Thank you Mr. Chairman,

My name is Robert Venables, Energy Coordinator for Southeast Conference (the State's regional development organization for southeast Alaska and the federally recognized Economic Development District).

Southeast Conference has worked since 1958 to advance the collective interests of the people, communities and businesses of the region with a mission to help develop strong economies, healthy communities and a quality environment in Southeast Alaska. Our Energy Committee continues to bring focus to the need to develop our vast renewable resources and displace diesel dependency – especially in our rural communities devastated by high energy costs, unemployment and outmigration.

And we thank the State Legislature for efforts to date that will bring about the long-term improvements in developing those renewable energy resources that will diminish, and hopefully someday displace the need for PCE as well.

But that day is not here yet. There are still communities with decimated economies that need help now. Businesses are hurting in rural communities like Hoonah – and they are disappearing in communities like Angoon and Kake. The costs of operating our schools here in southeast continue to increase in an era of diminished federal support. This legislation would be a life-saver to school districts and businesses in our most needy communities.

Perhaps HB 294 should be called the "Back to the Future" bill. It does not seek to establish a new program, but restores back to what was the original intent of the PCE program and give rural businesses a future and possibly survive. The program was understandably cut back during the days of $9/barrel oil. That is not the case today with oil prices well above historic averages.

HB 294 can help make a difference – and help now as we all work toward better long-term solutions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the many efforts you all are making on our region and state's behalf and for this opportunity to provide comment.

I am available for any questions.