



January 19, 2021

To: Senate Appropriations Committee
Re: SB 2018 – ND Tourism Division Support

Dear Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

My name is Darren Bleth, and I am the General Manager of the La Quinta Inn & Suites in Dickinson. I am writing this letter, to implore you to increase the ND Tourism Division's budget.

I have served in the hotel industry in Dickinson, for the past 20+ years. During that time, our state and Southwestern North Dakota especially have seen its share of economic ups and downs. In the past decade, we have endured the oil and energy best of times as well as its worst of times. This past year has presented our industry, our state, our nation, and our world with unprecedented adversity. The likes of which, we could have never imagined.

As we navigated through the period of such uncertainty, beginning in March 2020, we were left only to question when or if tourism would again return. And, if so, to what degree? Given the pandemic's implications, travel from abroad was out of the equation. What then could be expected from domestic travel?

As 2020Q2 neared its close, our region began to see the domestic traveler. Unable to utilize airline travel as originally planned, given the pandemic, these individuals instead took to the interstates and highways to engage in outdoor vacation plans. And, as a result, the national parks provided one of the few "open" venues for responsible, safe socializing and gathering. This represents just an example of the impact of the ND Tourism Division's impact on our state. Without their efforts in bringing awareness and exposure for our state, and all its attractions and destinations, our industry...our region will become stagnant. The impact and inroads realized by their efforts necessitate a long-term, increased budgetary commitment.

I challenge you to think of the ND Tourism Division as, in essence, our state's dedicated Sales force. Historically, our state legislature has funded our state's Sales force approximately \$1 for every \$4-\$5 afforded the neighboring states in our region. This is not competitive. Not close. This is a travesty and a disservice. To our industry, to our region, and to our state.

wake up on the bright side®



I implore each of you to help the ND Tourism Division, our state's dedicated Sales force, sell our wonderful state to the rest of the nation...and rest of the world...better than ever before. Please support increasing ND Tourism Division funding to \$9 million per year/\$18 million for the biennium.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darren Bleth'.

Darren Bleth
General Manager
La Quinta Inn & Suites
Dickinson, ND