

SPONSOR STATEMENT

House Joint Resolution 34

2/2/04

“A Resolution requesting the United States Department of Labor to extend Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits to Alaska salmon fishermen; requesting the United States Congress and the United States Department of Agriculture to extend additional disaster and price support benefits to Alaska salmon fishermen; and requesting the United States Department of Commerce to establish a Trade Adjustment Assistance program specific to commercial fishermen.”

In recent years, Alaska salmon fishermen have seen dramatically reduced prices for their salmon catches due to imported salmon flooding the market. Many salmon fishermen could not fish at all in 2002 or 2003 because the processors who traditionally bought their catch made the decision not to buy salmon because of devastatingly low prices.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the United States Department of Labor have Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs that were designed to help workers whose industries have been hurt by imports. As a result of efforts by Sen. Lisa Murkowski last year, Alaska salmon fishermen were made eligible for these TAA programs. However, the programs were designed primarily for agricultural workers and have proven difficult for fishermen to navigate.

It is undisputed that Alaska salmon fishermen have suffered price declines due to foreign imports. But salmon fishermen may not show a net fishing income decline from one year to the next because they received other income. For instance, in 2002 some fishermen received Exxon payments from the 1989 oil spill, thereby making many of them ineligible for TAA. This resolution urges the federal government to make adjustments to the existing program to accommodate the current petition and to ultimately create a separate program designed to better suit the unique qualities of the commercial fishing industry.

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In light of the continuing downturn in the salmon market, many fishermen are eager to learn new skills to make them viable in a competitive job market. As it stands now, however, retraining benefits from the U.S. Dept. of Labor are only available if the fishermen qualify for the USDA TAA price adjustment benefits.

In order to make the TAA programs a better fit for commercial fishermen the resolution makes four specific requests:

- 1) It asks that the USDA give price-adjustment benefits to Alaska salmon fishermen who fished five of six years from 1997 to 2002 and subsequent qualifying years if the fishermen can prove they lost income in any one of those five years due to imports or they lost their market due to imports. This would remove the requirement that fishermen show a net income loss from one year to the next, providing instead for a loss over a period of time.
- 2) It asks that the U.S. Dept. of Labor extend retraining benefits to Alaska salmon fishermen who fished in five of the six years from 1997 to 2002 even if the fishermen did not fish in the preceding year due to impacts from price fluctuations or loss of market.
- 3) It asks that the U.S. Congress and the USDA make Alaska salmon a covered commodity, which makes Alaska salmon fishermen eligible for other disaster and price support benefits.
- 4) It asks that the U.S. Secretary of Commerce pursue the creation of a TAA program specific to commercial fishermen.