NGCOA
NATIONAL GOLF COURSE OWNERS ASSOCIATION

TESTIMONY OF JAY KAREN

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Chairman Bilirakis, Ranking Member Schakowsky, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Golf Course Owners Association of America. My name is Jay Karen, Chief Executive Officer of NGCOA, headquartered in Charleston, South Carolina. We represent over 4,000 golf facilities throughout the United States, including privately-owned public courses, private clubs, municipal courses, and resorts.

I also serve on the leadership committee of the American Golf Industry Coalition, which brings together organizations representing golf facility owners, superintendents, the PGA of America, club managers, and the USGA. Additionally, I serve on the Board of Directors of the U.S. Travel Association, which provides me with a broader perspective on the critical intersection between tourism policy and economic development nationwide. These roles have shown me firsthand that even within our industry, there are diverse views on some of the issues before you today, particularly regarding daylight saving time.

THE GOLF INDUSTRY'S ECONOMIC FOOTPRINT

Many elected officials see golf as simply a game until it becomes relevant to discussions about taxes, land use, water management, employment, tourism, and local economic development. What comes into view is a $102 billion industry employing nearly 2 million people across 15,000 facilities and 2 million acres of land—approximately the combined size of Delaware and Rhode Island.

Key facts about the golf industry:

- **28.1 million Americans** played golf in 2024 on over 15,000 golf courses across the United States
- **Nearly 80% of golf courses** are public access facilities, not private country clubs
- **$102 billion** in economic activity in 2022, representing a 20% increase over 2016
- **$226 billion** in extended economic impact
- **1.65 million Americans** employed directly and indirectly by the golf industry
- **$5 billion** raised annually through nearly 150,000 charitable golf events at more than 80% of all facilities

Golf's impact extends beyond recreation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of Americans discovered golf for the first time as one of the few outdoor activities available for families seeking safe recreation. Golf facilities provide valuable green space—trees and turfgrass improve air quality by producing oxygen and trapping pollutants before they reach groundwater supplies. U.S. golf courses serve as sanctuaries for wildlife while demonstrating dramatic environmental improvements, including a 29% reduction in water usage since 2005.

Golf delivers measurable health benefits. A typical 18-hole round involves walking 4-6 miles and burning up to 2,000 calories. Studies show golfers have a 40% lower mortality rate than non-golfers of the same age. The sport supports mental wellness, particularly for adults aged 35-49, who report using golf to reduce stress. In 2022, 97% of U.S. golf facilities hosted programs to expand recreational access, underscoring golf's role as a community wellness asset combining exercise, nature, and social connection into a sustainable lifelong activity.

SECTION I: DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

Understanding "Locking the Clock"

"Locking the clock" does not change the amount of daylight available; it simply changes where that daylight appears on our clocks. For golf and outdoor recreation generally, this shift has profound economic, operational, and public health implications.

The Concept of Recreational Daylight

Golf facilities depend on what we call "Recreational Daylight"—the overlap of sunlight and people's availability to be outdoors. Historically, Americans overwhelmingly prefer pursuing recreation and outdoor activities in "after-dinner" hours rather than "before-breakfast" daylight. This preference extends beyond golf to soccer, jogging, walking, biking, tennis, pickleball, and virtually all outdoor recreational activities.

How Daylight Hours Shape Golf Operations

A golf course operator's day revolves entirely around available sunlight. Operations start before dawn, with superintendents coordinating maintenance crews and preparing the course before the first tee times. Sunrise determines when play can safely begin. As players arrive, operators oversee pace of play, manage food and beverage service, and handle midday office tasks and course checks. Afternoons shift toward twilight play and evening event planning, with closing duties focused on cart returns and preparing for the next day.

Tee times are scheduled based strictly on available daylight, with early starts shortly after sunrise and final rounds finishing at sunset. Some premier facilities, like Pebble Beach Golf Links, even install lights in trees on the finishing green to accommodate golfers trying to complete their rounds in fading light. Seasonal shifts in daylight directly affect how many rounds can be played, staffing requirements, event timing, maintenance windows, and twilight pricing strategies. In short, daylight hours form the framework for nearly every operational and financial decision, impacting both guest experience and the bottom line.

Seasonal and Geographic Considerations

Seasonal changes in sunrise, sunset, and weather conditions—particularly frost—significantly impact daily operations. In winter, even if sunrise occurs at 7:30 AM, play may be delayed until 9:00 AM or later due to frost, which damages turf if disturbed. This reduces playable hours and limits tee time availability, often requiring operators to start later, compress tee sheets, and reduce staffing.

Summer offers long days with early sunrises and late sunsets, allowing more tee times, twilight play, and higher revenue potential. Maintenance crews must adjust seasonally, often starting before first light in summer while winter operations compress into tighter windows. Event planning, food and beverage hours, and dynamic pricing models all adapt to seasonal light and weather patterns.

Geographic latitude matters substantially. At the June summer solstice, daylight length varies dramatically:

- **Miami, FL** (benchmark): 13 hours 45 minutes of daylight
- **Minneapolis, MN**: 15 hours 37 minutes (almost 2 hours more)
- **Seattle, WA**: 15 hours 59 minutes (+2 hours)
- **Sioux Falls, SD**: 15 hours 36 minutes (+2 hours)
- **East Lansing, MI**: 15 hours 21 minutes (+1.5 hours)
- **Buffalo, NY**: 15 hours 21 minutes (+1.5 hours)
- **Boston, MA**: 15 hours 17 minutes (+1.5 hours)

In a formula adjusting for weather patterns, a Minneapolis course has capacity for 50+ more golfers per day than a Miami course on the same summer date. This capacity advantage continues through the autumnal equinox in September. Northern courses benefit from annual daylight distribution naturally, which partly explains why golf participation rates are significantly higher in northern versus southern states.

Revenue Distribution Throughout the Day

Golf courses generate substantially higher revenue in late-day versus early-morning hours. Analysis of Point of Sale data across diverse facilities reveals that **afternoon and evening daylight revenue is approximately 40% higher than before-lunch hours** for the average golf facility.

This revenue differential exists because:

- Working professionals play after work, not before dawn
- Twilight rates still generate substantial revenue per round
- Evening play drives food and beverage sales
- After-work leagues represent high-volume, consistent business
- Group outings and events schedule for afternoon/evening times

Hence, eliminating evening daylight through permanent Standard Time would cost the average operator approximately 7-8% of annual revenue by removing the most valuable inventory.

Economic Impact Analysis

The following analysis examines approximately 8,000 public, regulation-length golf courses in the United States. This economic picture includes only green fee revenue gains or losses, and does not account for impacts on golf cart rentals, merchandise, food and beverage, golf lessons, and other business areas. Additionally, these figures exclude thousands of private clubs, which would amplify the impacts in both directions by an enormous sum.

Metric	Permanent Standard Time	Permanent Daylight Saving Time
Public Regulation Courses Affected	8,000	8,000
Hours per week lost/gained	-7	+7 (Nov-Mar)
Weeks impacted annually	34	20
Capacity rounds per hour	28	28
Total capacity rounds impact	-53,000,000	+32,000,000
Likely utilization factor	70%	70%
Actual rounds lost/gained	**-37,000,000**	**+23,000,000**
% of Annual U.S. Total	**-7.0%**	**+4.3%**
Green Fee Revenue Impact	**-$1.665 billion**	**+$1.035 billion**
Average impact per course	**-$200,000**	**+$250,000**

Permanent Standard Time would shift one hour per day from recreational to non-recreational daylight—essentially trading 8 PM for 8 AM. Americans do not play golf at 8 AM in the volume they play at 8 PM. This would:

- Eliminate approximately 37 million rounds of golf annually
- Cost the industry at least $1.6 billion in green fee revenue alone
- Reduce annual revenue by 7-8% per facility
- Result in significant job losses during peak employment seasons
- Devastate evening leagues, after-work play, and fundraising events
- Disproportionately harm working golfers who depend on evening access

Permanent Daylight Saving Time would provide additional recreational daylight from November through March, which would:

- Add an estimated 23 million rounds to current golf inventory
- Generate approximately $1 billion in additional green fee revenue
- Provide a tailwind of roughly $250,000 per affected facility
- Extend playing seasons in temperate climates
- Increase employment during shoulder seasons

Important distinction: Northern facilities would benefit less from permanent DST because November-March represents non-season months due to snow and temperature. However, these months represent peak season for "snowbird" locations including Florida, Arizona, Southern California, and the Carolinas, where the economic impact would be most pronounced.

Current Status Quo (changing clocks twice yearly) avoids the significant downside while forfeiting the moderate upside.

Industry Sentiment: A Nuanced Picture

Through extensive member surveys, the NGCOA has documented diverse opinions within our industry on this complex issue:

Industry-Wide Sentiment:

- **64% support** making Daylight Saving Time permanent
- **27% support** keeping the current system of changing clocks twice yearly
- **7% support** making Standard Time permanent
- **2% unsure**

Notably, 83% of NGCOA members feel a permanent change to Daylight Saving Time would benefit the overall success and viability of their businesses, yet only 64% support actually making the change. This 19-percentage-point gap likely represents operators who acknowledge the business benefit but question whether the change and related disruptions to business operations and daily life justify the gain.

Why Some Operators Prefer the Status Quo:

Approximately one-quarter to one-third of our members prefer maintaining the current system of changing clocks. Their reasoning includes:

- Golf courses in areas that close or significantly slow down during winter months see limited benefit from November-March evening daylight they cannot utilize
- Some facilities enjoy giving employees relief with earlier sunset times during slower winter months, supporting workplace culture and work-life balance
- Resort operations with strong morning play from vacationers may value morning inventory more than evening
- Established customer patterns around existing tee times create resistance to operational changes
- Uncertainty about whether customers would adjust behaviors to match new daylight patterns

Why Very Few Support Permanent Standard Time:

Only 7-9% of operators favor permanent Standard Time. Even those who run morning-heavy businesses recognize that permanent Standard Time would eliminate their most valuable late-afternoon and evening inventory without generating offsetting morning demand. Early-morning golfers represent lower revenue per round, and pushing sunrise back an hour does not create new demand at 4:00-5:00 AM tee times.

Superintendent Perspectives: Operational Complexity

Golf course superintendents—the professionals responsible for course maintenance and agronomic quality—report more mixed views than facility operators, illustrating the operational complexity of this issue:

- **40% feel** permanent DST would benefit the success and viability of their work
- **33% unsure** about the impact
- **27% believe** it would not be helpful

Superintendent concerns about permanent Daylight Saving Time include:

Morning Operations and Safety: Course maintenance must be completed before first tee times. Superintendents and grounds crews would face extended periods of darkness for essential tasks including mowing, irrigation system checks, fertilizer application, and course setup. This raises safety concerns for employees working in darkness and potential impacts on the agronomic quality customers expect.

Frost Management: In northern states, morning frost already delays tee times even with current daylight patterns. Permanent DST would push sunrise back an hour, potentially extending frost delays and compressing playable windows during shoulder seasons.

Noise Ordinances: Many facilities operate under local noise ordinances restricting early-morning equipment use. Permanent DST might force maintenance crews to start even earlier to complete work before play begins, potentially conflicting with municipal regulations designed to protect residential areas.

Crew Scheduling and Labor Costs: Extended early-morning darkness work might require shift differential pay or additional safety measures, increasing operational expenses. In winter months at northern latitudes, permanent DST could mean maintenance crews working in darkness for several hours.

Work-Life Balance: Year-round golf facilities in temperate climates already require staff to work long hours during peak seasons. Some superintendents value the earlier sunset times that current Standard Time provides during winter months, allowing employees more evening time with families.

In contrast, only 19% of superintendents feel permanent Standard Time would benefit their operations, with 46% saying it would not be helpful and 35% unsure.

Geographic and Business Model Variations

The diversity of opinions within our industry reflects genuine differences in business models and geographic situations:

Northern Seasonal Courses: Facilities that close November-March see limited upside from permanent DST but significant downside from permanent Standard Time during their April-October operating season.

Sunbelt Resort Destinations: Florida, Arizona, and Southern California facilities operate year-round with peak winter seasons. For these businesses, permanent DST's November-March evening daylight would be most valuable, while permanent Standard Time would be most harmful.

Municipal vs. Private Operations: Municipal courses often serve working-class golfers who play after work. Private clubs may have more flexible membership demographics with greater morning availability.

Daily-Fee vs. Resort Models: Daily-fee courses depend heavily on after-work play and twilight rounds. Resort courses hosting destination travelers may see stronger morning rounds from vacationers.

The Industry's Clear Position

Despite this internal diversity of opinion, **the golf industry is unequivocally and strongly opposed to making Standard Time permanent**. The economic analysis is clear: permanent Standard Time would cost our industry $1.6 billion annually, eliminate 37 million rounds of golf, result in widespread job losses, and reduce recreational access for millions of working Americans.

The NGCOA does not take a formal position on whether Congress should make Daylight Saving Time permanent, because a substantial portion of our members prefer the status quo of changing clocks twice yearly. However, if Congress determines that eliminating clock changes serves the national interest, we urge permanent Daylight Saving Time over permanent Standard Time.

Public Health and Broader Recreational Considerations

This issue extends far beyond golf's economic interests. Extended evening daylight supports public health goals that benefit all Americans:

Physical Activity: Outdoor recreation—whether golf, soccer, jogging, walking, or biking—overwhelmingly occurs in afternoon and evening hours. Reducing evening daylight would decrease physical activity participation precisely when public health officials emphasize combating sedentary lifestyles and obesity.

Mental Health: The biological benefits of sunlight include Vitamin D production, improved immune function, bone health, and positive mental health outcomes. Evening sunlight exposure supports circadian rhythm regulation and mental wellness.

Public Safety: Ample research correlates increased evening daylight with reduced crime rates. Hikers, joggers, and cyclists face greater safety risks with earlier sunsets, which may also discourage participation entirely.

Youth Sports and Activities: After-school sports programs, youth leagues, and family outdoor activities depend on evening daylight. Permanent Standard Time would push sunset back an hour during spring, summer, and fall—the very seasons when youth outdoor programming peaks.

Economic Ripple Effects: The impacts extend beyond golf to restaurants, retailers, hospitality businesses, and service industries that depend on discretionary consumer spending during evening hours when people are active and outdoors.

Recommendation on Daylight Saving Time

We ask this Subcommittee to carefully consider the economic and public health consequences of reducing evening recreational daylight. If Congress moves toward eliminating clock changes, we strongly encourage permanent Daylight Saving Time over permanent Standard Time. At minimum, we urge the Subcommittee to avoid the severe negative consequences that permanent Standard Time would impose on outdoor recreation, local economies, and public health.

SECTION II: TRAVEL AND TOURISM TO THE UNITED STATES AND GOLF’S PART IN THE PICTURE

Zooming Out: The State of Travel

Travel and tourism remain powerful engines of the U.S. economy. The industry generates **$2.9 trillion in annual economic output**, supports **15 million American jobs**, and produces **$190 billion in tax revenue**. Leisure travel continues to anchor the sector—responsible for **$1 trillion in spending** last year and **82% of all domestic trips**—while business travel added another **$312 billion**.

International inbound travel, however, is where America is losing ground. Visitors contributed **$181 billion** last year, but overall volume remains well below 2019 levels. In just over a decade, the U.S. has fallen from a **$50 billion travel trade surplus** to a projected **$60+ billion deficit in 2025**, driven largely by the failure to regain pre-pandemic international visitation.

Domestic travel remains stable. U.S. trips are projected to rise **1.9% in 2025**, and more than **90% of Americans** say they plan to travel in the next six months. Air travel set records over summer and during Labor Day. Yet visits to National Parks lag—**9.1 million trips below last year** prior to the shutdown, which further disrupted visitation and gateway-community economies.

The international picture is more troubling. Through August, inbound visitation is down **4.8%**—driven by a **23% drop from Canada** (nearly **4 million fewer trips and $4 billion in lost spending**). Mexico is up **11%**, but major overseas markets remain soft. Overseas visitors spend an average of **$4,000 per trip**, nearly four times more than domestic travelers, meaning every **1% decline costs the U.S. $1.8 billion** in export revenue. The U.S. is the **only major country projected to see a decline** in international visitor spending in 2025.

Cost and perception issues are major barriers. The strong dollar, high airfare, and now the new **$250 Visa Integrity Fee** make the U.S. one of the most expensive destinations in the world for visa-requiring travelers—likely deterring **nearly 1 million annual visits**. Visa interview wait times in top markets average **175 days**, and the U.S. counts only **42 countries** in its Visa Waiver Program, compared to the U.K.'s 102. These challenges reinforce a perception that the U.S. is unwelcoming and difficult to visit.

These obstacles come at exactly the wrong time. In the next four years, the U.S. will host **America250**, the **2026 FIFA World Cup**, the **2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games**, and other global events expected to draw **up to 40 million international visitors** and nearly **$100 billion in economic activity**—but only if we strengthen our competitiveness.

The Administration has taken important steps: launching a White House World Cup Task Force; increasing State Department visa-processing capacity; funding **5,000 additional CBP officers**; modernizing TSA screening; expanding one-stop security; and proposing full funding for Brand USA in FY26.

Congress has an equally important role. The recent shutdown alone cost more than **$6 billion in lost travel spending**, shut down federal attractions, halted data reporting, and slowed air travel—all preventable impacts. Keeping the government funded is essential to the health of the travel economy, and if a shutdown ever occurs again, essential workers such as TSA and air traffic controllers must continue to be paid.

Congress must also restore full funding for **Brand USA**, the nation's public–private international marketing arm. Funded entirely by industry contributions and ESTA fees—not taxpayer dollars—Brand USA generates a **24:1 return on investment**, supports nearly **80,000 jobs**, and is critical for communicating official U.S. entry policies abroad. Cuts under the One Big Beautiful Bill—from $100 million to $20 million in annual federal matching funds—risk at least **$7.5 billion in lost visitor spending** and **100,000 American jobs** over the coming years. Bipartisan legislation led by Chairman Bilirakis and Rep. Castor would restore its funding and ensure international promotion ahead of our major events.

Finally, Congress should reconsider the Visa Integrity Fee or limit its use to countries with high overstay risks. At the statutory minimum of $250, this fee will mean **nearly 1 million fewer annual visitors**, **$2.9 billion in lost spending**, **15,000 lost jobs**, and **over $400 million in lost tax revenue** in the first year alone.

Strengthening our visa system, restoring Brand USA, investing in air travel modernization, fully staffing National Parks, and keeping government open are necessary steps to ensure the United States remains the world's premier travel destination—especially as we prepare to host the largest gatherings of visitors on American soil in a generation.

Zooming In on Golf

Golf represents a critical and significantly underappreciated component of America's tourism economy and competitive position in the global travel market.

Golf Tourism's Economic Impact

Golf tourism is the second-largest economic driver in the golf industry, generating over $40 billion in annual travel-related expenditures within the United States. This represents a substantial portion of the industry's overall $102 billion economic footprint.

Golf travelers represent exceptionally high-value visitors who generate disproportionate economic impact:

Extended Stays: Golf travelers book longer trips than general tourists, averaging 3-5 nights compared to 2-3 nights for typical leisure travel.

Group Travel Patterns: Golf trips typically involve groups of 4-12 travelers, multiplying local economic impact through lodging, dining, retail, entertainment, and transportation spending.

Shoulder Season Concentration: Golf destinations attract visitors during spring and fall shoulder seasons when other tourism sectors experience softness. This provides economic stability for hospitality workers and service businesses during periods when beach destinations see lower visitation and ski resorts remain closed.

Year-Round Appeal: While ski destinations face summer challenges and beach destinations see winter declines, golf destinations can attract visitors across extended seasons in temperate climates, supporting year-round employment.

High Per-Trip Spending: Beyond green fees, golf travelers spend substantially on premium lodging, fine dining, equipment and apparel purchases, spa services, and entertainment. The average golf trip generates $1,200-2,000 per person in total travel expenditures.

Regional Economic Multipliers: Golf tourism supports entire destination ecosystems. From Myrtle Beach to Scottsdale, Palm Springs to Pinehurst, Kiawah Island to Bandon Dunes, golf facilities anchor regional economies that depend on visitor spending to sustain hospitality jobs, restaurants, retail establishments, ground transportation, and service businesses.

America's Competitive Position in Global Golf Tourism

The United States faces intensifying international competition for golf tourism dollars. Traditional competitors including Scotland, Ireland, and Spain actively market golf tourism as signature destination experiences. Emerging markets in Asia, the Middle East, and other regions invest heavily in championship golf facilities and aggressive tourism marketing to capture market share.

Scotland promotes itself as "The Home of Golf" with coordinated national marketing campaigns. Ireland leverages dramatic coastal courses and cultural authenticity. Spain offers Mediterranean climate and resort experiences. Dubai and other Middle Eastern destinations provide luxury golf resort experiences with world-class facilities.

Meanwhile, the United States—despite having the world's most diverse golf landscape, from affordable municipal courses to championship resort destinations—has underinvested in international golf tourism marketing compared to these competitors. The strong U.S. dollar through 2023 and 2024 made American travel more expensive for international visitors, and while currency conditions have improved in 2025, the lag effect in international travel planning means we are still experiencing the impact of that previous dollar strength. International leisure travelers typically book major trips 6-12 months in advance, meaning current visitation reflects decisions made when the dollar was less favorable. This timing dynamic underscores why sustained, aggressive marketing is essential—we cannot simply wait for favorable economic conditions to automatically generate visitation.

Brand USA: Critical Infrastructure for Golf Tourism

Brand USA, established as a public-private partnership following the Travel Promotion Act of 2009, serves as the United States' primary tourism marketing organization to international audiences. However, Brand USA faces ongoing reauthorization and funding challenges that limit its effectiveness in promoting American tourism, including golf tourism.

Current Limitations: Brand USA's current structure and appropriations have not adequately positioned golf as a differentiating American travel experience. While competitor nations actively market golf tourism through coordinated campaigns, American golf destinations lack the visibility in international markets that the industry's economic impact warrants.

Return on Investment: Tourism marketing generates substantial economic returns. For every federal dollar invested in tourism promotion, research demonstrates returns of $25-30 in visitor spending and associated tax revenue. Given golf's $40 billion annual tourism impact and high-value traveler profile, targeted international golf tourism marketing would produce measurable returns.

International Visitor Value: International golf travelers spend significantly more per trip than domestic visitors and travel during periods when domestic tourism is lower. European and Asian golfers view American destinations as bucket-list experiences but make travel decisions based substantially on marketing visibility and destination awareness.

Policy Recommendations for Tourism and Golf Tourism Enhancement

As a member of the U.S. Travel Association Board of Directors, I have worked extensively on tourism policy issues that affect not only golf but the broader American travel industry. I offer the following recommendations to strengthen America's competitive position in golf tourism:

1. Restore Brand USA's Full Funding for FY26-27

Congress should immediately restore Brand USA's authorized ESTA fee allocation to $100 million annually for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. The current $20 million funding level—an 80% reduction—severely undermines America's ability to compete in the global tourism market. We strongly support the bipartisan legislation advanced by Representatives Bilirakis and Castor, along with Senators Sullivan, Klobuchar, Capito, and Rosen, to achieve this restoration.

Given golf's $40 billion annual tourism impact and the demonstrated $25-30 return for every dollar invested in tourism marketing, restoring Brand USA's funding would generate substantial returns through international visitor spending. The organization's unique funding mechanism through ESTA fees and private sector contributions, rather than annual appropriations, provides stability and efficiency that should be maintained and strengthened.

2. Reauthorize Brand USA Beyond FY27

Following the restoration of full funding, Congress should reauthorize Brand USA beyond the end of fiscal year 2027 to ensure long-term stability for international tourism marketing. The reauthorization should maintain the ESTA fee funding structure and explicitly direct Brand USA to develop golf tourism as a distinct marketing category with dedicated resources.

- Championship resort courses in premiere destinations
- Historic and culturally significant golf facilities
- Accessible public golf representing American democratic values
- Unique American golf experiences (desert golf, mountain golf, coastal links-style courses)

- Integration of golf into broader destination marketing highlighting American culture, hospitality, and diverse landscapes

2. Create Golf Tourism as a Distinct Marketing Category

Brand USA should establish golf tourism as a distinct marketing category with dedicated resources, similar to how competitor nations position golf as signature tourism experiences. This includes:

- Coordinated campaigns targeting European and Asian golf travelers
- Digital marketing showcasing American golf diversity
- Partnership with state and regional tourism organizations to amplify messaging
- Integration with major American golf events (U.S. Open, PGA Championship, Ryder Cup) to leverage international media attention

4. Regional Airport Access and Transportation Infrastructure

Golf destinations in smaller markets often face limited air service, constraining visitor volume and economic potential. Many premium golf destinations lack direct international flights or convenient domestic connections, creating barriers to visitation despite world-class facilities.

Transportation policy should consider tourism access and economic impact on destination communities. Federal programs supporting regional airport improvements, essential air service, and connectivity enhancements would benefit golf destinations and the broader tourism ecosystem they support.

5. Hospitality Workforce Development

The hospitality workforce challenges facing hotels, restaurants, and attractions equally affect golf facilities. Golf operations employ professionals across diverse roles:

- Golf professionals and teaching staff
- Course superintendents and grounds crew
- Hospitality and customer service personnel
- Food and beverage staff
- Specialized positions including caddies and operations managers

Federal support for hospitality workforce training programs, seasonal employment pathways, career advancement initiatives, and apprenticeship models would strengthen the entire travel ecosystem. Golf facilities provide entry-level opportunities and career pathways that support local economies, particularly in smaller destination communities where golf serves as a primary employer.

6. Tourism Infrastructure Investment

Federal investment in tourism infrastructure provides disproportionate benefits to smaller destination communities where golf serves as an economic anchor. Priorities include:

- Broadband connectivity in resort areas to support modern traveler expectations
- Regional transportation improvements
- Wayfinding and visitor information systems
- Sustainable tourism infrastructure supporting environmental stewardship

7. Visa and Travel Facilitation

For international golf tourism to reach its potential, visa processing and travel facilitation must remain competitive with destinations competing for the same travelers. Extended visa processing times or cumbersome entry procedures create friction that benefits competitor nations with more streamlined processes. Congress should ensure resources for efficient visa processing that facilitates legitimate travel while maintaining security.

Golf's Broader Community Value

Beyond economic impact, golf facilities provide environmental and community benefits that support tourism sustainability:

Environmental Stewardship: Golf courses function as green infrastructure providing stormwater management, wildlife habitat, and temperature moderation in suburban and urban areas. The industry has reduced water usage 29% since 2005 while maintaining 2 million acres of managed green space that improves air quality and sequesters carbon.

Community Wellness Assets: Golf serves as lifestyle infrastructure supporting physical and mental wellness. The sport's health benefits, accessibility across age ranges, and social connection aspects make golf facilities valuable community resources beyond their economic contributions.

Charitable Platform: Golf facilities host charitable fundraising events generating nearly $5 billion annually, supporting local nonprofits, healthcare organizations, youth programs, and community causes.

Climate Adaptation: As climate patterns shift, golf facilities increasingly implement resilience measures including water conservation systems, drought-resistant turf varieties, and habitat preservation—environmental services that complement their recreational and economic roles.

These attributes position golf tourism as sustainable and community-beneficial economic development, contrasting with some tourism models that strain local resources or generate negative externalities.

CONCLUSIONS

The questions before this Subcommittee—concerning daylight, travel, and tourism—directly affect the golf industry's ability to serve as an economic engine and recreational resource in communities nationwide.

On Daylight Saving Time: The data is clear. Permanent Standard Time would cost our industry a minimum of $1.6 billion annually, eliminate 37 million rounds of golf, destroy seasonal employment opportunities, and reduce recreational access for millions of working Americans who depend on evening daylight for outdoor activity. While opinions within our industry vary on whether to make Daylight Saving Time permanent, there is absolute consensus opposing permanent Standard Time.

If Congress determines that eliminating clock changes serves the national interest, we strongly urge permanent Daylight Saving Time over permanent Standard Time to preserve evening recreational opportunities that benefit public health, local economies, and outdoor recreation access. At minimum, we ask the Subcommittee to carefully consider the economic and public health consequences before reducing evening recreational daylight.

On Tourism Policy: Golf represents an underutilized asset in America's competitive position in the global tourism market. The immediate priority is restoring Brand USA's full funding—from the current $20 million to $100 million annually—for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. We strongly support the bipartisan legislation led by Representatives Bilirakis and Castor, along with Senators Sullivan, Klobuchar, Capito, and Rosen, to achieve this restoration. Following funding restoration, Brand USA should be reauthorized beyond fiscal year 2027 with specific integration of golf tourism into destination marketing strategies.

The recommendations I have offered today—from Brand USA funding restoration to workforce development, regional connectivity to travel facilitation—would benefit not only golf but the entire American tourism ecosystem. Golf's $40 billion annual tourism impact and position as a year-round economic anchor in destination communities warrants strategic policy attention.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's focus on these critical issues affecting time, travel, and tourism. The golf industry stands ready to provide technical assistance, additional data, and industry expertise as you develop policy solutions. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome your questions.

FOOTNOTES

[1] National Golf Foundation, "Golf Economy Report 2024" (2024).

[2] National Golf Foundation, "Golf Tourism Study" (2023).

[3] NGCOA Point of Sale Revenue Analysis (2024).

[4] National Golf Foundation, "Golf Tourism Study" (2023).

[5] Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, "Environmental Profile of U.S. Golf Courses" (2023).

[6] Journal of Aging and Physical Activity, "Golf and Health: A Systematic Review" (2020).

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