



For Immediate Release

February 7, 2018

Contacts:

Mike Inacay (Schatz), (202) 224-3123

Ty Bofferding (Cassidy), (202) 224-6765

Chip Unruh (Reed), (202) 224-4642

**SCHATZ, CASSIDY, REED INTRODUCE BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION TO
BOOST TOURISM**

*Explore America Act Will Expand Cultural Heritage Tourism, Bring New Jobs and
Revenue to Rural Areas Across the Country*

WASHINGTON – Today U.S. Senators Brian Schatz (D-Hawai‘i), Bill Cassidy (R-La.), and Jack Reed (D-R.I.) introduced the Explore America Act, legislation that supports the expansion of cultural heritage tourism by strengthening the Preserve America Grant Program. Changes to the program will help attract more visitors to American landscapes and cultural heritage sites in the National Parks System, enhance existing programs, and increase collaboration between communities and the federal government.

“Every year, Hawaii sets new records for tourism growth in our state, but for too many people, it doesn’t feel like that growth is helping small businesses, families, and young people who are looking to build a life in Hawaii,” **said Senator Schatz**. “This bill is about returning control to the people who live in the places everyone else wants to visit. It gives local communities the chance to see more benefits from tourism, including better jobs, and it puts the story of Hawaii in the hands of our own residents. This is what international visitors and tourists are looking for—authentic experiences that tell a story and have a history. With this bill, we can strengthen what Hawaii has to offer, and make sure local people benefit along the way.”

“Louisiana communities, urban and rural, have rich histories. They should have a bigger say in how their stories are shared with visitors and tourists,” **said Senator Cassidy**. “Reforming the Preserve America Grant Program will improve the experiences of millions of families who visit national parks each year. This increases the positive impact this tourism has on local economies.”

“Cultural heritage tourism provides an authentic view into our nation’s past and allows the public to learn about and enjoy the various cultural histories of gateway communities across our nation,” **said Senator Reed**. “This effort will also stimulate local economies and create jobs in the tourism industry. National Parks and Heritage Areas are among our nation’s greatest assets, and I am proud to join my colleagues in this bipartisan effort to help communities display their history and natural beauty while simultaneously building their economies.”

The Preserve America Program, established by Executive Order in 2003, supports state, tribal, and local government efforts to preserve and enhance heritage tourism. The grant component of the Preserve America Program is a matching partnership between the Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation and the Department of the Interior that supports heritage tourism at the state and local levels.

The Explore America Act would amend the Preserve America Grant Program to:

- **Provide technical assistance.** The bill directs the Departments of Commerce and Interior, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) to provide technical assistance in lieu of monetary funds.
- **Focus on economic growth.** It directs the Secretary of Commerce to coordinate with the Secretary of the Interior and the ACHP to evaluate how the program can increase job creation, boost economic growth, and promote tourism.
- **Increase accountability.** It establishes program metrics to measure effectiveness and report findings to Congress.
- **Prioritize community coordination.** The bill directs collaboration with gateway communities (communities adjacent to National Parks) by providing financial and technical assistance, tourism development and promotion, visitor management services, and access to federal resources.

“Hundreds of gateway communities across the country rely on the national parks for their economic vitality,” **said Bill Hardman, president and CEO of the Southeast Tourism Society.** “The Southeast Tourism Society enthusiastically endorses the Explore America Act, which builds on existing parks tourism to encourage partnerships between the National Park Service and local stakeholders, and empowers gateway communities to leverage cultural and heritage tourism assets to promote visitation and to better tell the stories of these communities.”

“Place-based preservation matters,” **said Alan Spears, director of cultural resources at the National Parks Conservation Association.** “The Explore America Act provides the National Park Service with enhanced ability to partner with gateway communities across the United States to better leverage their local cultural and historic resources through heritage tourism. The National Parks Conservation Association is pleased to support this bill that empowers communities to promote pride of place.”

“Protected areas, particularly World Heritage sites and National Parks, are some of tourism’s biggest attractions, and a key driver of economic activity in surrounding communities,” **said Don Welsh, president and CEO of Destinations International.** “Visitors to U.S. National Parks spent an estimated \$18.4 billion in local gateway regions in 2016, generating thousands of jobs and significant tax revenue for these communities. Destinations International supports any legislation that helps foster a better relationship between governments and local stakeholders, empowering them to share their unique stories with visitors and expand the economic benefits of tourism.”

“In 2016, National Parks welcomed nearly 331 million visitors, spending \$18.4 billion in gateway communities and supporting thousands of American jobs,” **said Victoria Barnes, a senior vice president at the U.S. Travel Association.** “The Explore America Act supports the future growth and vitality of gateway communities by strengthening collaboration between local stakeholders and the federal government to enhance visitation and access federal resources. We thank Senators Cassidy and Schatz for introducing this bill and for their leadership and support of America’s travel and tourism industry.”