officers, our partners in the business community and foreign governments, we're beginning to understand how important American global diplomatic presence can be in building economic growth here at home and just how important economic outreach is to our diplomacy is around the world.

From hosting the first ever State Department's Global Business Conference last year, to championing American firms at all of her meetings around the world, to creating the office of our chief economist, Secretary Clinton is leading the charge. She has the right to say she gets it. She gets how important business is and economics is to our foreign policy, and as she says, we live in an era where the size of our economy is just as important as the size as our army.

We must position ourselves to lead the world where security is shaped in board rooms and on trading floors as well as on battlefields. So under Secretary Clinton's leadership, this Department has changed the way we do business. We elevated the role of economics in everything we do. We've sharpened our thinking about how market forces can advance foreign policy goals. We've made it easier for businesses to work with our embassies, and we've empowered our wonderful consular officers and doubled down on the efforts to promote tourism in the United States. And we've encouraged every officer, whether the title is political officer or consular officer, to think of themselves as job officers.

And since you're all here today, it's clear to you that you've dramatically stepped up our efforts to connect with you, the private sector, including the travel and tourism industry. No one understands the importance of travel and tourism better than Secretary Clinton. (Laughter.) And it's not just because she's visited over a hundred countries in the last four years; the truth is, she understands just how important this industry is to our economic future and to the strength of our ties to the people and governments of our nations.

So as a recovering business man and a current diplomat, it's my honor and privilege to introduce Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton. Thank you. (Applause.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you all very much. And I'm delighted to be here with you for this dialogue and to welcome all of you to the State Department. I appreciate not only Tom's introduction, but much more than that his leadership in the area of economic statecraft and the specifics that we have been focused on because of his incredible experience and expertise.

This is the third of a series of conferences that we are hosting to bring the talents and resources of the private sector together with the United States Government to address key economic and diplomatic challenges – from creating a level playing field for American companies to meeting the world's massive infrastructure needs. And today's topic – boosting travel and tourism – is just as important to our government and to American jobs.

Now, we're bringing a whole-of-government approach to this issue. I want to thank my counterparts from the Departments of Commerce, Homeland Security, and Interior for their focus on this issue. And I especially want to acknowledge Secretary Napolitano for joining with all of you today.

As Tom was saying, you could ask: Why is travel and tourism the concern of the State Department? And besides the fact that we are the place of both first and last resort for Americans traveling abroad, we also see travel and tourism through an economic lens.

It is about jobs. It's about what we can do to promote greater economic growth here at home by expanding the opportunities for Americans to do business and travel for pleasure and recreation abroad. We want to use our global reach and our diplomatic tools to help drive that economic growth here at home and to advance our strategic interests around the world.

And encouraging travel and tourism moves us toward these goals. The average tourist from overseas spends \$4,000 in the United States. In July of this year, foreign tourists spent nearly \$14 billion here. For every 65 international visitors, one American job is created. And that figure adds up. In the last year, visitors from just China and Brazil supported more than 40,000 American jobs. And the number of tourists bound for the United States is growing all the time. So in addition to trying to ease the way for Americans to travel, we have matched that commitment with trying to ease the way for foreigners to travel here.

But the benefits can't be measured in just dollars and percentages. Whenever I walk around New York, as I did yesterday at the conclusion of a week in New York for the UN General Assembly, I am greeted by people from all over the world, most of whom want to take a picture. (Laughter.) And I don't mind if they just can figure out how to use their cameras. (Laughter.) That is my big problem. I am more than happy to stop for 30 seconds to take a picture, but what happens invariably is people get so nervous, they can't figure out how to make the camera work, and then I've got people trying to help them to get their camera to work. (Laughter.)

But nevertheless, it is a moment of American specialness and openness and inclusivity and, frankly, optimism. Because the more people who actually get to see us for who we are as opposed to the often distorted pictures of who others say we are, the easier it is to conduct both business and diplomacy.

So for all these reasons, the State Department and the U.S. Government wants to see more travel and tourism. And how is the State Department helping?

Well, for starters, we're making it easier for tourists to get here. We have sped up visa processing times at our posts around the world – like in Sao Paulo in Brazil, it once took 140 days to get a visa, that time is now under 48 hours; or in China, where the average wait time is five days, even though visa applications are up nearly 40 percent; and in Mexico, where we issued more than two million visas and border crossing cards this year alone.

We also know there are real threats to our country from overseas, and we are focused on stopping those threats before they reach our shores. Today, our screening process is more thorough and effective than ever, and keeping America safe will be our top priority. So while we are speeding up processes, we cannot – and I know you will understand this – we cannot shortchange our security. So there is a constant commitment to security. We have created systems that we think manage to do both, but we will periodically have to review those.

Second, our embassies are stepping up their efforts to promote the United States as a tourist destination. In Brazil, we have showcased travel opportunities at an international tourism fair. In Germany, we dedicated our July 4th celebration to encouraging visits to the United States. In Japan, we are partnering with travel agents to find new ways to bring more visitors here. And from New Delhi to Lima, Peru, our public diplomacy staff is reaching out using social media and mobile technology.

And finally, we're working with foreign governments and private-sector partners to make it easier for people to travel between countries. For example, earlier this year I signed an agreement with the Brazilian Government that will increase the number of flights between our countries. Beginning next month, American Airlines will fly its first nonstop routes from Miami to Recife and Salvador five times a week.

We've taken positive steps, but we still face unanswered questions. How do we continue boosting the United States as a tourist destination? How do we get more travelers to our country without compromising security? How do we make sure that those tourist dollars are creating as many American jobs as possible?

And these are important questions that aren't just about the number of visas issued or passports stamped. They're questions about how our foreign policy can support the economic recovery of the American people and how people-to-people exchanges can help strengthen partnerships with governments and people around the world. So you're helping us answer those questions by being here today.

We hope that this meeting is just one more way to continue the dialogue. Some of you have met with Tom and our team before, and we want to continue to have that conversation, to keep the lines of communications open, because although we're very excited about what more we can do, we're also clear-eyed about the challenges that we face. And it's important be encouraging and supportive, to be reaching out, but also to be smart about how we can take this partnership between all of you and the private sector and continue to enhance it so that it really does work for you and for our country.

As Tom said, I have done a lot of traveling in this job, and fortunately, even before that, and I really feel like every American who travels abroad is, in effect, an American diplomat. We are judged on an ongoing basis, fairly or not, and we want to do more to prepare our own citizens to travel. But we really, really want to send a message to the rest of the world that America is open to you.

We had to, by necessity, kind of pull up the welcome mat after 9/11. It was just too uncertain an environment. We have made so many changes, we've enhanced a lot of our security provisions, but there is no risk-free environment in life, in travel, in government, anywhere. And so we need your best ideas. And we're going to look to you as our advisers and our supporters in making this a win-win for everyone.

Thank you so much for being here today. (Applause.)

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