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Floridians aren't always kind to tourists.

Some of our cars sport bumper stickers that read "Welcome to Florida; now go home" or "If it's tourist season, why can't we shoot 'em?"

Gulf Coast Magazine, in its recent best-and-worst list, suggested that the best place to take an out-of-state tourist is out of state.

Floridians with such an attitude are biting an important hand that feeds state coffers and keeps tax increases at bay, said John E. Evans, president of the Florida Tourism Association.

Evans, who heads one of several tourist industry trade groups in Florida, was in Tampa on Tuesday speaking at a Tampa/Hillsborough Convention and Visitors Association luncheon. He is part of a traveling road show of tourism officials staging public hearings on a plan to create a state Tourism Commission that would control a \$40-million-a-year tourist marketing program most likely financed by a tax on tourist-related businesses.

Evans said that tourism as an industry doesn't get enough respect among state lawmakers, partly because of residents' anti-tourist sentiment.

"As a general population, we don't appreciate tourists very much," he said. "At a public hearing in Fort My-

ers last week a citizen told of visiting from Texas and having residents pull up alongside her car at stoplights and yell at her to go home."

Floridians may not realize that last year about 41-million tourists paid \$1.7-billion in state taxes and spent \$16-billion in Florida retail businesses, he said. This year the recession will cause tourism revenues to fall 2 percent, he predicted, a dropoff of \$34.3-million from state tax collections.

And Floridians will have to pay to make up the revenue shortfall. As Evans said, maybe they should sport bumper stickers that read, "If it weren't for you (tourists), I'd be paying nearly \$400 a year more in taxes. Thanks."

But while the tourism industry suffers from a lack of collective clout among lawmakers, it also suffers from infighting and apathy within its ranks, he said.

The restaurant industry, the major attractions and the hotel industry have been struggling for years over who should pay what to promote tourism in the state, he said. So far hotels and car rental agency customers are bearing the burden. Yet at three public hearings on tourism taxation, including Monday's in Clearwater, fewer than 50 people showed up each time.

"The issue is going to be settled by a half-dozen lobbyists in Tallahassee," he said later in an interview.