

From: [Caribou Crossings](#)
To: [City Clerk](#)
Subject: Visitor Industry Task Force Comments
Date: Wednesday, January 15, 2020 9:27:25 PM

EXTERNAL E-MAIL: BE CAUTIOUS WHEN OPENING FILES OR FOLLOWING LINKS

January 15, 2020

Dear Task Force Members,

Thank you for donating your time to be a member of this task force and for your dedication to Juneau's future. I submitted the following letter to the Juneau Empire recently and would also like to share it with the committee.

The community discussion around tourism seems to become more and more divisive. It's starting to feel like "us" vs "them" – and as a lifelong local who works in tourism, I'm left feeling a bit disheartened, and a bit baffled as to who is the "us" and who is the "them". This term "industry representative" seems to be misleading the narrative. I would be considered an "industry representative" – but I am also a resident, taxpayer, local business owner, local business patron, local charity supporter, volunteer, and neighbor. My parents live here. My grandfather lives here. I have a two-year-old daughter who I am so proud and excited to raise here in my hometown. Do I get to be part of your "us"? When I hear "we've had enough" – why is my future here not included in the "we"? I care deeply about this community, and I too would like the very best future for Juneau. I am not an "outsider" – I am not "taking the money and running" – I live here, I've always lived here, and there are thousands of locals working in this industry just like me.

Like many of my local peers, I started working in this industry in high school. Tourism put me through college at UAS and allowed me to stay home in the summer and have solid employment during my studies. The local business I worked for and now own funded my MBA from University of Alaska and gave me the opportunity to become involved in the local business arena. Over the last twenty years, this one small business has employed 119 members of this community, patronized over 130 other local businesses, donated to over 30 charities, sports teams, and non-profit organizations, and supported 113 Alaskan artists. Many of our former employees are active members in this community today – because they were given opportunities through tourism. I remember writing a letter of recommendation for one employee as she was applying for nursing school, and then when my daughter was born, this same employee was one of my nurses – what a full community circle.

We live in a dynamic economy that changes over time. We are no longer in a natural resource boom. College tuition has risen 498% since 1985, health insurance costs in Alaska are more than double the national average – there is no tier one for me. When we look at the future of our community, I wonder what it looks like without my generation thriving. What does it look like when we stifle a growing industry to keep things the way they used to be, in a time where nothing is as it used to be?

Working downtown for twenty years I have always found a parking space, and I don't mind walking a bit. I allow myself ten extra minutes to navigate traffic. As I see it, these are small compromises to take part in the vibrant atmosphere. I get to enjoy the dozens of local businesses that open their doors for the visitors, businesses that we as a community of 33,000 residents could never sustain on our own. I also get the benefit of shopping at Costco, signing up for three air ambulance memberships should I ever need a medevac, and the increased Alaska Airlines flights – services that would not be available without the tourism industry. And every single dollar I spend comes directly from tourism.

Tourism provides young entrepreneurs with avenues to start and grow their own businesses, there is no other industry currently doing that for my generation. It's starting to feel like everyone else has earned their livelihood, and now ours is a bit too inconvenient. As the dialogue continues, I would encourage our community to focus its energy on looking for solutions. Telling visitors they aren't welcome here is not a solution. I am proud to share this space with folks that are on the adventure of a lifetime, I consider it an honor to be a part of their experience as I have been a tourist many times myself. I will continue to welcome our guests as both a lifelong local and an "industry representative" – these titles are not mutually exclusive, and this is my community too.

Laura Martinson

Juneau, Alaska

Owner of Caribou Crossings, which has been locally operated for 23 years. Graduate of Glacier Valley Elementary School, Floyd Dryden Middle School, Juneau Douglas Highschool, UAS School of Business, UAA School of Management Master's Program.