

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Florida

January 19, 2012

The President. Hello, everybody! I am glad to be at Disney World, the Magic Kingdom. This is outstanding.

Well, let me begin by thanking Ruben for that extraordinary introduction. And he was too bashful; maybe he's not supposed to do this. I will do it. His restaurant is called Zaza [Yaya's]*—new Cuban diners. So everybody check it out. And I told him, he was—on the way out, he was wondering, I don't know, I don't do this a lot. He's a natural. [Laughter] We're going to have to run him for something. [Laughter]

But thank you so much for taking the time. It is great to be here. It is rare that I get to do something that Sasha and Malia envy me for. [Laughter] That doesn't happen very often. Maybe for once they'll actually ask me at dinner how my day went. [Laughter]

And I confess, I am excited to see Mickey. It's always nice to meet a world leader who has bigger ears than me. [Laughter]

I want to acknowledge the presence of one of Florida's outstanding mayors, the mayor of Orlando, Buddy Dyer is in the house. We've got two outstanding members of my Cabinet, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Commerce Secretary John Bryson. Because they're focused on what brings us here today, and that's creating jobs and boosting tourism.

You just heard what a huge difference tourism makes for small businesses like Ruben's. Every year, tens of millions of tourists all over the world come to visit America. Makes sense. You got the greatest country on Earth, people want to come. As folks in Orlando know, that's good for our economy. It means people are renting cars and they're staying in hotels and they're eating at restaurants and they're checking out the sights. It means people are doing business here in the United States. In 2010, nearly 60 million international visitors helped the tourism industry generate over \$134 billion. Tourism is the number-one service that we export—number one. And that means jobs.

More money spent by more tourists means more businesses can hire more workers. This is a pretty simple formula. And that's why we're all here today, to tell the world that America is open for business. We want to welcome you and to take concrete steps to boost America's tourism industry so that we can keep growing our economy and creating more jobs here in Florida and all across the country.

Now, here's the good news: We've got the best product to sell. I mean, look at where we are. We've got the most entertaining destinations in the world. This is the land of extraordinary natural wonders, from the Rocky Mountains to the Grand Canyon, from Yellowstone to Yosemite.

This is the land where we do big things, and so have incredible landmarks, like the Golden Gate Bridge and the Empire State Building, the Hoover Dam, the Gateway Arch. This is the land of iconic cities and all their sights, from Independence Hall in Philadelphia to Faneuil Hall in Boston, from the Space Needle in Seattle to the skyline of my hometown in Chicago.

* White House correction.

It's a nice skyline, for those of you who have never been there. [Laughter] All right, a couple of Chicagoans back there. [Laughter]

But I'm here today because I want more tourists here tomorrow. I want America to be the top tourist destination in the world—[applause]—the top tourist destination in the world. And this is something that we've been focused on for some time.

Two years ago, I signed a bill into law called the Travel Promotion Act. It had broad support of both Democrats and Republicans. And as you know, that doesn't always happen. [Laughter] And it set up a new nonprofit organization called Brand USA. Its job is to pitch America as a travel destination for the rest of the world to come to visit.

You guys see advertising for other countries, other destinations, here in the United States, right? Well, we've got to do the same thing so that when people are thinking about where they want to travel, where they want to spend their vacation, we want them to come here. And so that's already in place, but we've got to do more.

So today I directed my administration to send me a new national tourism strategy focused on creating jobs. And some of America's most successful business leaders—some who are here today—have signed up to help. We're going to see how we can make it easier for foreign tourists to find basic information about visiting America. And we're going to see how we can attract more tourists to our national parks. We want people visiting not just Epcot Center, but the Everglades too. The more folks who visit America, the more Americans we get back to work. It's that simple.

Now, just as we do a better job of marketing our tourist destinations, we've also got to make it easier for tourists to make the visit. There's a good reason why it's not easy for anybody to get a visa to come to America. Obviously, our national security is a top priority. We will always protect our borders and our shores and our tourist destinations from people who want to do us harm. And unfortunately, such people exist, and that's not going to change.

But we also want to get more international tourists coming to America. And there's no reason why we can't do both. We can make sure that we're doing a good job keeping America secure while at the same time maintaining the openness that's always been the hallmark of America and making sure that we're welcoming travelers from all around the world.

So one step we're taking is the expansion of something called the Global Entry Program. It's a program that protects our borders and makes life easier for frequent travelers to and from the United States. Now, getting into the program requires an extensive background check. But once you're in, once you've proven yourself to be a solid individual who is coming here for business or recreation purposes, instead of going through long lines at immigration, we can scan your passport, your fingerprints, and you're on your way.

So it's a great example of how we're using new technology to maintain national security and boost tourism at the same time. And we're now going to make it available to almost all international travelers coming to the United States. If they're willing to submit themselves to the background checks necessary, we can make sure that we're facilitating their easy travel into the United States.

There are some additional steps, though, that we can take. Right now, there are 36 countries around the world whose citizens can visit America without getting a tourist visa. After they go online they get precleared by Homeland Security, and there's only one thing they have

to do and that's book a flight. And that's been a great boost for tourism. Over 60 percent of our visitors don't require a visa, and in most cases, that's because of this program.

Today I'm directing my administration to see if we can add more countries to it. We want more folks to have an easier time coming to the United States.

And let's also realize that in the years ahead, more and more tourists are going to come from countries not currently in this program, countries with rapidly growing economies, huge populations, and emerging middle classes, countries like China and India, and especially important here in Florida, Brazil, a huge population that loves to come to Florida. But we make it too hard for them. More and more of their people can now afford to visit America who couldn't come before, and in fact, over the next 4 years, the tourists traveling from those countries we expect to more than double.

But we want them coming right here. We want them spending money here, in Orlando, in Florida, in the United States of America, which will boost our businesses and our economy.

So today I'm directing the State Department to accelerate our ability to process visas by 40 percent in China and in Brazil this year. We're not talking about 5 years from now or 10 years from now—this year.

We've already made incredible progress in this area. We've better staffed our Embassies and our consulates. We've streamlined services with better technology. Waiting times for a visa are down. But applications keep on going up; they are skyrocketing. People want to come here. And China and Brazil are the two countries which have some of the biggest backlogs. And these are two of the countries with some of the fastest growing middle classes that want to visit and have disposable income, money that they want to spend at our parks and our monuments and at businesses like Ruben's.

So that's what this is all about: telling the world that America is open for business, making it as safe and as simple as possible to visit, helping our businesses all across the country grow and create jobs, helping those businesses compete and win.

Ultimately, that's how we're going to rebuild an economy where hard work pays off, where responsibility is rewarded, and where anybody can make it if they try. That's what America is all about. That's part of the reason why people want to come here, because they know our history. They know what the American Dream has been all about. And a place like Disneyland represents that quintessentially American spirit. This image is something that's recognized all around the world, and this weather is something that people appreciate all around the world, including the northern parts of this country. [*Laughter*]

So we want everybody to come. All who are watching, Disney World and Florida are open for business, but we want people all around the world to know the same. And we are going to do everything we can to make sure that we're continuing to boost tourism for decades to come.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Ruben Perez, owner of Yaya's Cuban Cafe and Bakery.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks: Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, FL.

Locations: Lake Buena Vista, FL.

Names: Bryson, John E.; Dyer, John "Buddy," Jr.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Perez, Ruben; Salazar, Kenneth L.

Subjects: Brazil : Visa policy, U.S.; Business and industry : Global competitiveness; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; China : Visa policy, U.S.; Commerce, Department of : Secretary; Commerce, international : U. S. exports :: Expansion; Commerce, international : U. S. exports :: National security issues; Congress : Bipartisanship; Defense and national security : Border security; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Economy, national : Travel and tourism, promotion efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Florida : President's visit; Florida : Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista; Immigration and naturalization : Visa policy, U.S.; India : Visa policy, U.S.; Interior, Department of : Secretary; State, Department of : Consular and passport services.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200034.