

News

# Updated: What a Biden Presidency Will Mean for Travel and Meetings

Controlling the virus and improving infrastructure are top priorities; Georgia's Senate race could determine how much change to expect.



by [Loren G. Edelstein](#)

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*Updated Nov. 11, 2020.* The Biden administration is poised to enact policies that would benefit the beleaguered travel and meetings industry, beginning with a federal response to Covid-19. President Trump's failure to concede the election will have no bearing on the transition, the President-elect told several media outlets yesterday.



If campaign promises come to fruition, positive changes should bring relief to the hospitality industry, according to [Tori Emerson Barnes](#), executive vice president of public affairs and policy for the [U.S. Travel Association](#). "I think the President-elect's plan to put first and foremost the health and safety needs of the country is paramount to reopening the economy," Barnes told Northstar in an exclusive interview on Nov. 10. "We

Tori Emerson Barnes, executive vice president of public affairs and policy for the U.S. Travel Association

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are hopeful that standardized protocols and processes can be established in the context of a new administration."

Matters important to our industry aren't confined to one party or the other, she noted. Both Trump and Biden support policies that would be good for the travel industry. Each party also favors different actions that could pose challenges. One fact is a common denominator: Travel supports jobs and the economy.

"Travel was such a vital economic driver prepandemic. We were one in 10 jobs," said Barnes. "And, quite frankly, the travel industry exists in all 435 districts represented in Congress and is important to all 50 states and the territories. Our industry is very bipartisan. We've got folks who will work together because they want to advance good policies."

## An Open Letter From the Marriott CEO

[In addressing President-Elect Joe Biden](#), Marriott International president and CEO Arne Sorenson discusses the importance of unity, as well as how to tackle the pandemic and rebuild the economy.

## Keep an eye on the senate

The runoff for senate seats in Georgia's special election is particularly important, said Barnes, as it will determine which party has control of the Senate. "If the Republicans maintain the majority in the Senate, that will bring Biden more to the middle; it would require working together across the aisle. That could prevent some things from happening that otherwise could be difficult for our industry," she said.

For example, we would be less likely to see Green New Deal provisions that could negatively impact air travel or otherwise limit transportation options. "While some of those initiatives could be challenging," Barnes added, "there are things we can do to help advance sustainability, which we care a lot about. But maybe they're not so drastic that they would negatively impact our business in the midst of the pandemic scenario. I think if the Senate is Republican-controlled, we'll see folks coming together, because compromise will be necessary to be able to enact power."

## What to expect

Following are further insights from Barnes and other sources on how the incoming administration will impact travel and meetings.

### • Experts will lead the nation's coronavirus response.

The President-elect's Coronavirus Task Force has been on the job for months, readying strategies for a federal approach to the Covid-19 crisis. The diverse group of experts is chaired by former Surgeon General [Vivek Murthy](#); former Food and Drug Administration commissioner [David Kessler](#); and [Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith](#), associate professor of medicine and epidemiology at the Yale School of Medicine. Among others are [Dr.](#)



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[Luciana Borio](#), a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations; and [Dr. Zeke Emanuel](#), one of the architects of the Affordable Care Act and a former health adviser to President Barack Obama.

Already working for several months, the task force has been holding briefings with Biden up to four times per week, according to global security expert [Bruce McIndoe](#), founder of [WorldAware](#) and [McIndoe Risk Advisory](#), who keeps clients apprised of developments that relate to business risk.

- **Covid-19 testing will be widespread, consistent and free.**

The [Biden Plan to Combat Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) and Prepare for Future Global Health Threats](#) calls for making testing widely available — a need U.S. Travel has been stressing in its lobbying efforts. "We've called for a federalized approach to testing and the absolute need to have rapid, reliable testing available throughout the whole country," said Barnes. "The inconsistency from state to state creates confusion for travelers." This is a priority for the Biden administration.

- **Quarantines and group-size limits could be eased.**

An added benefit of more testing, noted Barnes, would be the ability to opt out of long quarantines and other important constructs that hinder travel. For example: "We've got gathering limitations in certain states that don't necessarily make sense, when you could hold a meeting in a healthy and safe way with masks, proper sanitation and social distancing."

In a convention hotel or hotel ballroom, for example, a group of 200 could maintain ample physical distance for an in-person meeting, but state and local regulations might not allow for gatherings of that size.

- **Sustainable infrastructure improvements will create jobs and facilitate travel.**

Biden's "[Build Back Better](#)" plan is a national effort aimed at creating the jobs needed to build a modern, sustainable infrastructure now and into the future. "We have the opportunity to build a more resilient, sustainable economy — one that will put the United States on an irreversible path to achieve net-zero emissions, economywide, by no later than 2050," the plan promises. The goal is to make the movement of goods and people faster, cheaper, cleaner and manufactured in America, while preserving and growing the union workforce.

"On infrastructure, there's a real opportunity to do something big and significant that can contemplate more than just moving freight, but really moving people," said Barnes. "How do we invest more in our airports? How do we put money into rail? How do we build an electric vehicle infrastructure throughout the country? What kind of infrastructure will we need for some of these newer technologies in hotels and cities?"

We think that under a Biden presidency we'll see a more focused effort early in his term to move forward with robust projects on infrastructure, which can also help bring back jobs."

- **Public transit investments will benefit cities.**

A tenant of the Build Back Better plan is to provide every American city with 100,000 or more residents with high-quality, zero-emissions public transportation options. This will entail creating light-rail networks, improving existing transit and bus lines, and installing infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The President-elect also envisions a "railroad revolution" that will create the "cleanest, safest and fastest rail system in the world" for both passengers and freight. His administration will work with Amtrak and private freight rail companies to further electrify the rail system, reducing diesel fuel emissions.

- **We might see an individual tax credit for travel.**

"A bipartisan bill was already introduced in the Senate, and we're looking at introducing a continued bill in the House, that would establish an individual travel tax credit, a tax credit for attendees of meetings and events, and other tax incentives," said Barnes. "We look at this as a jobs-recovery bill, which would help to stimulate the demand across the travel ecosystem."

While the industry would love to see this happen even before Biden takes office, Barnes doesn't expect immediate action. "I don't actually know where the Biden administration would stand on it," she said. "There is support from Democrats in the Senate, including positive conversations we've had with Senate leadership. I think that's something, based on Biden's history, that he would be supportive of."

Just this week, hospitality and travel industry leaders called on U.S. government officials to support such tax incentives during a [virtual panel](#) discussion held as part of the 42nd annual [NYU International Hospitality Industry Investment Conference](#).



Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association

"We've proposed a tax credit for travel, and we want to show people that it's additive, because when people travel, they spend money and they create jobs," said [Roger Dow](#), president and CEO of U.S. Travel. "We think it's one of the easiest ways to get travel moving again."

- **Better international relations will encourage inbound travel.**

Biden's history of positive working relationships with other governments could bolster inbound international travel. "His global experience and expertise will be an opportunity for us," said Barnes.

• **We'll need to keep lobbying for aid.**

While it's not among the campaign's promises, U.S. Travel is hopeful that the new administration will provide more aid to travel and hospitality companies.

"We obviously need not only a more robust relief package, but a stimulus package as well. Some folks called the CARES Act a stimulus package, but I would call it a relief package – and not enough relief has been given for the industry, and specifically for meetings and events," said Barnes.

Insufficient aid has been a disappointment across the industry. "I thought, given the fact that the Trump family owns hotels, that there would be a little bit more bailout for hospitality than there was," mused [Brian Stevens](#), CEO of [ConferenceDirect](#). "In my opinion, the Biden Administration couldn't do any less, because the Trump Administration didn't do any more."

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