

Wrangell Sentinel -

Don Young makes stop in Wrangell



By [Caleb Vierkant](#)



Representative Don Young made a stop in Wrangell Monday, July 7, to meet with constituents and discuss issues that matter to voters while on a tour of Southeast Alaska. There are several issues Wrangell is facing that are common across multiple Southeast communities, he said. He also discussed problems facing Alaska, in general, and common issues across the entire United States.

The ferry system is a common issue for many Southeast residents, Young said. His role, in Congress, relates to the federal funding the Alaska Marine Highway receives. Young said his main job is to protect that money. He also said that he has spoken with Governor [Mike Dunleavy](#) about the ferries, and that it can be hard to get federal funding for the ferries if the ferries are not running.

Another common issue across the region is replacing aging infrastructure, he said, as well as improving local water sources. He said he supports new hydropower and water system projects in Southeast Alaska. Even without the logging industry, he said that the region is still growing and new infrastructure will be needed.

A big issue that many Alaskan communities are facing, especially in Southeast, is a hurting tourism industry. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly reduced the number of people willing to travel right now. A recent report by the Wrangell Sentinel shows that Wrangell is expecting only a maximum capacity of 2,000 people with their summer cruise season, down from an anticipated 24,000 visitors. It is a similar challenge across several cities, Young said. Alaska is still a very popular tourist destination, Young said, and there needs to be some campaigning to start bringing tourists back in.

"I do think that this epidemic will, hopefully, be gone," Young said. "Maybe not as quick as we think it will because a lot of people weren't exposed, so it may hang around a while, but we can't let it paralyze the economy."

Young also talked about some statewide issues he is focusing on, not just in Southeast Alaska. One is the fishing industry. His main concern is trying to avoid federal interference in state fishing, he said. Getting Alaska's sea otter population under control is another priority for him, he said, as they pose a threat to Alaskan fisheries. He said he would also like to see Alaska diversify its interest in the seafood industries.

"The bright side is the kelp industry, which I'm going to try and help them more," Young said. "There may be possibilities of marketing. If we could use that bull kelp for making pickles and relishes and things like that out of the ocean, that's a good diversification."

On the topic of diversification, Young said he would also like to see Alaska's economy become less reliant on the oil industry. The state is too dependent on oil, he said. When oil prices drop, the economy suffers and people suffer. Then the price of oil rises again, and everyone forgets about the bad times and spends the extra oil money. Young said that oil will always be an important part of Alaska's economy, but the state needs to diversify its interests so it is not dependent on oil prices.

"The biggest mistake we've made as a state is we've been totally dependent on a resource where we have no control over the price," he said. "You have to have a better economy based on something else, and that's really what I want ... Right now I don't see that, and you need to develop hydropower. Southeast could be the Saudi Arabia of America, excuse me, Saudi Arabia of the West. We gotta do that, we can't just spend the money as we get it and not build anything."

Young also discussed some nationwide issues during his Wrangell visit. The COVID-19 pandemic has played a big role in hurting state and local economies across the country. Young said that the passage of the [CARES Act](#) was a good way to provide some relief to communities in need. There is some talk of expanding it further, and having the federal government pick up debt that was accrued even before the pandemic. However, he said that would be expensive and could have some other economic ramifications, such as increasing inflation. He also said he wants to look towards long-term relief plans. Some other ideas being considered in Congress are too short-term, he said.

"That's a real challenge to the Congress, it's temporary relief but does it help out in the long run?" Young said. "That's something we have to look at."

Another nationwide concern of Young's is the attitude of the country. The United States seems to be filled with hate and divisiveness. Young said, if he was allowed to be cynical, that this is because the country has had things good for a long time. Good times lead to discontent, he said, as people are achieving big goals. When people are challenged they can respond better, he said, when people are not challenged they have time to hate one another.

"It's easy to hate, it's easy to divide a population or society through hate," Young said. "Love is hard, but it solves problems."

It is a campaign year for Young, the longest-serving member of the U.S. House of Representatives. According to his biography online, at <http://www.donyoung.house.gov>, Young was first elected to represent Alaska in a special election in 1973, and has been re-elected ever since. This does not mean that Young has gotten complacent, he said. He wants Alaskans to vote for whoever they think will best represent them in Washington. So far that has been him, he said, but if people feel someone else could do a better job they should vote for them.

"I promise you one thing, I will serve you, and I will try to solve problems," Young said. "I've always been a problem solver, I've been very good at that, and I will continue to do that. The public is the one that makes that decision. It's not about Don Young, it's who can do that best job for Alaska."

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