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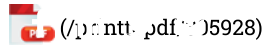


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US hotel industry desperate for next round of relief

17 DECEMBER 2020 9:32 AM

Hotel industry experts say the industry needs another round of stimulus to survive this crisis, and it's especially needed to bring employees back.



By Danielle Hess (/Author/29270/Danielle-Hess)
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REPORT FROM THE U.S.—Congress is close to passing another round of stimulus (https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/12/16/business/us-economy-coronavirus?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage), which sources said is critically important for hotels to survive.

Chip Rogers, president and CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, said, “we’re probably closer than we’ve been in months of at least getting another round of (Paycheck Protection Program funds),” but liability protection is also needed for hotels.

Providing that liability protection to “businesses that are doing all they can do like hotels to make sure businesses are clean and safe” seems to be a hang-up and “we’re not really sure why,” he said.

“It’s critically important for travel to begin again for there to be some sort of liability protection,” he said. “So another round of PPP and limited liability protections is what we’re hoping to have here in the next week or so.”

Moving into 2021, Rogers said AHLA will have a broader list of things it is advocating for to Congress and the administration.

To get these things done, the industry needs to create a unified voice so hoteliers can reach members of Congress, he said.

“As you might expect, these lawmakers are hearing from everybody,” he said. “When certain industries have a single unified voice and a single message, they are much more likely to be heard.”

The survival of the industry is at stake, Rogers said.

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Recent weekly performance (<https://hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/305766/STR-US-hotel-results-for-week-ending-5-December>) numbers from STR (<https://str.com>), parent company of HNN, show that nationwide occupancies were at 37%, "which is nowhere near what you need for break even," he said.

He added that seven of the top 25 markets are now under 30% occupancy.

"Once you get into the mid-20s for any hotel, the decision really is whether you just shut the place down," he said. "We're in that area, and we really need Congress to do something."

Maverick Hospitality

The first round of PPP was helpful for most in the industry, said Bob Habeeb, founder and CEO of Maverick Hospitality.

It bought hoteliers time to stay afloat for 60 days or so, but it's run out, which is why another round of relief is needed now for hoteliers, he said.

Another good outcome from the first round of relief was it gave hoteliers the ability to bring back employees they had to lay off.

"It spread the wealth," Habeeb said.

While it helped, PPP is still "just a stop gap," he added.

"We'll never get back the occupied rooms we lost in the last six months," he said.

"Unfortunately, many hoteliers dealing with deferred real estate taxes and other expenses, they haven't been forgiven, they are just deferred."

The vaccine will become more widely distributed and people will gain more confidence to travel, but the industry is still a "long way from being healthy," Habeeb said.

"The short-term stimulus will allow people to stay alive. We may stay alive, but our health is still questionable," he said.

Distinctive Hospitality Group

Hotels in the New England region has been hit very hard by the pandemic, with the Boston market being one of the worst performers in the country, said Lou Carrier, president of Distinctive Hospitality Group.

The region saw a little relief over the summer, but that was a long time ago, he said.

"We're down 85% year over year, and we can't keep any people working when we're doing 15% of the business. It doesn't pay the light bill," he said.

Carrier said there's a sense of optimism related to the vaccine, but there's also a sense of doom over the fact that people are not working.

People are wondering when they can return to work and stimulus is needed to send people back to work, sources said.

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