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October 9, 2018

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## **Leading Gubernatorial Candidates Talk Tourism at Alaska Travel Industry Association Forum**

### ***Vehicle Rental Tax revenue promoted as funding source for destination marketing***

**Anchorage, AK** – The Alaska Travel Industry Association’s (ATIA) gubernatorial forum Tuesday highlighted support for tourism’s role in Alaska’s economy. More than 500 tourism industry representatives listened attentively as Governor Bill Walker (I), Mike Dunleavy (R), and Mark Begich (D) talked about their understanding of the industry and their plans for tourism, Alaska’s renewable natural resource. All three candidates expressed support for using the state’s Vehicle Rental Tax (VRT) revenue for marketing Alaska as the premier tourism destination.

The 2003 legislation establishing the VRT included language that legislators may appropriate the actual balance of the tax for tourism development and marketing.

“Tourism is Alaska’s second largest private sector employer after the oil and gas industry,” explained Sarah Leonard, ATIA President and CEO. “With more than 1 in 10 Alaska jobs and \$4.5 billion in total economic activity generated for the state, Alaska’s tourism industry is pleased the candidates support investing in statewide destination marketing for Alaska.”

The three leading candidates for governor highlighted tourism’s role as an economic driver and expressed interest in working with the tourism industry to identify opportunities to support economic growth. Mike Dunleavy expressed his willingness to work with industry and said the revenue from the VRT, whether \$12 million or more, should be used for tourism marketing.

Governor Walker, who’s administration recently committed a \$12 million investment in the tourism industry, noted that Alaska must work harder to attract tourists, and Alaska’s improved fiscal environment supports additional state investment in destination marketing.

All three candidates pledged to work with federal agencies to improve access to, and infrastructure on, federal lands. Mark Begich noted mom-and-pop tourism operations shouldn’t require a lawyer to get through permitting red tape.

State investment in destination marketing is an important issue for the industry. ATIA-funded research shows that every dollar spent in marketing Alaska as a destination generates \$58 in visitor spending. In

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2016 alone, Alaska's 2 million visitors directly spent more than \$1.9 billion, generating more than \$190 million in fees that support state and local budgets.

Prior to the Forum, special awards were presented to Sen. Pete Kelly (R-Fairbanks) and Rep. Jason Grenn (I-Anchorage) in recognition of their ongoing support for Alaska's tourism marketing program and Alaska's travel industry.

ATIA is Alaska's largest statewide membership trade association for the travel industry and represents close to 700 members and businesses supporting Alaska tourism. ATIA promotes Alaska's travel industry as one of the state's major economic forces and advocates for the growth of the industry while remaining attentive to Alaska's natural environment, diverse cultures, and unique quality of life.

For more information, visit [www.AlaskaTIA.org](http://www.AlaskaTIA.org) or contact 907.306.2331.

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