



IMEX America and US Travel – 2012 Political Advocacy Forum Report

“Building a Stronger Meetings Industry - in Washington and Your Community”

In order of Appearance:

Ray Bloom, IMEX Group Chairman

Roger Dow, President and CEO, US Travel Association

Rossi Ralenkotter, President and CEO, Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA)

Carolyn G. Goodman, Mayor of Las Vegas

Rod Cameron, Executive Director of Development, International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC) and Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC)

Geoff Freeman, COO and Executive Vice President, U.S. Travel Association

Elliot Ferguson, President & CEO, Destination DC

Steve Moore, President and CEO, Greater Phoenix Convention & Visitor’s Bureau

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Ray Bloom Welcomes Esteemed Thought Leaders to first IMEX America Political Advocacy Forum

The IMEX America 2012 show held October 9 - 11 at Las Vegas Sands marked the first IMEX America Political Advocacy Forum hosted by the US Travel Association on October 09 2012.

Designed to provide an update on the travel and meeting industry’s efforts to raise the political bar, as well as give industry professionals practical ideas on how to get involved, the session was dynamic and well attended.

US MEETINGS REPRESENT A \$100B MARKET
AND 1M JOBS IN THE U.S. ALONE

Ray Bloom set the stage for the discussion by commenting on the recent [IMEX Power of 10 Study](#) which reinforced that “one of the most pressing challenges for the meeting, events and incentive travel industry over the next decade is to measure and effectively communicate the strategic and economic value of events to local, national, and global economies.” He also noted, that the IMEX America Political Advocacy Forum – offering a distinctly North American perspective and platform- was intended to build on the efforts that IMEX and the global meetings industry had made over the past 10 years with the Politicians Forum in Frankfurt.

Following Bloom's remarks, a strong line-up of fellow meetings, travel and destination movers-and-shakers took to the stage with the main call to action being that US Meetings represent a \$100B market and 1M jobs in the U.S. alone and we must think globally but act locally to influence policy and political change.

This means meetings professionals, in the U.S. and globally, need to unite under the message of meetings as an economic and job engine, but then "individually" roll up their sleeves at the community, state and national level to educate, communicate and build critical relationships with policy makers.

Roger Dow Urges 4 Action Steps to Get Politically Involved & Provides Update on Political Progress

After being introduced by Ray Bloom, Roger Dow focused on four specific actions industry members can take to get more politically involved.

First he asked meetings professionals to "establish and strengthen relationships with local and state government stakeholders as well as members of Congress." One way to achieve this is to invite officials to go behind the scenes of local conventions and meetings to experience the positive impact first hand.

INVITE OFFICIALS TO GO BEHIND THE SCENES OF LOCAL CONVENTIONS AND MEETINGS TO EXPERIENCE THE POSITIVE IMPACT FIRST HAND

Secondly, he encouraged proactively "feeding these key politicians and influencers a steady stream of real-time, localized and district-by-district meetings impact data," such as how many jobs are supported, how much revenue is brought in, and what looming issues could

negatively affect meetings, and subsequently jobs and tax revenues. (As background and starter ideas, the U.S. Travel Association offers statistics as well as tool kits containing presentations, press release and opinion piece templates at: <http://www.ustravel.org/news/business-travel-roi> and <http://www.ustravel.org/news/toolkits>.)

In his third action point, Dow reinforced the need for industry members to tell the U.S. Travel Association about challenges or barriers they're facing on visas, TSA and custom issues, and transportation and aviation needs. In this way he reiterated that he and his team can then carry these concerns to Washington (contact: Nan Marchand Beauvois, Senior Director National Councils Relations at nbeauvois@ustravel.org, 202-408-2147).

Finally, he asked everyone to learn more about and join the Power of Travel Coalition, U.S. Travel's grassroots advocacy program that is already 500,000 professionals strong - <http://www.travelcoalition.org/about-us>.

In addition to providing these tangible steps, Dow also gave an overview of the progress made by U.S. Travel's Government Relations efforts including the "Meetings Means Business," "Keep America Meeting," and "Vote Travel" campaigns which have moved the needle by:

- Identifying the key people in Congress who influence meetings policy and arming them with compelling economic and jobs data for the travel and meetings industry.
- Helping to block legislation that would deeply cut government meeting budgets.
- Logging in 20,000 miles on the US Travel Tour bus raising awareness and enthusiasm for meetings.
- Hosting "back of the House" tours and campaigns with senators and congressman at key events and meetings.

With each of these gains, he emphasized the importance of "rallying together with one industry voice and having data ready to educate politicians and influencers on the economic value of meetings." Executing against these

items is especially important, he stressed, in the wake of the recent GSA meeting stories where data and education helped to reduce some of the negative back-lash that was experienced.

Mayor Goodman Delivers a Message of Strength, Unity & Self Empowerment to Create Political Change

Introduced by Rossi Ralenkotter of the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA,) Mayor Carolyn G. Goodman took the podium sharing a message of strength, unity and self-empowerment to create political change.

“Change lies first and foremost within ourselves as meetings professionals and as an industry,” she said “We cannot wait for Washington to do things for us. She further stated, “We must empower ourselves and make things happen. We are all in this together and need to be strong as an industry. We have to push understanding with congressman and senators ourselves.”

As an example of how to do this, she shared the LVCVA’s and her office’s work with local and state government and infrastructure officials to ensure increasing availability of international direct flights; ensuring convenience and safety of moving around the city on foot; and creating expansions and updates to meeting and convention facilities.

She also reminded the audience that everything is under a microscope in the events and hospitality business so attention to detail is key. As destinations, venues and service providers she stressed we need to always deliver top notch customer service, cleanliness, strong security and safety, effective tech support, ample business space, and access to excellent dining, entertainment and outdoor experiences.

Rod Cameron Encourages a New Global Value Proposition ... Meetings = A Strategic Tool in the Knowledge-Based Economy

Taking the conversation to a global level, Rod Cameron spoke about the “new normal” of our knowledge-based, tech connected world and the realities, opportunities and challenges that it presents. He focused on our industry as a prime example of market globalization but also as an industry group that needs to behave more like an integrated unit ... thinking globally and acting locally.

On the challenges front he shared that he witnesses consistently around the world “a lack of appreciation outside the industry for just how much meetings and conventions support business, economies and jobs and a disconnect of understanding between the desired global economic recovery and the positive role that meetings and events can play in bringing this about.”

To more effectively combat an uncertain economic future and reduce industry vulnerability he encourages that we “communicate a new value proposition for the industry” that being that: Meetings are a primary economic engine in a knowledge-based world and a strategic tool in advancing innovation, knowledge transfer, and new investments for business growth. According to Cameron, getting politicians and policy influencers to understand this is key to getting more involved in economic development strategies in our towns, states and countries.



MEETINGS ARE A PRIMARY ECONOMIC ENGINE IN A KNOWLEDGE-BASED WORLD AND A STRATEGIC TOOL IN ADVANCING INNOVATION, KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER, AND NEW INVESTMENTS FOR BUSINESS GROWTH.

To support this it is critical, he stresses, to build the “supporting messages, statistics, case histories and advocacy materials” that show how we drive business and jobs in our communities and beyond. He went on to say: “We need to take this data and use it as thought leaders with government officials and policy makers, starting at the most local levels and building up from there.”

We also need to become more effective “story tellers” partnering more strongly with the media to communicate how meetings help combat economic and business worries in our communities by generating employment, promoting cities, supporting local communities, and aiding in the understanding of local culture.

He also feels it is important to share best industry practices across the globe through elements such as award programs that celebrate success and create added recognition and visibility.

Finally Cameron invited all industry professionals to visit the JMIC website www.themeetingsindustry.org to access resources, information and professional development session schedules.

Panel moderated by Geoff Freeman & Featuring Rossi Ralenkotter, Elliot Ferguson, Steve Moore Takes on Local Political Issues & Dubs Meetings the Place Where “Ideas Become Reality”

Rounding off the Forum more political and industry figures took to the stage for an in-depth panel on the unique issues that destinations face politically and to share some best practices of how to combat them.

Freeman acted as moderator posing conversation-starting questions like “What has been your biggest surprise in working with politicians and government officials,” and emphasizing the importance of the industry “keeping our foot on the pedal” of political progress.

There was an overarching theme during the panel of the industry creating American jobs- jobs that cannot be outsourced or exported, and meetings as “the place where ideas become reality,” selling happens and innovation thrives. Meetings and tourism as an industry that will help lead us out of the recession by creating jobs of all types, for all levels of workers was also clearly communicated.

Ferguson spoke to the unique challenges of the Nation’s Capital where tourism is almost taken for granted by politicians and policy makers. To help them understand the level of work that goes on behind the scenes and the fact that tourism and meetings is the second largest employer to the government in Washington DC with 76,000 + jobs, Ferguson provides them with “economic performance and ROI data” continually. He also reinforces with legislators that each Washington DC resident pays \$2,500 less in taxes because of revenue brought in by visitors.

FERGUSON PROVIDES “ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND ROI DATA” CONTINUALLY. HE ALSO REINFORCES WITH LEGISLATORS THAT EACH WASHINGTON DC RESIDENTS PAYS \$2,500 LESS IN TAXES BECAUSE OF REVENUE BROUGHT IN BY VISITORS.

Moore’s comments centered on Phoenix’s recent controversial immigration issues and how the industry rallied there and across Arizona to meet with officials. Here it was critical to stop or minimize boycotts and educate politicians by having “strong and consistent messages around the importance of the meetings and tourism industry which is #1 in the state.”

Ralenkotter majored on his message to politicians that not only does the tourism and

meetings industries fuel the majority of jobs in Vegas but also hotel room taxes “help fund the community’s schools, roads, park and rec departments etc. ... helping to improve the overall quality of life for residents.” He also feels it is critical to get policy makers out there and behind the scenes to witness the true impact of meetings and events and sees the meetings industry as a place where on-the-job training and adult education thrives.

The Forum Wrapped with Audience Q&A

The thought-provoking session then wrapped with a series of audience Q&As where industry professionals had the opportunity to dig more deeply into political efforts on the ground in their town, cities and states and how to overall become more politically plugged-in.

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About IMEX America

IMEX America is America’s worldwide exhibition for incentive travel, meetings and events and is the largest tradeshow for the industry in the USA. The third edition will take place at the Sands Expo, Las Vegas®, (which is connected to the show's Headquarters Hotel, The Venetian®|The Palazzo®), Oct 15-17, 2013. The show’s Official Airline is Delta.

IMEX America’s strategic partner and premier educational provider is MPI, who power “Smart Monday” - Oct. 14 – a full day of education on the day prior to the tradeshow. Smart Monday also includes a range of high level education delivered by other partners and associations, including Association Focus – a conference within a conference for association meeting planners – delivered by ASAE, ICCA and PCMA.

IMEX also has an exclusive partnership with the US Travel Association and is endorsed by ICCA, DMAI and Site, has an Industry Partnership with PCMA and is an AIPC Corporate Partner.

Other supporting associations include: ACTE Global, ADME, AMCI, ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership, Association Forum of Chicagoland, CIC, ECM, FICP, GMIC, IACC, IAEE, IAPCO, ISES, JMIC, PATA, SKAL and Spin. A full list of industry and media partners can be found here.

Find high resolution photos of the 2012 show here – <http://www.imexamerica.com/showphotos.html>
Find headshots, logos and 2012 guest photos here - <http://www.imexamerica.com/picturelibrary.html>

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