

March 19, 2009

Senator Hollis French  
State Capitol, Room 417  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator French,

Thank you for your past support of Alaska's tourism industry. I know you understand the importance of a viable marketing program and the value of the visitor industry to so many people who live in our State. Getting ATIA to a \$9 million funding level last year was a critical first step but in order for us to be competitive in a global marketplace we need a \$20 million marketing budget.

I have had the privilege of working in Alaska tourism for the past 9 years and I am fortunate to currently work for ATIA. In my role, I work with tour operators and travel agents from all over the world. What I hear from them is not good. Bookings to Alaska for this upcoming season are significantly down. Because of the global economic crisis, the trend for both domestic and international travelers is fewer and shorter trips closer to home. This is especially bad for Alaska. Land-based tours are being cancelled or are going to operate at significantly reduced volumes. Alaskan businesses that cater to these travelers are going to be greatly impacted.

When I ask these tour operators what we as a destination can do to help them with their sales the answer is always the same: more marketing. Tour operators will only place tour programs in their brochures if they can sell them. We can not assume that there will always be demand for an Alaskan vacation. We are competing with destinations from all over the world that have much more substantial marketing budgets. If there is more image awareness and consumer demand for another destination then the tour operator will sell that tour over one to Alaska. We have been losing market share even before the economic situation developed this year and an increased marketing budget is the only answer.

I urge you to support SB 138 the Cruise Corporate Tax Credit. By reinvesting tourism tax dollars back into our marketing program we can have a healthy industry with a sustainable funding formula. It is now more important than ever for the State to have a strong marketing campaign.

Kind regards,

Jillian Simpson  
Director of Travel Trade & International Marketing