



FOR RELEASE

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**NEW PERFORMANCE-BASED STATEWIDE TOURISM MARKETING PROGRAM READY FOR LEGISLATORS
STATE SENATE AND HOUSE LEGISLATION INTRODUCED IN 2017 SESSION**

(Olympia) --- Washington would no longer be the only state in the nation without a statewide tourism marketing program under legislation introduced in both the state House and Senate this week. The legislation would create an industry-led Tourism Marketing Authority and provide performance-based industry funding mechanisms without additional taxes. Both HB1123 and SB 5251 (the same legislation but entered in both the Senate and House) have bipartisan support from legislators representing urban and rural districts throughout the state.

“This legislation has strong support from the tourism industry,” said Cheryl Kilday, chair of the board of the Washington Tourism Alliance (WTA). “We want to thank the sponsors who have worked so hard to find a solution that will provide for more economic development and jobs as well as state and local tax revenue from increasing tourism to Washington.”

Washington State closed its tourism office in 2011 and while visitors to the Greater Seattle area have continued to be strong, many of our smaller and rural communities have struggled to keep vital tourism dollars (and the resulting jobs and tax revenue) flowing to their businesses. Tourism is Washington’s 4th 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 revenues are generated directly from tourism. It’s the largest employer of women and minorities and is responsible for more than 170,500 jobs.

“Washington is the only state in the union that does not have a statewide tourism program. With this legislation a small investment by the state should see double or even triple the return from the tourism industry. It is a great way to raise revenue without raising taxes,” said **Rep. Cary Condotta**, R-Wenatchee. “We should see a boost to our tourism industry and economy. It is time to get the word out about our great tourist destinations.”

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WTA 1-19-17

Page Two

“We’re lucky to live in one of the most beautiful places in the world, so it only makes sense to encourage more economic growth by attracting more tourism in Washington state,” said **Rep. Cindy Ryu**, D-Shoreline. “This is especially in rural areas, where we have such natural beauty and a need for new jobs. So I want to thank everyone who visits our state and all those who work to make those visits a memory they will treasure forever.”

The measure also has bipartisan sponsorship and support in the Washington Senate.

“The true wonder of Washington is that with just a two-hour drive in any direction, you can find yourself in a completely different natural ecosystem,” said **Sen. Dean Takko**, D-Longview. “Establishing a Washington Tourism Marketing Program is win-win, benefitting our small business owners on the shores of coastal towns and expanding our ability to share our distinct cultures and environments with the world.”

“We need these kinds of creative solutions to expand and promote the tourism opportunities in our state,” said **Sen. Judy Warnick**, R-Moses Lake. “The tourism industry is such a large part of our economy and these are wise investments that the state should make to promote all we have to offer. My district is so geographically diverse, spanning from the Cascades to desert areas in the East - I want to showcase this beauty as much as possible.”

A tourism working group of legislators met with industry leaders over the 2016 interim to create the new legislation which contains the following key provisions:

- Independent oversight of the industry-run program by a board of tourism industry representatives and a legislator from each of the four political caucuses. There will also be some non-voting representatives from relevant state agencies including the Department of Commerce, Parks and Recreation Commission and the Department of Revenue.
- 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: Beginning July 1, 2017, 0.1 percent of general sales taxes collected on retail sales of lodging, restaurants and rental cars will be deposited into the Statewide Tourism Marketing Account. Deposits are limited to \$5 million per biennium (every two year state budget cycle) and are subject to private matching funds prior to expenditure. The plan offers the potential for a maximum of \$15 million per biennium to be spent on the tourism marketing program.

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WTA 1-19-17

Page Three

There will be a hearing on HB 1123 on January 25th before the House Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs Committee. Senate consideration of the legislation is being scheduled.

Other House and Senate Sponsors include: Rep. Andrew Barkis R-Olympia, Rep. Steve Kirby D-Tacoma, Rep. J.T. Wilcox R-Yelm, Rep. Gael Tarleton D-Seattle, Rep. Gina McBride R-Goldendale, Rep. Norma Smith R-Clinton, Rep. Dick Muri R-Steilacoom, Rep. Noel Frame D-Seattle, Rep. Steve Tharinger D-Dungeness, Rep. Jeff Morris D-Anacortes, Rep. Jim Walsh R-Aberdeen Sen. Maralyn Chase D-Edmonds, Sen. Christine Rolfes D-Bainbridge Island, Sen. John McCoy D-Tulalip, Sen. Hans Zeiger R-Puyallup.

The WTA has launched a statewide grassroots effort to support the legislation to rally support. The “It’s a Great Return – Tourism Works for Washington” campaign showcases how tourism benefits every community throughout the state. Links to more information are found here:

<http://watourismalliance.com/tourismworks/>

<https://twitter.com/WTAlliance>

<https://www.facebook.com/Washington-Tourism-Alliance-197125650316989/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzh8CjNQt-6hmYv0px96RpA>

#tourismworksforwa

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About the Washington Tourism Alliance

The Washington Tourism Alliance (WTA) is a 501[c]6 organization established by industry stakeholders with the sole mission of sustaining Washington State destination tourism marketing. The WTA procures and administers funds for state destination tourism marketing activities and creates and implements a strategic statewide destination marketing plan. www.watourismalliance.com