LOOKING FORWARD--
MY WISHES FOR BETTER TOURISM

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* I am honored to be here and talk about tourism. You are involved in the most exciting and yet complicated phenomenon this world has known.

* Having lived for these 80 years and worked with tourism for 50, it has been my good fortune to have seen a lot of change.
  --I was born not only before television and computers but before radio, before inside plumbing, before we had electricity in our home, before we had automobiles and good roads. And of course, long before mass travel as we know it today.

* I was initiated into travel at the young age of five when my father took us camping in Upper Michigan in a Model T Ford in 1921. Then, the real adventure came in 1929 when we had graduated to a Model A Ford for a camping tour from Michigan throughout the West. It took us six weeks to travel over 8,500 miles and we wore out three sets of tires and a set of brakes.

* Little did I realize then that travel and tourism would become my lifelong career.

* When I was asked to address you this evening, I considered several approaches, most of which you can find in my books. So, rather than repeat some of that material, I thought I would draw on my experience to identify key issues that we all face today as we seek better tourism in the future.

* So, for the next few minutes I would like to give you my wish book for tourism in the future. This is strictly a personal view--not sophisticated research--but built on my observations both here in North America and abroad.

* Let me describe just 10 wishes--things I hope can be accomplished in the next decade or two--and they are not presented in any order of priority. It would be presumptuous of me to say that all apply to Ontario because I lack your depth of understanding of tourism here. I was pleased to see that many of these points are addressed in your new Strategic Framework Report.

1. I wish planners and investors would look beyond the building site.

  --During consulting work on a South Pacific Island, I saw how resort hotels were failing, largely because their attention was focused only within property lines.
  --They paid no attention to the surrounding assets which held abundant visitor
opportunities, such as the many ancient Polynesian archeological sites that were neither accessible nor interpreted; the rich Polynesian culture that would lend itself to pageantry; and the magnificent mountain scenery behind the hotels that had no guided or self-guided trails.

--They missed completely the visitor's desire to see and do things outside as well as inside the hotels--things that had already been revealed in their market analysis.

--When natural and cultural resources nearby are made available, the visitor is enriched by the entire package of experiences.

--When board-room decisions, thousands of miles away, consider only the hotel site, such a myopic view is reflected in a poor bottom-line performance.

2. I wish planners and investors would accept responsibility for resource protection.

--Too often, tourism developers are anti-environmentalism.

--A state tourism director once told me that she could not support environmentalism; her only role was economic. Following my work on her state tourism plan, I had to tell her that she won't have any tourism soon unless the thousands of cottage and resort owners quit running their sewage directly into recreational lakes, causing the health department to close beaches during the peak summer use.

--A huge amount of tourism depends on clean water. Yet, everywhere I go, from the Americas to South Africa, and Asia, development is polluting this valuable resource at an alarming rate. Although the greatest threat is coming from cities and industries, tourism is contributing a significant share.

--On the Texas Gulf Coast in 1995, one of our prime destination areas, volunteers collected 180 tons of trash along only one-third of the coast--not very smart tourism.

--Vital to tourism, especially in this part of the world are the cultural and natural resources.

--For most communities, the greatest limiting factor for tourism is neither the lack of finance nor ambition. It is inadequate treatment and disposal of waste that is polluting their waters.

3. I wish we would spend as much effort on information as on promotion.

--In spite of this age of spectacular electronic communication, it is still difficult for the visitor to gain needed information on travel.

--Recently, while staying in a popular hotel chain, my wife and I had a couple hours before the next stop and wanted to know what we could visit in the community. The desk clerk turned red and asked her supervisor to help, who immediately told us she didn't know. There was no descriptive literature and she could give us no information.
--I am pleased to see many places in Canada using the "i" sign along highways and on maps to guide the tourist to places where information can be obtained.

--For major park areas, the interpretive visitor center is a very effective informational tool. And, by concentrating visitors where they can be managed, it is good conservation.

--One of the best designed interpretive centers I have ever seen is HEAD-SMASHED-IN BUFFALO JUMP. It is located south of Calgary and was designed by your national park office. This three-story structure, built right into the escarpment and hardly visible, is filled with exhibits and descriptions of this unusual archeological site.

--I see great opportunities for joint public-private ventures for well-planned visitor interpretive centers and other improvements in information.

4. I wish communities would accept a responsible role for tourism development.

--Today, many communities want tourism and yet have no community-wide policies or programs for its development. And then they complain about threats to their way of life.

--Not long ago, in my work in a Canadian coastal village, residents expressed great concern over threats of condominium building along their beautiful waterfront. When I asked what they had done to protect this resource they couldn't answer.

--In my opinion, communities have three choices:

a. **Prohibition.** Communities should have the right to say "no, we don't want any." Some, such as a town in Illinois, have already started "demarketing." They believe they have reached their tourism capacity.

b. **Willy-nilly.** Just let in anyone who wants to develop anything and anywhere. This policy has messed up many communities.

c. **Planned growth.** By doing their own homework--analyzing their strengths and weaknesses and deciding what, where and why they want tourism to develop--they can give it proper guidance. Communities have the power but often lack the initiative.

5. I wish we would work harder on improved quality than on greater quantity.

--Everywhere, communities, states, and provinces want more and more tourism in the belief that more is better. But, is it? If I can't cross my own street because of nose-to-tail tour buses belching out noise and fumes, if I have to drive fifteen miles to shop because all my retail outlets were driven away from main street by touristy shops and if my amenities and quality of life have deteriorated because of tourism's growth, do I want more?

--We are finally learning that tourism development is not a free good--it does have costs. It has economic costs, requiring new investment, not only for tourism building but often for expanded infrastructure such as for water supply, waste disposal and police. It has social costs, often putting a strain on local citizens. And, it
frequently has environmental costs--erosion of resources when not properly planned.

--Why not put greater effort toward the real goals of tourism. Let me name just five: better visitor satisfaction; better job quality and incomes; better host-guest relationships; better protection and interpretation of resources; and much better integration of tourism into the life of every community.

6. I wish we could practice better tourism ethics.

--In recent years we have been riding the runaway train of exploding technology. There is no question that technology has improved tourism greatly.

--But, at some point, I think we need to ask the question--**Just because we can, should we?**

--This is not a question answered by research; it is an ethical question, one answered only by our judgment. But, isn't this what management is all about?

--For example, just because we now can use solar and wind power for electricity, should we place so-called ecologues in primitive and fragile environments? This was brought home to me vividly in my participation in an ecologue seminar on the Virgin Islands, where I saw rare and beautiful landscapes being destroyed by tourism development in the name of ecotourism.

--I submit to you some ethical questions:

*Should we impose tourism on communities that don't want any?*
*Should we promise more in advertising than can be delivered?*
*Should every lake be ringed with cottages and resorts?*
*Should all highways be cluttered with tourist businesses?*
*To what extent should we commoditize culture?*
*Should we add casinos to every community?*

--Shouldn't we be thinking about these ethical questions?

--At this point, I want to commend TIA for its excellent Code of Ethics for Tourism. No one in the US has even thought about such a guide. It is an excellent document, and especially significant because it was sponsored by business.

--Now, it is my wish to see it applied throughout Canada and the US.

7. I wish that hoteliers would redefine their tourism product.

--I recognize the importance of good management and the significance of selling rooms.

--But, selling rooms is only part of the total product. I don't travel over a thousand miles just to stay in a hotel like the one at home. Something else pulls me to a destination. Unless hotels are supportive of that something, their rooms may not be needed. The attractions, for both business and pleasure, come first.

--Too often in community meetings for improving tourism, hoteliers are either absent or apathetic. Yet, proposals for new museums, festivals, zoos, park and recreation areas, historic sites, better transportation, and better community
amenities need moral and even monetary support from the hoteliers. This is not mere altruism. This is in their self-interest.

8. How I wish we could return to the personal service of the '50s and '60s.

--Today, customer service has eroded badly.
-- Back in the '50s and '60s the motel era demonstrated how travel markets appreciated personal attention. The guest could talk to the manager, a person who really cared about your interests.
--Recently I was treated so shabbily by an airline gate clerk that I complained to the manager of the parent company. My commuter flight had been cancelled but when I asked her "what do we do now?" She replied, "I don't know. Maybe you could call the 800 number." I said, "Where is there a phone." Her answer was, "Somewhere down there." Meanwhile travelers kept asking for help because the boarding light was on behind her, even though the next flight wasn't for four hours. She was rude to everyone.
--Fortunately, this airline has taken a new interest in service and responded quickly to my complaint, giving me a voucher for another flight and an apology, saying my letter was forwarded to the management of the commuter airline. There is hope.

9. I wish government agencies would talk to each other.

--At both the national and the provincial or state levels, many such agencies have policies and practices that are critical to tourism. For example, in a study of tourism in The Finger Lakes region of New York, we found in this area of only fourteen counties that there were 203 government agencies that had direct impact on tourism:
  22 national, 41 state, 35 regional, 60 county, and 45 local.
Yet there was little evidence that any were speaking to each other, certainly not about tourism.
--In a workshop discussion in Boston regarding the tourism and recreational potential of 40 harbor islands, we discovered that most were controlled by two state agencies that were at loggerheads with each other. The major outcome of this conference was for representatives of these two agencies to agree to resolve their differences. But, why did it take this kind of pressure to make it happen?
--In Texas we produce a superb travel publication called Texas Highways. It is published by the Department of Transportation but this division does not communicate with the arm that builds highways and puts up signs. The construction division knows how to mix concrete and build bridges but doesn't know how travelers think and what they need in signage.
--Agency communication and even cooperation could be a win-win situation but turf protection and politics keep them apart.
--For the good of tourism, something must change.
10. I wish governments would revise their tourism policies.

--Most government offices of tourism around the world are preoccupied with promotion.
--In my opinion, I would like to see governments accept some other roles that are more difficult for other sectors to accomplish.
--For example, governments could provide greater support to technical schools, colleges, and universities for better research, training and education. Faculty are often hampered by lack of administrative support from both business and government.
--Governments could provide a forum for better communication between all the action agents responsible for tourism development and management.
--Governments could exercise better control and guidance on resource planning and use for tourism. Cultural and natural resources need their help.
--Governments could redefine their destination concepts to become more sensitive to the images of the travelers that may have nothing to do with political boundaries.
For example, unless there is a traditional image for a state, such as for Hawaii and Texas, I do not believe people are induced to travel to states. Instead, they go to destinations such as the Catskills of New York, Williamsburg restoration, the Redwoods of California, the several theme parks, and metropolitan areas such as San Francisco, San Antonio, or Las Vegas. Who knows or cares that Las Vegas is in Nevada so why promote Nevada?
--Governments have great opportunities for supporting tourism in ways that go way beyond promotion.

Conclusion

Well folks, there are my wishes for the future of tourism.
I hope that my wishes are your wishes.
For your future, I challenge you to reconsider tourism's power.
It is like electricity. I gives us a multitude of bounties--abundant riches that I never even dreamed could come true. Or, it can be deadly, destroying what we hold dear. Without control, neither electricity nor tourism will bring their anticipated rewards
I am confident that these wishes for the future are within your reach and offer a win-win situation--
business will be more successful,
visitors will be better satisfied.
the environment will be protected, and
tourism will not be merely an economic overlay for communities but an integral part of local life.
The choices and opportunities are yours.