To provide grants for tourism and events support and promotion in areas affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID–19), and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 23, 2020

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO (for herself, Mr. BLUNT, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, and Mr. CRAMER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works

A BILL

To provide grants for tourism and events support and promotion in areas affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID–19), and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-

tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Sustaining Tourism

Enterprises During the COVID–19 Pandemic Act” or the

“STEP Act”.

To provide grants for tourism and events support and promotion in areas affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID–19), and for other purposes.
SEC. 2. TOURISM AND EVENTS SUPPORT AND PROMOTION.

Title II of the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 is amended by inserting after section 207 (42 U.S.C. 3147) the following:

“SEC. 208. TOURISM AND EVENTS SUPPORT AND PROMOTION.

“(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of the Sustaining Tourism Enterprises During the COVID–19 Pandemic Act, the Secretary shall provide grants to eligible entities—

“(1) to assist with loss of revenue due to the economic impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID–19); and

“(2) to promote economic recovery in communities affected by a decline in tourism and events due to COVID–19.

“(b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—An entity eligible to receive a grant under this section is an entity that performs tourism promotion responsibilities, hosts, organizes, owns, operates, or staffs an event venue, a convention, or a trade show, or provides services as a concessionaire to events and tourism locations, including—

“(1) a State tourism board or department;

“(2) a political subdivision or instrumentality of a State or local government;
“(3) a unit of local government, including a county government;

“(4) a Tribal government;

“(5) a multijurisdictional or regional group;

“(6) a nonprofit organization described in section 501(e) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from taxation under section 501(a) of that Code;

“(7) a quasi-governmental organization; and

“(8) a private business.

“(c) APPLICATION.—To be eligible to receive a grant under this section, an eligible entity shall submit to the Secretary an application at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

“(d) SELECTION.—The Secretary shall select eligible entities to receive grants under this section based on factors to be determined by the Secretary, using the best available data, including economic impact information provided by applicants, such as information on job losses faced by the eligible entity or within the industry of the eligible entity, to address the economic recovery needs in areas impacted by the decline in travel, tourism, and events activities, and the associated revenues, due to COVID–19.
“(e) **USE OF FUNDS.**—

“(1) **IN GENERAL.**—An eligible entity may use the funds from a grant under this section—

“(A) to pay costs associated with tourism marketing and promotion activities necessary to assist with economic recovery from lost revenue due to COVID–19, including to purchase media advertisements on print, broadcast, or digital media for the purpose of marketing, public awareness, or information campaigns relating to local tourism;

“(B) to pay costs to promote economic recovery in communities impacted by a decline in travel, tourism, and events revenue as a result of COVID–19, including through the provision of information on the safety and security of sites for traveler or attendee awareness;

“(C) to pay cleaning and sanitary costs, including physical modifications, associated with precautions to provide for safe worker, traveler, or event environments; and

“(D) to pay the costs of salaries and expenses associated with the operations of the eligible entity with respect to activities described in subparagraphs (A), (B), and (C).
“(2) Prohibition.—Funds from a grant under this section may not be used for activities related to or for purposes of lobbying any governmental entity.

“(f) Distribution.—Of the amounts made available to carry out this section—

“(1) $2,000,000,000 shall be for expedited grants to eligible entities to offset revenue losses due to the economic impact of COVID–19; and

“(2) any remaining amounts shall be for grants for activities described in subparagraphs (A) through (D) of subsection (e)(1).

“(g) Maximum Amount of Grant.—An eligible entity may not receive a grant under this section in an amount that is—

“(1) in the case of a grant under subsection (f)(1), more than 80 percent of the loss in revenue experienced by the eligible entity during the period beginning March 1, 2020, and ending on the date of submission of the application, as compared to the same period in 2019; and

“(2) in the case of a grant under subsection (f)(2), more than 80 percent of the revenue of the eligible entity during calendar year 2019.

“(h) Limitation.—
“(1) IN GENERAL.—Not more than 15 percent of the amounts made available to carry out this section may be used to provide grants to eligible entities that are private businesses.

“(2) PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall give priority for the amounts under paragraph (1) to private businesses that are small business concerns (within the meaning of section 3 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632)).

“(i) NO CEDS REQUIRED.—To receive a grant under this section, an eligible entity shall not be required to have a comprehensive economic development strategy.

“(j) WAIVER.—The Secretary may waive, or specify alternative requirements for, any provision of any statute or regulation that the Secretary administers in connection with a grant under this section if the Secretary determines that any such waivers or alternative requirements are necessary to expedite or facilitate the use of the amounts made available under this section.

“(k) FEDERAL SHARE.—Notwithstanding section 204, the Federal share of the cost of an activity carried out with a grant under this section shall be 100 percent.

“(l) ADMINISTRATION.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Not more than 2 percent of the amounts made available to carry out this section
may be used for the administrative costs of carrying out this section.

“(2) Staffing.—

“(A) Temporary appointment.—The Secretary may appoint and fix the compensation of such temporary personnel as may be necessary to carry out this section, without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in competitive service.

“(B) Permanent appointment.—

“(i) In general.—In the case of an individual appointed as temporary personnel under subparagraph (A) who has served continuously for not less than 2 years, the Secretary may appoint that individual to a position in the Economic Development Administration in the same manner that competitive service employees with competitive status are considered for transfer, reassignment, or promotion to such positions.

“(ii) Treatment.—An individual appointed to a position under clause (i) shall become a career-conditional employee, un-
less the employee has already completed
the service requirements for career tenure.

“(3) INVESTIGATIONS AND AUDITS.—The Sec-
retary shall use $3,000,000 of the amounts made
available to carry out this section to carry out inves-
tigations and audits related to the provision of
grants under this section.

“(m) FUNDING.—

“(1) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—
There is authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-
retary to carry out this section $10,000,000,000, to
remain available until September 30, 2022.

“(2) ADDITIONAL FUNDING.—Notwithstanding
any other provision of law, the Secretary may use
any amounts made available to the Secretary under
the heading ‘ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE
PROGRAMS (INCLUDING TRANSFERS OF FUNDS)’
under the heading ‘ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AD-
MINISTRATION’ under the heading ‘DEPARTMENT
OF COMMERCE’ in title II of division B of the
CARES Act (Public Law 116–136) that are unobli-
gated as of the date of enactment of the Sustaining
Tourism Enterprises During the COVID–19 Pan-
demic Act to provide grants under this section.”.