

IAAPA PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE



While Congress Is in Recess, Our Advocacy Continues

As Congress settles into its August recess and lawmakers return to their home districts, we evaluate where Public Affairs has made an impact — and what lies ahead.

Legislative Win Protects Zoos, Aquariums, and Museums

As part of a successful coalition effort, Public Affairs secured a major victory by defeating a proposed 21% tax on all 501(c) organizations that was being considered as part of the budget reconciliation package (aka Big Beautiful Bill). This outcome protects our nonprofit zoo, aquarium, and museum members from what could have been financially devastating consequences.

The legislation unexpectedly introduced a new \$250 "Visa Integrity Fee" for all non immigrant visa applicants, supplementing existing visa costs. This fee is reimbursable only upon full compliance with visa terms, including timely departure from the United States or lawful adjustment of status.

Following the recess, we will collaborate with travel and tourism industry partners to inform lawmakers about the potential negative impacts of this fee on international visitation, seasonal employment programs, and exchange initiatives.

OSHA Heat Rule Future Remains Uncertain

Working with the Biden administration, Public Affairs opposed OSHA's proposed Heat Injury and Illness Prevention rule, citing concerns over its "one size fits all" approach that failed to account for regional climate variations and other factors such as our industry's solid safety record. Despite robust opposition from the business community - and a push toward deregulation - the Trump administration has not withdrawn the proposal.

In fact, OSHA held additional public hearings this summer, signaling potential continued interest in the rule. Public Affairs and several member organizations testified before the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) and participated in the Small Business Administration's Labor Safety Roundtable to reiterate industry opposition and offer alternatives.

While the rule's future remains uncertain, the good news is this administration seems to favor a more reasonable and flexible approach. In the meantime, the proposal remains under review with no announced release timeline. If a final rule is ultimately approved and published, it will face a legal challenge. Public Affairs will continue to collaborate with the North America Safety Sub Committee on this issue, monitor developments and provide updates accordingly.

Federal Ride Safety Legislation Remains at Standstill

IAAPA's dual approach regarding ride safety regulations involves opposing federal oversight while supporting state oversight. For example, Public Affairs recently assisted Montana in passing new ride safety legislation, bringing the total to 49 states with regulatory standards in place.

This new law strengthens our position against the proposed National Amusement Park Safety Act, which would shift ride safety oversight from state to federal jurisdiction—a transition we consider both unnecessary and counterproductive.

We achieve this by strengthening relationships with key stakeholders, including relevant U.S. House Committees and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. These officials acknowledge the industry's outstanding safety record and recognize that federal oversight would create redundant regulatory structures.

Nevertheless, we remain vigilant and prepared to respond should legislative momentum develop.

Significant Progress Made in Drone Regulation and Legislation

Public Affairs continues its collaborative efforts with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), congressional committees, and law enforcement agencies to establish regulations designating fixed-site amusement parks as restricted airspace, thereby prohibiting unauthorized drone use.

Following many years of engagement, the FAA has initiated formal rule-making procedures. With public release of these regulations anticipated in September, Public Affairs is actively engaged to ensure the final provisions adequately address the safety needs of fixed-site facilities.

It is worth noting, we have submitted specific requests for FAA clarification to permit facility operators to conduct drone operations for entertainment, security, and safety purposes within their designated airspace.

Working in partnership with other business organizations, IAAPA also supports complementary federal legislation that would authorize fixed-site facilities to partner with local law enforcement agencies on drone threat detection and mitigation protocols. This legislation is scheduled for formal introduction in September. We are cautiously optimistic about making progress on both fronts during the upcoming fall session.

Workforce Development Remains Top Priority on Capitol Hill

IAAPA's Quarterly Outlook Survey identified staffing shortages as the primary challenge confronting the industry. In the absence of comprehensive immigration reform, Public Affairs continues to advocate for interim workforce solutions. Here are a few examples.

As part of a successful coalition effort, we secured a supplemental increase of 64,716 H-2B visas, raising the total available H-2B visas for FY 2025 to 132,716. The H-2B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows U.S. employers to temporarily hire foreign workers for non-agricultural jobs.

We also remain engaged in coalition efforts to protect the J-1 visa summer work travel program (BridgeUSA). Fortunately, the program remains operational and continues to be utilized by numerous members, particularly during peak summer season.

That said, Public Affairs is intensifying efforts to educate members of relevant U.S. House Committees with State Department oversight responsibilities regarding the importance of the BridgeUSA program due to a proposed 93% reduction in funding for international exchange programs administered by the U.S. State Department.

IAAPA extends its appreciation to Matt Eckert, President and CEO of Holiday World & Splashin' Safari and Chair of the IAAPA North America Government Relations Sub Committee, for his leadership advocating for the J-1 visa summer work travel program.

The Holiday World & Splashin' Safari team hosted a comprehensive two-day educational program for Rebecca Pasini, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. The event brought together Public Affairs, IAAPA members, U.S. State Department officials, and executives from national exchange organizations to demonstrate the multifaceted value of the J-1 summer work travel program as a diplomatic initiative, supplemental workforce solution, and economic driver for the United States.

Given strong bipartisan congressional support, we remain cautiously optimistic about the program's continued viability. Public Affairs will continue to provide updates and opportunities to engage.

Finally, I recently had the privilege of briefing labor policy experts at White House and Department of Labor meetings regarding workforce challenges facing the U.S. attractions industry. Given the pace of executive orders, it is critical for the administration to understand industry priorities.

Registration Open for 2025 Public Affairs Conference

The IAAPA Public Affairs Conference serves as the industry's foremost grassroots advocacy gathering. This conference offers critical opportunities to influence policy decisions affecting your bottom line. Click [here to register](#) today!

Attendees will participate in direct legislative meetings on Capitol Hill and receive briefings from senior political leaders, policy experts, nationally recognized media specialists, leading travel and tourism economists, and industry professionals. The program includes a Washington Nationals baseball game, a reception and dinner at the historic Willard Hotel, and networking sessions in iconic Washington, D.C. locations.

Tariff Resources

As a global organization, IAAPA opposes excessive tariffs that could impact travel spending or raise costs for manufacturers and suppliers. We are monitoring developments and providing updates on our website to help you stay informed. Click [here](#) for more information.

Sincerely,



Keith Stephenson
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IAAPA North America