**MEETING OUTLINE AND TALKING POINTS**

**1. Meeting kickoff [team captain facilitates and hands out 1-pager to lawmaker/staffer]**

* Self-introduction: Name, organization, location, and 1-sentence description.
* We are here as part of the Exhibitions & Conferences Alliance, a coalition of leading organizations that represents the unified advocacy voice of the business events industry.
* Today is ECA Legislative Action Day, our industry’s annual day on Capitol Hill, and we would like to speak with you about two issues that are critical to the future our industry:
* Further reducing visa wait times, and
* Helping build our next-generation skilled workforce.
* Thank the staffer for taking the time to meet with the group.
* Have everyone introduce themselves: Name, organization, location, and 1-sentence description. (For House meetings, ensure that all district constituents are identified.)

**2. Industry overview [team captain or group member: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]**

* Our industry employs [insert state number] in [state] and drives [insert state number] of direct spending annually in [state].
* Business events—including trade shows, conferences, and expositions—drive demand for restaurants, hotels, travel services, and Main Street commerce.
* We also support small businesses: 99% of all business events companies are small businesses themselves, and 80% of exhibitors at business events are small businesses.
* To help us grow the business events industry going forward, we are here today to talk about two issues with strong bipartisan support that Congress can act on *this year*.

**3. Visa delays [one or more group members: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]**

* It’s hard to believe, but nearly three years after international travel restarted, we are *still* unable to fully bring back all our international exhibitors, attendees, and buyers.
* Visitors from 150+ countries need a visa to come to the U.S. for business, and visa delays in many markets remain far too high.
* In Mexico City, the wait time for a visitor visa interview appointment is 849 days.
* In Bogota, it’s 640 days, while in Mumbai, it’s 499 days.
* While the State Department has set a goal of having 90% of all posts with wait times below 90 days, that’s not good enough for many of our international stakeholders who need to start making financial outlays 6-9 months in advance of coming to a U.S. event.
* Earlier this year, Congress gave the State Department $50 million to deal with the ongoing visa delays and backlogs.
* While this was good news, we still need Congress to make some important policy changes that will future reduce wait times and help ensure this never happens again.

**SENATE ASK**: ECA encourages the Senator to co-sponsor S.2632, the *Visa Processing Improvement Act*, a bipartisan bill from Senators Amy Klobuchar (MN) and Jerry Moran (KS).

* This comprehensive legislation would reduce current and future wait times by making a series of improvements to the visa application process:
	+ Require the State Department to set interview wait time goals and take steps to lower wait times in locations that consistently fail to achieve those goals.
	+ Provide the State Department with permanent authority to waive in-person interviews for certain previously vetted and low-risk nonimmigrant visa applicants.
	+ Create a pilot-program to test videoconferencing as an alternative to in-person interviews for certain low-risk, pre-vetted applicants from Global Entry countries.
	+ Improve the nonimmigrant visa processing experience by providing an expedited processing fee and the opportunity to extend visitors visas while in the U.S.

**HOUSE ASK**: ECA encourages the Representative to co-sponsor two bipartisan bills that will increase State Department flexibility, transparency, and accountability.

* H.R.5127: the *Visitor Visa Wait Time Reduction Act* from Representatives María Elvira Salazar (FL) and Susie Lee (NV).
	+ This legislation would require the State Department to outline specific steps to address visa delays at each diplomatic post where the wait time for a visitor visa appointment is 100 days or more.
	+ It also allows the State Department to temporarily reassign staff from other offices to diplomatic posts where the wait time exceeds 300 days.
* H.R.7263: the *VISITOR Act* from Representatives Dina Titus (NV) and María Elvira Salazar (FL).
	+ This legislation would allow greater flexibility for the State Department to use the money collected from passport and visa fees to address the massive backlog in processing tourist visas at various consular posts overseas.
	+ Additionally, with funds collected from passport and visa fees, the State Department would be able to make needed technological upgrades at posts, hire more personnel to conduct visa adjudications, and build out visa processing infrastructure at high-volume sites.

**4. Next-generation workforce [one or more group members: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]**

* Hard-working men and women are the backbone of the business events industry!
* There are many pathways into the great middle-class jobs and careers that the business events industry offers: from 2-year and 4-year colleges to trade schools, apprenticeships, skills-based training and certification programs, and more.
* We need Congress’ help to attract and grow our industry’s (and our country’s!) next-generation skilled workforce that will help our small businesses thrive going forward.

**SENATE ASK**: ECA encourages the Senator to co-sponsor two bipartisan bills that will improve access to skills-based training opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds to help them access great new jobs and careers.

* S.161: the *JOBS Act* from Senators Tim Kaine (VA) and Mike Braun (IN)
	+ This legislation would help more Americans get good-paying jobs by allowing students to use federal Pell Grants to afford high-quality, shorter-term job training programs for the first time.
	+ By expanding eligibility, the Pell Grant program would help us close the skills gap and ensure workers have the job training and credentials they need for careers in high-demand fields, including those in our industry.
* S.722: the *Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act* from Senators Amy Klobuchar (MN), Susan Collins (ME), and Mike Braun (IN), which would allow students and workers to use 529 college savings program funds for high-quality workforce training and credentialing programs.
	+ This legislation would give Americans the flexibility to use their 529 savings plans to cover the costs of qualifying workforce training and credentialing programs.
	+ By covering tuition, exam, and training costs associated with obtaining certain workforce certifications and licenses, this legislation would transform 529 plans from college saving plans into *career* savings plans and help workers secure in-demand, good-paying jobs.

Only if asked: For the *JOBS Act*, ECA does not have a position on which types of institutions should be allowed to provide training (e.g., traditional colleges, for-profit institutions, etc.).

**HOUSE ASK**: ECA encourages the Representative to co-sponsor two bipartisan bills that will improve access to skills-based training opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds to help them access great new jobs and careers.

* H.R.6585: the *Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act* from Representatives Elise Stefanik (NY), Virginia Foxx (NC), Bobby Scott (VA), and Mark DeSaulnier (CA).
	+ This legislation would help more Americans get good-paying jobs by allowing students to use federal Pell Grants to afford high-quality, shorter-term job training programs for the first time.
	+ By expanding eligibility, the Pell Grant program would help us close the skills gap and ensure workers have the job training and credentials they need for careers in high-demand fields, including those in our industry.
	+ In December, this bill passed out of the House Education & Workforce Committee on a 44-3 vote.
* H.R.1477, the *Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act* from Representatives Rob Wittman (VA) and Abigail Spanberger (VA).
	+ This legislation would give Americans the flexibility to use their 529 savings plans to cover the costs of qualifying workforce training and credentialing programs.
	+ By covering tuition, exam, and training costs associated with obtaining certain workforce certifications and licenses, this legislation would transform 529 plans from college saving plans into *career* savings plans and help workers secure in-demand, good-paying jobs.

Only if asked: For the *Bipartisan Workforce Pell Act*, ECA does not have a position on (a) the funding mechanism (or “pay for”) for the legislation or (b) which types of institutions should be allowed to provide training (e.g., traditional colleges, for-profit institutions, etc.).

**5. Meeting conclusions [team captain facilitates]**

* Our industry strongly believes that these bills that would further reduce visa wait times and help build our next-generation skilled workforce will help us grow the business events industry and help our people thrive going forward.
* Ask if you can answer any questions or provide any additional information.
* Thank the staffer(s) for her/his time.
* Conclude by asking if you and ECA can follow-up with her/him on our policy priorities, as well as any important industry developments that impact the state or district.