

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ARCTIC POLICY,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND TOURISM**

March 24, 2022

11:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Grier Hopkins, Chair
Representative Sara Hannan
Representative Liz Snyder
Representative Harriet Drummond
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Tom McKay (via teleconference)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Josiah Patkotak

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): ALASKA TOURISM UPDATE

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

SARAH LEONARD, President & CEO
Alaska Travel Industry Association
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of ATIA during the presentation titled "Alaska Tourism Update."

SCOTT MCCREA, President & CEO
Explore Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of Explore Fairbanks during the presentation titled "Alaska Tourism Update."

JULIE SAUPE, President & CEO
Explore Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of Explore Anchorage during the presentation, titled "Alaska Tourism Update."

LIZ PERRY, President & CEO
Travel Juneau
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of Travel Juneau during the presentation titled "Alaska Tourism Update."

ACTION NARRATIVE

[11:03:47 AM](#)

CHAIR GRIER HOPKINS called the House Special Committee on Arctic Policy, Economic Development, and Tourism meeting to order at [11:03] a.m. Representatives Prax, Hannan, McKay (via teleconference), Drummond, Snyder, and Hopkins were present at the call to order.

PRESENTATION(S): Alaska Tourism Update

[11:05:15 AM](#)

CHAIR HOPKINS announced that the only order of business would be a presentation titled "Alaska Tourism Update"

[11:06:17 AM](#)

SARAH LEONARD, President & CEO, Alaska Travel Industry Association, gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of ATIA during the presentation titled "Alaska Tourism Update." She began the presentation on slide 2, which detailed the makeup of the Alaska Travel Association (ATIA) and moved to slide 3, which emphasized the importance of Alaska's travel branding as an asset. She continued to slide 4, which detailed the economic impacts of Alaskan tourism in 2019 and moved through slides 5-6, which described how "Alaska is doing now" with regard to its travel industry. She continued through slides 7-8, which described Alaska's travel trends as an outlook on its future as an industry in the state and moved to slide 9, which proposed the idea of arctic tourism in Alaska. She continued to slide 10, which warned of possible roadblocks in the advancement of tourism in Alaska and moved to slide 11, which spoke to the employment opportunities that Alaska's tourism industry provides.

[11:24:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked if the ATIA was in communication with high schools and universities in Alaska to make students aware of employment opportunities in tourism.

MS. LEONARD answered that the ATIA was in partnership with other agencies like the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DLWD) to enlighten both high school and college students in Alaska of the opportunities available to them.

[11:26:28 AM](#)

CHAIR HOPKINS asked how the J-1 visa program's status would affect tourism employment in Alaska.

MS. LEONARD said that the ATIA was keeping an eye on the J-1 visa program and explained that the visa was beneficial to Alaskan tourism, but it was a very limited and restricted program.

[11:28:55 AM](#)

MS. LEONARD resumed the presentation on slide 12, which explained the annual revenue that the State of Alaska received from tourism and continued to slide 13, which highlighted how little Alaska spent in comparison to other states with tourism marketing campaigns. She concluded the presentation on slide 14, which listed Fiscal Year 2023 capital budget allocation for tourism in Alaska.

[11:32:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked what specific places had received support from the state for their tourism industries.

MS. LEONARD explained that certain policies like an electric vehicle revenue tax are an example of a state-sponsored benefit to a local tourism economy and said that the state is working to promote Alaska as a tourist destination on a whole.

[11:36:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER asked Ms. Leonard for more detail on a previous slide concerning financial discrepancies.

MS. LEONARD explained that the outspending figure was directly tied to the money spent by the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development on tourism promotion.

[11:41:07 AM](#)

SCOTT MCCREA, President & CEO, Explore Fairbanks, gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of Explore Fairbanks during the presentation titled "Alaska Tourism Update." He began the presentation on slide 2, which detailed the outsized impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the tourism industry in Fairbanks and continued to slide 3, which displayed a bar graph that compared both winter and summer tourism spending in Fairbanks. He moved to slide 4, which displayed another bar graph that outlined cruise passengers in Alaska between 2019-2022 and continued to slide 5, which briefly touched on the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB)'s 2021 COVID-19 remarketing plan. He moved to slide 6, which described opportunities and challenges facing Fairbanks tourism in 2022 and concluded the presentation on slide 7.

[11:50:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked if there would be more hotels and housing spaces opening for summer use in Fairbanks.

MR. MCCREA replied that there are currently seasonal operating housing buildings owned by cruise corporations that are used to house employees and travelers.

[11:53:28 AM](#)

CHAIR HOPKINS asked if there was any outreach work being done by Explore Fairbanks to homeowners willing to rent some of their property.

MR. MCCREA answered that Explore Fairbanks was working to navigate the challenge of tourist housing.

[11:55:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER remarked the importance of ensuring affordable housing remain a key policy initiative by both the Alaska State Legislature and corporations who provide employment in the state.

[11:56:03 AM](#)

JULIE SAUPE, President & CEO, Explore Anchorage, gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of Explore Anchorage during the presentation titled "Alaska Tourism Update." She began the brief presentation on slide 2, which gave a broad overview of Anchorage's 2021 tourism statistics and concluded the presentation on slide 3, which gave a detailed outlook for Anchorage tourism in 2022 and beyond.

[12:08:58 PM](#)

LIZ PERRY, President & CEO, Travel Juneau, gave a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of Travel Juneau during the presentation titled "Alaska Tourism Update." She began the presentation on slide 1, which gave a broad overview of tourism data from 2021 and moved to slide 2, which further detailed tourism statistics from 2021. She continued to slide 3, which spoke to the lodging occupancy rates during the 2021 tourism season and concluded the presentation on slide 4, which emphasized the importance of an investment from the Alaska State Legislature in the state's tourism industry.

[12:20:44 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN asked who took the photo of the bear in the final slide of Ms. Perry's presentation and also asked if the photo was taken at Pack Creek.

MS. PERRY said that she did not know but would follow up soon.

[12:21:22 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX complimented Juneau on its economic recovery made after the COVID-19 pandemic and opined that there could be great opportunity in making people more aware of more niche tourism activities in Juneau. He commented at the importance of expanding the sale of made in Alaska goods.

MS. PERRY assured Representative Prax that

[12:25:18 PM](#)

CHAIR HOPKINS asked how the reopening of the capitol had impacted winter business and lodging in Juneau.

MS. PERRY said that the reopening has had a "big difference" in Juneau.

12:26:41 PM

CHAIR HOPKINS thanked the presenters and delivered committee announcements.

12:27:19 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Arctic Policy, Economic Development, and Tourism meeting was adjourned at 12:27 p.m.