



Congressional Summit Update

2019 Congressional Summit on Travel & Tourism

Empowering tourism community leaders to speak with elected officials on the importance of tourism to the vitality of their communities is a pillar focus of STS. The Congressional Summit on Travel & Tourism is a platform for tourism leaders to tell their success stories and challenges and build relationships with Members of Congress and key federal agency officials. To provide a strong advocacy platform, STS compiles data, narratives, fact sheets, and talking points to help tourism leaders make a compelling case for the federal programs and policies that fuel tourism and economic development at the community level.

The 2019 Summit continued to experience strong growth with record high attendance – 92 registered participants, up from 81 in 2018. The Federal Tourism Directory, which was released at the Summit, also garnered record high sponsorship.

The centerpiece of the Summit is a tourism policy briefing that provides updates on STS's policy priorities to ensure that participants are fully informed on key legislation and ready to have engaging conversations with their congressional delegations. This year's briefing featured a keynote presentation from Representative Robert Aderholt of Alabama, who talked about his efforts to leverage tourism as an economic driver for smaller and rural communities, including his work on the commemoration of America's 250th founding in 2026.

Other speakers at the policy briefing, included:

- **Alex Morris**, Legislative Assistant to Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT) and **Chris Jones**, Legislative Assistant to Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) on *Renewing Brand USA*
- **Mark Falzone** with Scenic America on *Revitalizing the National Scenic Byways Program*
- **Susan Howard** with American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials on *Highway Trust Fund Solvency & Prospects for Surface Transportation Reauthorization*
- **Jim Mathews** with Rail Passengers Association on *Trains, Tourism, and Rural Development*
- **Rebecca Knuffke** with Pew Trusts' Restore America's Parks Campaign on *the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act*
- **Lenna Aoki**, General Counsel to Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) on the *Explore America Act*
- **Kendra Briechle** of The Conservation Fund provided an update on their *Gateway Communities initiative*

The priority issues discussed at Summit, included:

- Boost International Travel to the US: Maintain Brand USA
- Address the National Park Service Deferred Maintenance Backlog
- Support the Explore America Act
- Strengthen the American Battlefield Protection Program
- Modernization of the National Heritage Areas Program

Several states localized their talking points by incorporating issues important to their communities. These localized issues, included:

- **Georgia** advocated for legislation to authorize a special resource study of the Kettle Creek Battlefield – a Revolutionary War site – and adjacent property to evaluate the national significance of the site and determine the suitability and feasibility of designating the site as a unit of the National Park System.
- **Alabama** provided an update on its efforts to designate its Civil Rights heritage sites as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- **South Carolina** discussed the establishment of a Southern Campaign of the American Revolution National Heritage Area.
- **Kentucky** discussed support for the Appalachian Regional Commission and its economic development projects in Kentucky.
- **Arkansas** encouraged full funding of the Land & Water Conservation Fund.

The Summit talking points can be read [here](#). Congress is scheduled to adjourn on July 26 for the August district work period. If you are interested in setting up a meeting with your Congressional representatives to discuss tourism policy, please contact Halle Czechowski at halleczech@mac.com for assistance.