

AVA Rafting & Zipline

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8/21/21

VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION
The Honorable Marty Walsh
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20210

RE: Executive Order 14026 - Increasing the Minimum Wage for Federal Contractors

Dear Mr. Walsh:

I am writing as the CEO of the Colorado-based outfitter AVA Rafting & Zipline. We operate whitewater rafting on 5 rivers across Colorado as well as tours on 2 zipline courses, 2 via ferratas, rock climbing, off roading and fishing. I would like to express my concerns regarding the inclusion of the outfitter industry in the proposed change to federal minimum wage requirements. This EO will cause us to provide guides with less work while dramatically increasing prices to the point that it threatens the viability of the industry at a time when we are already struggling to survive the effects of drought, wildfires, and COVID.

Outfitters and guides operate in a seasonal model that is unlike most other businesses, and the EO ignores how seasonal businesses traditionally operate. We have window of about 90 days in which we fulfill almost all of our business for the year.

This EO will force outfitters to dramatically reduce the amount of work they can provide their staff in order to curb costs – our current wage model allows our guides to pick up as much work as they would like in this short, seasonal window, which means that they can take advantage of when the demand is there and then take weeks or months off in the shoulder season. This model has worked for decades and is part of the appeal that causes someone to choose to work in the outfitting industry.

If this change is enacted, we will need to turn away business and cap guide hours to prevent an unsustainable increase in payroll costs. And the most dependable employees will not be able to receive the wage raises they would typically be entitled to receive. Guide staff will be forced to choose between a job and lifestyle they love, but that can no longer provide them sufficient work, and leaving the industry entirely – this will cause a major decline in the experience level and knowledge of the guides who remain.

How will we, as a company, respond if this passes? In order to offset the increased payroll costs and lost business, we will be forced dramatically increase the price of tours to the point where only the very well-off will be able to use our services. This will result in our company excluding many everyday people. We regularly take

youth groups, family reunions, Scout troops and schools, all of whom will no longer be able to recreate on public lands using a commercial outfitter.

Increasing prices may also cause members of the public to attempt many of these activities on their own, without the training and knowledge that outfitters bring. This can lead to dangerous consequences.

Outfitters play a vital role in how the American people recreate on public lands. We provide trained and knowledgeable staff, safety equipment, and proper orientation to reduce risk while also preventing damage to the natural environment. We provide employment and an economic boost to communities across the country. And we contribute key funds to sustaining those same public lands through the permitting fees we pay. Please ensure we are able to continue to operate and provide fulfilling jobs by exempting the industry from this Executive Order.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alison Mathes
CEO
AVA Rafting & Zipline