



March 15, 2020

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The Honorable Dan Sullivan  
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702 Hart Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Don Young  
United States House of Representatives  
2314 Rayburn House Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20515

On behalf of the more than 52,000 people employed by the Alaska tourism industry, thank you for your leadership as our state – and our nation – address the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate your advocacy on behalf of all Alaskans. As an association representing businesses large and small and in every region of the state, the Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) is deeply concerned with the economic ramifications of COVID-19.

Tourism is a multi-billion-dollar industry in Alaska, generating \$4.5 billion in total economic impact for our state in 2018 alone. Tourism is the state's second-largest private sector employer, supporting 1 in 10 jobs. As an industry supported almost exclusively by out-of-state and international visitors, we are highly susceptible to national and international affairs.

The events of the last few weeks have hit our industry hard:

- March 8: U.S. State Department issues alert warning U.S. citizens, particularly those with underlying health conditions, against traveling by cruise ship.
- March 12: Princess Cruises cancels all sailings through May 10. Viking cruise lines cancels all cruises until May 1.
- March 13: Canada closes all ports to cruise ships through July 1.

While any one of these actions would have serious implications to Alaska's tourism industry, together, they are devastating. We estimate losing more than half of our already short summer visitor season.

In 2020, we estimate approximately 70% of our visitors will travel by cruise both to and from Alaska. Those visitors stay in hotels, attend local events, take excursions, explore public lands, and pay taxes and fees to our state and our communities. Without them, our businesses face untenable economic and financial decisions. For many, the loss of even a small portion of their summer business may result in closing their company permanently.

Because of an existing law, "The Passenger Vessel Services Act of 1886," the ban from Canadian ports means until July 1 there can be no cruise visitation to Alaska.

The loss of these weeks of the season will devastate Southeast Alaska ports, and reduce the number of visitors to all other regions of the State. The economic impacts to our communities – and to the hundreds of small businesses and their thousands of employees who rely on cruise ship visitors for their economic livelihoods – will be decimating.

We are asking for your support and leadership to have the Federal Government implement a waiver to *The Passenger Vessel Services Act of 1886*, allowing foreign hull cruise ships that carry more than 500 passengers and crew, to operate until July 1, 2020, or until the Canadian ban is lifted, providing for an emergency exemption from the foreign port requirement as required by this law. This temporary and targeted waiver would do the most for Alaskan businesses and the State. This single action would be the highest priority federal assistance for tourism businesses and mitigate job and revenue loss.

Additionally, we support efforts to fast-track vaccine development and other measures that can return people to work – and travel – as quickly and safely as possible.

Again, thank you for all that you are doing to support the American people during this uncertain time. We are available as a resource to you and your staff as you work to identify solutions to keep America – and Alaska – open for business.

Thank you,



Sarah Leonard  
President & CEO



Dan Oberlatz, Alaska Alpine Adventures  
ATIA 2019-2020 Board Chair