

March 18, 2009

Senator Gary Stevens
Room 111, State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Stevens:

I am writing today to express to you how important the tourism industry is to me and my family and to ask that you support continued re-investment of state revenues into tourism marketing.

After living in many Alaska communities, we have ultimately chosen Seward as our permanent home, due not only to the stunning environment, but also the quality of life. The tourism industry in Seward sustains activities, restaurants, and retail venues that make Seward a vibrant community. My family takes a Gray Whale tour each year, enjoys the SeaLife Center, and have enjoyed our natural surroundings on guided kayak excursions. These activities are available to us because of tourism, and encourage us to spend our recreational dollars locally.

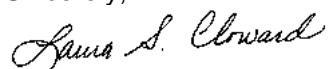
Professionally, I am the Executive Director of the Seward Chamber of Commerce, Conference and Visitors Bureau. It goes without saying that my livelihood is directly connected to the visitor industry. Our members reflect visitor services, as well as other industries that are tied to the visitor industry. Through their membership, they voice their confidence in our marketing programs and ensure that I remain employed. I don't take their investment in me lightly, and work hard to promote our community to in-state and out-of-state visitors. It is these visitors that bring outside revenue to our community and other areas of the state, helping us all prosper.

My salary, in part paid by the industry's investment, further strengthens Alaska's economy. From the local Safeway, to Costco and Nordstrom's – my husband would verify that everything I earn goes back into Alaska's economy. We own vehicles, boats, and a home – and our personal property tax helps fund Peninsula programs. With the high cost of goods in Seward, it would be difficult to remain homeowners in Seward without this job, and without the tourism aspect of Seward's economy, many others would be finding it even more difficult.

Two examples are our boys; young men, actually. Both attend University of Alaska Anchorage. Looking at it through their eyes, you could say that tourism is helping to fund our public post-secondary education programs, as they work in the tourism industry during the summers to pay their tuition. These jobs allow them to earn well above the minimum wage, and provide them valuable customer-service experience. Their interactions with visitors are honing skills which will benefit our state when they enter Alaska's full-time workforce, regardless of what career path they ultimately follow.

The tourism industry plays a vital role for our family – and I firmly believe that most Alaskans are touched by tourism in one way or another. I ask that you support the Alaska Travel Industry Association's request for re-investment of visitor-related revenues back into tourism marketing. I, in turn, will build on ATIA's efforts here in Seward, using our City's and members' investments to ensure that the State's investment produces exponential results.

Sincerely,



Laura S. Cloward
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