

Hawaii needs a better plan for tourism

Our Governor has the hardest job of any, he has to make impossible life changing decision for the citizens of Hawaii. Any action taken is guaranteed to cost jobs, housing, health and lives. We will not all get through this intact. Residents are having to balance going back to work with increased risk of COVID19 spread, at the very same time schools will be reopening. Some people will regain income, while others will fall sick and possibly die and children will be returning to a frightening school situation. Our governor is dealing with life and death no matter how we move forward. This is the most dangerous and contagious virus most of us have dealt with in our lifetimes. We see hospitals reaching capacity in many states. We see states rolling back welcoming tourism plans. We watched our numbers go up and we all made huge sacrifices to make them go back down. I think most people know what will happen if we open too fast with too little restrictions, or oversight. Many people are anxious as the threat of COVID19 taking over Hawaii looms closer and closer.

Unfortunately people have bills to pay, rent/mortgages are due and we all need to be able to put food on the table and keep a roof over our head. So when Gov. Ige announced our reopening I thought we all need to do our part and accept the risk of reopening. I personally thought it was a terrible idea to welcome back tourist and start school the same week. I immediately started looking into homeschooling. I run a 100% tourism based business but did not want to reopen. The risk was not worth it. As I started talking to friends a couple were excited but most were not. So I posted a poll in a group and was shocked to find over 80% of people did not like the current plan to reopen with a negative test prior to travel. I decided to try the same poll in bigger groups and in groups on other islands. Over and over the same response. Overwhelmingly people did not like the current plan. So I think it is important in such a huge decision to find out what local residents want because we will all be affected by every decision and policy that is made.

Part of my reluctance with welcoming tourist August 1st is definitely the fact that school starts Aug 4th. Opening schools and welcoming tourist will definitely muddy the waters and we lose the ability to determine what caused a sudden spike.

I found it very ironic that the state expects the DOE to instantly re-tool the entire system of learning in order to accommodate us inviting in a highly contagious virus. There is an expectation that the DOE can just switch to more virtual based learning as a main source of educating students. Also there is an expectation that parents can accommodate part-time or full time at home schedules. Many cannot. So now parents make the sacrifice of choosing whether they will work or keep their children more safely at home. Also this mean keiki have to sacrifice a normal school setting, normal social interactions, normal

play, participation in sports and normal development. This is not healthy for children but it is the sacrifice we ask our keiki to make when we open our doors to COVID19. Our keiki can only have a healthy childhood for the next year if we keep our viral load extremely low. Otherwise we must protect them and others which means only being around family and staying home as much as possible. The DOE is expected to work a miracle and change everything because the state government cannot rework things so that we exist in an economy without being largely dependent on tourism.

So what is the answer? Different groups have been promoting many different ideas and strategies to make opening to tourism safer (none of which have been adopted). There is something they all seem to agree on though. This (at the absolute peak of COVID19 in the US) is the worst possible time to welcome hordes of tourist. When we put economy before public health we are most like going to lose both. If we open too soon with too weak of a plan then it is just a matter of time before we have to practice “safer at home” and very likely ask tourist to please reschedule. So we strongly suggest delaying the welcoming of tourism and we fully support the plan suggested by the group of doctors on Kauai as well as the petition “Modify Hawaii requirements for travelers arriving after 8/1/2020”.

Another thing that make Hawaii unique from many other states is we have limited resources and once they run out we cannot easily lean on other states for assistance. We also have a large population of indigenous people who are uniquely susceptible to this virus. Native Hawaiians are decreasing in number every year and we cannot place their lives on the line for tourism’s sake. That has already been done too many times in Hawaii’s history.

Finally the people of Hawaii have made HUGE sacrifices to get our numbers low. Is it surprising that we don’t want all that personal and economic sacrifice thrown away? Many families here live in multi-generational households. With so many people working in the tourism industry it is inevitable that some of those households will have members who work closely with visitors and are therefore at a much higher risk of contracting COVID19. What do they do when they bring it home and lose their kupuna? People are weighing these things and most feel we need a better plan. SO we are imploring Governor Ige to delay welcoming tourism back until things have improved greatly and are improving on the mainland. We ask that when we welcome back tourist it is done in a smarter way that keeps our cases as low as possible and we ask that the government gets creative on making the delay in welcoming tourism work for people financially.