

Alaska State Legislature

Vice-Chair, Legislative Council
Chair, World Trade
And
State/Federal Relations

REPRESENTATIVE
RAMONA L. BARNES
District 22

April 19, 2000

The Honorable Drue Pearce
President of the Senate
Alaska State Legislature

Dear President Pearce:

I understand your strong interest in passage of SB 273 and appreciate the environmental concerns that prompted the legislation. I believe most or all of us in the Legislature share those concerns.

However, you are asking that we pass legislation that brings with it many unanswered questions and issues. As you may recall, I have repeatedly requested an assessment of the economic impact of this legislation on the state, its businesses and especially, its residents.

There has developed a feeling that as the legislation has progressed, implementation becomes increasingly complex and of concern. Even the basic costs for trawler steamers, fish processors and cruise lines are bandied about in widely-ranging numbers.

I still see a significant element missing in the overall equation. Again, we need an analysis of the impact on businesses in our state, the continued viability of our exports and the effect on Alaska's residents and consumers. This is major legislation that has moved at a fast pace and with what appears to be reluctant support. I share this reluctance because I see us rushing into law something that needs considerable further evaluation and review.

Fortunately, existing federal regulations already provide significant regulation for spill response, cleanup and financial responsibility in Alaska waters. As I know you must be aware, many of the affected industries have for some time, suggested that rather than pass legislation this year a balanced, interim task force be established to accomplish this necessary review. In this way, working closely with DEC, legislation could be crafted to meet the concerns of all those involved. For example, the environmental concerns SB 273 now attempts to address while in addition, it could address the economic concerns to which I refer above. Also, such lingering questions of redundancy (including the cost to businesses of such redundancy) and overlap with existing federal law could be thoroughly addressed. This could still effectively result in final regulations being in place by April, 2002, just as they would under SB 273 in its present form.

The government working together with interested parties is a time-honored process that certainly would seem preferable to putting this into law now and later seeking answers to the many questions that are sure to arise.

In the interests of time, I am including a draft of a resolution for your consideration to implement an interim task force.

Sincerely,

Ramona L. Barnes
Representative