

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPRESENTATIVE STEVE THOMPSON DISTRICT 3

Sponsor Statement

HB 176 “An Act relating to experimental vehicles”

Cold weather vehicle testing is one of the Interior Alaska’s quietest industries. Fairbanks’ own Economic Development Corporation advertises the Interior as “one of the greatest places in the world for Cold Weather Testing,” thereby, seeking the attention of automakers to come to Fairbanks to test their vehicles in the region’s cold winter climate. However, as secretive as these experimental vehicles are, sightings are common. Interior residents trade tales of sightings of packs of shadowy grey silhouettes whipping by in the ice fog.

Cold weather vehicle testing is a great economic driver for the Interior. Vehicles are flown in to the Fairbanks International Airport, warehouse facilities are leased, hundreds of hotel rooms are booked, local companies are hired to provide services, and many local citizens are employed over the course of the season.

The Interior is a testing ground for Mercedes, Nissan and Volkswagen Group of America, Inc. (VWGoA). In 2002, Alaska State Troopers held several of VWGoA’s vehicles at Delta Junction advising them that under Alaska Statute 28.10.121, VWGoA is required to use Alaska plates since they are being operated for a commercial purpose, as defined in AS 28.90.990.

From 2002 to 2012, licensing of these test vehicles was accomplished by paying for a one-year registration fee to use Alaska plates. Recently, however, a problem arose when VWGoA had to bring the same vehicles back for a second season of extended testing, which was required by stricter emissions regulations. Unfortunately, the one-year registration has been an “informal” concession provided by a former Director of DMV. Due to the “informal” arrangement, DMV was not able to extend the one-year license without statutory authority.

HB 176 provides statutory authority for experimental vehicle plates to be issued to manufacturers or distributors for a 12-month period, with the ability for the license to be renewed for additional 12-month periods, for a maximum of 36 months.

Please join Representative Thompson in supporting this legislation.

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