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Utah Film Commission Ready to Boost Utah's Film Industry

By Trevor Snarr

Salt Lake City - The signing of Senate Bill 14 "Financial Incentives for Motion Picture Productions," has given the green light to the Utah Film Commission to start aggressively marketing the state for large budget films and studio productions. The Motion Picture Incentive Fund (MPIF) has now been restructured to be attractive to the major productions while still appealing to the smaller independent film companies. The MPIF will now be able to offer an incentive of up to 20% of the money spent in the State in the form of a cash rebate or refundable tax credit up to \$500,000 for smaller films and as a tax credit when the incentive exceeds \$500,000 for major productions.

This bill will create new jobs and bring in more tax dollars for Utah. It is estimated the state will see 4,500 jobs generated through the new film incentive program. "Our crews are already known as some of the best in the business," said Governor Jon Huntsman. "There is Hollywood and Bollywood, Utah has Saltywood. The combination of the enhanced incentive, our variety of scenery and locations, as well as our proximity to Los Angeles all contribute to our reputation as a premier destination for filmmaking," said Governor Huntsman.

The Utah Film Commission is excited about the increased incentive and the flexibility now allowed under the current law. "We know filmmakers will be excited about this change and we will be presenting this new program at the Locations Trade Show hosted by the Association of Film Commissioner's International in April. We will follow the trade show with personal visits to the studios and networks," said Film Commission director Marshall Moore.

The MPIF's return on investment has been a high priority for Jason Perry, executive director of the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED). "Every dollar we spend will generate two-and-a-half dollars in return." GOED conducted a comprehensive economic impact study on film incentives during the past 10 months, concluding that the incentive money spent is a sound investment for the state. "The positive impact is significant. Not only will the Utah film industry grow, but our communities generally will see substantial benefits from film productions that will add excitement and new revenue whenever a production is produced in their area of the state," added Perry.

The economic impact of films that used incentives between 2005 and 2009 was \$115 million. The MPIF has also helped create 3,000 Utah jobs over the same period. Job creation was a big factor in passing the bill. Don Schain who produced all of the "High School Musical" series and "The Worlds Fastest Indian," reiterated to the Revenue and Taxation Committee during the legislation that more than 90% of people working on a typical movie set are from Utah. "During the production of 'High School Musical 3: Senior Year' we had a full time crew of approximately 150, and 140 of them were from Utah," said Schain.

Editor's Note: For more information about the Utah Film Commission visit film.utah.gov.

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