

January 21, 2021

Honorable Ray Holmberg
State Senator and Appropriations Committee Chair

Testimony before Senator Holmberg and Appropriations Committee Members, January 25, 2021

Good morning Senator Holmberg and Members of the Committee and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Charley Johnson, and I am the President and CEO of the Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo Convention and Visitors Bureau. I'm here to wholeheartedly support—as a minimum—the Governor's proposed \$461-thousand increase in the Tourism Division Budget for the Biennium that begins next summer, and his proposal for an additional two-million dollars (\$2,000,000) for destination marketing. I say minimum because even the increase and the one-time marketing fund would still leave North Dakota well short of the tourism spending done by most of our competitors around the country, including those closest to us. The increased state expenditure is even more vital this year, as most of our local destination marketing budgets—largely dependent on the local lodging tax—have been devastated as Covid-19 curtailed all kinds of travel.

Many of you have heard me say this before, but it bears repeating—on their own, tourism & travel are probably the purest form of economic development, since visitors leave their money behind when they go home. But it's well-established that Tourism Marketing also lifts the national and international profile of the entire state, including for purposes of economic and workforce development. Very few people ever decide to move to a state to take a job unless they've had a chance to visit, first, and the visits that influence those decisions to move somewhere don't always come during a specific job search. Sometimes they come during a family vacation, or a trip to a conference, or to a Squirt Hockey Tournament. A visit is the "first date" of an economic relationship. People who visit ND for any reason whatsoever are far more likely to consider working, living, or starting a business here, and make no mistake about it—*marketing drives the vast majority of the first visits*. You have a great team in the Tourism Division of the Commerce Department, and I believe I can speak for all my travel, tourism and economic development colleagues around the state when I implore you to give them the tools—indeed, the funding—they need to raise North Dakota and all it has to offer to the place it deserves in the national consciousness. I would be delighted to answer any questions, either in person before your committee or via email or a phone call.

Sincerely,



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