

Good afternoon.

I'm glad to be back again this year to talk about one of my favorite topics--Tourism.

However, quite a bit has changed for the industry since I last addressed this group.

Terrorism dealt the United States a deadly blow September 11. The effects were wide and deep, with the travel and tourism industry being hit the hardest.

For months after, Americans were afraid to fly and are still nervous about traveling. Add the national recession and we've had a dilemma to deal with.

This year I want to talk about what we are going to do about it.

The Minnesota Office of Tourism's main goal is to promote Minnesota as a travel destination. They assist an industry--your industry--that brings in 9-billion dollars and supports 130,000 jobs.

The Office of Tourism is working full-steam ahead to assist the tourism industry. Isn't that right, John?

Matter-of-fact, shortly after September 11 John Edman called together the Tourism Task Force. What came out of it was Explore Minnesota Now!

Explore Minnesota Now! kicked off in October when the Office of Tourism personally made sales trips and met with tour operators from Wisconsin, Iowa, Winnipeg, and Minnesota.

And in November they coordinated a business summit, which was held at my office and included a who's who of Minnesota business leaders.

The week after that was something I'm very proud of: A very large and successful travel fair at the Mall of America. Put together in less than a month, resorts, hotels, bed & breakfasts, convention and visitor's bureaus and others set up shop at the Mall for a weekend to offer Minnesotans special deals and discounts.

It was designed to kick-start our local travel. The Twin Cities media, I have to give them SOME CREDIT, did a nice job of covering this special event. Explore Minnesota Now! generated nearly \$140,000 in media coverage.

The Office of Tourism also promoted online travel specials through their Web site Explore Minnesota dot com

They stepped up radio spots, and they conducted many broadcast interviews on Minnesota travel.

We still need to think abroad too.

800,000 international travelers visit Minnesota each year.

I've visited Japan, Chicago, California, Washington, D.C., and Canada to promote tourism, and in March I will travel to Germany to promote Minnesota at the world's largest travel exhibition in Berlin.

While there, I'll be speaking at a reception for major German tour operators at the residence of U.S. Ambassador Daniel Coats. The following day, I will address 1,000 German tour operators, travel agents and travel media representatives

Germany is a major international tourism market that provides Minnesota with its third largest source of overseas visitors every year.

Given the impact on the travel industry following the events of September 11, it's more important than ever to get out the 'Explore Minnesota' message to our European market.

Representatives from the Mall of America, the Bloomington Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Greater Minneapolis Convention and Visitors Association and Bluefin Bay will join me.

Maybe I'll invite a few German reporters to go golfing!

Who says I don't like the media?

Last fall we had the first ever Governor's Fall Golf Classic, or better known as "The Jackal Open," at Superior National in Lutsen.

The Minnesota Office of Tourism hosted the event, and from what I hear it was a tremendous success. Unfortunately, the morning I was to fly up the weather prevented me from making the trip.

More than 50 golf writers from the Midwest came to play. They were treated to a beautiful course. No offense John, but I hear you need to hit the practice range. Better yet, I hear Rebecca Yanisch hits _em pretty well; maybe she can give you a few tips.

Minnesota is the #1 golf state based on rounds played per capita.

Minnesota has over 450 golf courses. In a state with 5 months of winter (at least most years)--we love our golf and travelers do too.

This year we want to do it earlier in the season to maximize the media coverage.

In May, we will be having the second annual Governor's Fall Golf Classic--actually we'll need to change the title to Spring or Summer, won't we? I like the sound of Jackal Open, that'll do.

Along with the Minnesota Golf Alliance, the Office of Tourism will invite even MORE media to play golf in Minnesota.

For the media here--you might want to write this down--this is news:

The second annual Jackal Open will be June 2nd and 3rd in Brainerd at The Classic at Madden's Resort.

I will also be looking forward to the Governor's Fishing Opener in International Falls this year, where more than 150 media members will see what we all know: There is no finer place in the world to fresh water fish than Minnesota.

As you can see, we have a lot of wonderful things coming up to help promote Minnesota travel and tourism.

The Minnesota Office of Tourism is there for you. Call them. Together we will improve Minnesota travel and tourism.

Coming up in a few minutes the Office of Tourism will unveil their new ad campaign for spring, and from what my staff tells me it's really good.

Last year I closed with something that I think should be repeated after the year we've had:

I challenge you to go home and think big, think bold, and come up with new ideas and new ways of doing business, new ways of building tourism.

We've worked hard for Minnesota tourism in the past three years, and together, we'll tell Minnesota's story.

As your Tourism Governor, I promise to continue to promote Minnesota travel and tourism. Let's not forget: we have the best product in the world.

Thank you.