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By Edward Munger Jr.

Schumer touts tourism legislation at Schoharie County's biggest tourist destination



U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer shakes hands Monday with Earl Van Wormer III, chairman of the Schoharie County Board of Supervisors, at Howe Caverns.

HOWES CAVE — Some argue the financial industry is New York's top money-maker, others say it's agriculture. But there's another contender for the Empire State's top revenue generator — tourism, and U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer on Monday said federal legislators are poised to throw money in that direction too.

Schumer gathered with local officials at Howe Caverns to recognize Schoharie County's biggest tourism attraction as an example of why the proposed TRIP Act is a good piece of legislation.

Considered the state's second-most visited natural attraction behind Niagara Falls, Howe Caverns is putting 150 people to work this summer while piecing together a multimillion-dollar expansion plan, all with private investment.

grants for upgrades or promotion.

Introduced by Sen. Mark Begich, D-Alaska, the Travel Regional Investment Partnership Act would encourage partnerships with public and private entities and provide matching

"One of the ways to get jobs is to strengthen tourism," Schumer said.

Under the proposed law, he said, Schoharie County could team up with New York state after developing an investment plan, and if each pitched in \$25,000, the federal government would match the \$50,000 for a \$100,000 project.

Howe Caverns went under new ownership about four years ago when it was purchased by Cobleskill Stone Products president Emil Galasso and local attorney Charles Wright.

The site was busy Monday.

"On a cloudy Monday, the parking lot is full. That could be magnified here," Schumer said of the TRIP Act's potential.

Howe Caverns received approval for a planned development district and plans are being drawn up for major additions there, general manager Robert Holt said.

Howe Caverns has announced several aspects of the plans include adding an entertainment building with a 4-D theater, a 24,600 square-foot Dinosaur Canyon Visitor Center that would sit near a 120-foot pit with a lake surrounded by walkways with animated dinosaur replicas.

The site would add a 250-room hotel connected to a 50,000 square-foot indoor water park, a new tot lot and kiddie park and a zip line ride that would suspend guests 60 feet in the air for a 2,500 foot ride down a hill.

Holt said it's too early at this point to forecast when all the additional enjoyment will begin, the management now is focused on planning water and sewer service and burying utility wires.

Schumer said the TRIP Act is in the Commerce Committee and he expects it to clear the Senate before the end of this year.