
Committee Meeting

of

ASSEMBLY TOURISM GAMING AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

“The Committee will take testimony from invited guests about the upcoming FIFA World Cup 26™ event and its potential impact on New Jersey tourism”

LOCATION: MetLife Stadium
East Rutherford, New Jersey

DATE: June 10, 2024
10:30 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman William F. Moen, Jr., Chair
Assemblyman Clinton Calabrese, Vice Chair
Assemblyman John Allen
Assemblywoman Margie Donlon, M.D.
Assemblyman Donald A. Guardian
Assemblyman Antwan L. McClellan



ALSO PRESENT:

Ryan Brinkerhoff
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide

Nicole Brown
Assembly Majority
Committee Aide

Reilly Kerr
Assembly Republican
Committee Aide

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

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Chair

Clinton Calabrese
Vice-Chair

John Allen
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NEW JERSEY STATE LEGISLATURE

ASSEMBLY TOURISM, GAMING AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

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COMMITTEE NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY TOURISM, GAMING AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

FROM: ASSEMBLYMAN WILLIAM F. MOEN, JR., CHAIRMAN

SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING - JUNE 10, 2024

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The Assembly Tourism, Gaming and the Arts Committee will meet on Monday, June 10, 2024 at 10:30 AM at One MetLife Stadium Drive, East Rutherford, New Jersey.

The committee will take testimony from invited guests about the upcoming FIFA World Cup 26th event and its potential impact on New Jersey tourism.

Issued 5/31/24

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ASSEMBLYMAN WILLIAM F. MOEN, Jr. (Chair): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Assembly Touring, Gaming, and Arts Committee.

Before we begin, I will ask Ryan for a roll call.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblyman McClellan.

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblyman Guardian.

ASSEMBLYMAN GUARDIAN: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblywoman Donlon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblyman Allen.

ASSEMBLYMAN ALLEN: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Vice Chairman Calabrese.

ASSEMBLYMAN CLINTON CALABRESE (Vice Chair):
Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: And, Chairman Moen.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: You have a quorum.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you, Ryan.

Again, good morning to everyone.

This is the second Committee hearing that we're holding off site this year, and we could not be more excited to be here at MetLife Stadium, home to the 2026 World Cup final and other matches.

Let me thank Vice Chairman Calabrese for welcoming our Committee to his district today.

The FIFA selection of New Jersey is a recognition that our state is an attractive location for major events, and underscores the Garden State as an important hub for sports. FIFA estimates there to be five billion soccer fans worldwide -- a statistic that will provide New Jersey with increased visitors numbers and economic growth. That means 2026 will be a huge year for tourism in New Jersey.

Holding the World Cup final in New Jersey will be a boon to local businesses, including restaurants, shops, hotels, and transportation services, and *will* increase our tourism revenue. Estimates indicate -- and, we hope to hear more of this through the Committee hearing today -- estimates indicate that hosting the World Cup final could result in between \$2 and \$3 billion for the region, and includes upwards of 14,000 jobs and more than one million visitors.

We expect to see hotels, motels, and other short-term rentals see a spike in bookings. Restaurants, bars, and retail stores and other tourist attractions will experience increased patronage, bringing tourism dollars into our local downtowns. Public transportation and car rentals will see heightened demand. The World Cup puts host cities on the global stage, attracting future tourists.

As we convene here at MetLife Stadium, home to the much-anticipated 2026 World Cup final, we stand on the cusp of a momentous opportunity for New Jersey's tourism industry.

I look forward to hearing from our invited guests today, each of whom has a unique perspective on the impact that the World Cup final, as well as the other tournament matches that will be played here in New Jersey, will have on the Garden State.

So, to provide a layout for today's hearing, we will first hear from Lauren Nathan LaRusso of the FIFA World Cup New Jersey -- New York New Jersey Host Committee and Jeffrey Vassar from the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism. The second panel will include Judith Ross of the Meadowlands Chamber of Commerce and Meadowlands Live, as well as Ron Simoncini of Axiom Communications. And, finally, the third panel -- which let me preface this by saying and reminding everyone that the city of Philadelphia was selected as a World Cup host city as well -- that will be Hilary Chebra of the Chamber of Commerce of Southern New Jersey. Hilary will give us an understanding of the impact of those Philadelphia matches and what they will have on the tourism economy for southern New Jersey.

There is a timely quote by Benjamin Franklin that I think is particularly accurate as we begin this hearing. When asked about the Garden State, Dr. Franklin said that, "New Jersey is a keg that's tapped at both ends." And, so, let's keep that in mind as we begin this hearing.

And, I want to thank those who are here to testify; and I want to thank the MetLife Stadium for the tour that we just took.

And, let me also end by saying thank you to our OLS staff who worked with MetLife to make this hearing happen.

So, with that said, I would like to welcome Lauren and Jeffrey to testify.

And, the floor is yours.

L A U R E N N A T H A N L a R U S S O, Esq.: Sure; thank you so much, Chairman.

And, thank you to the MetLife staff, as well as yours, for getting this all together and giving us the opportunity.

I appreciate seeing the Assembly members of the Tourism, Gaming, and Arts Committee here today.

It's a great day to be with you at MetLife, this grand venue in New Jersey, to discuss the preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and its impact on tourism and the economy in New Jersey.

My name, as you said, Chairman, is Lauren Nathan LaRusso, and I currently serve as the Co-Host City Manager and General Counsel to the FIFA World Cup 2026 New York New Jersey Host Committee. I am also a proud member and resident of Monmouth County.

Prior to the formation of the Host Committee, I served for five years between 2018 and 2023 as Counsel to the Governor in the Authorities Unit, working with state and bi-state commissions, including -- but certainly not limited to -- the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey; Gateway Development Commission; Delaware River Basin Commission; Cannabis Regulatory Commission; New Jersey Transit; New Jersey Turnpike; and the great New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority.

I am very proud of the large-scale projects those agencies achieved during my tenure, including the opening of American Dream in 2019; the early agreements with New York and New Jersey on the Gateway Tunnel project in 2022; and the establishment of the Cannabis Regulations that same year.

The highlight, though, of my time in government was working on the bid for New York and New Jersey to host the FIFA World Cup. By way of background, the bid process actually started in 2017 under Governor Christie's administration, when the bid documents were first introduced for the United States, Canada, and Mexico to host. It was called, "The United

Bid.” In 2018, the United Bid was awarded hosting rights, winning out over Morocco. And, between 2018 and 2022, the host cities vied for host city status. In 2022, New York and New Jersey were officially named a host city. Governor Murphy and Mayor Adams of New York City, along with residents from both sides of the river, celebrated as one at Liberty State Park.

It was a true moment to celebrate, as our region had not hosted the men’s FIFA World Cup since 1994 -- almost exactly 30 years ago from today. As a reminder, New Jersey also proudly hosted the women’s FIFA World Cup in 1999, and the United States hosted the women again in 2003. For further context, 1994 is considered to this day as the most successful FIFA World Cup in its history. Records were set with ticket sales, attendance, and global audiences. A \$50 million surplus also propelled the U.S. Soccer Foundation to improve facilities and grow access to the sport.

Here in the region, we saw our professional teams grow from the New York Cosmos to the Metro Stars. And, now we have three successful professional clubs -- the New York Red Bulls, the New Jersey-New York Gotham F.C. -- both playing in Harrison, New Jersey; and NYCFC.

Arguably, New Jersey has the richest American history for the world’s most popular game, being home to the first official intercollegiate soccer match in 1876, and the formation of the American Football Association -- the other football, soccer -- in Newark in 1884. And, Kearny -- otherwise known as Soccer Town U.S.A -- was where our immigrant communities grew a love for the game, and is a hotbed for talented soccer stars.

Our soccer legends include John Harkes, Tab Ramos, Claudio Reyna, Tony Meola, and some of the greatest of the game. Our own U.S.

Men's head coach, Gregg Berhalter, proudly hails from the State of New Jersey. And, in more recent years, our state's history in the game includes stars like Carli Lloyd and Tim Howard. Our current U.S. Men's team includes starter and captain Matt Turner in goal; and Paxten and Brenden Aaronson; John Tolkin; and Daniel Edelman -- all from New Jersey.

The global game's -- this is a good one -- the global game's youngest player in the world in international competition is currently 16-year-old player Casey Phair from Warren, New Jersey. And, our U.S. Women's team boasts Casey Murphy, a Bridgewater native and Rutgers alum, along with Alana Cook -- all stars we may see in the upcoming Olympics this summer.

There is so much to be proud of in New Jersey, and such excitement for hosting the FIFA World Cup 2026. Let's get into what this really means now and how we are preparing for it.

And, I'll turn your attention to our presentation.

Just a little note on that: FIFA helps us produce some of the branding and marketing for World Cup, but when they put together films like that, we work very closely with Visit New Jersey as well as NYC Tourism to make sure that shots in there reflect different parts of the state and different parts of the city, including the boroughs.

The biggest game -- the biggest game *ever* is coming, excuse me. As mentioned, it has been 30 years since we last hosted the FIFA World Cup. This tournament, though, is a little different and much larger than '94, as you can see from the footprint there. It went from 64 matches to 104; from nine stadiums in '94 to 16 host cities. It spread across three countries -- United States, Canada, and Mexico. There will be 11 U.S. host cities, New

York/New Jersey being one of them. We're going from 32 teams to 48, allowing more countries to qualify.

In case anyone was worried, the U.S. automatically qualifies as host.

(laughter)

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: The entire tournament will span 40 days.

For us in this region, we are excited, too, for the cluster of playing around New York/New Jersey, Boston, Philadelphia, and Toronto -- if you can see up in that corner -- and the tourism that it will bring.

The east coast play, including Miami, hosts the largest percentage of matches -- 30%, or over 30 matches, are played here, allowing fans to travel to more than one host city in one day. And, we certainly hope to anchor people here in New Jersey.

The FIFA World Cup in 2022, which was hosted in Qatar, had a final viewership that outdrew the last 13 Super Bowls combined. We just give this for context, given that the Super Bowl is the most watched event annually in America. In 2022, the final drew a broadcast of over 1.5 billion. Just for perspective, though, that is the combined audience of the last 13 Super Bowls. In 2026, the world will be watching us, and FIFA projects three billion will have their eyes on this stadium, right here in New Jersey.

In 2026, New York/New Jersey will host the world's biggest event ever. I know it's hard to believe it's true, but because of the geographic footprint and the length of the tournament, it will be the biggest the world has ever seen in terms of events.

The world's biggest game on the world's biggest stage -- that was our pitch. From day one of this bid, Governor Murphy told FIFA that its trophy should only be raised in this great place. And, our partner in New York City, Mayor Adams, rightfully said as well that the world's biggest game deserves the world's biggest stage. We delivered on that, and this past February, FIFA awarded New York/New Jersey the coveted final match.

It was a true team effort by our State and city leaders, agencies, community and business partners, all coming together and showing FIFA our greatness and what we stand for, to "welcome the world" with our diversity, inclusion, and grit to succeed; to provide a world-class experience to our community, teams, FIFA, and visitors from around the world.

So, what can we expect in New Jersey and the greater region? New York/New Jersey will host eight matches that will be played at this stadium between June 13 and July 19, 2026. We will have five group stage matches, two knockout rounds, and, of course, the final on July 19. Keep your eyes on the group stage matches though, because those are just as exciting. It's when your team still has hope of winning.

We hear a lot of stories out of '94, and what stands out is not the semi-final held at Giants Stadium, but the group stage match between Ireland and Italy. The battle on and off the field makes everyone smile when they reminisce about that one. And, sadly, Italy lost that one.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: But Ireland won.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Yes.

(laughter)

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: They did.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It's starting already.

(laughter)

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: I got you.

The World Cup *will* ignite our region. One of the greatest things about FIFA World Cup is that it is a true celebration of our neighborhoods, rooting for our country -- the United States -- but also for those with roots around the world. It can be a great moment of pride for your family who immigrated from Poland, Argentina, Mexico, England, or Spain -- like mine.

We will fill not only the stadium with 80,000 fans, but we will organize two large-scale FIFA fan festivals in iconic locations in New York and New Jersey. Those will be open to the public throughout the duration of the tournament for the community to gather, enjoy local flare, activations, and watch the biggest games. Working with our partners in government, tourism, and business, we will also support watch parties throughout the state from Cape May to Asbury Park to Jersey City -- all above and in between.

In New Jersey, we have a very special relationship with Philadelphia. As a host committee, we are working closely with the Philly team to think through operations, including transportation and security, as well as hotel accommodations and tourism. Our team -- on our team, we are doing this for the benefit of the entire state. And, so long as you don't ask me to root for the Eagles, we will be celebrating the six matches that Philadelphia will host, and our South Jersey fans.

I actually also root for the Jets, as I earlier said.

2026 also marks a momentous occasion for Boston, New York/New Jersey, and especially Philadelphia, as we celebrate our 250th birthday. Planning is underway between our teams in both New York, New

Jersey, and Philadelphia, to celebrate together around the Fourth of July, and encourage heritage tourism throughout the state.

As you've said, Chairman, the World Cup is expected to generate \$2 billion in economic impact, and will support 14,000 jobs. In New York/New Jersey region, we will see over 1 million visitors -- half of which will not be ticketed, but will just come to the region to celebrate the World Cup. To achieve these numbers, though, we are planning aggressively with our government, community, and business partners -- particularly those in tourism and hospitality -- to think through vehicles to activate both big and small. Restaurants; hotels; curating tourism packages; a communication tool with FIFA; to share all these great things that New Jersey and the region have to offer.

Just to give you a sense of the exposure we have already received, in the three days following the match schedule announcement, New Jersey hosting the final appeared in approximately 3,000 news articles from around the world, with almost 87 million views -- overwhelming positive, and, in fact, the key search terms, "New Jersey," and, separately, "MetLife Stadium" appeared more than any other host city or country -- only equal to that of "FIFA."

As you know, New York City and New Jersey are one team on this. To achieve their hosting goals, the New York New Jersey Host Committee was formed -- a private nonprofit to serve as the local organizer for FIFA, government, community, and business. We represent, connect, coordinate with all key stakeholders and authorities and present their needs and opportunities to FIFA. We strive to ensure on-time and world-class delivery of infrastructure, facilities, and services including the mobility plan

for the region. With our partners at the New Jersey State Police and the NYPD, we *will* deliver a safe and incomparable experience for those taking part in the FIFA World Cup 2026. Ultimately, we aim to fully leverage this opportunity, exposing the greatness of New Jersey and our region to the world; unite us like never before, leaving a lasting impact that grows the game and provides an inclusive community memory that is shared for generations and brings economic and social impact and growth to our community.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I now will turn it over to my great colleague from the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism, Jeff Vasser.

Thank you.

J E F F R E Y V A S S E R: Lauren often refers to me as her lone Eagles fan. So, I enjoy working with her despite that.

(laughter)

MR. VASSER: But, it's an honor being with you.

I'm sorry I haven't met several of you on this Committee, but I first want to thank all of you for what you do for tourism. The support you give us at the Division of Travel and Tourism has been tremendous, and despite -- or, not -- in addition to what we're going to be doing with World Cup, I appreciate everything you're doing with the Revolutionary War initiative that's coming up, as well as everything that we've been trying to do.

So, I thank you for that.

I want to echo what Lauren said in her opening statement, and what I'd like to do is just simply amplify what this means for tourism for New Jersey.

First and foremost, the Division looks at this as an opportunity to introduce New Jersey to a new audience, one that frankly may not have been to New Jersey before, or, in some cases, may not even know where we're located. But, we're going to make sure that that happens.

We get a lot of people who are interested in our beach; in our arts and culture; in our agritourism and our ecotourism; and we want to increase the amount of people who are interested in sports. And, as the Chairman mentioned, there are five billion -- I think you said -- soccer fans around the world. We want to make sure that they know what New Jersey is and where we're located.

Having said that, when they come in 2026 for that six-week period, we want to make sure that this is sustainable. We want to introduce all that New Jersey has to offer, and to make sure that they are aware of this so that, eventually, they can't get to everything. So, we want to make sure that they come back to New Jersey and want to come back and recognize the fact that New York is *the* Number 1 gateway city in the United States, and therefore they're going to come through New York City and take advantage of all that New Jersey has to offer, because now they're going to recognize that we offer the same -- and even better, in some cases -- things that New York has to offer.

We have no tax on clothes and shoes, so we're going to make sure they know that. And, if that doesn't get them, we're going to make sure that they know that we'll pump your gas for you.

(laughter)

MR. VASSER: So-- So, we're going to use the next two years to get ourselves visitor ready; to make sure that we create the momentum that's going to lead to 2026.

Lauren already described some of the facts about what we're going to be bringing in economic impact to New Jersey -- the jobs, the number of visitors that are going to be coming. And, I was especially struck by the fact that only half of these are going to be ticketed. So, we have an opportunity to bring these people to watch parties -- both official and unofficial -- to show them around the state and make sure that they have all of the information that they need to make sure that they tour around New Jersey. Because we are a small state. They can get from top to bottom in three hours, so we want to make sure that they take advantage of that excess time that they have.

I want to point out -- and, I think everybody knows this -- New Jersey is in a unique position. Not only are we the co-host with New York City, and we are going to certainly enjoy the economic impact from the games that are held here, but we're also going to be enjoying the economic impact from the games in Philadelphia. And, I say that we are unique, and I don't use that term lightly, because we are going to get economic impact from *14* matches. Every other host city in this United Bid is only going to be enjoying six, or maybe eight. So, this is a great opportunity for us to enjoy the fact that we have a great working relationship with Philadelphia. Our proximity with Philadelphia is key, and we're going to make sure that we take care of all that they have to offer.

So, Philadelphia is expecting about half a million visitors to their city. We're going to make sure that they know that staying in New Jersey is

just as convenient as staying in the Philadelphia suburbs as well. So, again, that comes to having them understand the proximity that New Jersey has with New York City and Philadelphia. Five hundred million dollars in economic impact is what's expected for Philadelphia, and that includes the \$262 million in direct spending.

The final match -- which I think is really exciting -- is going to be held on July 4, in celebration of the 250th anniversary of America. Speaking of the 250th, we're going to make sure, in Tourism, that we cross-market to the people who are going to be coming into this region to celebrate the Semiquincentennial -- how many times can you say that fast, right?

(laughter)

MR. VASSER: We're going to make sure that heritage tourism visitors are aware of soccer, and certainly, there's going to be some crossover. If there's five billion soccer fans, a select number of them are going to be heritage tourism fans as well. And, by the same token, we're going to make sure that the other folks know that New Jersey has more Rev War sites in its state than any of the original 13 colonies. And, I hope you're all aware of that; we have more than anybody else. So, we're going to make sure that people are aware of that.

First and foremost, I want to show you what we've been doing from an ad campaign and marketing component. You see on the right, right now, "Little State, Lot of Wow" is our current campaign. And, just to -- just to let you know if you haven't seen it, this has been very successful. The message is that everywhere you turn, you're going to be wowed by something else. And, we encourage people to step out of their comfort zone and try something new and see something new.

So, what we're doing is incorporating the FIFA World Cup coming to New Jersey and New York in 2026 by including a soccer ball here. And, you see, we say, "See you in 2026." We are incorporating this into every component that we do. Ultimately, we're going to be doing videos and commercials; we're going to be promoting our website; we're going to have portals that are really focused on what people want to do. We're going to have countdown widgets. We're going to have modules for events; the attractions; for restaurants; for everything that people want to do -- they're going to be able to go to this main portal and be able to see and plan everything.

The Number 1 thing that people want, that we're going to give to them, is itineraries. We want to make sure that if you're staying up north and you have some time to kill before you go to a match in Philadelphia, this is what you can do throughout New Jersey, and vice versa. If you want to go to the shore, this is what you do; this is what some of the personalities of all the different shore towns are. You have your kids with you, this is what you could do with your families. If it's just a group of guys or gals, go enjoy a tasting room at one of our great wineries or breweries. We're going to get the message out that there are so many things to do and we're going to have three-day, four-day, week-long itineraries for people to take advantage of.

Right now, what we're doing is working with our various DMOs throughout the state to make sure that they upload and they have an inventory of those hotels that want to be a part of this, and the restaurants and the attractions that want to be a part of the 2026 initiative. So, we're working with our DMOs to make sure that they upload all of the information

that they need, and we are then going to put it on the larger portal for everyone to enjoy.

We're also going to create events with our partners. We're going to be working closely with Lauren and Bruce, her Co-Host Manager, and making sure that everything we do is set and focused on what's coming up in 2026.

I want to show you a sample of one of the commercials that we have running right now, and how we incorporated 2026 with it. And, I hope I can get this right.

(advertisement plays)

MR. VASSER: Again, just a clip of what we're doing, but, again, you see how we incorporated FIFA into this. So, as we get into international marketing, you're going to see that more and more.

And, it worked. OK.

So, over the next two years, we've got a lot of soccer that we're able to take advantage of. Copa matches are going to be here. Paris Olympics is going to be focused on soccer. There's going to be club events that are going on. So, over the next two years, we're going to make sure that all of these qualifying matches have a New Jersey tourism focus to it. We're going to promote New Jersey in all of these upcoming events, and we're going to have representation right now in the U.K.; in Ireland; in Germany; in Canada. And, we're going to be working with our New York City partners on all of the representation that they have throughout the world. We're only in those markets -- New York City is in 35 additional ones. So, we're going to work with them to make sure everybody is aware when they come over to this side

of the pond that New Jersey is here and this is where we're going to be focusing our efforts.

For those of you who aren't familiar with Brand U.S.A., that is the United States' DMO. It's only about 10 years old, and what they're doing is focused on bringing international visitors here. So, recently, Brand U.S.A. announced that they're going to be focused on the travel trade -- those are tour operators; media; travel agents; and they're going to be focused mostly on all of the U.S.-based host cities that are going to be hosting the World Cup. So, they're going to be in every international market, focused on what's going on in New Jersey.

And, international is something that we started just a few years ago. What a great opportunity it is, when we have Newark Liberty International Airport, that brings in about 20 international arrivals -- 20 million international arrivals a year. Philadelphia is another five million international arrivals a year. What an opportunity we have to talk to international visitors who come here about FIFA, and to hit a whole new demographic that we haven't gotten before.

Brand U.S.A. hosted a sales mission down in Brazil and Colombia a few months ago, and we participated with New York City -- all they wanted to talk about was World Cup. And, so, hooking up with tour operators to make sure that they have opportunities to package hotels, and restaurants, and tickets to the events, and other attractions. That's going to be our focus for the next couple of years on the international market.

Finally, PR is a big component of what we do. We're going to be working with all of the different soccer clubs, youth, and Gotham and Red Bulls to make sure that everybody knows again that soccer is going to be here

and we're going to be doing events; we're going to be doing countdown press releases six months out, a year out, etc., to make sure that people are zeroed-in on what we're trying to do. We're looking for some major activations.

One thing we're kicking around is, as the Olympics get ready, everybody is familiar with the torch, where it starts from one location and travels around and ultimately is the-- The fire is lit at the opening ceremonies. We're talking about having a soccer ball start at the tip of Cape May and working its way through New Jersey and we're going to have a variety of people kicking it or something -- signing it -- and then perhaps even end at MetLife Stadium -- or what will then be called the New York New Jersey Stadium -- and maybe even meet our partners from New York City in the middle of the G.W. Bridge. Who knows? But, those are things we're working on, our PR firm is engaged, and we're looking at some really cool things to do -- again, to make sure that people know the New Jersey brand and all of the great things there are to do.

And, with that, thank you for your time, and it's great to see everybody here.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you, Lauren and thank you, Jeffrey.

We'll take questions from the Committee; I can begin.

Lauren, we had-- Some of the members of the Committee took a tour before the hearing today. Could you talk about maybe the progress and the construction here at MetLife, and what is expected to continue, and maybe where, perhaps, the State and the Legislature should be keeping an eye on or a pulse on where that work is going and, ultimately, where we may need to consider that in the future?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Sure.

So, early on in this process we learned MetLife Stadium, like many other NFL stadiums, were built a little more like an oval, and the field for soccer -- or a pitch -- needs to be a little more rectangular. So, in the corners for our stadium, we did need to widen them. That work began this year, and we've done one side of the stadium and we'll do the next, next year.

To widen the stadium costs about \$16 million. That did come through the State of New Jersey, and we're very, very appreciative of that, because without that work we not only would have not gotten a final, but we would have not been able to host, either, in general, because there's certain safety parameters that need to be met on the field for FIFA so that the players can play safely. And, so we had to do this work and we're very appreciative of the support. That all went through the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority, and is considered authorized and done, so we're moving very well there.

The next stage will be the installation of the infrastructure to grow grass. As you know, MetLife Stadium has artificial turf and will now need to install grass for 2026. It's temporary, it's not permanent, but unlike when you have a (indiscernible) come, for example this summer for Copa, where the grass sort of gets laid out just for a one-off, the grass for 2026 will actually take root here, and will need an irrigation system. And, that work is also authorized through the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority. There's additional authorizations coming up I believe this summer, possibly, to enable that work to get done. Estimates for that work originally were estimated at \$3.5, but we're going out now for bid on that work.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: And, where is the grass grown?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Sure, the grass is grown in Tuckahoe down in, I believe, Hammonton, New Jersey. We're very, very proud to have the grass homegrown, literally. It's not only used by our stadium but others around the country, so we're very, very proud of that.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: And, how does the window, throughout the year of construction, work with the Giants and Jets using the facility for a certain period of time?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Sure. It's timed almost perfectly, and kudos to the staff at the stadium for ensuring that we don't interfere -- the planning for World Cup does not interfere with the NFL season, or the concert season, really.

It is done right after the NFL season, so in January of this year it went 'til about May, and the same thing will happen next year on the other side of the field. They do one corner at a time.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Great, great.

Are there any questions from the Committee?

Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Hi, thank you so much.

I have a question about transportation. Have there been any adjustments made to allow for increased visitors or use of public transportation to or from the stadium?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Yes, so, New Jersey Transit provides the main form of public transportation to the stadium via rail and bus. They currently serve NFL games, as well as events that are 50,000-plus. So, they're very busy all summer here, not only during the NFL season.

We will need to increase capacity, not only in public service but private carriers as well for 2026. And, that's largely due because of the stadium footprint widening a bit; there's overlay that goes outside into the parking lots. And, so, planning on that has already started with the Secaucus Transitway and increasing bus service -- bus, rapid-transit service -- to MetLife, as well as looking at any private carriers that will need -- be needed.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Assemblyman, you have a question?

ASSEMBLYMAN GUARDIAN: Jeff, you spoke about expanding marketing internationally to sporting events, soccer events, prior to our event, but you need additional funding for that? If you have it available now, please speak to it. If not, through the Chair, would you provide us with the additional funding that's needed?

And, as a Jersey boy, it's sea-cauc-us, not sa-cauc-us.

(laughter)

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: I told you I was from New York originally, actually.

ASSEMBLYMAN GUARDIAN: I know.

MR. VASSER: Thank you for that, Assemblyman.

I will say that, thanks to the funding that this Committee helped us authorize through the ARP funds a couple of years ago, that has helped us do the outreach into the U.K., Ireland, Germany, and Canada. That-- Those funds will certainly expire next year, and we will be looking for an opportunity to get more funding, because if we need to go into Brazil and Colombia and other key soccer-crazed communities, we want to make sure that they're aware of New Jersey, and that will take funding.

So, without a doubt, we're going to reach out to this Committee and the Governor's Office and the Senate and talk about how we can use this money -- and, to say nothing of what we're going to be talking about for Rev War. You know, that-- That needs funds, too. So, after this year when the ARP funds expire, it will be time to look (indiscernible).

But, I just want to add that, in the two years that we've started the international initiative that I spoke about, in the first year we had growth of about 130% in visitation to New Jersey, and last year it was a 77% increase over that year. So, it's -- if anybody was in the U.K. or Ireland -- and, I get a lot of these texts from friends that we've been wrapping buses and wrapping taxi cabs with a "Greetings from New Jersey" that really pops. And, it's created a lot of buzz in those markets.

So, we're excited about it, and international is the future, and a lot of our fellow states, they would give anything to have two -- three, if you include JFK -- international arrivals. So, it's pretty cool.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: I know the Vice Chairman has a question, but just as a follow up to Assemblyman Guardian, Lauren, could you discuss the timeline on when we would know which countries or which teams would be participating in the matches at MetLife?

And, then, how Jeff, on the State end, how we are then focusing on the advertising for those countries? As you had already said, I'm just wondering how that timeline could work out.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Yes, no, it's something we think about not only on the tourism side, but operationally as well for security and transportation purposes, and making sure things are translated in certain languages so it's on our mind, too, for operations.

But, we will not know until December of 2025 when FIFA does what's called "the final draw" and you see the countries being allocated into different groups. And, that's when we'll know.

But, I believe this summer we will also be getting some sense of what countries could be clustered here. They're going to start to at least, I think, identify a subset because they have to start looking at team-based camps. I believe -- don't quote me on that.

We would love, as soon as we can, to get some insight into who is coming here from what countries. Because on the tourism end, we want to start curating things that are targeting different nationalities and different groups and pockets of restaurants that are here that they can go and visit if they're Argentinian, for example. And, so, we are going to work in lock and step with Jeff as well as our friends in New York City to make sure we're curating around the countries and the visitors.

I will say also on this front, we recently just formed an International Affairs Committee between New Jersey and New York where we are working with all the consulates and planning with them for their leadership as well as their businesses, and also ensuring communication, because they will be a resource to people coming from their country. So, we just formed that, and, I will tell you, it's great to see New York and New Jersey coming together, because there's no reason the two shouldn't make a system that's most efficient; that communicates "not fractured, but one;" and we help international visitors when they come here.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Great; thank you.

Vice Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Chairman, I do have a question.

You mentioned the watch parties. Do you know how many-- Well, first of all, has that been set yet? Do you know how many there are, and where they'll take place?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: So, I'll just distinguish between what I said, or called -- because it's a trademarked name.

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Oh, OK.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: FIFA Fan Festival is a very specific type of event, and I talked about two large ones.

The watch parties that you're talking about can be official -- done by the Host Committee -- or they can be unofficial--

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Yes--

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: --because FIFA does license, in the broadcast -- the broadcaster is FOX and Telemundo -- they *do* license out public viewing, or watch parties. So, you'll see not only official ones done by Jeff and I throughout the state, but we will help and serve as a resource for the unofficial ones, too, that are done by different towns in Hoboken, or Summit, where they want to host one themselves.

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Well, where are the two fan experiences going to be?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Right now, we are proposing Liberty State Park and Randall's Island in New York. They're both being looked at, though, so I would say nothing is set in stone, but they offer iconic views -- particularly in New Jersey -- of the Statue of Liberty and the New York City skyline, as well as parts of Jersey City. It also is a great partnership that we

have with the State in thinking through the use of that space so that it could be open to the public. These are free events -- free gatherings.

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Sounds like fun.

MR. VASSER: Can I add, Assemblyman, to that--

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Yes, please.

MR. VASSER: For the unofficial ones, we will be working with our DMOs that are interested to make sure that they have all of the necessary information and infrastructure needs.

And, I'd like to acknowledge Lauren's co-host, City Manager Bruce, who comes from New York. He coined the term -- I think you coined it, Bruce -- "watch party in a box." So, basically, coming up with a kit that you can use that would give you all the information you need to make sure you have a successful watch party.

So, we're going to be working with the DMOs around the state to see who is interested, because it's a big undertaking, for sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Yes, and obviously a lot of people are going to come to this region. Like you said, they're not going to have a ticket to the game, they're going to want to just get that feel and that vibe of being in one of the host cities.

And, then, these aren't questions, but more of just some thought -- some little thought bubbles.

Your cute slogan, "Little Jersey, lot of now?"

MR. VASSER: "Little state, lot of wow."

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: "Little state, lot of wow."

Cross-marketing -- "Little state, lotto wow," right, throw that Jersey lotto in there, too.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Right?

And, I'm thinking, we get that lotto--

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Aren't they a sponsor already?

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: --in the billions.

And then, lastly, the one about the ball on the ground. I think it's very clever, but you should have the ball stay *on* the ground. And, like, kick it up--

MR. VASSER: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Like, that ball doesn't get into a vehicle; it's getting kicked up.

MR. VASSER: Yes. Exactly.

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: That's what your thought was?

MR. VASSER: That's what my thought was, yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Oh, I thought you were going to put it in a van and drive it up.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: I did not know that was Jeff's thought. (laughter)

MR. VASSER: No, kick it and-- And, it's a big undertaking to make sure, you know--

ASSEMBLYMAN CALABRESE: Yes, it's a big undertaking--

MR. VASSER: --but we're going to need the cooperation of every community that we're going through that--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Maybe the Parkway, too, right?

(laughter)

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: The State Police.

MR. VASSER: We'll get a windy day and just let it roll up.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Any other questions?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: I just have one question.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Assemblyman McClellan.

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: Just-- Is there any thought about Atlantic City International playing a part in this as well? You know, with the vicinity to Philadelphia and not everybody flying into Philly, I know Atlantic City International could play some sort of part.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: So, we already work with the South Jersey Transportation Authority, they're a part of our transportation working group from day one.

Yes, we do see Atlantic City Airport serving lots of purposes -- not only for Philadelphia, but New Jersey as well, as being a spillover or possibly an easier place to land if you obviously want to go and stay in Atlantic City and then take in a game at Lincoln Financial.

So, we are going to look to market Atlantic City Airport as part of our attracting domestic visitors, as -- I know they can land an international plane there, is what they've told me -- but, we will have a lot of domestic traveling, because there are 10 other U.S. host cities, so people will be hopping around. So, we do plan to market Atlantic City as well in there.

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: OK.

ASSEMBLYMAN GUARDIAN: Obviously, this brings a lot of energy and money into the state: entertainment; overnight accommodations; dining.

Do we have -- and, you've mentioned those numbers and the jobs it creates -- do we have any idea of the amount of sales tax that it's going to be creating for the state?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Sure. We've done some analysis early on when we were looking, and that's where we got the \$2 billion number. It was done regionally, and I believe there's projected over \$200 million in direct tax revenue for the region.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Donlon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Yes, I just had a question about safety for fans, and if there would be allowed tailgating; non-ticketed fans, could they be in the parking lot, or is that something that-- Will there be more staff available for security purposes? That sort of thing.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Sure, that's a really great question, and we're going through what's called a SEAR rating right now with the Federal Government, where they come in and evaluate each match and determine its level of risk and whether or not Federal resources will be coming in. We feel strongly on not only the final, but other matches requiring Federal assistance, and we are lobbying and asking for Federal in kind, as well as financial support for security.

We are not encouraging non-ticketed spectators at the stadium. We will work with the New Jersey State Police -- our lead, for us -- as well as the NYPD on the New York side. So, they will work in tandem.

We actually have bi-weekly meetings as a team *just* talking about security. We are working closely with FIFA to set the security plan and the secure perimeter. Right now, it has not been determined about tailgating,

but, again, it's not going to be encouraged that non-ticketed spectators come from a safety perspective.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: My last question.

Could you talk a bit about the home base camps, and perhaps how some of our state's universities, colleges, other private venues, could be considered for use by any of the teams that are traveling to New Jersey?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Thank you.

We are really excited about this, and we are very fortunate in New Jersey to have premiere, world-class facilities -- be them college, or even on the high school level. We have offered to FIFA a number of facilities throughout the State of New Jersey.

In 1994, I don't know if you were aware, but Pingry hosted Italy, and Stockton hosted Saudi Arabia. And, having a team base camp is something that Pingry had been pining for for 30 years. They're very, very excited about this; it brought great pride. So, we're working with all the facilities in New Jersey and FIFA to see if we can find a match.

It is ultimately up to the teams to pick a facility, so we could propose them and not get picked. As far as the timeline and how that process works, it's something we've been working on for four years. We have a number of facilities that are being looked at. The first version of the team base camp brochure will go out to the countries this June, and there will be subsequent versions in October, and then in the spring of the following year. You will see New Jersey facilities get into the booklet likely by October.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: OK, and those facilities would have to be grass fields as opposed to turf, right?

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Yes, yes.

They do prefer at least two grass fields -- which is hard for some facilities. But, we have a number of them, and we're in constant communication with the team accommodations from FIFA.

It is a process that FIFA does control, but we like to advocate as much as we can for our facilities.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Great, thank you.

Are there any other questions? (no response)

Thank you both for coming.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Thank you.

MR. VASSER: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: So, next, our second panel will include Judith Ross, Director of -- Senior Director of Operations from the Meadowlands Chamber and Meadowlands Live; and Ron Simoncini of Axiom Communications.

RONALD SIMONCINI: Nice to see you all here.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Welcome, welcome.

MR. SIMONCINI: Thank you for coming.

Judy and I have offices that are within sight of this. That twin office building over there is where my office is; Judy's office is a little bit over here; and, the Meadowlands YMCA, which I was Chairman of for 12 years, is-- So, we have a lot of ownership feeling about this site. Judy and I both worked here when there was a thing called Giants Stadium and when there was a racetrack that had a room called the Pegasus. And, so, we've both spent over 40 years associated with this piece of property.

So, it's a little bit emotional for us, actually, and we take it as a point of pride and we also have a sense of real ownership that you're here and

that that game is coming here and that we'll be able to once again celebrate, really, the brilliance of the vision that caused the site to be built in the late 1970s and is still rewarding our region today, and should be a focus of our national and international travel and tourism efforts for the foreseeable future.

Judy, previous President of the NJDMOs, a group that the Meadowlands Regional Chamber formed, founded, and provided leadership for for the first four years of its existence.

Judy Ross.

JUDITH ROSS: Thank you, Ron.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and esteemed members of the Committee.

As mentioned, I am on the Executive Staff of Meadowlands Chamber, and I do oversee the Meadowlands Live Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

Allow me, please, to just provide a bit of our background and our role here.

MR. SIMONCINI: We ripped off Lauren's picture. (laughter)
Double use from that great image.

MS. ROSS: Well, we're working on the technology.

There we go.

I'll share that we proudly serve 1,200 Meadowlands Chamber members of all size -- small businesses to large well-known companies in the area as well, like Goya, PSE&G, and Hackensack Meridian. We were established in 2005 -- our DMO was established as a national accreditation and well over 100 members.

In 2008, as Ron had mentioned, we founded the NJDMO group and organized a declaration of destinations, started with 14 others and resulting in a long-term state-funding grant program, which is in effect today. We are one of the larger independent New Jersey destination marketing organizations, and a large grant recipient as well.

I sit on the Executive Committee of New Jersey Tourism, NJ Industry Association, and I do lead the NJDMOs on a regular basis. We were a loose association until 2021, when we modified the bylaws and have now established NJDMOs as an official marketing division of the association. And, now there are 19 organizations in our group.

And, our organization -- Meadowlands Live, CBB -- has had a long presence on local organizing committees for other historical events in the region, such as Super Bowl XLVII; Wrestlemania, both 29 and 33; Copa; (indiscernible); and many others.

In July in 2017, as you heard before, the bid process began and we were asked for a letter of support from MetLife Stadium and the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority. We are the regional tourism resource, contributing on a number of areas in the bid -- city infrastructure; practice fields with pitch, whether it's turf or grass; proximity to hotel accommodations; transportation providers; infrastructure and mobility; and, even, the airports.

Team base camps, hotels, practice fields, the FIFA Fan Fest location, and volunteers. We've been providing five-and-a-half years of bid development and support, mainly as a hospitality focus. I, personally, had 20 years in hotels and have long relationships with many of the hotel staff in the area, as well as many of the teams in the area.

As I recall, it was about 30,000 total number of hotel rooms that were required for the New Jersey-New York bid, and 12 separate FIFA constituents. We had to identify and supply a census of all three-, four-, and five-star hotels with their rates, their number of rooms that they can allocate to the event, as well as the distance to the stadium. We also specified all meeting space and supporting facilities for the events. Then, we captured and coordinated all the bids from the hotels; we interfaced with the major hotel brands and corporate offices; and made calls on behalf of the host committee. We provided site tours to the host committee and FIFA and sponsors -- including Coca-Cola. Sometimes, this would include up to five or six hotels in a day.

We continue to work on the required accommodations, hospitality venues, and facilities assistance. We play a role in the community outreach, educating our stakeholders and constituents. We maintain our role as a key resource for New Jersey DMOs, as liaison to the host committee, and will help with their activation and marketing coordination. We will continue to promote the region to international visitors for this worldwide event.

I want to thank you for allowing us to present today, and I will now turn the balance of the presentation over to Ron Simoncini of Axiom Communications.

MR. SIMONCINI: So, you can see that Jeff Vasser's job is a substantial, essential job, because he has 18 other Judy Rosses across the state who do this type of work at various levels.

And, so, in our case, provisioning housing related to the state's largest events is something we've been doing for the 17 years at the DMO. In 2002, when we convened a Super Bowl Committee to attempt to draw the

2008 Super Bowl game here, myself and my colleague, Pam Tully, went through the Yellow Pages to find out what hotels were in the region and to try and get a room count the night before the meeting.

The world of destination marketing in New Jersey has changed dramatically since that little pizza session that we had that night. We were successful in attracting the 2014 game here, and a little bit of what I want to talk about relates to the lessons that we learned in that game and how we need to convert those into a more positive experience for the World Cup.

So, as we look at what's going to happen here and we're all talking about this being the sum of 15 Super Bowls or 10 Super Bowls, and we see this number of games, this is a massive, *massive* undertaking. This is a not-for-the-faint-of-heart sort of situation. And, we know that for a few different reasons. Our region -- our DMO -- was involved in five of the largest seven activations for the Super Bowl, including two -- what are being termed viewing parties here -- and we've got a scenario or concept for the viewing party situation in our region.

We had viewing parties in Rutherford, East Rutherford, at the train station there, and in Secaucus in its downtown. Each of those activations drew more than 7,000 people. It took five months for us to plan and oversee what was happening in those two games for 15,000 people. Imagine what's going to happen when 80 New Jersey municipalities want to hold viewing parties.

So, our sort-of moment here today is to talk about what happens with an organization like ours and what help we need, and what we think the State's investment should be through the DMO program in order to facilitate these watch parties and other events; provide funding for them so that these

activations can happen on downtown levels with municipalities who don't necessarily have the funding or the insight to capture the economic benefit of bringing all these folks to their downtown, which is why we're having the game in the first place.

So, if we don't convert on the attention that this game gets in two ways -- Number 1, economic development and activation from people who come here; and, Number 2, by showing people what this region provides relative to tourism -- then we have failed to convert on the value of the game.

And, so, your Committee will be debating all those issues -- and, I'm sure, will consider how it wants to support DMO organizations like us, in addition to what you're doing for the committee that Lauren runs.

Now, if I can compare the tone of interaction between the National Football League and what's happening now, there's an enormous sea change. This group, led by Lauren and Bruce, has been welcoming, inviting. Some of the things that they talked about today were things that we've talked about with them, and I hope we've inspired or even motivated some of the direction that those committees are taking by what we've been able to talk about, relative to how we saw these things transpire over the Super Bowl.

So, as we look at what's happening -- thank you very much -- and, here's another image that we ripped off of Lauren.

(laughter)

MR. SIMONCINI: Appreciate it.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: I think that's actually from FIFA, so.

MR. SIMONCINI: We'll probably be getting a letter from FIFA, because--

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: (laughter)

MR. SIMONCINI: -- Jim Kirkos tells this great story -- he's sorry he couldn't be here today, the President of our Chamber -- about an ice sculpture that we had at one of our activations for Super Bowl, and we literally got a letter a week later from the NFL telling us to cease and desist the ice sculpture, which had melted six days before.

But, it's legit. If I'm FIFA or the NFL, or Major League Baseball, I'm very jealous of my brand. I want to protect that; I want everything associated with it to be exactly what my constituents expect. And, so, how am I going to govern what happens in downtown East Rutherford at a watch party? And, so, we have to be the organization that embraces our members -- they are people who want a benefit with economic activity.

We have to embrace the towns around us. And, as you all know -- and, particularly Assemblyman Calabrese and Assemblyman Allen will appreciate what I say -- there's some cranky people in this region with some pretty assertive personalities. We've got a personal style that we've got to deal with here. You don't want the echo of this to be what the echo from Super Bowl was -- despite the fact that region had five of the seven best-attended events at the Super Bowl; that we captured an enormous amount of economic activity. The expectations could never have been met. We need to create a good set of expectations that we can fulfill.

So, as you look at what the FIFA constituent groups are, that's us; we're the FIFA constituent group, and I think that we're going to be the most active, probably the most visible, and the most exposed. We definitely don't want this game coming to our region and us to be under-prepared and not have the capacity resources to host it as the local DMO. That is

something we're taking extraordinarily seriously, and I know that Lauren and Bruce are, too, but there is going to be this dividing line because Lauren and Bruce are always going to fall on the side of, "I work with FIFA as the host committee," and we *mostly* are going to be on the side, of, "We're not going to have FIFA-sanctioned events."

So, as we sit today -- and, could you go to the next, please -- as we sit today and we think about what we're asking you for, we would like you to have a system of funding that's available to us in much the same way that you fund the DMOs -- provide a pot of money that's informed by what the needs are and make us all compete for it. Let Bruce decide who gets what in his staff. Because, I know that we're in this position; we are a natural funding source. We are already one of the largest-funded DMOs, perhaps the largest independent DMO. We already do a great job. We already are the winner year, after year, after year because we've got scale; because we've got this building; because we've got this site; because we have these events, these games.

So, I am pretty confident that we are going to provide you with a compelling reason to provide us with the dough that we need to make sure this comes off right. I also know that from our work with the various committees and the entities around here, think about what we're dealing with -- American Dream, two NFL teams, the NJSEA -- it goes on, and on, and on, and on. We have to play really nice in the sandbox, and the fact that we've still been able to come and sit before you is a good indication that we know how to do that.

So, we're pretty confident that we'll use your money well; that we'll make it so that your local municipalities feel good about having been

part of the game. Incredibly important, because the faith of those people is in what you do. If you bring the game here and don't provide them with a vehicle to participate, they are going to be very-- They're already resentful; you can't change their resentment in general terms, but, in specific terms, we want this game to be an outlet for them to succeed as municipalities.

And, so, we would like to work with you, with Lauren and Bruce, who I know are -- and, Jeff Vasser -- supportive of what we're saying conceptually, but it needs a vehicle, and it needs the (indiscernible) of the State upon it. And, so, we're here to say, "This is the beginning of that conversation, not the end." Our concept for the local activations is to have what we're calling the "Flag City Series" where each of the group games has an activation in a city that's corresponded to a team. So, if Ireland is playing Italy, maybe East Rutherford is the Ireland place and Secaucus is the Italy place.

We're not going to know how to create that correspondence until the games are announced, but our feeling is that our region could host 10 of those that we will-- We have the relationships and the faith that we need from the 10 municipalities you've identified to bring those 10 activations, which is not competitive to FIFA. It is a local outlet that allows the energy that this game is going to create to occur among our leading municipalities that have the sorts of facilities -- and the will -- to do those events independent of what FIFA is going to do.

And, of course, Judy and myself will be supporting it -- as I close -- will be supporting the activations that FIFA does; the requirements for the game volunteers; the housing; and all of the other things that are connected

to FIFA are things that we, of course, are committed to supporting. And, we believe that that warrants your support as well.

So, thank you very much for having us, and if we can answer any questions, we'd be happy to.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you both.

Are there any questions for the panelists?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: I do.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Assemblywoman Donlon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: I do have a question.

So, if you have a municipality -- maybe a smaller municipality, for example -- who would be interested in hosting one of these parties, they would -- the mechanism would be they would collaborate with you or connect with you to--

MR. SIMONCINI: Well, I'm very intrigued by Bruce's "event in a box" theory, and that's something that I think that we would be a good vehicle to distribute to municipalities that aren't able to do the sort of mid-scale activations that we envision.

It's complicated, Doctor, because you have categories of sponsorship through FIFA that we can't trample over. So, if FIFA has Coca-Cola, we can't really bring Pepsi in to do an activation and hope to get any sort of collaboration. And, so, we have to sort of figure that out, because sponsorship is going to be necessary.

But, the events that we're talking about will be sponsored by very different groups. If Ford Motor Company sponsors FIFA, a local car dealership here may be sponsoring this "flag cities" concept that we have, in all 10 of the games we have; maybe one. The bar that serves Michelob Light

is going to be the liquor license holder for the provisioning that we're going to do locally. These are all things that we're going to have to filter through Lauren and Bruce and Jeff and make sure that we do it the right way, but that we preserve the ability for the municipalities to either go the "event in a box" route, or to participate in something that's a little bit bigger that, again, allows the energy of this thing to have a very organized outlet if you look at some of the efficiencies that we'll bring. If we have four very large viewing screens -- two per game -- there's five games in 35 days, we'll be able to move those from municipality to municipality.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Got it, got it.

MR. SIMONCINI: We want to be able to achieve that scale, because if we don't achieve the scale each of the events is depressed in its orientation -- the larger we can do a critical mass infrastructure, sort of logistical solution, and move that around what's really a very, very tight region, the better off we'll be.

And, that doesn't stop anybody -- and you're going to hear from another region in the Philadelphia area -- doesn't stop anybody from taking what we're doing; collaborating with us; figuring out what are the standards for these events; how should they be run; how do we work together? Absolutely, positively, we expect to be working with other DMOs, and we expect the other DMOs to have events in every place from Asbury Park -- you can see New Brunswick -- places where we don't have a footprint, where we wouldn't presume to be active.

So, these are all things that are going to work themselves out. Some people are going to say, "I don't need your damned box, I'm doing my own thing." Maybe Hoboken. (laughter)

Assemblyman Allen and I have a lot of connectivity in the different parts of our lives.

So, the potential for that stuff is certainly there. To differentiate, there's not going to be one solution, but we have one that we think is very appealing and we want to be able to sell it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Got it.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you.

Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: How much money are you thinking? You've got to have an idea in your head of what you're needing to pull this off, so, what are you thinking at this point? I know it could change a year from now, but.

MR. SIMONCINI: If we had a million dollars, we'd knock your socks off. And, that would pretty much scale up to the whole DMO world if you look at it from what we regularly get. The whole DMO world would need somewhere between \$10-15 million for that to happen.

Again, I would expect to compete for that. I would expect to be able to justify the money that I'm getting, based on what I'm going to deliver, but if you don't put the pot together first -- if you put \$100,000 in the pot, I'm going to say, "I don't need it, I'd rather go on my own," because what I have to do to get the \$100, I have to do \$50,000 worth of work to get the \$100.

So, if there was a million dollars, we would be able to hold our 10 events; we would be able to hold those under the State's banner; we would be able to provide all of the tax generation that would come from those

events, which probably would pay for them back -- just with the tax on beer alone, we'd probably generate a million dollars from these 10 events.

But, again, it remains to be seen, and I think that we are, again, here at the beginning of a conversation that says, if you're going to spend \$300 million to bring this game here, give us \$10 million of it. Let us do what we do as DMOs locally and make sure that we have that local shine that we need to make sure that we're justifying this game coming here.

By the way, that's 3.3% of the entire State support if it's \$300 million -- which, I'm not certain of that. But, if there's \$300 million going to the support of this game, putting 3.3% into the communities for activation doesn't seem like a lot of money.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: Can I just clarify we are not seeking \$300 million from the State Government (indiscernible)?

But, I fully support what Ron is saying.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Any other questions?

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: Chair, just a follow up--

MR. SIMONCINI: If it's only \$100 million, then I need 10%. The math is inversely proportional.

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: You asked for a lot less than Jeff always asks for, so that's all I'm saying.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: No, as far as partnerships that you guys have in your chambers and stuff like that, are you guys going to be seeking individuals who you can clarify and put out to these -- our guests -- who are saying these hotels or these businesses are certified by us and it's safe to go to or OK to go to? Or, you guys are just going to allow these vendors

to do whatever, and people are going to say, “OK, I’m a FIFA supporter, but they’re really not?”

MS. ROSS: We’ve identified team hotels. We’re in the process of identifying the balance of the list which could be media, could be security, could be a couple of other areas; VIPs -- I know some of them will be staying in New York.

But, our hotels-- I, personally, like I said, have a relationship with them. And, I want to make sure that anyone who’s staying in those hotels gets the best service. So, if there’s a hotel that’s in the region that is not up to what I consider best service, I wouldn’t be recommending them.

And, it doesn’t have to stop at this region. We’ve recommended hotels to the FIFA and to the host committee that are well outside the area.

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you.

MR. SIMONCINI: Really, really, good.

MS. ROSS: Thank you.

MR. SIMONCINI: I appreciate very much you having us.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you.

OK, thank you to Judy and to Ron.

And, our final panelist will be Hilary Chebra, Manager of Government Relations for the Chamber of Commerce Southern New Jersey.

HILARY CHEBRA: Good afternoon, Chairman--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Welcome--

MS. CHEBRA: --members of the Committee.

As the Chairman stated, my name is Hilary Chebra. I am the Manager of Government Affairs for the Chamber of Commerce Southern New Jersey.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to talk about the impact that these games will have, particularly focused on South Jersey as that is where our chamber likes to focus on.

So, just a quick background about our Chamber -- I know many of the members on this Committee know our chamber well, but those who don't, we are the largest chamber in the region with over 1,200 members representing both businesses and nonprofits. We represent the seven southern counties, as well as the Greater Philadelphia region and Northern Delaware. So, that makes us uniquely qualified to talk about the enthusiasm that our region has for the games that are going to be played both in the northern part of the state, as well as the Philadelphia games.

Chairman, I think your quote from Ben Franklin really exemplifies that South Jersey is really well-positioned to benefit from both host cities, and we are really looking forward to this global showcase.

This will put on a global stage our local businesses as well as our unique attractions. South Jersey has our beaches; our boardwalks; as well as our agritourism; as well as wineries, breweries. We are full of that, and we are ready. South Jersey already welcomes millions of visitors to the region yearly, so we are well-positioned and well ready to welcome these first-time visitors from international destinations, and to make them repeat visitors. They will see all that South Jersey has to offer. We are ready to put on the best show for them to see and return.

So, a couple of places that I want to highlight that I think are pillars of the region that will benefit from these games, and therefore the entire region.

The first is Camden. We believe that it is well-positioned to host some of these watch parties. Chairman, as you well know, Camden's waterfront recently went over a revitalization and has attractions for all interests and all ages. We have the Freedom Mortgage Pavilion -- it's a 25,000 seat open-air amphitheater that is perfect for hosting these watch parties. We have the Battleship New Jersey. It is the nation's most decorated battleship; it is going to be coming home soon after a recent facelift in dry dock. So, again, an attraction for folks from all over to come and see, as well as Adventure Aquarium. It is often voted one of the best aquariums on the northeast.

So, these are, as we've heard, folks are coming, not necessarily have tickets to the games and are looking for things to do, in between watching tournaments. These are some of the attractions that will feel the economic benefits of all of these influx of visitors and we are ready to take them.

Then, as mentioned before, is Atlantic City -- already a world-renowned destination for entertainment, for hospitality. We have recently seen declines in visits to the brick-and-mortar casinos and hotels there, so this influx of international visitors will provide a revamp of the visits and will provide a much-needed boost to the local economy. There -- has all the amenities to host these watch parties, and for folks to enjoy these casinos -- the dining, the entertainment -- that the city provides.

So, we would like to recommend that the host committee consider maximizing the opportunity to showcase our local businesses by -- with an eye towards procuring goods and services from our local businesses. We would encourage them to work with us to create these procurement processes, as well as making sure that there's access to all businesses with a mind toward minority and women-owned businesses. That is something that we feel is very important to make sure that all of our businesses benefit from this local stage and this international event.

And, I am just going to note some challenges. Those who have heard me speak before on this issue -- transportation. It is always an issue in South Jersey, because we are considered a transit desert. We have less public transportation than our northern friends. So, this will be less than optimal for visitors who are coming from internationally and they're looking for public transportation.

So, we always come with solutions. The Atlantic City Rail Line is -- could be a crucial artery for these games. It is the only rail line New Jersey Transit operates in the southern part of the state, and the only rail line that runs to Atlantic City. So, increasing services and investing in marketing for the Atlantic City Rail Line leading up to the games and during the games could ensure that soccer enthusiasts know that this is an option for them; that they know they have a way to get to and from the Philadelphia games and can stay in Atlantic City and provide that boost to the local economy.

So, those are just some of the challenges; some of the things we're looking forward to. Like I said, South Jersey is accustomed to visitors coming and being impressed, and we look forward to impressing a worldwide stage with the upcoming games.

So, if anyone has any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thanks, Hilary.

And, I'll just begin by saying I -- as someone who represents a district in South Jersey -- I know I have a few colleagues that do as well.

July of 2026 will be an incredible, incredible month. Not just for New Jersey, but, really, I think, obviously, for the nation. But, as it pertains to our proximity to Philadelphia, when we think about what the Semiquincentennial means to the City of Philadelphia and then to South Jersey, that in itself is something that I think deserves more attention just generally. I think the State is doing good work to get us to that place.

But, when you think about Philly and add upon that, that we just saw in the presentation that the final match game is -- is that what it's called, match game? -- will be held on July 4. The Major League Baseball All-Star game is going to be held in Philadelphia in July of 2026, too.

And, so, when you add those events together, South Jersey stands to benefit in ways I think that are very-- There's very few examples that you can compare to. And, so, I think we as a Committee -- while we're thinking through supporting the work that's going to happen here at MetLife -- if we're doing our jobs, it's going to also be supporting the rest of the state through the DMOs; understanding that-- If you think about what July 4 means to each of us, and you pair that with what the World Cup means, and think about maybe that first-generation American who lives somewhere in New Jersey -- maybe in Vineland, a migrant worker maybe in Vineland or somewhere else in the state -- this could be that connective tissue to how we welcome them or they-- This might be the closest opportunity we have to

making them feel welcome since perhaps they've been here in the United States.

And, so, that's certainly something. That's the lens we're looking at these next couple years in supporting the work that's being done.

Hilary, I think from my experience with the Chamber, you all are great advocates for the needs of the region, and I think from that perspective we do have, I think, a great foundation to build upon.

I'll ask if there's any questions from the Committee.

MS. CHEBRA: And, real quick, Chairman -- we've already had some great conversations with the host committee, who are here today, and how to partner to make sure that South Jersey benefits just as much as the rest of the state.

So, just to make your note -- yes, we're looking forward to working with everyone.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Great.

Any questions? (no response)

Thank you, Hilary; thank you.

MS. CHEBRA: Thank you, Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Well, let me just say, in closing, thank you to those who joined us today.

Thank you to MetLife Stadium for hosting us.

Thank you, again, to the panelists.

I want to thank, again, the OLS staff who helped set this up, as well as the partisan staff who made this all happen today.

And, of course, my fellow Committee members who joined us today.

I would like to adjourn soon so I can make it back by dinner.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: And, my last remark will be that it sounds like, the way that the construction is working here, Lauren, that you have to work between the end of the football season and concert season. So, then, as an Eagles fan, it would make sense for us to root for the Giants and the Jets *not* to make the playoffs--

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: --so that construction can start sooner in the year. That sounds about right.

MS. NATHAN LaRUSSO: (indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: So, again, I want to thank everyone for coming.

This is the first of what I will say is many conversations we will be having as a Committee on this topic and figuring out how we can support the work that's going to happen over the next two years.

With that, I'll ask for a motion to adjourn.

ASSEMBLYMAN ALLEN: Motion.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Second?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Second.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: All right, we're adjourned.

Thank you.

(applause)

(MEETING CONCLUDED)