

YOU ARE HERE Death by a thousand cuts

Death by a thousand cuts



By Dave Harbour

Alaska Standard Contributor

Today, we are sad to note that Alaska's coastal communities seem via their Juneau representatives to be poised with hammer and nail above Alaska's economic coffin, ready to drive home a killing blow to outer continental shelf drilling and related development.

This morning the Alaska State Senate Finance Committee will take up Senate Bill 4, Alaska Coastal Management Program. Like its companion bill in the House of Representatives, House Bill 74, it would overlay already stringent state and federal statutes and regulations with a new group, with massive powers, called the "Alaska Coastal Policy Board".

It is obvious to any close observer that this is a strategy carefully coordinated with environmental activists and possibly the office of U.S. Senator Mark Begich, whose similar plan we exposed last summer for an Arctic Regional Citizens Advisory Council. While these efforts could be a curious coincidence, it is not impossible that a subtle blackmail fills the air. It's as if some North Slope or other coastal government leader were saying, "Pass the Alaska Coastal Policy Board (ACPB) in the form of an Alaska bill, or you'll get the Arctic Regional Citizens Advisory Council (ARCAC) in the form of a Federal law. If neither passes, we'll block OCS. With passage of either, our bargaining power with the Alaska State Government and the natural resource companies will be dramatically increased—at taxpayer expense—without the guarantee or even the promise of more reasonable management of Alaska's coastal areas."

Either the Alaska Coastal Board or the Federal Arctic Regional Citizens Advisory Council would create a huge new cost center as members of either group fly to meetings throughout the year, collect per diem, demand participation at hearings by government and industry, foster new studies, create regulatory uncertainty and generally give a number of political appointees to these to-be-envied travel positions new ways to stop Alaska's development in its tracks.

We believe that if either group is established, Alaska will never again have the benefit of budget sustaining, safe--and even lifesaving--OCS development, diverting billions of dollars in current and potential investment to other parts of the world.

Let's review how these self-serving and dangerous groups could further injure Alaska's economy. Earlier, we analyzed the destructive potential of Senator Begich's ARCAC.

The Alaska state version of the ARCAC is the ACBP. The Senate version is sponsored by Senator Donny Olson-D, Nome and the House bill is sponsored by Representatives Reggie Joule-D, Nome; Bryce Edgmon-D, Dillingham; Bob Buch-D, Anchorage; Bob Herron-D, Bethel; Neal Foster-D, Nome; Woodie Salmon-D, Ft. Yukon; Alan Austerman-R, Kodiak; Bill Thomas-R, Haines; and, Kyle Johansen-R, Ketchikan.

In particular, we address the features of SB 4, since it is having its hearing today. Here are a few, but not all, of its features:

- ACBP Membership. Permits the Governor to appoint 4 'public' members who have been recommended from the four coastal regions: 'Northwest, Southwest, Upper Cook Inlet and Southeast. Includes Commissioners of Environmental Conservation, Fish and Game and Natural Resources. Co-chairs will be a public member and a commissioner.
- ACBP Benefits. Members will receive government paid travel expenses and per diem.
- ACBP Powers. It can receive grants, contributions, appropriations (including Federal funds). It can "consult and cooperate with ... persons, organizations, and groups, public or private, interested in, affected by, or concerned with coastal area planning and management", and with, "agents and officials of the coastal resource districts of the state, and federal and state agencies concerned with or having jurisdiction over coastal planning and management," and it can, "take any reasonable action....," in support of its legislative mandate.
- ACBP Duties. Really an extension of "Powers", it will:
 - o "approve statewide standards for the Alaska coastal management program and criteria for the preparation and approval of coastal management plans in accordance with AS 46.40.
 - o provide, "data and information to coastal resource districts to carry out their planning and management functions under the program."
- ACBP Legislative Mandates. These mandates further increase the power of this group to affect economic development in coastal areas by:
 - o allowing it to approve changes to a coastal management program or portions thereof
 - o mandating its review of coastal management programs
 - o letting it evaluate the effectiveness of coastal management plans.
 - o letting it consider new information....
 - o having it oversee the protection and management of significant historic, cultural, natural, subsistence and aesthetic values and natural systems....
 - o GIVES APPROVAL POWER TO THE ACBP OVER THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL

RESOURCES TO EXECUTE 46.40.040 DUTIES:

- to promulgate regulations that: identify coastal boundaries, determine land and water uses, etc.
- to promulgate regulations establishing a consistency review of coastal management plan certification processes.
 - o giving it the power to veto or approve coastal management plans, conduct hearings and meet with parties to attempt to resolve differences. If "differences" are not resolved, the board can hold a hearing and then issue an order that has the force of law, and may be appealed to the Superior Court of Alaska.
 - o It can promulgate regulations that define how it will enforce its orders.

Conclusion

This destructive new layer of bureaucracy would be the most serious in a series of economic wounds leading eventually to Alaska's... and America's death by a thousand cuts. The Legislature should kill the bill and the concept before its effects kill the economy. It is a purely political play and would not properly argument the public interest in one single way. If passed, Governor Parnell should veto it for the same reasons that he opposes all of the negative federal government bureaucratic interference noted above: it works with federal and environmental initiatives to delay or decimate coastal development.

But there are other compelling reasons that state leaders should fight to kill this legislation. It provides a government sponsored and funded network inclined to support needlessly restrictive coastal policies. It will give birth to a huge new bureaucracy with new, destructive powers. It will arm that bureaucracy--along with environmental and village allies--with the ability to bully and blackmail industry and the State government. It will further reduce employment potential and further heighten subsidized cultures in rural Alaska. It will cause economic harm to Alaska's Native Regional Corporations and all other Alaskan businesses and citizens. It will--consciously or not--assist environmental allies and the federal government in forwarding a job killing agenda nationwide.