

As a recently returned Juneau resident, I can't help but feel a bit conflicted as I read through the My Turn articles being submitted regarding tourism.

I left Juneau after graduating from JDHS in 2005, and with the exception of a summer spent working in the tourism industry in 2008, I hadn't been back.

It's not that I didn't want to come back. I love Juneau and I had always hoped to return, it just never felt like it was in the cards. Eventually I accepted that I'd be stuck enduring big city life, unable to find a competitive job related to my field in a place like Juneau.

Luckily, I was proven wrong. The stars aligned, an opportunity appeared, and I grabbed it with both hands and moved back to Juneau in March of 2019. I brought with me a fiancée, a golden retriever, and aspirations of settling down and raising a family.

I mention all this for a reason. Alaskans who went out of state for their education are unlikely to return to Alaska. According to the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, the number of out-of-state graduates returning to Alaska post-degree has been declining since 2008, and Alaska's population in general has been shrinking since 2017. Juneau alone has lost over 1000 residents since 2015.

The conflict I mentioned at the start of my letter is simple. To most of us, Juneau is sacred ground. As an outdoorsman and someone who cherishes getting outside, I understand the complaints that have been raised in prior My Turn letters. Frequent helicopter & float plane noise can be jarring. More people from out of town on our trails means less peace and quiet and more maintenance. One writer even mentioned tourists picking flowers and trampling into private yards. These are all valid concerns that I genuinely care about as a resident... but are they concerns that warrant the kind of action being proposed?

Tourism is one of the only growing industries in the entire state. With a shrinking population and a severe lack of returning college graduates, doesn't it feel a little selfish to hamper an industry that represents so much opportunity for a younger generation, because we're annoyed with a few of the side-effects? These concerns should not be ignored, but I think there are better solutions to improve the situation that don't inhibit growth or opportunity.

Laura Martinson's letter on January 14th was a great reminder that this is not an us vs them situation. The tourism industry in Juneau is still a local industry. The businesses within it are local businesses, and they donate & fundraise for local charities, sports teams, and nonprofits. They generate a massive amount of tax revenue that eases the burden for all of us. Many businesses (tourism related or not) are able to keep their doors open for all of us to enjoy throughout the winter, even though they would never be able to exist in a community our size without the summer visitors to support them. Most importantly, tourism represents the biggest source of opportunity for a younger generation that is increasingly unwilling or unable to live in Alaska at all. Taking any action that would further the population decline and lack of returning college graduates isn't good for any of us.

In hindsight, perhaps I am not as conflicted as I originally thought. I think it's important that we seek solutions to the issues that have been raised, but it sure seems like we'd be cutting off our nose to spite our face if we attempt to restrict the number of visitors we allow into Juneau in a season.