

My Turn

Town not doing millennials — or anyone — a favor by allowing taller hotels

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Last year, when two friends and I visited our distinguished mayor at Town Hall, we all came to a friendly but firm disagreement about whether the airport needed a new runway as long and excessively weight-bearing as was planned.

As an afterthought, I suggested to the mayor that it might be a good idea to raise the minimum wage in Taos, which had been done with success in Santa Fe. The minimum wage in Taos is \$7.25 an hour, the U.S. minimum. I suggested this new Taos minimum could apply mainly to businesses employing some certain number of people, like more than three or so, to spare small local businesses but to keep more of Walmart's big take in town. Mayor Dan Barrone disagreed: "If we raised the minimum wage, I would have to lay somebody off," he said. I recalled this conversation when, during the hearing about the proposed taller hotel zoning, Barrone stated that we needed those \$7 an hour jobs to be provided by the construction of said tall hotels in order to keep our young people in Taos. Perhaps he expects our local millennials to live indefinitely with their parents.

Why does the current fashion in hotels have to be so very tall?

My guess is that it's cheaper to build that many rooms on a smaller footprint, stacking one atop the other. Town Manager Rick Bellis justifies the need to bend over so far backwards as to change our building code for the upscale tall hotel chains by pointing out how many of the huge crowd who attended the local Alabama Shakes concert had to look elsewhere for lodgings because of the scarcity of rooms in Taos. This scarcity is, in fact, rare. Vacancies usually abound, except during such crowd-attracting spectacles.

Well, I'm old and don't like loud music anymore and didn't attend, so I can't state with certainty the demographic of those thousands of recent concert-goers. But I'm guessing they were mostly much younger than I. And those much younger generations have pretty much gotten screwed by a minimum wage that can't support them; by the exorbitant cost of college; by slavery to a college debt that will follow them through life whether or not they actually earn degrees; and by an economy that is geared to benefit those who have more than plenty while exploiting the poverty-wage energies of the young.

So these are the hordes who can afford to fill the upscale rooms of the tall hotels when they attend the productions of Bellis? Give me a break.

If it is Bellis' ambition to attract more such crowds to more such concerts and to keep them spending their money here instead of in Questa, Red River or Angel Fire when they need to bed down, then perhaps he should remember when he was young and not so wealthy.

I'm glad my mind is still clear enough to remember those days – motoring all over America on next to no funds – and you know how my friends and I could afford it? Campgrounds.

Oh, how fondly I remember those many campgrounds of my youth. Take the Grand Canyon campground. It stretched for acres on end. (Probably still does). In its communal restrooms it had showers with hot and cold running water and flush toilets (but alas no ground-floor swimming pools).

It had electric hook-ups. You could park your Winnebago, or you could pitch a tent. You could trade stories with your fellow campers. And guess what? None of the campsites were 50 or more feet tall and they didn't obstruct any views.

Tall is not beautiful. Check out the monstrous new hotel at Taos Ski Valley to see what I mean. Try to remember the spectacular sight of Wheeler Peak from the Stray Dog Cantina. It's blotto.

So here's my suggestion—keep the building code as is, and if any big businessman wants to erect a hotel in Taos, he can do it to present code or forget it.

Meanwhile, the town of Taos can develop some vacant parcels of our wide open spaces to create "Taos Municipal Campgrounds," sporting all the amenities found at the Grand Canyon, with entry fees going directly into town coffers. Think of how many such campers might want to go out for breakfast in Taos after a bracing sleep in the pungent fresh night air. From the ever-growing underclass of our nation's young, such campgrounds could bring plenty of business.

Hoff lives in Arroyo Hondo.