

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

April 10, 2003

1:40 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator John Cowdery, Chair
Senator Thomas Wagoner, Vice Chair
Senator Donny Olson

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Gene Therriault
Senator Georgianna Lincoln

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 - No previous action to record.

WITNESS REGISTER

No witnesses to testify

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 03-14, SIDE A

CHAIR JOHN COWDERY called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:40 p.m. Senators Olson, Wagoner and Chair Cowdery were present. The committee took up SJR 14.

SJR 14-FAA FLIGHT SERVICE STATIONS

SENATOR DONNY OLSON, sponsor of SJR 14, explained to members that SJR 14 requests the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to fully staff and maintain its flight service stations in Alaska. He told members:

Alaska is a vast state that relies on air transportation for much of its commerce and continuity. A substantial portion of the state does not have road infrastructure to facilitate the transportation of freight and the movement of people. Furthermore, coastal and river communities in western, central and northern Alaska lose their marine transportation during five to eight months when winter ice conditions persist. These communities are solely dependent on air transportation for travel, goods and emergency services for that part of the year. Furthermore, there are 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 and depends on flight service stations for weather updates, runway conditions and assistance with safe air travel. After speaking to a number of people having been involved with flight service station communicators, I'd like to go ahead and quote a gentleman who has been a flight service station communicator for over 30 years. He wants to go ahead and see this present system continue because of its safety record. With that, I urge your support for the resolution, hoping to ensure the safety of air travel in Alaska.

CHAIR COWDERY said he not only supports SJR 14, he would like to co-sponsor the resolution.

SENATOR WAGONER said he has received several e-mails from constituents about this resolution. One was from an employee who stressed the necessity of continuing the flight service stations. Senator Wagoner asked if the federal government reduced the number of flight service stations in the state to three in one action.

SENATOR OLSON responded that there was a substantial reduction but he did not recall the number.

SENATOR WAGONER said the system was supposed to be automated to the point it would take care of the needs of the program for 40 years. The City of Kenai built a \$40 million facility to house the FAA and the FAA requested a 20-year lease with an option for a 20-year renew lease. Later he found the FAA had already started contracting out services to run the towers in some of the smaller communities. He questioned why dismantling a system that is working.

SENATOR OLSON agreed.

SENATOR WAGONER motioned to pass SJR 14 from committee with individual recommendations and attached zero fiscal note.

CHAIR COWDERY asked for unanimous consent. There being no objection, the motion carried. He then adjourned the meeting at 1:45 p.m.