

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE  
RUBY COMMUNITY CENTER

May 27, 2009  
4:08 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Lesil McGuire, Co-Chair  
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Co-Chair  
Senator Hollis French  
Senator Thomas Wagoner  
Senator Gary Stevens

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Charlie Huggins, Vice Chair  
Senator Bert Stedman

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

Public Hearing on Statewide Energy Plan

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record.

**WITNESS REGISTER**

CHARLES TOTEMOFF, President  
Chenega Corporation

**POSITION STATEMENT:**

JESS BOTRA, ABS Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:**

ED TARTAN

Ruby Tribal Council

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supported renewable energies.

JOHN WIREHOUSE, representing himself

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Urged funding an Emerging Technologies Fund at the highest level possible.

BILLY MCKARTY, JR.

Traditional Chief

Ruby

**POSITION STATEMENT:** He said the hall in Ruby was built in 1967, and the price per kilowatt hour then was about 12 cents; and it has gone sky high since then. Something needs to be done, and soon, he urged.

EDNA PETERS, representing herself

**POSITION STATEMENT:** She would like homeowners to get assistance in buying wind turbines and thought her home would be a good test location.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

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**Co-CHAIR LESIL MCGUIRE** called the Senate Resources Standing Committee to order. It was scheduled to start at approximately 3:30 p.m.

#### **Public Hearing on Statewide Energy Plan**

Due to technical difficulties, the first few minutes of the meeting were not recorded.

CHARLES TOTEMOFF, President, Chenega Corporation, said he had lived in Ruby for five years. It has hot springs and wind power potential. The cost of living has driven many people to migrate to urban centers. He noted that Power Cost Equalization (PCE) helped, but everyone in the community pays about \$20 per day for electricity. Fuel is high as well. He said that Rural Alaska pays a fuel tax, but receives no benefits from it. He suggested help for rural Alaska in terms of tapping into highway dollars to subsidize fuel deliveries.

He stressed the importance for rural Alaska to be able to sustain itself. The community is converting to solar panels and hopes to lower operational costs for its school. Lots can be done, and he looks forward to that.

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JESS BOTRA, ABS Alaska, said ABS Alaska sold equipment to the hydro project they had just seen. He thought that education about what alternative energies are available and how to use them was key in rural communities like Ruby. Communities all over Alaska are getting involved in alternative energy so that fuel and electrical costs are reduced. But people feel it's out of their grasp especially without knowing what is available and

being able to learn how to install and use it - and to pay for it.

Someone in Nome is successfully running a four-bedroom two story house, three-car garage based on solar hot water and a wind turbine, for instance; his electricity comes on only for five minutes every hour. He bought his home in Fairbanks based on the wind regime, but the problem he has is that there is no educational facility that can step him through the program of getting the funding and show him how to put those things on his property. Education programs would be useful in both rural and urban communities.

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ED TARTAN, Ruby Tribal Council, said there should be energy outfitting for homes to reduce energy consumption. Many fish camps now have wind generators and solar panels. They work. So, he knows it's possible to outfit the village and reduce energy consumption. The turbine project is the only thing happening and he is proud of it, but there is more that can be done.

CO-CHAIR MCGUIRE said the committee visited the Cold Climate Research Center and legislators will take back the idea that there should be more outreach. Congress has a tax incentive, but without an income tax it's not much incentive in Alaska.

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SENATOR THOMAS said bringing energy raters for the weatherization program to Ruby might be helpful as a start. It won't tell people how to install solar panels and wind energy, but it will tell people how to correct the inadequacies of their particular house. The next step is whether someone can afford to put panels in. Consolidating public services in one spot is a good idea to save energy.

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JOHN WIREHOUSE, Director, Yukon River Intertribal Water Shed Council, urged funding an Emerging Technologies Fund at the highest level possible, because Alaska has the energy resources that should make it a leader in the renewable energies industry.

Sometimes people who step up to the plate have the capacity to write the grants and get the money to fund their projects - large organizations can do that. But this process bypasses some of the great ideas from the guy who is working in his garage. Further, grantees should have a training component for installing and maintaining these renewable energy systems.

Third, he suggested having interest free loans or grants for small projects.

CO-CHAIR MCGUIRE said the Emerging Technology Fund is in SB 150 and there is need for support.

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BILLY MCKARTY, JR., Traditional Chief in Ruby, welcomed the committees. He said the hall in Ruby was built in 1967, and the price per kilowatt hour then was about 12 cents; and it has gone sky high since then. Something needs to be done, and soon, he urged.

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EDNA PETERS said she has been in Ruby for over 30 years. She and her husband are on a fixed income and the rising price of electricity is a huge concern. She is interested in wind turbines and so she bought some. However, they were all destroyed by the wind - so at least she knows she has a prime location. She would like homeowners to get assistance in buying wind turbines, and thought her home would be a good test location.

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SENATOR FRENCH thanked everyone for their hospitality. Rural Alaska will survive only if the basic costs of existence are brought down - especially the cost of energy, he said, and they need to work together. There are probably 100 villages just like theirs; and each solution will be slightly different. The best lawmakers can probably give them is "a tool box," but they would be the ones to have to open that box and make the tools work. It was very encouraging for him to see that happening here.

MS. PETERS remarked that with all the troubles going on in the world, living in an Alaskan village is probably the safest place they could be. That was brought out when 911 happened. When things are at their worst we are at our best, she said, but they need some help with their energy expenses.

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CO-CHAIR MCGUIRE thanked everyone for heir hospitality and testimony and adjourned the meeting at 4:38 p.m.