
Committee Meeting

of

ASSEMBLY TOURISM, GAMING, AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

“The Committee will take testimony from invited guests on the upcoming semiquincentennial celebration of the United States’ independence”

LOCATION: Morristown & Morris Township Library
Morristown, New Jersey

DATE: March 30, 2026
10:30 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman William F. Moen, Jr., Chair
Assemblyman David Bailey, Jr., Vice Chair
Assemblywoman Margie Donlon, M.D.
Assemblywoman Maureen Rowan
Assemblywoman Marisa Sweeney
Assemblyman Donald A. Guardian
Assemblyman Antwan L. McClellan



ALSO PRESENT:

Ryan Brinkerhoff
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide

Jack Barnes
Assembly Majority
Committee Aide

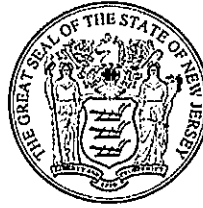
Diego Romero
Assembly Republican
Committee Aide

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
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Chair

David Bailey, Jr.
Vice-Chair

Clinton Calabrese
Margie Donlon, M.D.
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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 - MARCH 30, 2026

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The Assembly Tourism, Gaming and the Arts Committee will meet on Monday, March 30, 2026 at 10:30 AM in the Morristown & Morris Township Library, 1 Miller Road, Morristown, New Jersey 07960.

The committee will take testimony from invited guests on the upcoming semiquincentennial celebration of the United States' independence.

Issued 3/25/26

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submitted by
Jennifer M. Costa

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ASSEMBLYMAN WILLIAM F. MOEN, Jr. (Chair): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to the Assembly Tourism, Gaming, and Arts Committee -- the first offsite hearing of the 2026-2027 Legislative Session.

As many of you know and have heard me say before, our committee travels the state to highlight many of the attractions, history, and locations that make New Jersey, New Jersey. And, there's no better subject to kick off our travels for this Legislative Session than to some of our sites that highlight our nation's Semiquincentennial.

Today, we will receive testimony from organizations and stakeholders that are shedding light on New Jersey's rich heritage tourism.

Before we begin that, I would like to ask OLS to call the roll for us.

MR. BRINKERHOFF (Committee Aide): Assemblyman McClellan.

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblyman Guardian.

ASSEMBLYMAN GUARDIAN: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblywoman Rowan.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROWAN: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblywoman Donlon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Assemblywoman Sweeney.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SWEENEY: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: Vice Chairman Bailey.

ASSEMBLYMAN DAVID BAILEY, Jr. (Vice Chair): Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: And, Chairman Moen.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Here.

MR. BRINKERHOFF: You have a quorum.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you.

And, so, to begin, I know many of you have heard me say this before, but Ben Franklin described New Jersey as a “keg that’s tapped at both ends.” And, that’s what makes our state during the American Revolution and the history there so special. And, we’ve traveled to a number of different sites throughout the last three years to really highlight that, and some of the -- perhaps, the ancillary sites that would help with, certainly, the promotion of what we expect to see come into the state for the celebration. And, as you can imagine then, what other attractions might be available for families that are visiting New Jersey for the first time to say, “Let’s come here for 250, but then what are we going to do?”

And, so, it’s important for us as we visit Morristown today to realize that the Continental Army stayed in Morristown in 1776 and 1777 and returned back to Morristown from 1779 to 1780. And, George Washington praised Morristown -- which saw military action; fueled the Continental Army; and withstood bitter winter conditions, commemorated at the Morristown Green, which most of the Committee members had the opportunity to just visit. And, I’ll take credit for picking the day that had the best weather we’ve seen in a long time.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: But, we did see the Green and spent some time where we know that leaders like Washington, Marquis de

Lafayette, and Alexander Hamilton stayed and kept the Revolution alive in Morristown.

And, before today's hearing, while we did have the chance to tour down there, we hope that-- And, this was really the goal, was to get folks from around the state, our legislators, to visit Morristown to get to go see it and then have a conversation about what, perhaps, we can then help to foster in terms of where we go with the Committee and our work.

One thing I'll just say that's I think extremely important is we've had conversations -- and, I hope we hear it today -- is that while 2026 and the 250th is key to the nation's celebration, we know that the next eight years are what we have to celebrate here in New Jersey, as it relates to the Revolutionary War. And, as you heard me say the dates that are tied to Morristown, we need to think collectively and more broadly about what other dates fit into the next eight years around the rest of the state so that we can invest and celebrate in that.

And, so, I don't want anybody to think that we're coming here the year that we're celebrating the 250 and we're a little late doing so. The reality is that we're talking about things that are still a few years away, so we can chew gum and walk at the same time here; we celebrate 250 and then the 250th of the events that are occurring over the next eight years. So, I think that's an important point for us to mention here.

I do want to thank Morristown and the Morristown Township, Morristown Library -- the military capital of the American Revolution -- for hosting us today.

I want to recognize Assemblywoman Marisa Sweeney, who is joining us today as a substitute, who represents this district.

And, also, we did hear from the Morristown Mayor this morning, who was generous enough to guide us through the tour that we took at the Green.

Assemblywoman Sweeney, I would like to just give you a brief opportunity to give us a welcome to the district -- if you don't mind.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SWEENEY: Yes, absolutely.

I'm so excited to have this Committee here today.

I've lived in Morristown for 15 years. I walked here, which was really nice. It's a nice little treat from the hour-and-20-minute drive that I usually have to Trenton.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SWEENEY: And, I also have my business here. I've owned a wellness center here for 15 years, also within walking distance.

But, I mean, aside from the fact that Morristown is such a vibrant town, you all got a dose of the history that's here also.

So, I'm really honored to have everybody here. It's good to see everybody here in my hometown.

And, thanks for having me on the Committee today.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you; thank you.

Vice Chairman Bailey, would you like to provide any remarks before we begin?

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: Thank you, Chairman.

First and foremost, I just want to say I think I won the prize for traveling the longest distance today--

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: --down from Salem County -- again, rich--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: McClellan has -- he has--

ASSEMBLYMAN McCLELLAN: Ocean City--

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: Oh, no, I think I got you, sir. I got you.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: You've got the Parkway; I barely have roads.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: I love my district; rich in Revolutionary history as well.

But, what a fantastic town. So worth the trip up here.

And, thank you for bringing us up here, Chairman.

And, thank you for hosting us, Assemblywoman, today.

I think what stuck with me was the final piece on the Green, when they talked about the 6,000 French soldiers who marched from Newport, Rhode Island, down through Morristown, all the way down to Yorktown, eventually. That scene itself in our history and what it meant to our country and why we're here today will always stick in my mind from this -- from today.

So, thank you for having us today. I look forward to participating.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Absolutely.

So, to begin-- I want to be mindful of everyone's time. We're going to welcome Morris County 250 to the podium to provide testimony to kick us off.

Hi.

So, if you wouldn't mind, please introduce yourself and-- There's no button; in Trenton, we ask you to push a button; there's no button for the microphone. So, we're assuming it's on.

SAMANTHA RUTLEDGE: Hi, everybody.

My name is Samantha; I am the Director of Tourism and Strategic Partnerships for the Morris County Tourism Bureau. The Tourism Bureau is leading the initiative on the 250th celebration.

Our Executive Director, Sarah Neibart, she couldn't be here today, but I'm filling in to just tell you a little bit about the initiatives and the programming that we have going on. So, I will get started.

Morris County is often called "the crossroads of the Revolution," and for a good reason. General George Washington and the Continental Army endured two critical winters here; supplies were forged here; troops moved through here; leaders gathered here. Churches, taverns, homes, and ironworks across the county helped sustain the Continental Army during some of the most difficult periods of the war. The endurance and decisions that helped shape the future of a new nation happened right here in our communities. And, that's why Morris County's place in the Revolution deserves to be recognized, and it's also one of our greatest assets today.

So, as we celebrate the America's 250th anniversary, this milestone is more than a commemoration; it's an opportunity to elevate Morris County's national profile; strengthen heritage tourism; support our local businesses; and bring residents and visitors together around a shared story. And, heritage tourism, as we know, is a powerful driver of visitation and local economic growth. So, when people travel to experience history, they stay in our hotels; eat in our restaurants; shop in our downtowns; and explore our communities. So, in other words, that's why we're investing in telling our story well. And, it just doesn't preserve our history; it supports our local economy.

So, recognizing that opportunity, the Morris County Board of County Commissioners made an early commitment to us to support planning, marketing, and coordination for the 250th anniversary initiatives through the Tourism Bureau. So, this is truly a countywide initiative involving our 39 municipalities, historical societies, nonprofits, businesses, educators, and so on. So, we're working closely with partners -- including the Morris County Historical Society; our Heritage Commission; our Parks Commission; and, of course, our County Commissioners, because it is truly a partnership that brings everybody together.

So, just to go through a few of our different initiatives. One of the ways we are supporting that collaboration between everyone is through the Morris County 250th brand kit, which gives businesses, organizations, and the community partners the tools to align their own programming, promotions, and products with a broader celebration. So, restaurants, retailers, hotels, nonprofits, and municipalities can all participate in our

brand kit to strengthen the visibility of Morris County's role in the Revolution.

Because the 250th isn't just about remembering history; it's also about remembering and celebrating heritage tourism. So, travelers today are increasingly looking for authentic experience where history is real, tangible, and connected to a place. Morris County offers exactly that. So, we're bringing that story together in a multitude of ways.

So, we have already created and produced a Morris County 250th coloring book, which helps introduce younger audiences to the Revolutionary story in an accessible way. The coloring book is available to download directly from our website, making it easy for families, teachers, and community groups across the county to engage with history beyond the 250th.

We have also recently launched a traveling mural project, which will be one of the signature creative initiatives tied to the 250th. So, our mural is envisioned as a traveling installation that will first appear at community events across Morris County, creating opportunities for residents to engage with the project as it evolves. Ultimately, the goal is for the mural to be displayed in public spaces throughout the county, so it becomes a lasting visual reminder of our shared history and semiquincentennial celebrations.

As we develop the project, we're bringing partners together to help shape its artistic direction, themes, potential locations, and the broader community engagement strategy behind it. The goal is to create something that reflects not only Morris County's Revolutionary history, but also the creativity of our communities and the future we're building together.

We're also working with *Drive By History*, the PBS series, which will feature an episode on our very own Jockey Hollow, which is airing later this -- 2026, bringing Morris County's story to a national audience.

We're also expanding driving and walking tours through our app, highlighting the Morris County's story maps and the Tourism's walking tours of historic Morristown -- which you were all just on -- allowing residents and visitors to explore these sites through self-guided, digital experiences.

Education is also one of our major focuses. Through the Read Across Morris County Initiative, we have identified titles for the entire community; from the youngest of readers to those who have lived here for decades. These books highlight a wide range of perspectives on life during the Revolutionary era, and invite people of all ages to engage with that.

We're also excited that our County College of Morris will be launching a colonial cooking series, helping people experience the daily life of the Revolutionary period in a very tangible way.

And, of course, the 250th will also be marked through events that bring the community together. Earlier this year, we held a family Lego event in historic Morristown -- an intergenerational activity that invited families to connect with the history, while also highlighting the importance of historic preservation. That theme is especially meaningful here in Morris County. Since 2003, the county's Historic Preservation Trust Fund has supported the preservation of more than 130 historical sites, including Revolutionary-era locations that help tell the story.

In April, we'll welcome the Jockey Hollow encampment, which will once again bring Washington's winter headquarters to life through reenactments. In May and October, our local history organizations will open

historic sites across the county during the “Pathways of History” weekend tours. And, during that same month, we’ll be hosting our signature event, Morris County’s Patriot Ball, honoring George Washington, at our national historical park in Morristown; an evening that celebrates our shared history while also raising funds to support educational programming and shared living history experiences.

We’re also partnering with an artist to develop an augmented reality project, offering another way to experience Revolutionary history through a modern and technological lens. This summer, we’ll be bringing a Holt Fleet 250 on our largest freshwater lake in New Jersey, Lake Hopatcong, so we’ll have different boats participating in that with-- And, they will be decorated throughout the lake.

In September, we’ll be hosting a living history weekend and colonial fair. And, in November, we’ll conclude the year with a 250th 10K, a fitting tribute to endurance -- something that Washington and his army certainly understood well.

But, beyond the events, what matters most is the story we’re telling. Two hundred and fifty years ago, the future of the United States was uncertain. The Continental Army was exhausted, and resources were scarce. And, yet, they held. If the army had broken here in Morris County, the Revolution would have broken. Two hundred and fifty years ago, Morris County helped secure the future of a nation. Today, the partnerships help secure the future of this county. And, in 2026, together we have the opportunity to share that story with the world.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you, Samantha.

And, Samantha, if you don't mind, the Committee may have some questions.

MS. RUTLEDGE: Oh, sure. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: I'll say this: I was reading along and I'm impressed; I really am. I think one of the obvious, I would say differences-- Or, perhaps, over the last two years or so that we've encountered-- I'll just preface this by saying the last 250 hearing that we held was at the Monmouth Battlefield, in the museum there, where we heard testimony from Monmouth County and their 250th about what ultimately they were doing.

And, I think what really stood out to me is that I do think there are some counties -- and, perhaps, it is tied to the fact there is the history there--

MS. RUTLEDGE: Right, right--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: --that are really leading the way in what I think we should be doing in each county, to the extent that we can.

Do you feel that, as you're going around and talking with, perhaps, different counties or maybe different legislators or mayors-- Do you see a difference in the work that you all are doing, I would say as Morris County as a whole, when you compare it to perhaps some of the other surrounding counties? And, do you think that the State-- Is there something the State could be doing more to help maybe embrace the interests that might be present in some of the other counties that we might not be seeing the activity to the level that you're doing?

MS. RUTLEDGE: Right, right.

Yes, I mean I really think we credit a lot of what we've been doing and a lot of the initiatives and programming to our partnerships. We've had such great partnerships between our Morris County Historical Society; our Heritage Commission; our county college. We brought everybody together. We have a steering committee specifically for Morris County's 250th initiative, so I think all of those partnerships locally have helped us really get this off the ground. Because, we can't do half the things on here if it weren't for them.

So, I really think it's due to that.

And, I'm sorry, what was the other part of the question?

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Yes, so do you think-- Do you think that the steering committee, the group that you have formed, is there something that the State could be doing more as we think over the next eight years-- Is there something that might be obvious in terms of the success you've seen with the work you're doing in Morris County? If you think about what it might take for other counties to try to do something similar, what could the State be doing to say, "Hey, this is how you do this," or, "This is how we're going to help you do this?"

MS. RUTLEDGE: Right. I think, really, maybe working together a little bit more between the counties might help in promoting each of our different events, or initiatives, or whatever we have going on, and finding ways that we could collaborate to possibly even make our initiatives or programming even larger.

I think each county probably has their own partnerships and things they're working on, but maybe there could be some more collaboration between us. Not sure how exactly that would look like, but that's kind of

what I'm thinking there. Because I think each county probably has their strong, as I said, partnerships with their local historical organizations and things like that. So, I think if we collaborate on the county level a little bit more, maybe we can see some more success there.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Yes; thank you.

Are there any questions from the Committee? (no response)

OK, thank you.

MS. RUTLEDGE: Thank you; thank you.

Thank you for having me.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: OK, next we will hear from representatives from Crossroads of the American Revolution.

Hi, there.

CARRIE FELLOWS : Good morning.

Good morning, Chairman Moen and Committee.

Thank you again for having Crossroads here again today.

I am Carrie Fellows; I am the Executive Director of Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area.

And, we do have a PowerPoint; I think they're queueing that up-- There we go.

Crossroads contracts with the National Park Service and receives congressionally approved Federal funding to administer the National Heritage Area. And, since 2019, Crossroads has been partnered -- thanks to State legislation -- with the New Jersey Historical Commission. So, I'm going to be speaking from Crossroads' perspective, but most of what we are doing as a national heritage area, dedicated -- the only one in the country dedicated specifically to the American Revolution -- is our role with the partnership of

Revolution NJ. And, I know my colleague, Sara Cureton, has already provided written testimony -- she was unable to be here today.

So, I'm going to touch on many of the elements that we are -- we have a larger role in, as well as some we have worked on together.

And, I just want to say thank you again for creating the legislation that provided the funding for Revolution NJ, which gives Crossroads an annual line item grant from the Historical Commission that funds a portion of our staff time that is dedicated to this so that we're not spending our Federal funds on State initiatives, and allows us to do this important work.

So, I already mentioned what we are. One of the biggest things that we have been doing as the State initiative with Revolution NJ is to engage formally with municipalities, counties, nonprofits, businesses, and schools. And, this has really been one of our most effective programs to build State engagement across disciplines. It allows-- The partnership program allows organizations to use the appropriate Revolution NJ partner logo on all their 250th program materials, so we have one for communities; for municipalities and counties; one for not-for-profits, the proud partner; and, then schools, which we initiated last spring. This has been growing monthly, and this also provides a link on the *revnj.org* website to each of the organizations or governments that is participating in the initiative. And, it also creates a unified branded commemorative element across the constituency, even when the partners are using their own 250 logos.

Touching on what you had asked Samantha, I think one of the most important things that legislators can do is to encourage the municipalities and the not-for-profits in their districts to create a resolution

supporting the initiative and saying that they're going to participate, and also for the community organizations. And, it can be not-for-profits; it can be small businesses; it can even be corporations, universities, to become proud partners to engage with the initiative and use our branding. Because that unites us all.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Yes, and there are draft resolutions that are available.

MS. FELLOWS: There absolutely are draft resolutions on the website, and they're drafts because we realize that municipalities are all different, and you're going to want to create something that's unique to yours.

I'm just going to whiz through our signature programs, because I think Sara may have provided you some information on this as well. These are a couple of our-- This is a list of all of them. I'm going to hit on some of the bigger ones that are really important to our heritage tourism effort.

Our Tavern Talks have been incredibly popular. Unfortunately, they're all booked for this year. The locations-- We are now reserving locations for 2027. But, they feature costumed interpreters, and New Jersey's amazing small breweries. And, it's a great way for people to learn about how the question of independence affected people of various social and economic statuses. And, at the end, you have to decide which side to take in this defining moment for the American colonies. So, it's a little bit of role playing there, even with the participants, and it's kind of like speed dating; they move from table to table and talk with different reenactors.

Garden State Roots is a podcast, and this was developed by Historical Commission staff -- our colleagues -- with the assistance of a

professional podcast producer. And, this is where Crossroads comes in, as we are the fiscal agent as the not-for-profit for the initiative. And, we've got highlighted in green -- which is barely seeable -- but the top three are the ones that are already released. We will continue to release those through this year, and they're online, and they're really fun, and they kind of give you different perspective. And, we're hoping this as well will help to draw some tourism.

Another initiative effort is the Liberty Trail NJ app -- this was developed in collaboration and partnership with the American Battlefield Trust. And, building on their work that began with the Princeton Battlefield Society at Princeton Battlefield State Park, the Liberty Trail NJ app is designed for the original 13 colonies to commemorate the semiquincentennial. It is a *very* powerful heritage tourism aide; it combines easy-to-find stories about each area that's listed, as well as suggestions for visiting other non-military attractions. Obviously, ABT is very interested in battlefields, but our initiative is for all participants in the American Revolution, and how those ideals affect us down to today. We completed Phase 1 in 2025, and Phases 2 and 3 will release this year.

To help promote that, *Historically Correct* is a promotional video series with Nick Ferroni, he's a Union High School teacher, and he's the face and voice of the video series. He visits historic sites that are featured in the Liberty Trail app, and interacts with the visiting public at the sites to see what they've learned -- gives them a little pop quiz -- and find out how they feel about the stories. It's very fun, it's really sweet, and they keep putting out more episodes. So, I encourage you to have a look at that as well.

This element last year -- and, we're going to do it again when we have it this year -- was a Patriot's Week pop-up visitor center in downtown

Trenton. Trenton visitors have never had a single place to gather and get warm; sit down; have a place to eat their lunch at a table; use a restroom that was clean and open to the public during Patriot's Week. This was supported by the Revolution NJ's event planner, who dedicated staff to running the pop-up center at 1 West State at the corner Historic, which is the location of four historic Revolutionary taverns in the city, in the period. It's right on the main drag, on the corner. And, our announcement on social media -- which was boosted by \$1,000 to promote the event on Facebook and Instagram -- was by far the most widely seen and engaging post in Rev NJ social media history.

Crossroads hired our social media manager through quickSilver, his company, and he has really transformed the way the public sees us. He's got kind of a -- little bit of a snarky voice that he uses for Revolution NJ; it's inquisitive and it gets you excited about things.

Tracking some of our statistics for Patriot's Week can be challenging, because they're free; don't require registration. But, the website had 19,000 views and 7,700 active users in 2025, which was up 52% from last year. And, of the active users, 4,700 were new visitors. Google reports that during 2025 Patriot's Week event, there was an increase of 15% of organic searches for Patriot's Week, and an increase of 230% in social media activity around Patriot's Week. A lot of this was the result of Crossroads having applied to New Jersey Travel and Tourism for a marketing grant, specifically to support Patriot's Week activities. And, despite having to close on Friday, December 2026 (*sic*) for a winter storm -- remember that horrible ice storm right after the holidays -- our state partners report excellent event

attendance on the other days of the museum and the library and the planetarium.

So, you can see on the screen the last year, December 1 on the left, and then the big pop for December 2025. And, then, you can see the age, gender, and cities -- and, this is all in your handout.

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: I wanted to mention recently -- through the Chair--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Yes--

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: --we really appreciated that you had the pop-up center set up in the State House--

MS. FELLOWS: Yes--

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: --and we got to see it firsthand walking through the hallways. And, very impressive.

MS. FELLOWS: To get to see the exhibit.

ASSEMBLYMAN BAILEY: To get to see the exhibit, yes.

MS. FELLOWS: Excellent. Yes, I didn't put that in here because I knew Sara was going to talk about that. (laughter)

But, it is a wonderful exhibit.

National opportunities for this July and ongoing-- And, thank you, Chairman, for mentioning that this is indeed a long-term commemoration -- it goes all the way to 2033; we will have things going on that whole period.

Light to Unite is lighting public buildings in red, white, and blue on July 4. Easy low-hanging fruit; that's an easy thing for organizations and communities and companies to do. America Gives is an America 250 program that counts volunteer hours for registered nonprofits nationwide.

Keep America Beautiful, The Greatest American Cleanup collects 250 million pieces of trash by July 4 -- that's their goal; I'm sure they're going to make it. And, America's Potluck is something that we're promoting hard with Crossroads and Rev NJ. It's initiated by Utah 250, and it encourages people to gather with their communities on July 5 to share conversation and food in an effort to bring our divided population back together again. And, Sharing the Spirit of America -- again, an easy one. This was initiated by Hawaii 250 for all states and territories to participate in reading the Declaration of Independence aloud in their communities at 6 p.m. on July 8, commemorating the first public reading of the document in 1776. And, New Jersey will be doing this in Trenton during Heritage Week 2026 -- that will be our official reading for Revolution NJ.

So, the roadmap to 2026: Continue our statewide signature programs; promote our county and local programs and initiatives, because our marketing strategy is promoting 75% of other peoples' stuff, 25% of Revolution NJ's stuff. And, then, promoting our State partner programs and initiatives -- so, things that are going on in the various State agencies -- our State parks, especially, and historic sites. Installing state historic markers; statewide celebrations the whole week of July 1 through 8. Patriot's Week in 2026 will be the 250th of Washington crossing the Delaware and the battles of Trenton and Princeton. And, ongoing commemoration through 2033. And, Revolution NJ *and* Crossroads, together and independently, will be hosting activations and tablings all over the state during the year with a special effort the week of July 4.

We are still working on what it is we are going to be doing for our *big* thing, since our big thing was canceled at Liberty State Park. We have

several irons in the fire; we've got meetings going on this week and next week to talk more about that. And, of course, we are super excited about the opening of the Visitor Center this year at Washington Crossing Visitor Center. So, I can give you a hint that probably something will happen around that as well, as some other things that we're working on.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Very exciting.

Thank you, Carrie.

Carrie, would it make sense for us to read Sara's testimony, and then see if there's any questions for you--

MS. FELLOWS: Sure--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: --as it relates to both testimony?

Sorry, this is-- This is Sara Cureton, Executive Director, New Jersey Historical Commission, within the New Jersey Department of State. This is her written, submitted testimony. She was unable to make it today, but she did ask if we -- if she could submit testimony to be read.

I think it does compliment, Carrie, the testimony we just heard from you.

MR. BRINKERHOFF (Reading testimony from Sara Cureton):
"Chairman Moen and members of the Assembly Committee on Tourism, Gaming, and the Arts, kindly accept the following testimony on behalf of the New Jersey Department of State regarding Revolution NJ, New Jersey's official planning initiative for the semiquincentennial, or 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

Revolution NJ continues to serve as a national leader in the programming and preparation for the nation's landmark anniversary. Planning in New Jersey began in 2018, with the passage of Legislative Bill

A4194, that provided an annual appropriation of \$500,000 to support efforts in recognition of the semiquincentennial. The New Jersey Historical Commission and Crossroads of the American Revolution formed the public-private partnership that is Revolution NJ. Over the past eight years, the initiatives of the partnership encouraged community engagement in the development of the 250th programs that advanced the role that history plays in public discourse, community engagement, education, tourism, and scholarship in New Jersey.

The NJHC has also developed a series of programs that explore the history of the American Revolution, its context, and its legacy. Through these efforts, Revolution NJ is galvanizing diverse audiences statewide into embracing the enduring value and relevance of history. The NJHC has fostered a robust grassroots network of proud partners, communities, and Revolutionary Schools that spread activity and outreach throughout the state. Additional funds have been allocated by the State for capital projects at State-owned historic sites related to the American Revolution. These capital projects are focused on making these sites visitor ready for this critical anniversary period. The NJHC, on behalf of the Secretary of State, looks forward to celebrating these milestone accomplishments with our legislators and fellow citizens throughout the coming year.

Revolution NJ also serves as the liaison for State agencies, county, and local governments in Federal commemorative efforts for the semiquincentennial. Representing New Jersey and national gatherings of State 250th planners, the New Jersey Historical Commission receives regular communications from America 250, the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission. Revolution NJ then shares information about national program

opportunities with partners on a regular basis -- including but not limited to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, which is undertaking capital improvement and preservation projects at 10 State-owned Revolutionary War sites.

To help the public connect with the history of the American Revolution and its legacy, Revolution NJ launched a series of keystone programs. History Happened Here engages middle and high school students in exploring the Declaration of Independence and how the ideals it expresses have impacted their own communities. A celebration for students participating in this program is planned for May 28. Foundations of Democracy is a new civics tool kit aimed at grades K-5. Both programs are part of Revolutionary Schools, which was developed in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education.

Additionally, a traveling exhibition titled, Revolutionary Lives: Living the American Experiment Then and Now explores the everyday people of the American Revolution in New Jersey. It is fully booked for 2026, and already in demand for 2027. Over 50 venues will or have scheduled to host the exhibition so far. The exhibition also appears in a stationary form in the new archives gallery at 225 West State Street in Trenton, New Jersey.

History Pinned provides unique pins to visitors at featured New Jersey historic sites during the summer and fall tourism high season. This is the third year of this program. Participating sites for this year are the Dey Mansion in Wayne; Howell Living History Farm in Hopewell Township; the Battleship New Jersey in Camden; the Peter Mott House in Lawnside; and the Bruce Springsteen Archive and Center for the American Music in Long Branch.

To experience history in a unique way, the Revolution NJ Race Series offers 5K races and 1-mile fun walks at historic Revolutionary War sites. This year, six races were planned at Cedar Bridge Tavern, Ocean County; Red Bank Battlefield, in Gloucester County; Fort Lee, Bergen County; Monmouth Battlefield, Monmouth County; Princeton Battlefield, Mercer County; and Batsto Village, Atlantic County.

You can now participate in Revolution NJ and the history of New Jersey as you are traveling through the Liberty Trail New Jersey app, which highlights key Revolutionary War sites in New Jersey, providing itineraries, biographies, and other information related to heritage tourism. Additional sites will be added to the app through 2026.

A podcast called *Garden State Roots: New Jersey's Revolutionary History* highlights highly relevant themes and state history. The award-winning Tavern Talks series brings historical interpreters in New Jersey, craft breweries, and more events are being added daily.

In partnership with the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Revolution NJ will present Revolutionary Acts, a public arts program, showcasing performances and programs by New Jersey-based artists Anika and Nandi Jordan (*sic*). The program will invite visitors to reflect on memory, resilience, and the stories that continue to shape civic life. Activations are planned for Camden, Trenton, and Fort Lee in September 2026.

A special series of historical markers is in preparation for this anniversary. The goal of the State Historical Marker Program 250th Initiative is to explore the whole history of America's independence from its origins in the American Revolution through its Revolutionary legacy. Throughout 2026, approved markers will be fabricated and installed. After installation,

NJHC will develop virtual resources to accompany the markers and provide additional information about the sites' histories.

Revolution NJ also supports several nationwide programs by encouraging participation by New Jersey partners and constituents. These include Spirit of America, a national effort calling Americans to read the Declaration of Independence together at 6 p.m. on July 8; America's Potluck, a program encouraging Americans to come together and share a meal on July 5; Light to Unite, a call to illuminate public buildings in red, white, and blue on July 4, and the Great American Cleanup, sponsored by Keep America Beautiful.

As noted previously, Revolution NJ manages two key partnership programs: Revolution NJ Communities, and Revolution NJ Proud Partners, to encourage statewide participation. Municipalities and counties are encouraged to pass resolutions to become Revolution NJ communities, thereby embracing the mission and goals of this initiative and initiating planning for their own commemorative activities. Similarly, organizations of all kinds can apply to become proud partners and support the effort through their own programs. This outreach continues to grow every week with more joining to build networks and share ideas for programming and promote their offerings. All communities and proud partners are listed on the Revolution NJ website, www.revNJ.org, and are regularly featured on our social media platforms.

New Jersey has a truly unparalleled story to tell when it comes to the history of the Revolutionary era. The crossroads of the American Revolution, New Jersey saw over 600 battles, skirmishes, and acts of war, including the 10 crucial days of Washington's crossing, and the Battles of

Trenton and Princeton; the Battle of Monmouth -- the hottest and longest battle of the war; and, Morristown, the site of the 1780 encampment during the coldest winter of the war. New Jersey is investing in over a dozen of these sites, making capital improvements to get them visitor ready for anticipated increased visitation, and to transform New Jersey into a must-see destination for residents and visitors from around the country and around the world for years to come. Of note is the brand new Visitor Center, currently under construction at Washington Crossing State Park, New Jersey.

Marketing is a critical component in building visitation to New Jersey. In 2025, Revolution NJ conducted an initial marketing campaign in partnership with the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism, highlighting some of New Jersey's Revolutionary figures from the past 250 years. NJHC and the New Jersey Department of State will continue the partnership with travel and tourism as we promote our rich history and historical destinations to both visitors and residents. Revolution NJ also has numerous resources available to the public 250th planners and anyone interested in New Jersey history. This includes a detailed handbook; blog posts; recorded webinars; and lesson plans -- all of which can be found on www.revNJ.org/resources. Past newsletters, quarterly updates, and presentations and a press kit are also available. It offers free planning resources, detailed information on individual programs, and a 250th calendar of events. The partnership is also active on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

Revolution NJ is guided by its goal of presenting a diverse and inclusive history of New Jersey's past that invites participation from everyone. Guided by community input, priority is placed on strengthening heritage tourism to the state; enhancing state history education; encouraging

civic engagement; and building support for state history resources and programs. As New Jersey enters this anniversary year, Revolution NJ plans to build support for state history that will continue throughout the eight years of Revolutionary War commemoration and beyond.

Respectfully submitted, Sara Cureton, Executive Director, New Jersey Historical Commission.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thanks, Ryan.

Take a break, all right?

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Well, I wanted to make sure that that testimony is read in the record. I think it reflects, as we said, a compliment to, certainly, the testimony we heard today in person.

Carrie, I think one question I have, just from reading through this and seeing your testimony -- is there anything that you think, going back to that legislation that was originally creating the support-- And, I'll just say this so that-- I don't think we all realize this, that each member of the Legislature that's serving on this Committee was not in the Legislature when it was initially created, so I think this is helpful to understand.

We're now in 2026; that legislation was created in 2018. As you think about the next eight years, is there anything that perhaps you think that the legislation might not have accomplished that you're seeing now as you're looking back over the last eight years, that perhaps the Legislature should consider as we're looking towards the next eight years? Where I think a lot of folks -- and, I don't want to speak for my former colleagues back then -- may have thought that 2026 was, like, the end goal here.

I'm curious where things stand now, if there's anything that's obvious that we're missing or we should be looking at.

MS. FELLOWS: I don't want to encourage you to increase the State budget--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: (laughter)

MS. FELLOWS: (laughter)

But, a good portion of the funding that we receive is spent on Crossroads' side -- staff time. A good third of it or more is spent on staff time. And, then, a lot of the rest of the funding, it's a historical commission -- already having the resources of the State of New Jersey behind it takes \$200,000; Crossroads takes \$300,000. Out of that, about \$130,000 and change goes towards staff time for the initiative. The rest is divided up between programs. For example, the race series -- none of us have the expertise to run or time a 5K; we bring in a contractor who handles that.

So, we fund that position. We also fund our marketing in-house through quickSilver, our marketing consultant, who is -- does our social media; does our calendar; does the website. And, then, on top of that is the funding for the contract with the advertising agency that is through Travel and Tourism.

So, this year, of course, is the biggest year for marketing. And, I think if New Jersey wanted to see more tourism-- As you may know, we're a little behind the rest of the country. We're working on it, but we're still a little behind the rest of the country, given the resources that we have. Additional funding for Travel and Tourism, and potentially for the Revolution NJ initiative from marketing, specifically, would be very helpful, I think, to bring people not just in our state, to our programs, but bringing

people from out of state. So, we're not just a drive by. Unfortunately, I think that's a lot of what happens; people are -- they're heading down to Virginia to Williamsburg -- I love Williamsburg -- and they're going -- or, they're doing Boston, Philadelphia, Virginia, and they're skipping us. Even though they're driving through us, they're skipping us, and there's so much here that we have to share. You can do everything in New Jersey -- you can hike; you can ski; you can swim; you can play at the beach. (laughter)

You can go see a historic site. You can shop. There's everything. So, I think that's one of the areas I think we could -- we could improve.

I don't want to speak for Sara, but she would probably say, "more programming funding." (laughter)

That has been the biggest limit on our Tavern Talks. We probably have one ask a week for, "How can I get a Tavern Talk in my area?" We have enough funding to do one a month, and a finite number of costumed interpreters who we can pay to do that. So, that would be another thing.

But, like I said, I don't *really* want to ask you all to increase the State budget, because I know we're constantly fighting against that anyway. But, those are some of the things. There's-- It's always with money, right?

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Yes, and I think what was important-- And I caught on this a couple years ago as the markers, the historic markers were -- the program was being embraced and executed-- And, I think this is helpful for my colleagues on the Committee.

So, if there were-- As we heard in Sara's testimony, there's 600 sites, battle sites, around the state. So, if there were sites in any of our districts, that we're hearing from mayors that might not result in being what will be designated as a battlefield, but perhaps might be a skirmish, or

something along those lines. There's an opportunity to connect with those communities and say, "We could begin the discussion about proposing this as a site for a marker that could be incorporated into the State's larger planning."

MS. FELLOWS: Totally; absolutely, yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: I think in my district, in the 5th, the Battle of Gloucester is one that's-- I think, over time, research is showing that there's a little bit more than perhaps what recognition was maybe given or followed from that. And, I think that's an example of one where we are then engaging with some of the local folks in those towns -- Haddonfield, Audubon, Mt. Ephraim, Gloucester City to see what interest there might be in having something like that incorporated.

But, it's not-- I think what was important for us as we took testimony in Monmouth was to realize that the State should be supporting the existing programming at these truly historic sites. But, there are opportunities, also, around the rest of the state to show perhaps that first investment or maybe a little bit less support, but in proportion it's enough to see that individual skirmish or something be highlighted in a way that it never was before.

MS. FELLOWS: Right, exactly. And, my colleagues at the Historical Commission initiated a special grant program -- and, forgive me, I don't recall how many years it goes -- but, it was specifically on top of their regular grant funding to allow research into the history that's not told about our state sites. And, those grants were usually fairly small -- I mean, they were usually in the \$5,000 to \$15,000 range -- that allowed historic sites to

do that research; to engage a professional to help them pull those stories out so that we can tell them better. And, that program had tremendous impact.

I encourage you to reach out to Sara for more information on that, because I'm -- I'm a secondary source on that one.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Understood.

MS. FELLOWS: But, I know just from the work that the initiative had done early on started in 2018 right after legislation, and culminated with the final reports in kind of the turn of 2021, where there was historic preservational -- preservation professionals, heritage tourism professionals, and programming professionals that pull together this major report that looked at over 150 historic sites in the state.

That report leveraged individual small historic sites to get additional grant funds to do the work to become visitor-ready; to hire professionals to help them tell their stories better; and to get them on the map. So, those-- That kind of support is really transformational for the work that we all do.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Are there any other questions from the Committee?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROWAN: I have a question.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Assemblywoman.

ASSEMBLYMAN ROWAN: First of all, thank you very much for your testimony. It was very illuminating.

And, I don't want to be negative, but I do have a question.

Given the fact that many people in our country now want to erase history, have -- to the best of your knowledge -- have you or any other organizations faced any pushback about the content of your exhibits, or what

you're trying to do, or any attempts to control what you're trying to present to the public?

MS. FELLOWS: I wouldn't say we've had anyone trying to control the presentation of history. And, yes, we have had a little bit of pushback, but I would say a very little. There are always going to be haters; they come out on social media when we have a post, periodically, that features maybe a mixed-race couple dancing together. But, that's, I guess, unfortunately to be expected in the society we live in today. But, Revolution NJ was created with a very strong mission to make New Jersey's history open and accessible and celebrated for everyone who lives here. As one of the most diverse states in the union, that's important to all of us who are engaged in this work.

ASSEMBLYMAN ROWAN: Thank you very much.

MS. FELLOWS: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Are there any other questions?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: I have a question.

Thank you for your testimony.

I just have a question-- I mean, I've only been here a few years, but in terms of the budget decisions and things like that, if the budget were able to allow you to do more, would that -- would you be able to expand programs here in 2026? Or, is that more looking ahead to 2027?

MS. FELLOWS: It would be looked ahead--

ASSEMBLYMAN DONLON: Ahead; OK--

MS. FELLOWS: --yes, pretty much, we're booked out for this year.

ASSEMBLYMAN DONLON: Yes.

MS. FELLOWS: People I think who haven't really been thinking about 2026 and realizing that it was the anniversary have awakened to the fact that it is now here. And, unfortunately for some of them, it's -- they won't be able to create something new. But, that's been one of the elements of our publicizing initiative, is you don't have to create something new; you can take a program that you already have in your community or at your historic site, and you can rebrand it as a 250th program. Because we're still celebrating all of New Jersey's history, right up until today.

So, it's-- If you have an element that responds to immigration or any of the founders' ideals -- liberty; freedom for all people; pursuit of happiness -- that can be incorporated into something you already have going.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: And, just to clarify, using the Tavern Talks as an example -- when you say we're booked out, it means we can hold -- we're holding as many as we can, but in terms of attendance, it's still open to the public? If Assemblyman McClellan wanted to go to the May 10 Tavern Talk that's happening in Cape May County--

MS. FELLOWS: Oh, yes -- yes--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: --he can still--

MS. FELLOWS: Yes--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Right.

MS. FELLOWS: Tickets are open, it's just the sites--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: OK--

MS. FELLOWS: --and the reenactors that we hire to do those are already determined.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Got it.

MS. FELLOWS: And, the funding that pays those individuals is already accounted for; so, it's covered.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Any other questions? (no response)

MS. FELLOWS: Thank you very much for your allowing me to present today.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: OK, and to wrap us up we're going to hear from representatives from the New Jersey Tourism Industry Association.

ALEXIS BAILEY: Good morning, Chairman--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Morning--

MS. BAILEY: --and members of the Committee.

My name is Alexis Bailey; I'm with Public Strategies Impact, here today with my client from the New Jersey Tourism Industry Association.

NJTIA is a membership trade association representing all facets of tourism in New Jersey. We have destination marketing organizations; chambers of commerce; attractions that are all part of our association. And, we're proud to advocate for the over \$50 billion industry that tourism is in New Jersey.

And, I would like to start first by thanking you, Chairman, and members of the Committee for taking this Committee on the road. I think it really has invigorated our focus on tourism in really highlighting all the different assets that we have across the state. I know someone mentioned we have, of course, our heritage tourism, but you can ski; snowboard; surf; all of it in New Jersey -- go to our great wineries. So, we really appreciate you -- all of you guys -- driving around across the state to highlight all of our different assets.

But, here with me today we have the President of the Greater Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Office. She is a Vice President on the NJTIA board, here to talk a little bit about the different things that our DMOs are doing across the state to highlight tourism and the 250th.

Like you mentioned earlier in someone else's testimony, New Jersey is really diverse, and all of our DMOs are really working with the resources and assets that they have in their area to really put the 250 spin on whatever they have. Whether it's a battlefield, or even if it's their wineries, fireworks displays, whatever they have to really make it special for the 250th.

So, I'll turn it over to Jen to go over what's going on across the state--

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Alexis, can I ask you -- could you explain, just for-- We have many new members on the Committee. When you say DMO, can you just explain what that means?

MS. BAILEY: Yes, so, DMOs are destination marketing organizations. They are recognized by the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism, and get grants from the State to do marketing efforts in their areas. Some of them are countywide -- like, "Visit South Jersey" for example is one of them that covers multiple counties -- some are more focused on a town and an area; like, there is the Meadowlands district, they have theirs which is about 14 towns. Jen represents a DMO which is Elizabeth and that area.

So, they are unique in geography, but all receive grants from the State and really focus on highlighting their specific assets in their area.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you.

MS. BAILEY: Thanks.

Let's move to Jen.

JENNIFER M. COSTA: Thank you so much for your leadership to our industry. It's so needed, especially now -- 2026 is a pivotal year, not just for the World Cup, but for the opportunity we have to grow heritage tourism.

So, a special thank you to NJTIA for affording me the opportunity for the next 10 minutes to give you an overview of what the other DMOs are doing across the state.

So, we'll jump through-- I'm not scripted; we're going to kind of keep it informal, so, please, I welcome questions as we go through.

We're going to be highlighting all the way from Sussex County and concluding in my area of Elizabeth. But, you heard briefly from Samantha in Monmouth (*sic*); we'll speak to Wildwood and what South Jersey is doing as well.

So, in Sussex County, they have on Sunday, June 7, they have their 250th celebrations at the fairgrounds. It's a family-friendly community event. So, patriotic festivities including vendors, games, and fireworks for all ages. They also allocated one location, the Skylands Stadium in Augusta, New Jersey. And, there they have multiple events happening at the same location. May 8, a drone show. On June 20, they have George Washington -- a bobblehead giveaway. July 3 and 4, fireworks and a multi-day event. And, then, on Fourth of July, featuring their hometown heroes.

And, that's a trend that you'll see throughout -- a lot of the DMOs highlighting Fourth of July as the pivotal celebration.

Moving right along, you heard earlier from Samantha, everything from their 5K of June 14 throughout, and their county library festivities.

They do have an individual URL where all the events are posted. And, they have a great booklet as well that she mentioned earlier.

In Wildwood-- Wildwood is taking a lead, like some of our other DMOs, where they have regular scheduled events, but their 250-izing it. So, they're kind of putting that 250 twist. So, June 18 through the 21, they have the Barefoot Country Music Fest happening. June 28 through August 23, the Fox Park Amphitheater Concert Series. Fourth of July and fireworks. And, then, the fifth of July, the patriotic drone show. All of their events as well can be featured on their calendar, and the URL is posted.

South Jersey-- South Jersey has put a little bit of a spin on things. They actually created a separate website as a couple of our DMOs have done, but they've put together an itinerary builder so people can actually travel and experience South Jersey through Revolutionary War history and identify resources, places, events, and programming. So, through this separate website, you can actually build an itinerary. And, again, their URLs are posted there.

One aspect that we thought was super creative when it comes to marketing are these fun buttons or stickers that they created; very attractive themes. "Crossing the Delaware;" "It must be a Jersey thing;" "George Washington called it pork roll--" not confirmed, but highly possible.

(laughter)

MS. COSTA: So, it's taking history that may be dormant -- typically in a textbook -- and trying to bring it to life. And, this is just, again, the different creative ways that the DMOs are doing it.

Specifically in my area for Elizabeth and Union County, we were the original capital to the State of New Jersey. And, so, Mayor Bollwage was

one of the first mayors to put together a commission and, through a resolution, put together programming. And, with the county, it started back in January. There was an event with the Lenape talking about Native Americans; they did an event in February with WQXR personality radio host Terrance McKnight. There's going to be topics of programming-- Women in the American Revolution with Joanne Rajoppi, who is one of our elected officials, as well as a well-known historian and author. We're telling the difficult story as well when it comes to the history of immigration. We're tying in children's programming -- there's even a colonial camp for kids -- trying to make it multi-generational.

But, speaking to a couple of the specific events, Fourth of July -- we will not only be having Fourth of July festivities, but we're doing a multi-event at our waterfront, which is going to also encompass a FIFA watch party. So, we're trying to keep both themes relevant. Also, October-- I'm sorry, so, June 20, tying into Juneteenth, we're telling the story of Black history. Elizabeth has one of the oldest cemeteries in the State of New Jersey, and this is where we have found that in our cemetery there are American Revolutionary War figures buried, as well as over 313 enslaved and free members that had no marker prior to recent. So, we're actually telling that untold story. There will be an event Juneteenth, on June 20.

We are also putting together, October 14 through the 18, Four Centuries in a Weekend, and we're having a descendants conference. So, the cemetery that I mentioned -- they have been meeting monthly, virtually, across the country. And, so, they are speaking dialogue of where they are, what they know about their ancestors. And, so, during the week of Four Centuries, we're bringing everyone together. And, so, when we're speaking

of what's going to happen for the next eight years, we're looking at this descendant's conference to speak and to share healing of so much what our nation needs right now. And, it will be an annual conference.

In addition this week, we're-- Everyone knows *Bridgerton* right now; that's like a big trending Netflix-- We are actually recreating a *Bridgerton* ball. And, so, it'll be complete with horse-drawn carriage and period attire and cuisine. We are having the *Bridgerton* -- our Elizabeth Town Ball; the descendants conference; and, then, Four Centuries in a Weekend, where we'll have all the county museums open for free. And, so, this is where -- through our tourism -- we're traveling the country at different trade shows, promoting our Elizabeth attractions for heritage tourism.

And, then, throughout 2026, we are soon to open the Elizabeth Historic Train Station as an official welcome center. And, it'll be telling the story of Elizabeth and the 250th. And, we've even had one of our local businesses get involved. Mr. George Ortega owns one of three Lincoln vehicles in the world, and he actually branded it for the 250th for us. So, this vehicle has become a landmark, and it's been traveling at our different events and parades. And, we've created a children's cartoon version, and we're telling the story also through AI and our social media -- that's been trending tremendously.

And, so, we, too, have a separate website -- *goElizabethNJ250th* -- but then that also mirrors our regular tourism site. So, we're trying to reach multi-generational activity and programming, just like many of our other partners throughout the state like here in Morristown.

And, lastly, I will conclude-- As you all are looking for your next location to visit, we welcome you all in Trenton on May 7 to meet the DMOs.

Come out and not just meet Samantha and myself, but in one room, through NJTIA and our leadership, we're going to have all of our DMOs. So, we welcome you to join us for breakfast. And, that'll be May 7 at the War Memorial.

MS. BAILEY: Yes, that's our annual advocacy day. We know we've had, Chairman, one of our award winners; Assemblymen, you've been award winners, too, so we welcome you all to attend and have breakfast with us.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Great.

Well, thank you--

MS. COSTA: Thank you, and -- sorry -- just one last thing that I-- It's actually developing as early as last week.

Sail Force America is one of the big things that New York City is focusing on with all the tall ships. And, us in Elizabeth, we are actually coordinating to have the tall ships -- one of them -- docked at our marinas. We're trying to tie that in as well.

Thank you so much again for the opportunity to share a little bit about my hometown, as well as what our partners are doing throughout the state.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you; thank you.

I think one obvious point I'd like to make is that we -- from the testimony this morning -- is we started with I think, what I would say from a county perspective, the efforts of here in Morris County of the 250th. And, we saw from Carrie's perspective what the State is doing in partnership with Sara Cureton.

And, then, I think what's really interesting -- and, I think as a Committee, what we really should be thinking about -- is, hearing this testimony, you can begin to see how counties are leveraging the investment from the 250th into events that might not necessarily in any other year have a tie to the history of the country, or the 250th, or the Revolution. But, this year, because of that ability to stand on the foundation of the leverage point of the 250 planning, there is that opportunity there.

And, so, the counties that are doing that are the counties that are -- I think are doing it the right way in being able to show that ability to really propel beyond what, perhaps, we all might have expected would have been just 250 planning from the start. And, I think that's -- we're seeing that particularly I think in certain areas of the state around the World Cup. And, I think putting those two things together and then figuring out how they connect -- that's really how you're going to unlock the potential from a tourism perspective; economic development; filling restaurants; filling hotels. That's the combination.

I think what one thing we-- Just last week, I met with the Lieutenant Governor, and we were talking about how there are these opportunities that exist where, if you are able to invest -- whether it be in 2026 or over the next eight years -- in certain initiatives, whether it's building parks, or buildings, or investments that might not have occurred in any other year, but because of what we're seeing in front of us, that that can really pay dividends down the line as it relates to our communities and having this infrastructure that might be in place over time. And, I think that's something that, collectively-- Carrie, to your point earlier, I think we collectively can think about how, while we might be wrapping up the semiquincentennial,

there's a way to put us in a position to celebrate the next 50 years in a way where maybe that would not have occurred five or 10 years ago.

And, so, I think that's the lens that we as a Committee are looking through as we're having these conversations. I do want to just ask one question about that, though. And, Alexis, I think-- We've had some conversations about this. Do you think that, as we couple what the State is doing to support the 250th, and then knowing that obviously we're wedged between the World Cup New York/New Jersey host committee, and the Philadelphia FIFA host committee -- do we see any opportunities that maybe we're not yet capitalizing on, or do you think that we could be getting more out of that leverage position with those host committees?

MS. BAILEY: Yes, I think our DMOs are trying their best. I know we're scrappy in New Jersey; we're grateful for the resources that we get from the State, but of course we're between Philly and New York, like you said, that spend exorbitantly more than us on tourism marketing than we're able to. And, of course, you have Philly and New York City have their own brand. And, when we're talking about some of the different, unique aspects of New Jersey -- like Carrie mentioned -- sometimes we kind of get skipped over.

But, I think it's really on our DMOs right now who are working on highlighting the attractions that they do have, like you mentioned, and really putting a 250 spin on them. Because, we know we don't have maybe resources to reinvent the wheel on everything and create totally new programming -- which, in some ways, we are, but in other ways we kind of have to just tack onto what we have, like the Wildwoods and their Barefoot Country Music Festival, for example. It's a huge attraction for them; they're

putting a bit of a 250 spin, highlighting veterans throughout that programming as well.

So, I think it's capitalizing on what we already have and how we can expand on that, and really we know there's a lot of visitors, whether they're coming for the 250th or FIFA that maybe have never been to New Jersey before, and we want to make sure that our destinations are visitor ready. I know that's a big thing that a lot of our DMOs have been working on, on how are you interacting with people who might be from other countries; how are we educating them on tipping in New Jersey? Which, you know, if you're coming from Europe, you don't tip in any restaurants; you don't have to do that.

So, just things like that that we're preparing for people of different cultures to make sure that they're having a great experience and they're going to come back for eight years and beyond for other 250th experiences that we have. But, also, next time they're thinking of a family vacation, maybe they'll think of coming to the Jersey Shore the next time they're planning something to come to the United States.

So, I think all of those things are just things that we have to be a little bit more scrappy on; innovative on how we can really stretch the dollars that we do have.

I will say, we're very appreciative of the legislation that all of you supported last session to make sure that tourism gets that minimum funding level for advertising and promotion. Governor Sherrill included that \$17.6 million in her proposed budget thanks to the legislation that you guys were all supportive of in lame duck, so we appreciate that.

But, I think there's always ways for us to grow. I know the Lieutenant Governor is very excited, and I think is going to bring some innovative ideas to the Department of State on how we can really reimagine tourism. Because it is an economic driver, and if we could have visitors come and pay taxes, we'd love that more than all of your constituents, of course. So, there's definitely opportunities there for us. I think if we can just reimagine how we're investing in tourism, I think would be helpful.

And, really, us at NJTIA try to serve as a connector for all of our DMOs. Because, as you can see, every area is doing things differently. So, where we can learn from each other and pull different ideas and resources I think is the best way to do it. But, I think us -- I want to say lacking a little bit of a kind of top-down approach, which is good, because New Jersey is so different in every area. But, it is a unique challenge in that sense, that every area kind of has to do their own thing in a way. But, we try to make sure that we're sharing ideas and can kind of capitalize on those opportunities.

So, I hope that kind of answered your questions.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Yes; thank you.

MS. COSTA: And, if I can just also interject and extend a heartfelt plea to all of you for your continued leadership.

But, there is one pillar that is missing right now to strengthen and kind of unify all of us -- and, that's the leadership Ms. Bailey mentioned, stemming from the top down through the Division of Travel and Tourism. You heard about today, such great programming and so many good things. But, what good is it going to be if there's empty taverns? If people aren't visiting our attractions? And, that's where we really collectively have to come together and unify the voice for heritage tourism -- for tourism in general to

our state. Because, we have it just as good as any other state, but how do we come together to really amplify what each person is doing in that voice for New Jersey so we don't get overlooked?

So, that's where we're just looking to all of you for your leadership; our new Lieutenant Governor, and Governor Sherrill. So, it's something where we're all here; we're ready; we're eager; and we're seeking that guidance. But, we do want to come together, because everyone is so siloed doing wonderful things. But, we need that umbrella, and we need that guidance from the State down.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Are there any other questions from the Committee?

Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Yes, I was just-- Somebody had mentioned about New Jersey being a drive-through state, and I think that's incredibly true. We also have a lot of great rest stops along the highways. And, I'm wondering what efforts have been made either in terms of literature, or maybe even small museum exhibits or something -- something that would be there to promote, "Hey, you're getting off at -- you're between these exits, you can get off and see X, Y, and Z."

MS. COSTA: So, if you've seen at different rest stop areas, they started to name them with different things, whether it's Bon Jovi or Whitney Houston. So, I think it's slowly starting to come to life.

The visitor centers are still very traditional in the program booklets. I love the idea of what you're suggesting, doing more pop up. But, with that comes coordination needed from the top down. So, this is where I

know for our area, we'd be ready to do a pop up tomorrow; we would love that opportunity. But, again, we need that window on the door to be open. Because, just like there's other pop ups that are equally eager, it stems from the top down.

So, we're here; we're ready.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN DONLON: Yes; OK.

MS. BAILEY: And, I think the Division right now is updating the pamphlets that you have to do the new branding with Governor Sherrill and everything like that. So, I think that's being updated at this point.

MS. COSTA: And, the clock is really ticking for that kickoff. Looking at the 250th, being at a pivotal moment for the next eight years as the trajectory. But, we have the world's largest sporting event coming to our area. Global eyes are going to be looking at New Jersey. We can't miss the mark. We can't miss it now, and we're 90 days away.

So, how do we get all of these great events happening and one unified voice to really capitalize on it? Because how many people are going to be driving through and stopping at those rest areas?

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Any other questions? (no response)
Great; thank you.

MS. BAILEY: Thanks.

MS. COSTA: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: OK, well, folks, my pledge to the Committee was to get us out of here by noon, and I think we're pretty close.

I do want to just wrap up by thanking my Committee members first, for taking -- some of them -- taking quite a long drive to Morristown; some of them maybe walking here.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: And, I want to also thank, obviously, the library for hosting us today.

And, OLS for the work they do in setting up the event. And, certainly our staff, our individual offices, for getting us to a place where we can be here and ready to have this conversation.

Before we adjourn, I just want to open it up to the Committee, if there's any final remarks from the Committee members.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROWAN: Just, thank you again for everyone. It was very interesting.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ROWAN: And, thank you for all you do.

ASSEMBLYMAN MOEN: Thank you.

All right, consider us adjourned.

Thank you.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)