

**PREPARED STATEMENT
OF
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BOARD OF DIRECTORS PRESIDENT
AMERICAN INDIAN ALASKA NATIVE TOURISM ASSOCIATION**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN, INSULAR AND ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS
Hearing on the H.R. 3477, the NATIVE Act**

**Wednesday, February 24, 2016
2:30 p.m.
Room 1334, Longworth House Office Building**

Introduction

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Ruiz and Members of the House Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to speak in support of H.R. 3477, the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience Act (the “NATIVE Act”). I also thank Representative Markwayne Mullin for introducing this important legislation.

I am Sherry Rupert, Executive Director of the Nevada Indian Commission and a recent member of the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board.

As the President of the Board of Directors of the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (“AIANTA” for short), I have the honor of leading the Nation’s only nonprofit solely devoted to developing and sustaining Indian Country tourism. Begun in 2002 by a handful of tribes, AIANTA has grown to be a nationally-recognized leader in the tourism industry. AIANTA’s mission is to introduce the Nation’s Native peoples and their cultures to the world—a world where tourism has become a key economic driver generating hundreds of billions of dollars annually.

We are proud that AIANTA was included in the President’s National Travel and Tourism Strategy, a sign of confidence in Indian Country tourism, but the NATIVE Act will take us farther and will help integrate Native American, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian tourism interests—especially cultural heritage tourism interests—into broader U.S. tourism efforts.

Three Most Important Facts About the NATIVE Act

AIANTA would like to share three facts about H.R. 3477 with you today:

First, Indian Country tourism is already making significant contributions to the U.S. economy, and those contributions are growing each year. H.R. 3477 will accelerate that

economic development success through the expansion of cultural and heritage tourism.

Second, the NATIVE Act creates no new programs and requires no new funding.

It simply requires federal agencies to be more efficient in delivery of programs to Indian tribes and it offers an equally simple way to accomplish that goal—through private/public cooperation and coordination.

Third, the NATIVE Act was created from an existing, highly successful model of private/public cooperation and coordination that has been helping tribes create tourism programs and economic and cultural success stories for nearly a decade.

We respectfully urge you to pass the NATIVE Act to build on this record of achievement and expand tourism opportunities in Indian Country.

Indian Country Tourism Contributions to the U.S. Economy

As you may know, \$2.1 trillion in economic output is generated by domestic and international visitors to the United States annually. Tourism accounts for 15 million jobs and is our number one service export.

Indian Country does not have reliable data on domestic travelers but thanks to the U.S. Department of Commerce National Travel and Tourism Office, we do have Indian Country statistics on overseas visitors.

International visitation growth to Indian Country has exploded since 2008. 1.65 million overseas visitors were visiting tribal destinations by 2014, spending an estimated \$7 billion in country. And the Commerce Department predicts that these visitation numbers will grow 30% by 2020.

Perhaps more importantly, the Commerce figures tell us that overseas travelers who visit Indian country stay 12 nights longer in the U.S. than the average traveler. Visitors to Indian Country visit more states and more cities. They take more domestic flights, rent more cars, visit more national parks and monuments, visit more small towns and rural areas and visit more historical areas, cultural and heritage sites, art galleries and museums.

In other words, *overseas visitors to Indian Country spend more per capita than visitors to other destinations*. Encouraging overseas visitors to visit Indian Country will add to America's bottom line.

This brings me to our second point.

No New Programs, No New Funding

Congress and the federal government can support tribes in their efforts to create more tourism start-ups, more jobs, and needed infrastructure to support a sustainable tourism industry without spending more money or creating more programs.

You can do it through the NATIVE Act.

Current federal policies and programs with tourism and recreation authorities lack the coordination and integration needed for American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians to capitalize on currently available Federal resources. H.R. 3477 will correct that. Specifically, it requires federal agencies with existing recreation and tourism functions and authorities to include Indian Country tourism in future management plans. The NATIVE Act will improve tribal travel and tourism data collection and analysis, increase the integration of federal tourism assets, and support national tourism goals.

The NATIVE Act will empower Native American communities through increased coordination and collaboration between tribes and federal tourism assets. This will, in turn, expand heritage and cultural tourism opportunities and expand the U.S. tourism industry and its market share of global tourism.

NATIVE Act Created from Current, Existing Model of Cooperation

The NATIVE Act is built on existing models of public/private cooperation and coordination that have led to tourism success for tribes, tribal member businesses and tribal organizations.

AIANTA's professional staff, consultants and volunteer Board facilitate tribal tourism technical assistance and training and create and nurture our network of partners. That network of partners includes federal agencies, universities, leading tourism industry associations, and national Indian and non-Indian groups. We provide leadership and one-stop services for tribes primarily through a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Division of Transportation, our foremost partner from the beginning of our efforts to assist tribes. The BIA cooperative agreement is the model of what Indian Country tourism hopes to create with other agencies and bureaus as a result of the NATIVE Act.

Four years old, AIANTA's agreement with BIA-DOT has helped us offer tourism technical assistance to tribes; organize educational conferences; attract federal, tribal and non-tribal partnerships; attract project sponsors and grants; create training for tourism product development and international tour sales; build an Indian Country destinations web site; create a resource data base; and offer many other tools and opportunities for tribes in tourism.

Though H.R. 3477, cooperative agreements like the one between AIANTA and BIA-DOT are achievable in several additional federal agencies, making delivery of existing federal resources to tribes in tourism more efficient and cost-effective.

The best current example of what is possible through cooperative efforts is the Desert View Watchtower project at Grand Canyon National Park. The Desert View area of the south rim of the Grand Canyon is being repurposed into an Inter-tribal cultural heritage center, a place for the Hopi, Navajo, Zuni, Havasupai, Hualapai, Yavapai-Apache and Kaibab Paiute (representing the 5 bands of Southern Paiute) to share their cultures, art and stories and for

visitors to learn about the Canyon from tribal perspectives. Tribes will be able to offer side trips and excursions to their own visitor destinations, and build on their own tourism efforts.

The project partners include the National Park Service and tribes who are traditionally associated with the Grand Canyon, with AIANTA helping to facilitate planning for project implementation using private grant funds and funds provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs Division of Transportation.

Desert View is a model of what can be accomplished by joint planning and coordination between federal agencies and tribes—the kind of planning and coordination that H.R. 3477 creates.

Tourism Successes and Opportunities in Indian Country

There are more Native tourism growth stories—in every region of the country—than time to tell them.

Here are just a few examples:

Icy Strait Point, a Native Alaskan business, operates 21 excursions out of Hoonah and entertains 69 cruise ships.

Alaska Dream Cruises, a Native business based in Sitka, works with ten small Native communities in Southeast Alaska and continues to add ships to its fleet.

Huna Totem's Alaska Native Voices doubled its work force and Alaska Heritage Tourism has added escorted group tours to Kenai Fjords National Park and Denali National Park and Preserve.

Tundra Tours, Inc. operates a tour of Barrow's Iñupiat village 330 miles inside the Arctic Circle and the 50-room Top of the World Hotel in an area known for its diverse wildlife: polar bears, a variety of whales, walrus, seals, and snowy owls.

The Wrangell Cooperative Association promotes Tlingit culture on Wrangell Island, 155 miles south of Juneau, through tours of Chief Shakes Historic Site, a National Register site that receives more than 10,000 visitors a year and celebrates the unique totemic art of Southeast Native Alaskans.

On the Plains, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which straddles North and South Dakota, operates hundreds of reservation tours every year. Japanese visitors have stayed six weeks and spent an average of \$1500 a day at Standing Rock. The tribe also offers limited buffalo hunts at \$10,000 per customer.

In the Southwest, Monument Valley Simpson's Trailhandler Tours specializes in tours of Southern Utah by Navajo guides who teach Navajo culture, welcoming between 80 and 100 people on an average summer night—mostly foreign tourists—and employs about 30 people year round.

From Chicago through Missouri, Iowa, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona to Santa Monica, CA, 27 tribes who were along the Historic Route 66 are cooperating with AIANTA and the National Park Service to produce a tour guide of “the Mother Road” from a tribal perspective, highlighting cultural heritage sites along the way.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee are one of the U.S. tribes who have been practicing tourism for decades, developing four major cultural attractions that bring thousands of visitors to Cherokee, North Carolina, each year—the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, Qualla Arts & Crafts Mutual, the Oconaluftee Indian Village, and “Unto These Hills,” a play about the Trail of Tears.

The Oneida Native of Wisconsin is creating a premier tourism destination of culturally-related and integrated experiences built on community partnerships which directly and positively effect the reservation economy while protecting and preserving the resources of the Oneida Nation.

NATIVE Act Will Encourage Tourism Investment in Indian Country

With a solid foundation and accumulating track record of success, and the additional progress that can be made through the NATIVE Act, Indian Country will attract the additional investment it needs for tourism development.

The steps to attracting this investment are the ones AIANTA and its partners are already taking: providing technical assistance and training to tribes and encouraging community inventories and feasibility studies to find the right mix of visitor businesses and services for each tribe who wants to participate in tourism.

We encourage regional cooperation with non-Indian tourism enterprises and the establishment of tribal laws to protect resources and welcome investment. We encourage youth participation in the development of tourism plans, projects, hospitality courses and businesses. We lead tribal delegations to world tradeshows, promote through social and mainstream media, and work with our partners on projects that recognize the achievements of America’s native peoples.

U.S. Travel Association, NCAI, NIGA, Southeast Tourism Society, Western States Policy Council, the American Recreation Coalition, National Geographic Society—we are working with all of them and more to build awareness, attract resources and encourage travel, tourism and recreation development in Indian Country. We already have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of the Interior, and all of its bureaus. H.R. 3477 will build on this foundation and bring more federal agencies into closer and more productive relationship with tribal tourism efforts.

With this strong foundation, we know Indian Country can attract additional tourism investment from many sources and can be a major contributor to the U.S. tourism economy, helping the United States reach its goals in global tourism.

We believe that H.R. 3477 is the bridge we need between the foundation that has been laid and the bright future ahead for Indian Country tourism.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, on behalf of the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association, I thank you for this opportunity to talk to you about the significance of H.R. 3477 and what its implementation will mean to Indian Country tourism.

We urge this Subcommittee to support the bill and likewise urge the full Committee on Natural Resources to take it up and report it to the House Floor for further consideration.

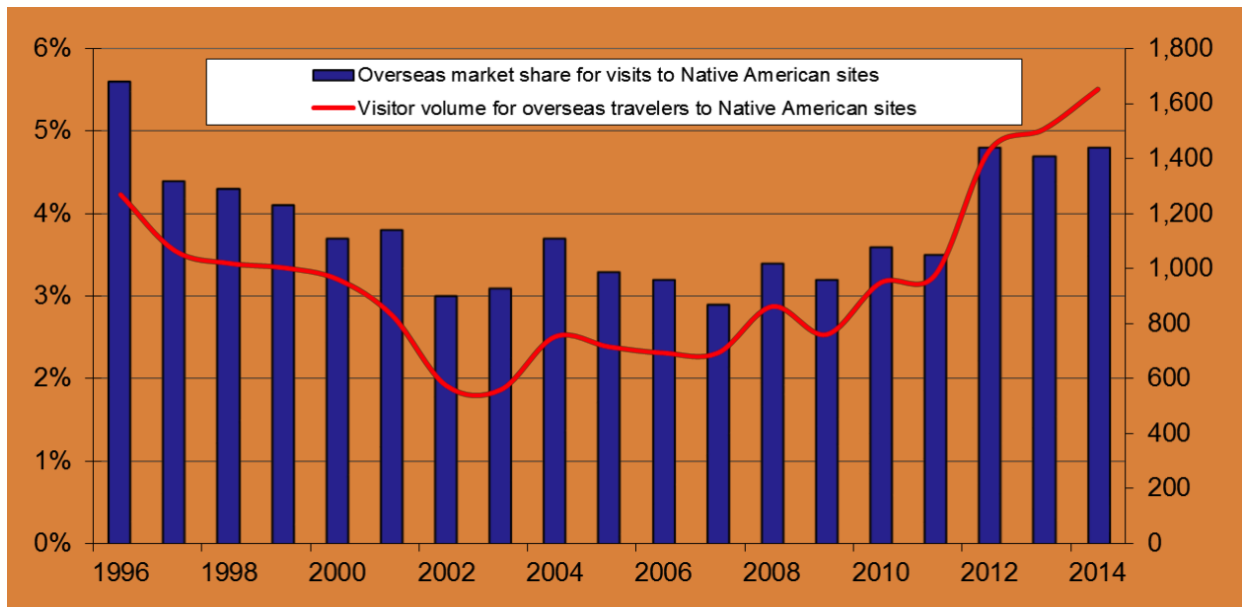
At this point, I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



Overseas Market Share for Visits to Native American Sites

Note: 2014 is the most recent year of overseas traveler survey data compiled by DOC



Visitors to Native Communities Spend More Per Capita on Many Travel Services

	Visit Amer. Indian Comm. 2014	Overseas Travelers to the USA 2014	Point Change
Mode of Transport			
Rented Auto	47%	35%	12%
Airlines in the U.S.	43%	30%	13%
Company or Private Auto	37%	32%	5%
City Subway/Tram/Bus	34%	31%	3%
Taxi/Cab/Limo	30%	33%	-4%
Bus Between Cities	25%	18%	7%

2014 Data—U.S. Department of Commerce, National Travel & Tourism Office

Activity	Visit Amer. Indian Comm. 2014	Overseas Travelers to th USA 2014	Point Change
Visit Am. Indian Comm.	100%	5%	95%
Shopping	91%	88%	3%
Sightseeing *	90%	77%	13%
Visit National Parks	77%	34%	43%
Small Towns/Countryside *	65%	28%	37%
Visit Historical Locations *	63%	26%	36%
Experience Fine Dining *	52%	38%	14%
Cultural Ethnic Heritage Sites *	51%	15%	36%
Art Gallery/Museum	50%	28%	22%
Guided Tours	50%	23%	27%

2014 Data—U.S. Department of Commerce, National Travel & Tourism Office

KEY DATA FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

- Of the 35 million total overseas visitors to the U.S. in 2014, a record 1.65 million visited Indian country (5%).
- Visitation to Indian country by overseas travelers grew by nearly 1 million from 2007 – 2014.
- DOC estimates 2014 expenditures by overseas visitors to Indian Country at \$7 billion (out of a total \$141 billion).
- DOC forecasts that arrivals/spending by overseas visitors will increase 30% by 2020, an average 4.4% per year growth rate.
- At a projection rate of 30%, expenditures of Indian Country overseas visitors by 2020 will reach \$9.5 billion.

Most importantly to U.S. tourism and Western states:

- States like Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and Washington State, though not among the top 10 states visited by overseas travelers overall, they are the top destinations visited by overseas travelers to Indian Country. (Arizona and Utah are the most visited states by overseas visitors to Indian Country).
- Overseas travelers who visit Indian country stay longer—30 nights compared to 18 nights for the average traveler.
- Visitors to Indian Country are likely to visit more states (2.4 vs. 1.5) and more cities (3.6 vs. 2.0) than travelers who don't visit Indian Country.
- They rent more cars (47% vs 35%).
- They take more domestic flights (43% vs. 30%).
- They are more likely to visit a National Park/Monument (77% vs. 34%).
- They visit more small towns/country sides (65% vs 28%).
- They visit more historical locations (65% vs 28%); cultural, ethnic, and heritage sites (51% vs 15%); and art galleries and museums (50% vs 28%)

**Supporters of H.R. 3477, the NATIVE Tourism Act (Mullin, sponsor)
(Titus, Young, Noem, Cole, Cramer, McCollum, Amodei: co-sponsors)**

The following organizations or tribes support H.R. 3477 (the NATIVE Act) and have passed resolutions or written formal letters of support.

National Organizations

U.S. Travel Association (USTA)
U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Native American Enterprise Initiative (NAEI)
American Indian and Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA)
National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)
Governor's Interstate Indian Council (GIIC)
Native American Contractor Association (NACA)

Regional and State-wide Organizations

Southeast Tourism Society (STS)
Western States Tourism Policy Council (WSTPC)
Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN)
Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)
Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma (ITC)
Coalition of Large Land Based Tribes (COLT)
Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA)
Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association (NaHHA)
Kentucky Native American Heritage Commission
Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada (ITCN)
Native American Tribes of Wisconsin (NATOW)
The Sovereign Councils of the Hawaiian Homeland Assembly (SCHHA)

Tribal and Alaska Village Governments

Chickaloon Native Village of Alaska
Native Village of Kasaan Alaska
Nez Perce Tribe