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Travel Industry Coalition Urges Congress to Pause National Park Fee Legislation, Citing Operational and Economic Risks

Washington, D.C. – [April 29, 2026] A coalition of leading U.S. travel and tourism associations is calling on Congress to refrain from advancing new national park fee provisions that could disrupt travel operations, deter international visitors, and negatively impact local economies across the country. In response to growing industry concerns, IITA worked alongside peer organizations to convene a coalition of leading travel and tourism associations.

In a joint letter to leaders and members of the House Natural Resources Committee, the coalition—representing hundreds of inbound tour operators, group travel companies, destinations, and small businesses—expressed concern over proposed provisions in the *Great American Outdoor Act 250 (GAOA 250)* that would codify the recently implemented international visitor surcharge and introduce additional commercial group entrance fees.

While reaffirming strong support for sustainable funding of America’s national parks, the coalition warned that the current fee structure is creating immediate operational challenges and economic consequences that will intensify as peak travel season approaches.

Real-Time Industry Impacts Already Emerging

According to recent industry data:

- Many 2026 international group tours were sold **18–24 months in advance**, with pricing that cannot be adjusted
- Operators are reporting **stalled bookings, cancellations, and itinerary changes**
- Some businesses are **removing national parks from itineraries altogether**
- Financial exposure for operators is significant, with some estimating losses exceeding **\$250,000**

“These are not hypothetical concerns—these impacts are already happening,” said Lisa Simon, CEO of the International Inbound Travel Association. “Without a workable system in place, we risk undermining both the visitor experience and the economic benefits that international travelers bring to communities across the country.”

Operational Gaps Creating Delays and Confusion

The coalition highlighted critical implementation issues at national parks, including:

- No current mechanism for tour operators to purchase required passes in advance for their clients
- Inconsistent and unclear procedures at park entrances
- Misalignment between the America the Beautiful (ATB) pass and the realities of group tour operations
- Increased congestion and delays at entrance gates

These challenges are creating confusion for visitors and frontline staff alike, while slowing entry into already high-demand parks.

Broader Economic Consequences at Stake

International visitors are a key driver of economic activity, particularly in national park gateway communities. They tend to stay longer, spend more, and travel across multiple states.

However, the coalition cautions that even modest declines in inbound travel can have outsized impacts. Industry analysis shows that small drops in demand can lead to disproportionate losses in revenue, jobs, and travel programs, particularly in rural and park-dependent communities.

A Call for Practical, Immediate Solutions

Rather than codifying fees at this stage, the coalition is urging Congress to direct the Department of the Interior to work with industry stakeholders on a more practical approach.

Recommended solutions include:

- Developing a group tour-specific pass or voucher system that can be purchased in advance
- Ensuring consistent, efficient implementation across parks
- Addressing operational gaps before peak travel demand intensifies

“The goal is not to oppose funding for our national parks,” Simon added. “It’s to ensure that any solution works in practice—for park staff, for visitors, and for the U.S. businesses that bring millions of travelers to these iconic destinations.”

Support for Proven Funding Mechanisms

The coalition also reiterated strong support for the bipartisan *America the Beautiful Act*, introduced in the Senate in 2025, which would reauthorize and expand funding for the Legacy

Restoration Fund—providing a proven and effective mechanism to address deferred maintenance across public lands without adding operational complexity at park entrances.

About the Coalition

The coalition includes national travel and tourism associations representing international inbound tour operators, domestic group travel companies, destinations, suppliers, and small businesses that collectively drive billions in economic impact across the United States.



Coalition participants include the [International Inbound Travel Association](#), [National Tour Association](#), [U.S. Tour Operators Association](#), [Student & Youth Travel Association](#), [U.S. Travel Association](#), [United Motorcoach Association](#), [American Bus Association](#), and [Adventure Travel Trade Association](#).

About International Inbound Travel Association

The International Inbound Travel Association is the trade association of the United States' inbound travel industry. Its members are the leading U.S.-based inbound operators, which are companies providing B2B travel services to international tour operators and travel buyers around the world. Other members include U.S. destinations and suppliers that work in partnership with the international inbound travel trade.

For more information on the International Inbound Travel Association, please visit inboundtravel.org or email headquarters@inboundtravel.org.