

# America's Story...



For many Americans, the negative press coverage of AIG's private event in December 2008, right after the TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) bailouts, painted a picture of corporate meetings as frivolous indulgences. This perception is erroneous and unfortunate, because the health of the meetings industry is essential to our economy's recovery.

The media could not foresee the impact of the story. But this isolated instance led some American corporations to react by cancelling their meetings, both to avoid negative press and in the misguided belief that the saved funds would lessen the economic damage to their companies. The irony is that cancelling their meetings will have further negative effects on growth and on the American economy as a whole – just at a time when we are trying to regain momentum.

The overheated criticism of legitimate corporate meetings and events had a devastating effect across the United States. The travel industry was estimated to have lost \$1.9 billion in January and February alone due to cancelled meetings and events.



A grassroots, viral marketing programme was launched - **Keep America Meeting** - to bring attention to this issue by giving the entire industry a unified voice. Our objectives were to unify the industry with a non-partisan campaign, and educate our industry on the need for continued awareness and action. We hoped to deliver two messages to the media and our government: Meetings and events help to build successful businesses, and that meetings and events are a critical part of the American economy.

The Keep America Meeting campaign succeeded in galvanising the entire meetings and events industry around this critical issue. Within 45 days, we:

- Received more than 21,000 signatures, the largest show of force in our industry
- Received international coverage and interest
- 13 May 2009: The signatures were delivered to the Senate Commerce Committee asking for support of meetings, events and incentive travel
- 9 September 2009: The Senate passes the Travel Promotion Act with an overwhelming vote of 79 to 19.

Gathering together to support each other is even more important in hard times. Looking back, the companies that emerged from the Great Depression stronger and earlier than the competition had this in common: Looking to the future, workers bonded together around a common, well-articulated mission. Meetings are how this is done, and how business is done. It's how economies are stimulated, and how employees and business partners are motivated to create positive results. The conclusion is obvious. **Meetings matter**, to the organisations that conduct them, and their employees; to the communities where they're held; to meeting and hospitality industry companies that supply the services – and to the entire economy.

Website: [.keepamericameeting.org](http://.keepamericameeting.org)  
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