
From: Sherry Aitken
Posted At: Thursday, March 19, 2009 9:49 PM
Subject: Support for SB 138 and other travel issues from Sitkan-Sherry Aitken
Importance: High

Dear Senator Stedman,

My name is Sherry Aitken. I'm a K-12 Sitkan who moved to town when I was three from Prince of Whales & Ketchikan. I am writing to ask for your support of the travel industry in Alaska and even more specifically Sitka. Today I received a newsletter from the SCVB stating that neither Celebrity nor Carnival plan to call in Sitka in 2010 (they are present in the 2009 schedule). Already this coming season Sitka is experiencing a drop in not only the number of cruiseship (both large and small) visits but also the capacity of the ships that make port. Visitors arriving by other means are also likely to be down as less charter clients book trips (cutting air arrivals), fewer yachts sail and independent ferry-riders react to the current fiscal climate.

With the present economic crisis affecting all of the US and the world it is more important than ever that we support the drivers of Alaska's economic engine—such as the tourism industry. My husband and I both work for Allen Marine Tours, a locally owned excursion company that operates not only out of Sitka but Juneau and Ketchikan as well. The health of AMT's business is imperative to not only to our own livelihoods but also to hundreds of our co-workers. Further we all support our communities financially with our rents, our purchases, our donations, our booster efforts—there is not an area of life in Sitka, Juneau or Ketchikan that is not touched by tourism earned dollars (whether folks realize it or not).

However I feel that especially in Sitka we are at a tipping point where we can either go positively forward or lose all momentum and benefit of the travel industry. Alaska and Sitka must be able to compete with other travel destinations and we must make our business climate a fair one. Please support the budget appropriation of \$9 million for Alaska marketing. Please add your name to **SB 138** as a co-sponsor and/or support this bill. And finally please level the playing field by supporting the House effort in **HB 134** to return fairness to waste-discharge requirements for cruiseships. I'm sure you've been through the talking points of HB 134 so just let me say that for Sitka it is of the utmost importance that cruiseships continue to have the time they need in SE Alaska so we are not dropped as a port. With HB 134 this can be accomplished without sacrificing good environmental stewardship.

Finally let me say that I whole-heartedly believe that a clean industry like tourism should be welcomed and encouraged to the utmost degree. This is not an extraction dependent business, it is completely renewable and has the potential to create even more jobs than it currently supports. Alaskans are all in the tourism boat whether they realize it or not and if it sinks it will ripple through-out many communities, most especially Sitka.

Warm regards,
Sherry Aitken

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"Tourism-It's Everyone's Business"