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BYRD'S EYE VIEW

A Public Service Column By

SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD

TOURISM CAN BE NEW BIG INDUSTRY FOR WEST VIRGINIA

A tremendous untapped and under-developed natural wealth--the sheer grandeur of her hills and valleys--holds promise of providing West Virginia with a new big industry called "tourism." Last year, this industry earned \$290 million for our State. Its potential, however, is several times this figure.

For many states, such as North Carolina, tourism already is their No. 1 industry. It grossed \$645 million for our neighboring state of Virginia last year. Maryland claims it earned \$225 million for her in 1960, and that she confidently expects the 1961 figure to be around \$300 million.

Today, domestic tourism--travel by Americans within this country--is estimated by the U. S. Department of Commerce as "a multi-billion dollar business." In addition, the Department also reports that foreigners last year spent \$1.1 billion sight-seeing in this country.

The only reason West Virginia's tourist industry is not currently enjoying its full potential is that the State lacks

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the kinds of developed recreational areas and facilities needed to attract great numbers of travelers. President John F. Kennedy's task force on depressed areas recognized this short-coming and recommended Federal action to overcome it. However, it made no specific proposals as to projects to be undertaken, because it lacked authority to do so.

Fortunately, West Virginians have not been asleep on the subject. Three project proposals already have been made to the Federal Departments responsible for such matters. If approved by them, they would then require appropriations by the Congress.

One proposal is for enlarging Harpers Ferry National Monument through purchase of old Storer College buildings and campus, as well as other adjacent parcels of land. This proposal has the approval of the National Park Service, and the budget just submitted to the Congress carried a request for \$300,000 for the acquisition. Funds for this project, however, were voted by the Senate last year, but the action was not concurred in by the House. Every effort will be made for passage by both Houses this year. Enlarging the Monument would make it additionally attractive to tourists.

A second proposal is to extend the Monongahela National Forest into south-central and south-western West Virginia, and to greatly enlarge its recreational facilities through the building

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of more cabins, camping sites, swimming areas, trails, and access roads. This proposal is currently being explored by the Forest Service, and there is much hope that it will receive favorable consideration. This National Forest holds enormous tourist potential if it can be enlarged and made attractive for vacationers.

The third proposal is for the creation of a New River Gorge National Park, extending from Gauley Bridge to Hinton, and possibly including the Bluestone Reservoir area. The New River gorge is without parallel in the East for beauty and grandeur. Moreover, the New River is the only major river system in the eastern United States which cuts through the Appalachian Mountain chain to flow westward. Both these factors would make it uniquely attractive to tourists. The National Park Service has been asked to study this proposal.

Meanwhile, more can be done on a local basis to make tourism a bigger industry for our State. Communities should plan for roadside picnic areas, and for brochures which tell in words and point out with maps the unusual or historical sights in the areas, as well as places to stop for good food and overnight lodging.