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Milwaukee County Zoo sea lion helps Walker tout state tourism boost



Gov. Scott Walker gamely allowed a trained, 600-lb. sea lion named Slick to give him "kisses" Friday at the Milwaukee County Zoo, as part of Walker's promotion of tourism in Wisconsin.

Walker and Tourism Secretary Stephanie Klett visited the zoo, where they also hand-fed fish to a seal named Scooter and visited the penguin exhibit.

Later they headed to La Crosse to tour the Loggers baseball stadium and then to Green Bay, where they visited the construction site for the Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame. The tour came to mark the start of this year's National Travel and Tourism Week, which runs May 2-10. Walker's administration announced **the tourism economy topped \$18.5 billion in 2014**, a \$1 billion boost from \$17.5 billion in 2013. The 5.5 percent increase was spurred by a rise in both visits and spending per trip.

The tour continues this weekend as Walker is in Hayward for the 50th annual Governor's Fishing Opener. Walker joked that his encounter with feeding the sea creatures "gave him an early taste of fishing" just in time for the fishing opener.

Klett said Wisconsin has had five tourism slogans in the past 15 years, but "we've decided to do something very radical and that's get away from slogans and just do outstanding marketing."

Walker told reporters at the zoo that tourism provides 187,000 jobs in the state. He acknowledged most are seasonal jobs, but said there are some permanent, family-supporting careers related to tourism.

Asked to respond to critics who say his administration's stances on environmental topics, such as limiting carbon emissions, hurt Wisconsin tourism, Walker gave a shout-out to efforts started before he took office.

"If you look at our record, we're one of the best states in the country," Walker said. "Over the past decade, we've put in major provisions that allow us to have better clean air, clean land and clean water. It's part of the reason citations are down by the DNR, is because we've been more proactive. You'll have people taking potshots but the facts are pretty clear and that is we have some of the best environmental conditions here in the state of Wisconsin."

Klett told WisPolitics.com that "One of the great things Gov. Walker did for tourism is four years ago he increased our marketing budget, so we took that money and reinvigorated Travel Green Wisconsin," said Klett, referring to a program created in 2006. "So we were the very first Travel Green-certified program for tourism departments in the United States. Right now we have 550 businesses that are Travel Green-certified. It's all about sustainability, visitors leaving their carbon footprint, recycling, composting, all of that."

-- *By Kay Nolan*
For WisPolitics.com

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