

March 13, 2017

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The Honorable Senator Curtis King
The Honorable Representative Norm Johnson
The Honorable Representative Gina McCabe
Olympia, WA 98504

RE: Tourism Works for Washington

The OneGorge Advocacy Group is a network of public agencies and private businesses from Washington and Oregon communities throughout the Columbia River Gorge working together to advocate for regional priorities. The undersigned participants wish to express our support for the efforts working toward the creation of a Washington Statewide Tourism Marketing Program through HB1123/SB 5251. These OneGorge participants recognize the significant impact that tourism has on the bi-state regional economy.

Investing in tourism promotion is critical to the economic health of Washington State. Despite the economic benefits of tourism, the state of Washington closed its tourism office in 2011 and Washington is the only state in the nation without a statewide tourism funding program.

Measures before the Washington State Legislature would create an industry-led Tourism Marketing Authority and provide performance-based industry funding mechanisms without additional taxes. Both HB 112 and SB 5251 have bipartisan support from legislators representing urban and rural districts throughout the state.

While visitors to the Greater Seattle area have continued to be strong, many of our small and rural communities – including Goldendale, Lyle, White Salmon, Bingen, Carson, Stevenson and North Bonneville – have struggled to keep vital tourism dollars (and the resulting jobs and tax revenue) flowing to their businesses.

Tourism is Washington's fourth largest industry and impacts more than hotels, restaurants and destinations. It benefits retailers, outdoor recreation, state parks, ports and cities – and ultimately the taxpayers of Washington. More than \$1.8 billion in local and state tax revenue are generated directly from tourism. It is the largest employer of women and minorities and is responsible for more than 170,500 jobs.

We support these priorities for 2017 legislation as a solution to provide for more economic development and jobs as well as state and local tax revenue from increasing tourism to Washington.

- Independent oversight of the industry-run program by a board of tourism industry representatives and legislators.
- A marketing plan and campaign that focuses on bringing more tourists to Washington and out to rural and tourism-dependent counties, emphasizing outdoor recreation opportunities and designed to attract international tourists, crafted by a non-profit entity representing the geographic and cultural diversity of the state.
- A funding mechanism for a Tourism Marketing Account that does not raise taxes and offers the potential for a \$15 million marketing program over the next two years for a tourism marketing program.

We ask all legislators to support the creation of a new statewide marketing program that provides the opportunities for economic development, jobs and revenue growth in every corner of our state.

Warm regards,

The undersigned, facilitated by OneGorge