

# Not So Great Gatsby



Dear Nick,

Happy Independence, Old Sport. Hope you were able to keep it cool surfing this wave of heat. This state of ours has got to be the best place to celebrate our nation's birthday, and I would be willing to wager as much. From top to bottom, beach to beach, you'd be hard pressed to find a better place to grill meat, imbibe refreshers and spy fireworks. I can't imagine calling anywhere else home, and it set me to thinking.

You could ask 20 different people to define home and you may get 25 different answers. I know folks born in New York, but lived elsewhere for all but their first breaths, yet claim the Big Apple as home. For some, it's where they spent their formative years, others where they studied, and some wherever their families live. I couldn't dismiss any answers as dubious knowing home is where the heart is. On this very computer alone I have 35 songs about home, so even the jingle that jangles in your head when the word is mentioned could vary from Buble' to Jay-Z. Some people have hearts on sleeves; for me, my heart belongs to the biggest little state.

Dwell in a home long enough and you stop dwelling over the things you would change. Instead of remodeling, the bathroom becomes good enough. The banister with the loose railing adds character, and didn't George Bailey have that in *It's A Wonderful Life*? We tend to gloss over the flaws with rose-tinted nostalgia. Rhode Island is my home, but that doesn't mean there aren't a few things I would fix if I could.

Indulge me while I talk about a few.

We shouldn't have a car tax. It's stupid and is basically a slap in the face to everyone who chooses to live in the state. It simultaneously says, "Our government can't manage its finances so we need to tax you every way we can," and, "Although the residents of RI talk about having it repealed all the time, your attention spans are so short you will forget and lose interest. Every time."

New York City has 1.1 million students in its public school systems and has 32 superintendents of schools. Rhode Island has about 150,000 students in its public schools. We have 39 superintendents. School superintendents are the highest paid public officials at the town level on average. But with a tenth of the students, couldn't we make do with a tenth of the superintendents rather than seven more?

Like most gents who love their home, I sometimes attempt some home improvement projects. Succeed or fail, I am usually finished in a finite amount of time. Here you may be Rhode Island born and Rhode Island bred, but you'll be Rhode Island dead before they finish any of these road projects. Can't we just

hire the people who did the roads in Massachusetts? They even have little bumpy things and reflectors in their lanes!

Finally, (I have more, but I don't want to drone on all night, Old Sport) can we talk about the accolades? We win all kinds of awards for best food and best place to live, and I agree wholeheartedly, but can we figure out a way to lure some companies to the state? While I can't agree that giving a chance to the ball player with the bloody sock, who once burned himself ironing clothes (because he was wearing them at the time) was a good idea, at least it was an attempt. We should be rivaling the local sports teams for rumored and potential free agent signings, not watching as both the intellectual and manufacturing jobs get sent out of town. If we can't woo companies, maybe we should at least play to our strengths. Bring in more tourists, support the arts and restaurants that seem to be our most attractive feature and let them shine against the beautiful backdrop that is our shores and historic cities. I don't know how to fix it exactly, but I know it needs fixing.

A home is not just where you live. It reflects who you are and it's where you feel most comfortable. Most people don't think twice about saying how much they love their house, but usually have what they would potentially change on the tip of their tongue.

What would you change about Rhode Island? What is the best way to make those changes? We all choose to live here - may as well make it the best place it can be.

Yours,

Gatsby