American Society of Travel Advisors

November 19, 2025

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
Chair
House Subcommittee on Commerce,
Manufacturing and Trade
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2306 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Commerce,
Manufacturing and Trade
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2408 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Statement for the Record to the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade in advance of the hearing, "Daylight and Destinations: Examining Time, Travel, and Tourism" on November 20, 2025.

Dear Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking Member Schakowsky and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and the more than 300,000 individuals working in the travel advisor profession, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. We could not agree more that "travel and tourism are key drivers of both our local and national economies, and it's essential that Congress explore the best ways to strengthen and capitalize on these opportunities for our country."

Time is one of our most valuable assets. We would be remiss if we did not highlight for the subcommittee the lost time (and revenue) in the travel sector stemming from the recent 43-day government shutdown. In the final days of the longest federal government shutdown in history, ASTA surveyed its members nationwide to assess the operational and economic impacts on both travel advisors and the travelers they serve. Unsurprisingly, the results provide a clear and consistent picture of an industry under significant strain.

Travel advisors play a central and indispensable role in the global travel and tourism industry. ASTA's membership encompasses the full breadth of the marketplace from home-based entrepreneurs and traditional brick-and-mortar agencies to large travel management companies (TMCs) and online travel agencies. These professionals provide critical services to the traveling public, offering informed guidance, real-time problem solving, and dedicated assistance in the event of emergencies, disruptions, or unexpected changes in plans. Corporations rely on TMCs to manage their business travel programs efficiently and effectively, ensuring policy compliance and cost control while maintaining traveler safety and satisfaction.

With more than 300,000 travel advisors nationwide, nearly two-thirds of which are independent contractors, the profession represents a significant segment of the U.S. small business

123 N Pitt St, Suite 400
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community. Ninety-five percent of travel agencies are small businesses under the SBA standard, and 80 percent are women-owned. In 2024, travel agencies sold 781,000 air tickets per day, totaling $99.2 billion in annual airline sales, and were responsible for booking more than 66 percent of all cruises and tour packages. The profession booked $119.3 billion in travel last year alone, with continued industry growth projected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Given this scale and economic importance, understanding the challenges faced by travel advisors during the government shutdown is essential to fully evaluating its effect on their businesses, U.S. travelers, and the broader travel economy.

Travel advisors overwhelmingly reported increased workloads, heightened client anxiety, disrupted travel operations, and material impacts on their business performance. Two major themes emerged: 1) air travel disruptions had a ripple effect on the entire travel ecosystem; and 2) the sharp decline in new bookings due to traveler hesitation and uncertainty cost agencies significant revenue. While the severity of the impact of the government shutdown varied, overall sentiment across the profession was decidedly negative.

The following summary of the impacts from the 43-day government shutdown on travelers and travel agencies presents a myriad of challenges and concerns to the travel industry. ASTA would welcome sharing the complete results of the research with the Subcommittee if it is of interest.

Financial Impact on Travel Agencies and Advisors

The most common theme expressed by advisors in the survey responses was a loss of income while their clients dealt with flight cancellations, national park restrictions and postponement of future travel. A large portion of survey respondents commented that travelers were postponing trips until the shutdown ended, or even until next year.

Travel advisors overwhelmingly reported that the shutdown created significant financial strain for their agencies, largely due to widespread flight disruptions that required hours of unpaid rebooking work and lost commissions when trips were canceled. Many advisors noted a sharp decline in new bookings, with clients delaying or abandoning travel plans entirely because of uncertainty, fear of being stranded, or financial stress from missed paychecks. For federal government employees and contractors hit directly by loss of pay, even long-planned vacations were canceled in order to free up funds for basic living expenses.

Many travelers expected advisors to have answers that didn’t exist given the day-to-day uncertainty around air traffic control staffing, TSA operations, and flight cancellations. This anxiety translated into a sharp decline in inquiries and bookings for many agencies, with sales for some agencies dropping to levels not seen since the pandemic. Advisors spent more time calming clients than creating new business, and many noted that they were doing dramatically more service work while earning less revenue.

In fact, nearly two-thirds reported clients delaying travel decisions. The hesitation spanned both leisure and business travelers and resulted in revenue drops averaging 25% for agencies. Overall, the shutdown shook consumer confidence, with many advisors reporting their phones had "gone silent" as clients adopted a wait-and-see approach. These dynamics suppressed travel demand and threatened long-term financial risk for small agencies.

Travel Agency Operational Disruption

More than seventy percent of advisors reported moderate or severe impacts on their business operations during the shutdown. Additionally, nearly eighty percent indicated they spent additional hours each week resolving shutdown-related issues, time that was largely uncompensated. While navigating crises for clients is part of the job, many advisors reported serving as a therapist to their clients, who were rightfully distressed about the possibility of missing an important client meeting, long-planned vacation, occupational conference, or a cruise departing from a distant port.

One comment from a travel agency owner summed up the sentiment voiced throughout the survey: "As a travel agency, we've definitely felt the ripple effects of the government shutdown. Air travel has become more unpredictable, with increased delays and limited staffing impacting both flight schedules and traveler confidence. Our team has spent much more time assisting clients with rebookings, schedule changes, and [offering] reassurance due to the uncertainty. Customer service has also been affected because many travelers are understandably anxious, and we're working harder to provide the support and communication they need. Overall, we've seen a slowdown in new bookings as clients hesitate to plan future travel until things feel more stable. It's been a challenging time, but we're staying proactive and doing everything we can to guide our clients through it."

Stress on the Air Travel System

Unsurprisingly, uncertainty around air travel represented the most significant disruption. Delays, cancellations, or rebookings for clients affected 83 percent of those responding. Travel advisors absorbed the brunt of traveler frustration as airlines and air traffic control faced capacity and staffing challenges. Government-mandated restrictions of flights across the system had immediate disruptive impacts resulting in fewer options to offer clients. These impacts continue to be sorted out in the days following the shutdown.

While advisors also reported disruptions to sales volume, customer service workloads, group tours and national park availability, air travel disruptions far exceeded the other concerns. The concentration on air travel issues reflects the role of the travel advisor on the front lines of the traveler experience. Advisors are absorbing the burden of airline disruption and uncertainty, which erodes efficiency and client satisfaction.

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Limited Federal Communication

Advisors also reported little to no communication from federal agencies during the shutdown, reducing their ability to provide accurate and timely guidance to travelers. In the absence of complete and comprehensive communication, advisors often relied upon anecdotal information and their own experiences to guide travelers.

With limited guidance from federal agencies and constantly changing conditions, many advisors felt they were operating without reliable information, trying to reassure clients in an environment where facts shift daily. The industry spent far more time managing crises than selling travel, leading to concerns about long-term revenue health.

Broader Industry Consequences

More than sixty percent of respondents believed the shutdown produced ripple effects across the travel ecosystem, including concerns about consumer confidence, airline reliability, and the economic health of key travel-dependent destinations.

At the center of the disruption is the instability of the air travel system. When flights are delayed or canceled, travelers miss cruises, tours, hotel stays, meetings, and events, creating a chain reaction of rebookings, refunds, and lost revenue for suppliers across the industry. Advisors described airports as chaotic and unpredictable, with limited information, long hold times, and inconsistent communication from both airlines and government agencies. This instability has eroded traveler confidence, which emerges as one of the most damaging industry-wide consequences.

As one respondent summed it up: “This shutdown is strangling our industry. Airports are chaos. Flights delayed. Passports and visas stalled. Conferences canceled. Small businesses are watching their income vanish overnight. The ripple effect is devastating – hotels, airlines, restaurants, drivers, guides, and local shops across the country are paying the price for Washington's paralysis.”

Policy Considerations

Travel advisors serve every congressional district and provide critical real-time support for millions of travelers. Based on the survey results, ASTA respectfully urges Congress to consider the following:

1. Prioritize stabilization of federal travel infrastructure, particularly aviation systems heavily affected during government shutdowns.
2. Improve communication from federal agencies to travel professionals who disseminate critical information to travelers.
3. Recognize travel advisors as essential partners in maintaining consumer confidence and navigating system-wide disruptions.

4. Include travel advisors in stakeholder discussions related to aviation reliability, shutdown impacts, and traveler-protection initiatives.

Conclusion

While many advisors believe their own role becomes more valuable in moments like these, the consensus is clear: government shutdowns disrupt not just travel plans, but the fundamental functioning of and confidence in the entire travel industry. The government placed substantial operational, economic, and emotional burdens on travel advisors, the travelers they support and the greater travel economy. Advisors are working longer hours under immense pressure, managing elevated traveler concerns, and absorbing the effects of widespread travel disruptions. Despite these challenges, they continue to provide stability and expertise during a period of significant uncertainty.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's time and consideration of our concerns, and stand ready to assist in your ongoing work. To that end, please don't hesitate to contact ASTA Vice President, Advocacy, Jessica Klement at jklement@asta.org.

Sincerely,

Zane Kerby
President and CEO
American Society of Travel Advisors

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