

Written Statement

Ralph Witsell

Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade – “Vacation Nation: How Tourism Benefits our Economy,”
May 7, 2013

I am Ralph Witsell, executive director of the Discover Torrance Visitors Bureau which is a 501 c6 nonprofit organization funded by the Torrance hotels of 50 or more rooms. Torrance, CA is situated about 12 miles south of the Los Angeles International Airport and our goals are designed to increase the economies of the city through sustained growth in tourism spending which results in significant increases in the economic impact of the areas of earnings, tax collection, and jobs.

We have come to Washington to demonstrate how Tourism impacts economic development. The US Travel Association in March of this year announced that Travel & Tourism generates \$2 Trillion for our economy and supports one out of every eight of the nation's jobs. These results have been achieved with an industry becoming more focused and unified while working together.

I would like to "localize" my approach to the subject of tourism, collaboration and jobs.

Like so many working Americans with me, I was laid off in early 2010 and became a statistic in regards to unemployment. I was fortunate to land the Torrance job and really appreciated and respected a community that developed this Tourism organization and allowed me to be the next new job in California. I, of course, needed an assistant and a sales manager and just like that, two more jobs created! Wow, this system does work! The incremental room nights my staff has booked impacted hotel revenue as well as the dollars the visitors have spent in my community have been a plus. Here we are, little Torrance, CA now getting our share of the California drive market plus a few meetings. I know, small stuff, when you look at the big picture regarding Tourism. It gets better - I'm a huge supporter of collaboration and realize that regional marketing creates even more economic development so I approached my neighboring cities, Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach and Redondo Beach and we agreed to market the region as "The Beach Cities, South Bay, Los Angeles" so now I'm not just promoting one city but my city, Torrance as the Gateway to the South Bay's Beach cities. This new recognition makes the region much more marketable, accessible and provides a true Southern California experience for the visitor. Now,

Discover Torrance is primed to be a player in the international arena. But with even the partnership with the Beaches probably won't be enough of a factor for say a young middle class Chinese couple in Shanghai to focus on the South Bay of Los Angeles for their first visit to the United States. This is where we collaborated with Visit California, our state's tourism agency who regularly travels abroad hosting sales missions to promote California. These cooperative opportunities allow smaller communities to promote their respective regions right along with well known icons as Disneyland, Universal Studios. Hollywood, Beverly Hills and all of Los Angeles.

In closing, I would like to state that California is reaping the fruits of our labor as International travel is California's top export. According to Visit California, the \$19.1 billion spent in California in 2011 was equal to the combined value of the state's top four product exports.

According to a January, 2013 report by the Legislative Analyst's Office "employment in the leisure and hospitality sector consistently outpaces almost every other industry. Even during the Great Recession, while California was shedding 1.3million jobs, travel businesses lost fewer than most, and leisure and hospitality has recovered quickly adding more than 100,000 jobs since February 2010 and it is the number 5 employer in the state.

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you how Tourism impacts economic development in the "Beach Cities – South Bay – Los Angeles".

One page summary of Testimony by Ralph Witsell, Executive Director of Discover Torrance Visitors Bureau
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May 7, 2013 at 10:30am

The major points of my testimony are:

- Tourism generates dollars into our economy
- Tourism creates and maintains jobs in the marketplace
- Regional marketing through coloration creates economic development
- International Travel is California’s top export

With regards,

Ralph Witsell
Executive Director, Discover Torrance Visitors Bureau