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January 24, 2014

The Honorable Shelley Hughes
Legislative Affairs
State Capitol
Room 409
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

via email: rep.shelley.hughes@akleg.gov

Re: UAS test facility award

Dear Ms. Hughes:

As you have probably heard, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced on December 30 that the University of Alaska has been selected as one of six public entities that will develop unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) research and test sites around the country. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of the university's successful efforts to seize a leadership role in the development and deployment of unmanned aircraft systems, and their safe integration into the national airspace.

Alaska has an abundance of natural resources, but its vast size and limited road access have provided substantial challenges for the management and utilization of those resources. Aviation is the only way to access large parts of the state. Recognizing the potential commercial and scientific benefits of the emerging technology of civilian unmanned aircraft systems over a decade ago, the University of Alaska Fairbanks Geophysical Institute (UAF-GI) began working aggressively with this technology, and rapidly became a world leader in civilian UAS.

In 2012, Congress passed the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act. Among other things, this Act addressed the issue of integrating unmanned aircraft systems into the national air space. It provided for the establishment of six separate UAS test ranges around the country aimed at safe implementation of these new technologies for commercial and scientific applications. An industry-commissioned study has predicted that more than 70,000 jobs would develop in the first three years after UAS restrictions are eventually eased by the FAA. Our own study suggests the numbers are much bigger, and can bring significant industry and jobs to Alaska.

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Realizing the enormous opportunity for Alaska to develop and exploit the benefits of this new technology, and leveraging the work already done by UAF-GI, it was decided that the university would submit a proposal to operate one of these test sites. After a rigorous 10-month selection process involving 25 proposals from 24 states, the university team prevailed.

This success took a collective effort: the university, the Alaska Legislature, the offices of the governor and the lieutenant governor, and Alaska's congressional delegation were all involved. A critical element was the state's decision to appropriate \$5 million to the university in the FY13 capital budget, to be used for "Research and Development of Unmanned Aerial Systems" and to help position UAF-GI to compete for one of the new UAS test ranges. This appropriation supplemented the significant external funding received by the university from a variety of federal and non-federal sources that support UAF-GI's Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Integration (ACUASI). It demonstrated the state's commitment to the project, and was an important factor in the FAA's decision. ACUASI anticipates 20 full-time employees by 2016, with the necessary funding coming from private investors and project work. In addition, the state legislature's efforts to establish a task force to pursue legislation that would both protect Alaskans' privacy while encouraging the industry here were another positive factor in the FAA's review of our proposal.

Again, my thanks for your support. Through collaborations like this, we will make a better future for Alaska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PAT GAMBLE". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Patrick Gamble

cc: Brian Rogers, Chancellor, UAF
Mark Myers, Vice Chancellor for Research, UAF
Ro Bailey, Special Projects Coordinator, UAF
Greg Walker, Director, Alaska Center for UAS Integration, UAF
Bob McCoy, Director, Geophysical Institute, UAF
Chris Christensen, Associate Vice President for State Relations, UA System
Michelle Rizk, Associate Vice President, UA System