

## BACKGROUND

### The Hidden Crisis of Seasonal Employment in South Carolina's 7th District

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Carolina's 7th Congressional District, home to the Grand Strand and one of the nation's premier tourism destinations, faces a paradox: the very industry that drives our economy leaves thousands of working families in crisis every year. While tourism brings prosperity to our region, the seasonal nature of hospitality employment creates a cycle of economic instability that threatens the foundation of our communities.

**The Core Problem:** Families working in tourism and hospitality—our district's largest employment sector—face months without work, inadequate healthcare, and wages that cannot keep pace with rising housing costs. These are not statistics; these are our neighbors, the people who serve our visitors and make the Grand Strand the destination it is today.

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## THE SCOPE OF THE CRISIS

### Tourism's Dominance and Its Double Edge

The Grand Strand's tourism industry generates billions in annual revenue and employs tens of thousands of residents. Hotels, restaurants, attractions, and retail establishments depend on seasonal workers to meet summer demand. But when Labor Day passes and the crowds thin, these same workers face a harsh reality:

- **Months without steady income** as businesses reduce staff or close entirely
- **No employer-provided health benefits** during off-season layoffs
- **Depleted savings** from trying to stretch summer earnings across twelve months
- **Forced reliance on SNAP and other government assistance** just to feed their families

## TOURISM & HOSPITALITY BY THE NUMBERS

The statistics reveal both the industry's impressive scale and its fundamental vulnerabilities:

### Employment Impact:

- **24% of all jobs** in Horry County are hospitality-based—37,238 out of 157,162 workers (source: Tourism Works for the Grand Strand)
- **82,000+ jobs** supported by tourism throughout the Grand Strand (direct and indirect) based on 2024 JobsEQ data
- Accommodation & Food Services is the **second-largest industry** in Horry County with 21,653 employees, trailing only Retail Trade (22,814)
- SC-07's total workforce stands at 318,000 people, with tourism representing a significant portion of employment

### Economic Scale:

- **\$13.2 billion** in visitor spending in 2024, up 5.3% from \$12.5 billion in 2023 (source: DK Shifflet Visitor Volume & Spending Study)
- **\$26 billion+** total economic impact when accounting for indirect and induced effects
- **18.2 million visitors** came to the Myrtle Beach area in 2024
- **66% of sales tax revenue** in Horry County comes from visitors (source: Visa data)
- **\$59.3 million** generated in Horry County Hospitality Fee taxes in 2024

**Industry Comparisons:** In SC-07, the top employment sectors demonstrate tourism's dominance:

- **Health Care & Social Assistance:** 43,549 workers
- **Retail Trade:** 42,049 workers
- **Manufacturing:** 34,364 workers
- **Accommodation & Food Services:** ~30,000+ workers (across the district)

**Unique Regional Characteristics:**

- **80 golf courses** generate \$1.6 billion and support 13,000+ jobs (2024 study)
- **157,000+ accommodation units** across 425 hotels—on par with Las Vegas
- **2,000+ restaurants** serving the tourism market
- **60 miles of beaches** forming the core attraction

**2024 Performance:** The tourism industry showed **strong growth in 2024**, with visitor spending increasing 5.3% year-over-year. This growth came despite national headwinds like inflation and geopolitical tensions that softened tourism in other U.S. destinations. The Grand Strand's family-friendly attributes and strategic marketing gave it a competitive edge.

**The Seasonal Paradox:** While CCU economists estimate that **80% of local tourism jobs are year-round, full-time**, this statistic masks the reality that many of these "year-round" positions experience dramatic seasonal fluctuations in hours and income. A "full-time" restaurant manager might work 60 hours a week in summer but see hours cut to 25-30 during winter months, with corresponding income reductions.

**Sources:** Tourism Works for the Grand Strand, DK Shifflet Visitor Volume & Spending Study, Data USA, Horry County Government, S.C. Department of Revenue, Coastal Carolina University economic studies

## The Housing Affordability Crisis

The mathematics of survival in SC-07 are brutal:

- A minimum wage worker must work **more than 100 hours per week** just to afford a two-bedroom apartment in the Grand Strand
- This calculation doesn't include food, transportation, utilities, healthcare, or childcare
- Meanwhile, the construction boom focuses on vacation rentals and second homes, not workforce housing
- Year-round workers are being priced out of the communities they serve

### The Healthcare Gap

Tourism and hospitality jobs rarely offer comprehensive health benefits. For seasonal workers, the situation is even more dire:

- Families go months without any health coverage
- A single emergency room visit can wipe out an entire summer's savings
- Chronic conditions go untreated because workers cannot afford preventive care
- Parents delay their own medical needs to pay for their children's care

### The Education Trap

The lure of immediate income in tourism creates a devastating cycle:

- Young people drop out of high school or skip college for quick-money tourism jobs
- Without skills or credentials, they remain trapped in low-wage, seasonal work
- The cycle repeats with the next generation
- Our district loses the skilled workforce needed for economic diversification

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## REAL FAMILIES, REAL STRUGGLES

**Marylou's Story:** A single mother working as a hotel housekeeper earns \$12/hour during peak season. She works 50-60 hours per week from May through September, saving every dollar she can. By November, her hours drop to 15 per week. By January, she's usually laid off, but she holds out hope her employer will keep her on this year with minimal hours. She relies on SNAP benefits to feed her two children and has delayed dental work for three years because she cannot afford the \$800 procedure. Last winter, her son broke his arm, and the \$3,200 emergency room bill consumed her entire savings. She was one unexpected expense away from eviction.

**The Rodriguez Family:** Both parents work in restaurants—he as a line cook, she as a server. Combined, they earn about \$45,000 during the busy season. They have no health insurance. Their teenage daughter showed promise in school but dropped out at 16 to work at a beachwear shop, seduced by the immediate paycheck. Now 19, she's stuck in the same cycle as her parents, with no clear path forward.

**James's Reality:** A 58-year-old maintenance worker at a resort has worked in hospitality for 35 years. He has no retirement savings, no pension, and no health insurance outside the summer months. He's developed diabetes but cannot afford consistent medication or doctor visits. He knows he should retire but cannot afford to stop working. He represents thousands of older workers in our district facing the same impossible choice.

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## THE POLICY SOLUTIONS

John Vincent believes that the people who make our tourism economy possible deserve dignity, stability, and opportunity. His comprehensive plan addresses both immediate relief and long-term transformation:

### 1. Raise the Minimum Wage

- Increase the federal minimum wage to \$15/hour, indexed to inflation
- This ensures that full-time work provides a living wage, even during slower seasons
- Reduces reliance on government assistance programs
- Stimulates local economy as workers have more purchasing power

### 2. Expand Healthcare Access

- Support Medicaid expansion in South Carolina to cover the healthcare gap
- Create a public option for seasonal workers during off-season months
- Establish community health centers specifically serving hospitality workers
- Mandate portable benefits that follow workers between seasonal jobs

### 3. Invest in Workforce Housing

- Federal incentives for developers who build affordable, year-round rental housing
- Restrict the conversion of residential properties to short-term vacation rentals in high-impact areas
- Create a workforce housing trust fund using a small percentage of tourism tax revenue

- Establish rent stabilization measures to prevent displacement of long-term residents

#### **4. Transform Education and Training**

- Expand Pell Grant eligibility for part-time students and non-traditional learners
- Create apprenticeship programs in partnership with Horry-Georgetown Technical College
- Establish "earn while you learn" programs that allow hospitality workers to gain credentials without losing income
- Develop career pathways from entry-level tourism jobs to management and skilled trades
- Partner with local businesses to create year-round employment opportunities in emerging sectors

#### **5. Stabilize Seasonal Employment**

- Incentivize businesses to maintain year-round staffing through tax credits
- Create a seasonal worker unemployment insurance program with extended benefits
- Support economic diversification to reduce over-reliance on tourism
- Attract industries that provide stable, year-round employment

#### **6. Strengthen Worker Protections**

- Ensure fair scheduling practices that give workers predictable hours
- Mandate paid sick leave so workers don't choose between health and income
- Protect workers from wage theft and tip skimming
- Strengthen collective bargaining rights for hospitality workers

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## **THE OPPOSITION'S FAILURE**

For too long, our representatives have celebrated tourism revenue while ignoring the workers who generate it. They've:

- Blocked minimum wage increases while cost of living soared

- Refused Medicaid expansion, leaving 300,000 South Carolinians without coverage
  - Prioritized developers and vacation property owners over working families
  - Cut funding for education and workforce development
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## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

We are currently in the off-season. Right now, thousands of families in our district are:

- Stretching their last paychecks from summer
- Choosing between rent and groceries
- Avoiding doctor visits they desperately need
- Wondering how they'll make it to spring

This isn't a future crisis—it's happening today, in our communities, to our neighbors.

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## JOHN VINCENT'S COMMITMENT

John Vincent understands that a strong economy must work for everyone, not just those at the top. He believes:

- **Every job should pay a living wage**
- **Healthcare is a right, not a privilege**
- **Housing should be affordable for the people who make our communities run**
- **Education is the pathway to opportunity**
- **Workers deserve dignity, stability, and respect**

John will fight in Congress to ensure that the families who power our tourism economy can build stable, secure lives in the communities they serve.

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## CALL TO ACTION

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# JOHN VINCENT

COMMON SENSE OVER CHAOS

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The choice is clear: we can continue down the path of economic instability and working poverty, or we can build an economy that works for everyone. John Vincent is ready to lead that fight.

*"We don't have to accept an economy where hardworking families live on the edge of disaster. We can do better, and we will."* — John Vincent