



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE TESTIMONY HB 1431

MARCH 31, 2021, 2:30 P.M. CST

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS

SENATOR RAY HOLMBERG CHAIR

**SARA OTTE COLEMAN DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**TOURISM AND MARKETING DIVISION DIRECTOR**

Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I am Sara Otte Coleman and I have the privilege of serving as the State Tourism and Marketing Director for the North Dakota Department of Commerce. I am in support of HB 1431 as it provides a solution to many of the problems our state has had meeting ongoing infrastructure needs. While all parts of the bill address areas to improve residents, visitors and potential new residents' experiences, there are two areas particularly significant to tourism and attracting visitors.

The Cultural Endowment Fund will provide \$1 million to support the maintenance of the soon-to-be erected public arts projects the North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) are developing through the statewide creative placemaking program. It is essential that we include sustainability plans as part of new project development and ongoing improvements to assure we do not end up with a backlog of deferred maintenance. This has been an on-going problem at private attractions like the Enchanted Highway and national sites such as Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Public art and our larger-than-life roadside attractions continue to be of great interest to visitors and the media. The NDCA, with other statewide agencies including DOT and North Dakota Tourism, are excited to develop the *Arts Across the Prairie* program that will benefit the state in many ways including attracting visitors to nearby communities.

I would also support the \$10 million inclusion to support maintenance and improvement at our State Parks. This will assure these parks are safe and meeting visitor's current needs.

With travel interests changing due to the pandemic, our state's competitive advantages are appealing to more visitors. The resources prescribed in this bill will provide needed sustainability to assure continued growth and recovery.