

**Will Seccombe's Testimony before
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade
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Vacation Nation: How Tourism Benefits our Economy

Florida is one of the most amazing travel destinations in the world, boasting 825 miles of beautiful beaches. Recognized around the globe as the Sunshine State, we are also the theme park capital, the fishing capital of the world, the home of American golf, the home of the American cruising industry and home to award winning State Parks. With amazing communities stretching from Pensacola to Tampa Bay to Key West, Florida is a destination of rich diversity and unrivaled art, culture and 500 years of history.

Florida is already the No. 1 domestic vacation destination, the top family vacation destination, the top U.S. beach destination and one of the top international travel destinations. At VISIT FLORIDA, our vision is to establish Florida as the No. 1 travel destination in the world.

As one of the largest industries in the state, tourism has lead Florida's recovery from the great recession. 2012 marked the second consecutive record year for Florida tourism with 89.3 million visitors. Logging over 500 million vacation nights in the Sunshine State last year, Florida's visitors spent \$71.8 billion on hotels, attractions, restaurants, retail and recreation. To put that in perspective, there are more people visiting the Sunshine State each day – nearly 1.6 million – than live in 11 U.S. states and they spend nearly \$196 million a day in Florida. This tourism spending generated \$4.3 billion in sales tax in 2012, meaning more than 23% of all the state's sales tax collections were paid by people who live outside Florida.

We know that every 85 visitors to the state create or support one new Florida job. Today, the tourism industry provides employment for 1,053,000 Floridians, with the number of jobs supported by visitors having grown for 36 straight months.

Looking to the future, the next major milestone for Florida tourism is to welcome 100 million visitors per year. This visitation level would have a significant, positive economic impact on the state.

According to Florida TaxWatch, achieving 100 million Florida visitors would generate 121,298 new jobs with an estimated average salary of \$43,751 and would increase personal income for Floridians by \$5.3 billion per year.

In order to reach that ambitious goal, VISIT FLORIDA – the official statewide destination marketing organization – must be highly aggressive in promoting the Sunshine State domestically and internationally in a hyper-competitive global marketplace.

In Florida, we are very fortunate to have the leadership of Governor Rick Scott and the Florida legislature who recognize the importance of the tourism industry's role in strengthening the state's economy and creating jobs for Floridians. In fact, just last week the Legislature passed the FY 2013-14 state budget which included record funding for VISIT FLORIDA at \$63.5 million – an increase of 18% over the current year.

In order to continue to increase the total economic impact of travel to the Sunshine State, we are increasingly focused on growing international visitation. Last year, Florida welcomed a record 3.6 million Canadians and surpassed 10 million overseas visitors from 181 countries. However, there remains a huge opportunity to continue to increase international visitation to the state.

On behalf of the entire Florida tourism industry, I would like to thank you for your support of the Travel Promotion Act and Brand USA. VISIT FLORIDA is a Founding Partner of Brand USA and to-date over 50 of VISIT FLORIDA's partner attractions, destinations and businesses have invested over \$8 million in their programs.

In a short period of time, Brand USA has demonstrated that their marketing campaign is working. Intent to travel to the United States is up 12-14% following their initial campaign and, this year, they are expanding marketing efforts into countries that are critical to our future success in Florida – Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Mexico and the UK. We are all 100% committed to their success, because a rising tide raises all ships.

And speaking of ships, 500 years ago last month, Juan Ponce de Leon became the first European to set foot on U.S. soil when he landed near St. Augustine and gave the State our name La Florida. Ponce was the United States' and Florida's first international visitor. With your continued support of the U.S. tourism industry and Brand USA, we can grow the country's share of a rapidly expanding global travel market. Increasing international visitation to the U.S. will be a key driver in the expansion of the economy and the creation of high-paying jobs.

Florida Tourism At-a-Glance

Employment –

- Tourism-related employment shows growth, year-over-year for the 36th straight month
- More than one million Floridians are employed in the tourism industry
- With 19.2 million residents living in Florida, roughly one in every 20 Floridians is employed in tourism

Visitation –

- Florida welcomed a record 89.3 million visitors in 2012
- Visitors spent over 500 million vacation nights in the Sunshine State in 2012
- On any given day, Florida has 1.6 million visitors
- That represents more people than live in 11 different U.S. states and the District of Columbia
- Every 85 visitors to the state supports one tourism job
- One in five international visitors to the U.S. travel to Florida
- Last year, Florida welcomed international visitors from 181 countries
- Florida visitation, including domestic, Canada, and overseas, for Q4 2012 equals 21.4 million, up 1.8% from Q4 2011
- Passengers who boarded at Florida's 14 major airports for Q4 2012 totals 16.8 million, down 0.2% from Q4-2011
- Hotel occupancy in Florida for March 2013 was at 81.8%, up 2.5% from March 2012
- Of all domestic visitors to Florida, 12% are traveling for business purposes
- Of those, 22% attended conventions and 20% attended seminars or training sessions
- Average expenditures for business visitors in Florida per person per day in 2011 (most recent available year) totaled \$243.80, up 15% from 2010
- The largest proportion of business spending in Florida was on transportation (36%), followed by accommodations (28%)

Spend –

- For every \$1 spent on tourism marketing, VISIT FLORIDA generates \$258 in tourism spending and \$15 in new sales tax collections
- Visitors spent a record \$71.8 billion last year in the Sunshine State
- Florida visitors average spending \$196 million a day
- Tourism generates 23% of the state's sales tax revenue
- Florida Tourism generated \$4.3 billion in sales tax collections
- Florida's hotel average daily room rate for March 2013 was \$146.08, up 8.3% from March 2012