

Virginia Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce

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PRESS RELEASE



March 11, 2015 – This morning in House Room 1 of the Virginia Capitol, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, Levar Stoney, swore in the Governor’s LGBT Tourism Task Force. The group will issue recommendations on how to make Virginia more welcoming to the LGBT community.

Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Maurice Jones, welcomed the group stating, “Tourism is a vital component of Virginia’s economy. It is a real growth engine. We need to continue to perfect our democracy. We need to be inclusive, reach out to, utilize and welcome every talent that there is. On behalf of the Governor, thank you for volunteering and thank you for what you are going to do on this Task Force. The Governor is very excited about your work.”



Before echoing Secretary Jones’ comments, Virginia Tourism Corporation (“VTC”) President & CEO, Rita McClenny, asked the group to pause and reflect on the historical moment that was taking place within the hallowed halls of the Virginia Capitol. Governor McAuliffe has long said that his goal is to “foster a more inclusive Commonwealth.” McClenny praised the Governor’s passion for making Virginia “inclusive and welcoming” so that everyone can live, work, play and invest here.

The “Virginia is for Lovers” campaign has been in place for 45 years. In tourism, McClenny noted, we are selling “memories, joy and love. Love is a short but very powerful word. Love is at the heart of everything we do. It is a component that has magic in it.” As Virginia continues to “create timeless values, this Task Force will sweeten it all.”

This Task Force is not just about love and goodwill—it’s got some economic teeth to it, too. Last year, Virginia’s tourism industry generated \$21.5 billion, approximately \$59 million every day. These funds created \$1.42 billion in local and state tax revenue and supported over 213,000 jobs across Virginia. In 2014, the LGBT community’s purchasing power exceeded \$835 billion (surpassing that of the Asian-American community). LGBT tourism is a \$100 billion industry. The LGBT community has a higher median income than the general population. Last year, 97% of LGBT consumers took a vacation, compared to the national average of 64%. LGBT consumers take between 5-7 vacations per year. LGBT consumers spend \$2,300 per year on leisure and travel, compared to non-LGBT consumers who spend only \$1,500 per year.

The Editorial Director of Passport Magazine, Robert Adams, keenly pointed out, “People feel they can go someplace and be themselves.” This is why VTC Director of Partnerships & Outreach, Wirt Confroy, noted that the three tenants of tourism are “authenticity, connectivity and visitor experience.” Indeed, the Task Force will work to showcase Virginia as a destination where LGBT travelers can be themselves and enjoy all that Virginia has to offer.

Secretary Stoney articulated the philosophy underpinning the purpose of the LGBT Tourism Task Force: “We can’t build a new Virginia economy without new Virginia values.” In his introductory remarks the Chief Operating Officer of the Virginia Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (“VGLCC”) and Task Force Member, Jesse LaVancher, embraced this philosophy stating that the group must work to diversify and strengthen Virginia’s economy. One way the VGLCC seeks to help the Task Force in its mission is to unite Virginia’s LGBT business community and integrate that historically underserved demographic into the broader marketplace.

Although unable to attend today’s meeting, Task Force Member Bob Witeck, President of Witeck Communications, issued the following statement: “The VGLCC is a crossroads for everyone who believes that opportunity is built on shared values, trust, ingenuity, innovation and hard work – and I’d add one more idea, friendships. If the VGLCC succeeds, many of us will be wide-eyed participants, not just observers, to creating jobs, starting and growing businesses, and expanding options for our entire economy. What could be more promising than that?”

Established in 2014 and launching in the spring of 2015, the VGLCC seeks to diversify and strengthen Virginia’s economy by uniting the Commonwealth’s LGBT business community and integrating that dynamic demographic into the broader marketplace. Through the guiding principles of advocacy, collaboration and education, the VGLCC aims to promote economic equality by serving as the nonpartisan voice of Virginia’s LGBT entrepreneurs, innovators, job creators and their allies. In short, the VGLCC’s objective is to effectively weave the story of the LGBT community into the evolving narrative of Virginia’s diverse 21st century economy.

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