

Jay Rasulo Introduces A Blueprint to Discover America

WASHINGTON, DC — Speaking to an audience of more than 500 travel industry leaders here today, Jay Rasulo, National Chairman of the Travel Industry Association (TIA), touted a new three-step plan to strengthen

America's security and repair the country's image to potential travelers abroad. The goal of the plan, called *A Blueprint to Discover America*, is to welcome more international visitors to the United States – something at which

America has been losing competitiveness for many years, Rasulo said. Overseas travel to the U.S. is down 17 percent since 2001, with business travel alone down 10 percent from 2004 to 2005, according to TIA. "This isn't a sweeping overhaul of our travel policies," Rasulo said. "It is, rather, a set of common sense solutions to adapt to the way that people are traveling today. It's using new technology and proven processes to make travel easier and more secure at the same time."

Rasulo's comments came at TIA's 15th annual State of the Travel Industry Luncheon. The gathering is one of the largest travel and tourism industry events held in

Washington. Rasulo is serving a second term as TIA's chairman, and has been crisscrossing the country over the last year, raising awareness about the nation's poor image abroad and attendant drop in business/leisure travel to the U.S.

The *Blueprint to Discover America* was unveiled earlier in the day by the Discover America Partnership (DAP), a coalition of some of America's foremost business and travel industry leaders dedicated to help the

U.S. better compete for international visitors. Rasulo, who is Chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, was instrumental in helping found the DAP last September and in creating the blueprint announced today. "Its fulfillment is the single most important action we can undertake as an industry."

Among the major reasons why travelers are not coming to the U.S.: concerns about the

U.S. visa process and perception of poor treatment at the point of entry. The blueprint provides detailed strategies to address these important issues, according to Rasulo.

Rasulo noted that the program presents an attractive return on investment.

"We can implement the plan for about \$300 million a year," he said. "That's a very low investment considering the high returns we'll generate: billions of dollars added to the economy and tax revenues, and hundreds of thousands of new jobs.

"The return is so good," he added, "that we can't afford NOT to make the investment."

Among the blueprint's recommendations:

Overhauling the country's visa system to improve security and process potential visitors more quickly. The plan calls for visa applications to be processed within 30 days and suggests methods to reduce the obstacles and barriers associated with the visa interview process, including videoconferencing and mobile consulate operations. The plan also calls for strengthening the Visa Waiver Program by expanding the security information required and the number of countries that can participate.

Modernizing and securing our ports of entry where visitors are welcomed. The plan calls for visitors to be processed within 30 minutes by hiring 250 new customs and immigrations officers. It also calls for turning the nation's 12 busiest inbound airports into world models through enhanced line management, automated forms and traffic management processes, and an expanded use of technology.

Change perceptions of

America that are turning away travelers. Create a comprehensive plan to improve perceptions of America in target countries, and building an effective program structure based on a public-private partnership, with a dependable funding stream.

The plan comes as Congress takes a growing interest in the

U.S. travel issue. Coinciding with the Jan. 31 release of the blueprint, the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee will hold hearings to investigate this growing problem. Rasulo and other travel industry leaders will testify at the hearing.

For full text of Jay's remarks, [please click here.](#)