

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

April 23, 2003

1:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Thomas Wagoner, Chair
Senator Georgianna Lincoln
Senator Kim Elton

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Robin Taylor, Vice Chair
Senator Gary Stevens

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 14

Requesting the Federal Aviation Administration to fully staff and maintain flight service stations in Alaska.

MOVED SJR 14 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS ACTION

SJR 14 - See Transportation minutes dated 4/10/03

WITNESS REGISTER

Senator Donny Olson
Alaska State Capitol, Room 510
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor SJR 14

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 03-11, SIDE A

CHAIR THOMAS WAGONER called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Present were Senators Lincoln, Elton and Chair Wagoner. Senator Taylor arrived momentarily.

The business to come before the committee was SJR 14.

#SJR 14

SJR 14-FAA FLIGHT SERVICE STATIONS

SENATOR DONNY OLSON, sponsor of SJR 14, paraphrased from the following sponsor statement:

SJR 14 is a resolution requesting the Federal Aviation Administration to fully staff and maintain its flight service stations in Alaska.

Alaska is a vast state that relies on air transportation for much of its commerce and connectivity. A substantial portion of the State of Alaska does not have the road infrastructure to facilitate the transport of freight and the movement of people. Furthermore, coastal and river communities in Western, Central, and Northern Alaska lose their marine transportation alternative during the five to eight months of winter ice conditions. These communities then are solely dependent on air transportation for travel, goods and emergency services for a substantial part of the year.

Furthermore, there is a large number of Alaskans that own and fly airplanes. Indeed, Alaska has the highest percentage of general aviation users per capita in the United States. General aviation users depend on FAA flight service stations to inform them of runway closures and conflicting runway traffic.

FAA flight service stations are essential for the continued safety and dependability of Alaska's vital air transportation network. Both commercial and private pilots are totally reliant on the expertise and competence of FAA's flight service personnel. The state of Alaska has over 180 airports that depend on flight service stations for weather updates, runway conditions, and assistance with safe air travel.

SENATOR ROBIN TAYLOR asked what could be done to encourage the FAA to expand staffing rather than constricting it and relying on private sector contracting. He favored returning to the system in which communities were FAA-authorized to provide on-site weather information for pilots. He opined having an individual look out the window to check for local landmarks was far more satisfactory for pilots than relying on a computerized box for weather information. He expressed frustration with the

FAA and asked whether there was a possibility of using more people and fewer machines.

SENATOR OLSON acknowledged it was a good question and he agreed that Alaskan pilots who fly in inclement weather find local observations to be invaluable. Unfortunately, privatization and mechanization is on the rise. SJR 14 is an effort to stem the tide and keep current FAA stations staffed and maintained to better provide for the safety of the flying public.

There were no further questions.

SENATOR TAYLOR made a motion to move SJR 14 from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note. There being no objection, it was so ordered.

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CHAIR WAGONER adjourned the meeting at 1:52 pm.