

Thank you, Commissioner Jerry Carlson...and thank you who are here today to focus attention on one of my most favorite topics:

Encouraging people to enjoy the State of Minnesota. I want to be Jesse “The Tourism Governor” Ventura.

I learned yesterday that I’m the first Governor who has ever attended this conference. You might have noticed that I’m making a habit of doing things Governors have not traditionally done –

- Visiting the Departments in person, including Trade & Economic Development,
- Taking questions at legislative caucuses so we can find agreements on things like tax rebates,
- and singing on stage with Warren Zevon. You might have noticed that I do like to have a good time.

That’s what tourism is about – having a good time.

Maybe that’s why the world is looking at Minnesota right now. Rest assured, they aren’t looking at me – they’re interested in coming here and checking out the people who VOTED for me! So if you get feeling uncomfortable, like somebody from Iowa is staring at you, you’re probably right. This is the new “political” zoo.

Frankly, I can’t think of anywhere else I would want to be right now. Tourism is, without a doubt, the “value-added industry” of Minnesota.

- People in every one of our counties benefit from tourism spending.
- We are a year-round playground, indoors and outdoors.
- I’m told for every dollar spent on tourism we make upwards of NINE dollars for our economy.

Every Governor brings some unique things to the job, and I believe I am uniquely suited to help boost your industry’s bottom line.

- I understand entertainment, and especially the film industry that can contribute so much to our economy. Let’s just say that my Rolodex includes some names that would be pretty familiar to you!
- I’m going to do my best to fill our hotel rooms for months on end with crews and famous actors who can draw attention to our state. Each one will leave knowing that Minnesota is a great state to do business – and everybody who buys a movie ticket or turns on a TV anywhere in the world will see the scenery that makes us famous already.
- Believe me, I know L.A. It’s no place to live, but I am already planning a visit. Because that’s the kind of effort that makes a difference between talk and action.

And speaking about the difference between talk and action...there are two more things on my mind: the Fishing Opener and the Legislature.

I've got my old fishing buddies studying maps of lakes around Grand Rapids, and those walleyes don't stand a chance. This is going to be the year the Governor comes in with a full stringer. No matter what, we're going to have fun. Every day of this job is fun – I look forward to coming to work every morning – but I will admit that I'm looking forward to spending a day sitting in a boat with a wet line. My first executive order will be for a speed boat – and pontoons for all the reporters!

I also mentioned the legislature.

Tonight, I release my budget. Ten tough, short weeks of work comes together with a budget that I can't say too much about at noon. I've learned the hard way that I don't dare say too much or the cat's out of the bag.

But I am willing to talk about what we're going to do for tourism, both in the budget and in other commitments.

First, I am announcing today that Steve Markuson will be reappointed as the Director of the Minnesota Office of Tourism.

- We are looking to you for some whizbang results.

Second, I'm going to increase the advertising budget of the Office of Tourism by \$5 million.

- The world is a big place and we must compete.

Third, we'll spend about \$900 million to upgrade the Journey travel information system, leveraging matching money from the private sector.

- Common sense says that the easier we make it to book a trip, the more people will come here.
- We need to help all businesses, large and small, benefit from our tourism investment.

Fourth, we need to take some risks and be creative.

- Who would think that the Japanese would be so crazy about wrestling that they want to see me on Japanese television? But they do...they remember me wrestling there years ago. And when they come here, they will love our winter sports and summer sports and open spaces.

- And how about that Mall of America? I was one of the skeptics ... but “we have built it, and they have come!” It now serves as a wonderful drawing card for promotion of all our other tourism opportunities.
- We are all ambassadors, no matter where we go.

Finally, my administration will be the one to finally TAKE SOME ACTION on transportation and transit to link us efficiently with the world and here at home. Let’s talk about Planes, Trains, and Automobiles...in reverse order.

- Automobiles – Obviously we need to continue our commitment to statewide transportation, and rest assured I won’t forget the need to move families around our state to all corners.
- Trains – I love trains. I’ve worked in LA and know we don’t want to turn into that 25 years from now. I have worked in Atlanta and know how easily I can get around that great city. After 25 years of planning, it’s time to get something done. With new Commissioner El Tinklenberg in Transportation and Met Council Chair Ted Mondale working together, look for some great improvements that will directly benefit tourists and tourism.
- Planes – Thanks to the hub airport and the worldwide vision of Northwest Airlines, we are linked to Asia with flyover rights, linked to Canada with direct flights, linked to Europe through partnership with KLM...and – this is brand new – a new direct flight to Oslo, Norway. (pause) Let’s call it “The Lutefisk Express”

Look at us here today, with smiles on our faces and laughter in our hearts.

Who wouldn’t want to invest in this?

Minnesota, we are winners – and people invest in winners.

Let’s work together to make these the best four years ... or eight! ... that tourism has ever had.

Thanks for inviting me here today.