

CULTURE, RECREATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE HEARING

Testimony by Heather Page,
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Good morning everyone, thank you Chairman, Vice-Chair Woman and Committee for inviting me to speak before you this morning. My name is Heather Page and I am Director of the Texas Film Commission, which was established in 1971 by proclamation of Governor Preston Smith as a trustee division of the Office of the Governor.

For the past 43 years the Film Commission has been the state's go to resource for the moving image industries including the film, television, commercial, animation, visual effects and video games. The Commission serves studios, fortune 500 companies as well as students; Texas' large metropolitan regions and small rural towns and countrysides. Indeed the diversity of our constituents reflects the range of interests, creatives and businesses as diverse as the state itself. It is indeed, a great honor for us in the Commission to serve so many different interests and people who are inspired by all that's unique to Texas.

CURRENT HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TEXAS MOVING IMAGE INDUSTRY

- Texas' moving image industry is a \$1.5 billion dollar a year industry.
- Texas is one of the major commercial production hubs in the United States.
- Texas is number 2 in the country for video game production.
- And since the conclusion of the 83rd legislative session, Texas has become one of the most in-demand production locations in the country.

How did we get here? We did it through the legislature's historic appropriation of up to \$95 million for moving image incentives to stimulate growth within Texas. This sent a strong signal to the industry that we wanted their business to create

jobs for Texans, encourage spending to Texas businesses, and to develop economic and tourism opportunities in our communities. The appropriation level also enabled the Texas Film Commission to refine the incentive program to make it more competitive, accountable, efficient and customer service focused. Now -

- Texas-based and out-of-state production companies are setting stakes here at greater levels than have been seen in years,
- Texas production industry workforce is growing with new workers entering the field to meet increased demand, and,
- native Texas crew returning home from work opportunities of neighboring states to bring their earning power back to Texas.

You may have heard me recently address the economic impact of the program for the House Select Committee on Economic Development and Incentives and the House Budget Committee. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the program in respect to how its funding incentivizes wages only to Texans and spending only to Texas businesses. But for the purposes of this committee, I'd like to speak more specifically to the culture and tourism benefits of in-state film and television production.

“Film Tourism” has become a very hot economic development tool for regions around the world in the past ten years. When you think of places like New Zealand these days, more often than not, the impression is formed by film projects such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, or at least the beauty of the locations used for it. Similarly, HBO's *Game of Thrones* creates impressions that inspire similar interest in exotic locations where the show was shot, notably Morocco, Ireland, England and Croatia.

Popular media of our time influences the appeal of travel destinations and activities through constructing or reinforcing particular images or impressions of those destinations. A location can amount to no more than a patch of dirt, but by the attention and meaning placed on it by a film, its value increases in so many ways and the film itself promotes the location even if the subject of the film is not about the location where it is shot.

Locations used for filmmaking also get the attention of the local community which then promotes it for having been a part of the film. And in both cases, the visitors to the location are content to be involved with what got them there.

People used to travel to locations based on having read about them, perhaps by Texas writers such as Horton Foote, J. Frank Dobie, Larry McMurtry. But with the visual mediums of film and TV, current tourism sites are in one way or another products of 20th this century media. For example, images of the Dallas skyline in films and television, even if only as a backdrop in a popular movie or TV show become “characters” that motivate tourists to visit them, in a way, because they are the only remnant of the feeling, emotion or interest that was created by the film itself. Locations develop iconic status because of the influences of film, TV, commercials and photos that represent them.

In Texas we see this with such films as ***DAZED AND CONFUSED*** which have brought tourists to Austin for decades, ***GIANT*** which has inspired travelers to the wide open ranges and towns of west Texas, and aside from the two ***THE ALAMO*** films, ***MISS CONGENIALITY*** has had its part in luring younger generations to San Antonio to visit the historic site.

Our identity, image and cultural representation from moving image media draw people to Texas, to visit bring their businesses and even to set down their own roots.

Until recently, film producers have given little concern for the impact of film-induced tourism. But with competition for film production business between states equalizing more and more between the top production states, This attitude is rapidly changing. Studios and filmmakers now recognize the value that communities place on their ability to garner attention and employment dollars resulting from projects being produced in their area, BUT ALSO the subsequent tourism dollars that can come from a film or television show is seen by a worldwide audience. Studios understand the relationships they need to have with the communities in which they bring their business, and the best ones are building those relationships, whether it be through bringing premieres of their shows to benefit a local charity, or paying forward or donating goods and resources used in productions themselves. They are selecting locations that make this easy for them to do and to make a difference in those communities so they can develop long term investment.

The popularity of movies and TV series has not only increased tourism to locations featured but has also created a range of niche tourism operations based on the story line, notoriety and cultural aspects of these media representations. Think about specific film-related business ventures, whether they be organized, tours of locations to theme parks.

Types of film tourism:

- Primary travel motivator
- As an activity within a larger holiday
- Celebrity tourism – locations that have taken on celebrity status
- Nostalgic Film Tourism that visit locations that represent another era
- Constructed film Tourism = attraction constructed after production to attract tourists, i.e. LOTR town
- Film/TV tours and guided tours of specific sites, sometimes on private land
- Film Studio tours

- Theme parks
- Movie Premieres
- Film Festivals
- TV Travel Programs
- Cooking/Food programs

So in considering the work of this committee, I would suggest that there are multiple levels of tourism opportunities to be had by a state's commitment to its media industries. Indeed, the UK and EU have truly capitalized on what they term SCREEN TOURISM, most notably with an economic development program called EUROSCREEN, which is working to build a framework where the production industry itself can participate in the success of the tourism industry there. Texas is a prime location for this exact type of programming, and to the degree possible with the resources of the Texas Film Commission, Texas' regional film commissions, CVB's, Film Friendly Certified communities and regional stakeholders, we are all working to bring added value to the taxpayer, even beyond the good paying jobs and direct spending that film production brings to their neighborhoods.

With this information in mind, I'd like to thank you for your time, and it is my pleasure to answer any questions you may have.

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