

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Brian Lunde and I'm a member of the volunteer board of directors of the Bison World Fund, a non-profit North Dakota corporation. With me today is the President of our Board, Alex Schweitzer, who many of you know from his years managing our state hospital system. And David Haukass who is the President of Aerling Associates who you will hear from shortly.

We appreciate this opportunity to give you a brief update on the Bison World project.

We have now completed a 2 ½ year planning process at a cost of over 1 million dollars. We have reached the point, that, with your support, we are ready to start the project.

But first, it's probably helpful for you to know what led us to being here today.

Back in 2020, a city councilwoman in Jamestown asked if we would take a fresh look at the Frontier Village and adjoining world's largest buffalo monument. She wanted to know how we could grow this roadside attraction into a major regional or even national tourist destination. After all, she said, the city did have 60 years invested in the bison theme.

Our answer to her -- as a group of volunteers along with the Jamestown Stutsman Development Corporation - was yes - we would help -- but only if we brought in Disney-level thinking. And we meant that literally.

So we brought in Apogee Attractions – considered by many in the tourism industry to be the leading firm that designs, develops and operates cultural theme parks -- like a Bison World. Apogee is the firm that's comprised of some of the most successful former executives at The Walt Disney Company, Sea World, Knotts Berry Farm, Universal Studios, and many others.

They have assigned a team of 19 people to our project alone. And the team is being led by the President of the company himself – Bob McTyre. His accolades in the industry include creating the most profitable attraction in Disney's history. McTyre - who Senator Wanzek knows well - will be here next Friday and, hopefully, all of you will have the opportunity to talk with him then.

To make a long story short – we found that the current Frontier Village and buffalo monument sat adjacent to hundreds of acres of vacant, non-producing state land along I-94 – with 8.8 million people going by it every year - where a new destination attraction could be built within three blocks of an interstate exit.

Apogee also said that we just happened to be on the cutting edge of the future of the tourism industry – that there are no more Disney World's or Six Flags to be done in the United States.

The future is in niche tourism attractions –based on things like an animal (the Kentucky Horse Park – in our case Bison World). A toy (Legoland) A football which is happening right now in Ohio. Even children’s TV characters at an attraction like Sesame Place.

Plus, Apogee pointed out a number of advantages we have going into the project. We are sitting on what could be the last best exit in the country for a destination tourism attraction – that we already have a running head start. Land at no cost – which to them is unheard of. An attraction that millions of people see each year as they drive by on an interstate highway. And 60 years of what they call “brand equity” - where you have a pre-existing tourism theme that just needs to be expanded upon and modernized.

Having the only bison-centered theme park in the world – the only theme park based on our national mammal -- is just sitting here to be done in North Dakota.

It’s also important to note that, from the very beginning - back in early 2020, when we saw this tourism opportunity on state land, we immediately reached out to Sara Otte Coleman and have been working with her and her team every step of the way. We also began working with Commissioner Teigen long before he became Commerce Commissioner. And because of Josh and Sara, this project has become a case study in how a model public-private partnership can work.

Before I turn this over to David Haukaas I just want to highlight this one-page summary along with this 100-plus page plan. These documents should provide you with much of the detail - but, of course, we will spend as much time as any of you would like to go through all the specifics.

So, our final step in the planning process was to bring in a leading outside investment advisor to do an independent financial analysis of all our work. We wanted someone who would look at the project from your point of view.... and try to anticipate some of the key questions you may have.

I will let David Haukaas tell you a little more about himself and explain his findings...but we are very fortunate that he has returned to the United States after serving as a senior executive at one of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds....David.