

Tourism Reps Outline Stimulus Plan To Stabilize Industry

Citing lost revenue and jobs, representatives of the tourism industry and areas dependent on it asked a Senate Commerce subcommittee today for an immediate, temporary economic stimulus package to stabilize the industry. Witnesses recommended a travel tax credit, loan guarantees, aid to displaced workers and the creation of a travel promotion bureau. The best proposal is a travel tax credit, said J.W. Marriott, Jr., chairman and CEO of Marriott International Inc., endorsing the Travel America Now Act of 2001 introduced by **Sens. Jon Kyl**, R-Ariz., and **Zell Miller**, D-Ga. Kyl testified before the Senate Commerce Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce and Tourism Subcommittee that the "body blow" to the tourism industry is "dragging down the rest of the economy." The bill would provide a temporary \$500 tax credit per person for personal travel expenses and would restore full deductibility for all business entertainment expenses.

Marilyn Carlson Nelson, chief executive officer of Carlson Companies Inc., a global travel and hospitality company, expressed support for the bill and called for the implementation of a national campaign to promote travel. To that end, **Sen. Barbara Boxer**, D-Calif., talked up her Rediscover America Act, which would create a Travel and Tourism Promotion Bureau and would provide \$60 million to the Commerce Department to develop an advertising campaign to encourage travel over the next two years.

Hawaii, which has an \$11 billion tourism industry, has been thrust into "a serious economic crisis," said Lt. Gov. Mazie Hirono. She requested Economic Development Administration disaster grants for states as well as federal assistance for workers. Hal Rosenbluth presented the American Society of Travel Agents' plan for federal travel agency relief, which included requests for loan guarantees similar to those given to the airlines and \$364 million in grants. John Wilhelm, president of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, testified that one-third of his members have been laid off, while others are working reduced schedules. "This is a national crisis," Wilhelm added. "And it's not getting better." — *by Stephanie Conner*