

## Tourism officials hopeful HB2 rollback will open doors to more entertainers



*Visit Winston Salem President  
Richard Geiger*

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The return of future NCAA and ACC events to the Triad could serve as the key to opening the door on other entertainment events in a post-House Bill 2 environment, according to Visit Winston-Salem officials.

Richard Geiger, the tourism agency's president, said it was encouraging that the NCAA announced Tuesday that it had awarded 26 neutral-site championships to North Carolina venues for its 2018-22 cycle.

Those include the 2019 field hockey championship at Wake Forest University and 2021 Division III men's and women's indoor track championships at JDL Fast Track in Winston-Salem.

"Although it wasn't the Benton that grabbed the NCAA bid, it is a good indication to us that the HB2 fog is mostly clearing," Geiger said.

Just as important from a hotel booking-spillover effect, Geiger said, is the NCAA putting the opening two rounds of its 2020 men's basketball tournament in Greensboro Coliseum as well as the ACC keeping the 2020 men's basketball tournament there.

The 11 championship events awarded to Greensboro are valuable. The Greensboro Convention & Visitors Bureau estimates the total economic impact at \$7.43 million. The men's basketball games alone are worth more than \$2 million.

It remains to be seen, however, how quickly, or even if, musical and other entertainers will choose to play concerts and events in the state post-HB2 repeal.

Several high-profile entertainers, such as Bruce Springsteen, Pearl Jam, Maroon 5, Ringo Starr, Boston, Ani DiFranco and Cirque du Soleil canceled shows in North Carolina within weeks or months of the passage of HB2, which limited LGBT rights and choice of restroom.

Other performers, such as comedians Joel McHale and Louis C.K., singer Cyndi Lauper and English band Mumford & Sons, turned their North Carolina performances into benefits to raise money and awareness against the law.

“Now we can get back to doing what we do best,” said Matt Brown, the managing director of the Greensboro Coliseum. Greensboro Coliseum officials also market non-university events at Winston-Salem’s Joel Coliseum for Wake Forest.

“And it’s so important for our community because it has a direct impact on our local economy,” Brown said. “That’s critically important. ... It’s more than just basketball. It drives dollars into our community.”

In Tuesday’s announcement, the NCAA didn’t make any specific comments about North Carolina venues or HB2, but it had said earlier on April 4 that a majority of its board of governors “reluctantly voted to allow consideration of championship bids in North Carolina by our committees that are presently meeting.”