



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF TRAVEL AGENTS 2009 FEDERAL POLICY PRIORITIES

Direct Lending to Small Businesses

Background:

ASTA was instrumental in the creation of the post-9/11 Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program, which offered a lifeline to small businesses in the form of immediate access to funds required to meet ordinary and necessary operating expenses. During the current period of economic uncertainty, many small businesses are finding it difficult to obtain credit to maintain operations in the face of collapsing demand and to cover unplanned expenses.

ASTA Position:

On November 18, 2008, ASTA wrote to the Small Business Administration to call for a renewed program to provide aid to travel agents and other small businesses in the form of expedited direct loans. We believe that a new, short-term direct loan program could help travel agents needing a quick cash infusion. In its response, the SBA declined to endorse this idea, citing the availability of lending assistance through existing loan programs. ASTA urges the Obama Administration SBA to revisit this request as a possible means of stabilizing the small business community and providing renewed confidence to the travel industry.

Travel to Cuba

Background:

During the 2008 presidential election campaign, the President-elect indicated that he supports changes to U.S. policy toward Cuba, including a suspension of restrictions on family remittances, visits, and humanitarian care packages from Cuban Americans.

ASTA Position:

ASTA has long supported the principle that Americans ought to be allowed to travel across the globe without restriction. To use travel freedom as an instrument of foreign policy manipulation ultimately does harm to the very citizens it purports to protect. Permitting American citizens to travel to Cuba would create immediate demand for new passenger routes, tour operations, and travel agent services. The resulting domestic economic activity would provide both short-term and long-term benefits to the U.S. Treasury. We urge the Obama Administration to eliminate existing restrictions on U.S. citizens' freedom to travel to Cuba, along with related financial restrictions that inhibit travel-related investment and spending.

Secure Flight Program

Background:

ASTA has worked with the TSA since the Secure Flight program was first announced to support the program and to ensure that the needs of the travel agency community and the travelling public were taken into consideration in its development. Many of the extensive comments ASTA had filed during the program's development were included in the program's Final Rule, including an extension of the implementation schedule to 270 days from the original 60 days.



While program staff have consistently made themselves available to industry representatives to share details of the program and to solicit input, obtaining key details relating to Secure Flight implementation remains difficult.

ASTA Position:

ASTA is keenly interested in helping to ensure that the Secure Flight program is implemented successfully. We hope that the incoming Administration will not be so focused on privacy that obstacles to an effective public education campaign, for example, are created.

Passenger Rights

Background:

In the wake of passenger abuses that occurred in the winter of 1999, ASTA rose to the defense of air travel consumers with a proposed air passenger bill of rights. Legislation was advancing when the airlines persuaded Congressional leadership that a system of voluntary commitments to improved treatment would suffice. Following the 9/11 attacks and system disruptions, passenger rights slipped off the airlines' agendas. Since then, the commitments have largely been ignored or irregularly applied.

With flight delays and stranded passenger episodes on the rise, the 110th Congress saw the introduction of legislation that would require airlines to comply with certain passenger rights guidelines. Similar legislation is likely to be attached to any FAA reauthorization bill that moves out of committee in the 111th Congress. There appears to be more support for Congressional intervention than ever before.

ASTA Position:

ASTA strongly supports the principle that airline passengers are entitled to reasonable protections that exceed the status quo, including compensation in cases of flight cancellations and protracted delays. We have also argued for restricting the scope of federal preemption of state law governing consumer rights in air travel. It is time to restrike the balance between airline flexibility and the minimum rights of travelers to be treated humanely and rationally.