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Obama Signs Travel Promotion Act Into Law

By Henry J. Pulizzi, Of DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

WASHINGTON -(Dow Jones)- Delivering a boost to the tourism industry, President Barack Obama on Thursday signed legislation designed to create jobs in the recession-scarred sector and lure foreign travelers back to U.S. attractions.

Passed by the Senate in a bipartisan vote last week, the Travel Promotion Act will create a partnership between the government and the private sector to market the U.S. to overseas visitors and communicate new security measures. The new Corporation for Travel Promotion will be funded through a \$10 fee on travelers from the 35 countries that don't have to pay for a visa, as well as cash and donations from the tourism industry.

The fee, capped at \$100 million a year, would be matched by the private sector, potentially creating a \$200 million program.

No taxpayer dollars will be spent on the initiative, making it less politically divisive than other stimulus programs.

Advocates say the measure will entice new visitors, spur new spending and goose tax revenues by more than \$300 million. The impact could be substantial for an industry that was hit hard by 9/11, then the global economic crisis.

The number of visitors from overseas still hasn't eclipsed its pre-9/11 levels. The tourism industry expects the new measure to attract 1.6 million international visitors who otherwise wouldn't visit the U.S.

Jim Abrahamson, Americas President at Intercontinental Hotels Group, said the legislation creates a "great promotional opportunity for the U.S."

"Anything that can stimulate tourism, revenue increases and jobs is a tremendous breakthrough," Abrahamson said. He said increases in demand in the travel sector translate "almost immediately" into new jobs.

-By Henry J. Pulizzi, Dow Jones Newswires; 202-862-9256; henry.pulizzi@ dowjones.com

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