

I felt compelled to write this letter on behalf of all the hard working people, families, business owners that comprise the tourism industry in Juneau. Unfortunately, the word “the industry” has become some how insidious and negative. As another summer rapidly approaches I believe it would be appropriate to understand what “the industry” is composed of.

It’s composed of people like me. It’s your sons and daughters. It’s your family members and neighbors. It’s all of us, because we love it here. I was born and raised in Juneau. I went to college, got a degree, and returned to Juneau to work in Tourism. I worked at ERA helicopters all through college. I eventually ended up selling tours on the docks, which led to the creation of a whale watch company. 20 years later our whale watching company employs 20 people, the majority of which like me, call Juneau home.

We all know the tourism numbers. In 2016 the visitor industry alone accounted for 22% of direct sales tax revenue for the city. Not to mention the countless indirect dollars that numerous companies like mine spend on fuel, maintenance, snacks, wages, and all the money our employees spend in town. This money works it’s way through the community. Benefitting more than just shops and tour companies. People come to see our beautiful state, spend money and leave. It could be far worse. Although the economic benefit cannot and should not be understated, there is something even more important. Opportunity.

Tourism is one of the last industries in this town that is still growing. Gone are the days of the \$5,000 lots in the valley and Tier 1 jobs at the state. Cuts to the state government, ferries, and universities have been increasing. They have only been exacerbated by the recent budgets.

As jobs have crept to Anchorage or been eliminated all together, Juneau has become more expensive. Despite the fact that my 1950’s house is in the avalanche zone, the city has it assessed for \$350,000. I know we don’t want Juneau to change. I don’t either. I love it here, but change is the one constant in life and nostalgia won’t help me with my mortgage or pay for the opportunity for my 9-month old daughter to go to college one day.

I don’t know the max number the town can handle, but I don’t think we are there yet. When we talk about regulating/limiting “the industry,” please think of people like me. People that grew up here. People that rely on “the industry” to support their families. People that visited here for work or a trip and fell in love, just like many of you. I’m glad to be a part of “the industry” and hope that you too will be glad it’s in Juneau.

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