

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL
TRADE AND TOURISM

March 15, 2011
10:19 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Bob Herron, Chair
Representative Kurt Olson, Vice Chair
Representative Reggie Joule
Representative Wes Keller
Representative Cathy Engstrom Munoz
Representative Steve Thompson
Representative Berta Gardner
Representative Chris Tuck

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Neal Foster

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Johnny Ellis
Representative Bill Stoltze

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: "Alaska Adventure Center: Selling Tourism in the 21st Century"

- HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 191

"An Act establishing a state department of agriculture and food and relating to its powers and duties; relating to the powers and duties of the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Natural Resources; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 191

SHORT TITLE: DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) THOMPSON BY REQUEST

03/11/11 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/11/11 (H) EDT, RES, FIN
03/15/11 (H) EDT AT 10:15 AM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

PERRY GREEN, Board Member
Alaska Adventure Exhibition Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Participated in a PowerPoint presentation titled, "Alaska Adventure Center: Selling Tourism in the 21st Century."

BOB COE, Development Chair
Alaska Adventure Exhibition Center
La Quinta, California

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided a PowerPoint presentation titled, "Alaska Adventure Center: Selling Tourism in the 21st Century."

PETE FELLMAN, Representative
Alaska Farm Bureau, Inc.
Delta Junction, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

LYALL BRASIER, Owner
Brasier Farms
Delta Junction, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

BRYCE WRIGLEY, President
Alaska Farm Bureau, Inc.
Delta Junction, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

RUBY HOLLEMBAEK, Owner-Operator
Alaska Interior Game Ranch; President
Alaska Diversified Livestock Association, Inc. (ADLA)

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

LYNN GATTIS, Owner
Gattis Farm
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

PAUL HUPPERT, Owner
Palmer Produce, Inc.

Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

MICHAEL NEECE, President

Homer Grange

Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

BRUCE WILLARD, Director

Alaska Farm Bureau, Inc.

Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

MARIE RICE

Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Ms. Rice's testimony supporting HB 191 was read by Bill Burton.

BILL BURTON

Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

GAYLE EASTWOOD

Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 191.

DELBERT SIMINEO

Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 191.

ED FOGELS, Deputy Commissioner

Office of the Commissioner

Department of Natural Resources

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 191.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:19:24 AM](#)

CHAIR BOB HERRON called the House Special Committee on Economic Development, International Trade and Tourism meeting to order at 10:19 a.m. Representatives Herron, Thompson, Gardener, Tuck, and Keller, and were present at the call to order. Representatives Munoz, Olson, and Joule arrived as the meeting was in progress. Senator Ellis and Representative Stoltze were also in attendance.

PRESENTATION: "Alaska Adventure Center: Selling Tourism in the 21st Century"

10:20:06 AM

CHAIR HERRON announced that the first order of business would be a presentation titled, "Alaska Adventure Center: Selling Tourism in the 21st Century," by Perry Green and Bob Coe.

10:21:08 AM

PERRY GREEN, Board Member, Alaska Adventure Exhibition Center, noted his long family history and business experience in Alaska, particularly in tourism. The Alaska Adventure Exhibition Center is an idea that has been evolving for over 10 years, and the members of the board of directors were chosen for their expertise in tourism marketing and for their ability to think "outside the box." Mr. Green reviewed the business history of the co-presenter, Mr. Coe, and named other members of the board. He pointed out that 75 percent of his personal business - from Ketchikan to Anchorage - is dependent upon tourism, and his organization seeks to build a unique structure on the Las Vegas Strip to promote Alaska tourism. Las Vegas was chosen because it has been the number-one exhibition city in the world for the last 16 years, and last year 31 million people visited the Las Vegas Strip. He introduced Mr. Coe and listed his many successful business and community activities.

10:26:45 AM

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked Mr. Green whether this was his idea.

10:27:22 AM

MR. GREEN said yes. He told a story of visiting Bethel where he realized that the Bush had changed, and that developing the tourism industry would help cities and rural areas as well.

10:29:18 AM

MR. GREEN, in response to Chair Herron, relayed some of his accomplishments related to poker tournaments and promotion. He observed that "it isn't the state that sells, it's the sizzle." As an example of the impact of tourism and successful promotion, he noted that when Mr. Coe managed the duty-free stores at the

Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (Anchorage airport), \$20 million in revenue was paid to the state annually.

[10:32:48 AM](#)

BOB COE, Development Chair, Alaska Adventure Exhibition Center, informed the committee that he retired from work in Alaska in 2004, but is here to give back to the state. He provided his background and described his efforts to market Alaska as the gateway to Japan after political changes in Russia, and longer-distance aircraft, threatened one-half of the international revenue coming into the Anchorage airport. In Guam, he assisted as the tourism industry became a large part of the economy. His primary tasks were to design and build retail stores, worldwide marketing programs, travel-industry relationships, consumer research, and aspects of these tasks are tourism and entertainment. Mr. Coe began presented slide 2 titled, "Alaska's Tourism Economy" and described "economic sizing." He reviewed the recent economic statistics on tourism in Alaska that revealed the tourism industry is shrinking, and causing economic challenges throughout the state from the loss of jobs and state revenue. The primary cause is the worldwide recession, which has affected the cruise industry especially, and the future is uncertain. Mr. Coe opined that spending habits have changed and traditional marketing methods through advertising will not make a difference; what is required are powerful marketing strategies that "push and pull." He explained that marketing to those Outside by businesses that are based in Alaska attempt to pull tourists to the state, but the cruise industry, because it establishes a schedule to a specific destination, pushes tourists to the state from another location. Thus the decline of the cruise industry is a problem because of the loss of the "push" element of tourism. He observed that millions of people still want to come to Alaska, except for the cold and the cost. Slide 4 titled, "Alaska Visitor numbers have declined since 2008," indicted a loss of 209,800 cruise visitors. He advised that some of the figures were preliminary numbers, but they are "in the ballpark."

[10:42:42 AM](#)

MR. COE doubted the airline industry's increase of 70,000 visitors in 2009. He then presented slide 5 titled, "Alaska's Tourism Economy is Shrinking Detailed Analysis Summary," which indicated a decline to the economy of \$560 million in direct and indirect spending since 2008. Slide 6 titled, "Alaska's Tourism Economy is Shrinking," was an itemized list of spending for

2008-2010, although the numbers for 2010 were an average from 2009. He pointed out the losses, and concluded that "we're in trouble and we need a strategy." Slide 9 was titled, "Targets Need to be Established New Marketing Strategies Need to be Initiated," and Mr. Coe advised that an aggressive strategy is required that will target large segments of the visitor industry. Slide 12 titled, "Key New Strategies Launch a New Foreign Visitor Strategy," described Mr. Green's idea of an Alaska Adventure Center "push" marketing strategy to target foreign visitors, expose foreigners to Alaska attractions, and provide incentives to travel agents and visitors. If successful, the center will return 20,000 visitors to Alaska. Mr. Coe detailed his objectives for tourism marketing through the 2013-2014 season with a focus on increasing air travelers.

[10:48:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked whether the figures underlined on slide 11 were the visitors targeted by the Alaska Adventure Center in Las Vegas.

[10:49:14 AM](#)

MR. COE indicated yes, and explained that the first target is 30,000 foreign visitors, primarily from China, Japan, and Germany. He said there is a need for a visa waiver program and to establish a gateway airline for Alaska such as the mainline China air carrier. The Alaska Adventure Center would include an outpost to focus on foreign travelers.

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked what proportion of Las Vegas visitors are Chinese.

[10:51:18 AM](#)

MR. COE said he was unsure; although he knows China is a new market with lots of potential. Slide 13 was a picture of the Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center in Anchorage and he spoke of the opportunity to attract small- and medium-sized conventions to utilize the facility; as a matter of fact, 4.5 million conventioners meet in Las Vegas. He turned to the Alaska Adventure Center, which is a themed attraction intended to attract 100,000 new visitors to Alaska. Slide 17 began depictions of the center which would be located on Las Vegas Boulevard and would have an impressive marquis, great corner visibility, and would promote all segments of Alaska's tourism industry.

[10:55:09 AM](#)

MR. COE, in response to Chair Herron, said this idea is new to Las Vegas, but has been done at Disney's Epcot Center and the Shanghai World Expo. He opined the center will increase the Alaska tourism economy by \$217 million. The initial concept for the center includes big screen video, oversized images, high ceilings, clear and open lines of sight, and animals. He provided a description of the China exhibit at Epcot Center and its impact on tourism.

[10:56:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked for a comparison of Epcot Center and Las Vegas.

MR. COE said Las Vegas reaches triple the market and Alaska needs to think big in terms of tourism.

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked whether Alaska has a pavilion at Epcot.

[10:57:44 AM](#)

MR. COE said no. Slide 22 displayed images from the Shanghai World Expo 2010. Slide 23 provided demographic similarities between Alaska and Las Vegas visitors. He advised that the Alaska Adventure Exhibition Center board of directors has located a site adjacent to the New YorkNew York casino where 45,000 people walk by every day. Due to the economic downturn, the price of the building is negotiable. Returning to the visitors targeted by the center, he stated that the center intends to increase cruise visitors by 20,000, air travelers by 65,000, business travelers by 5,000 and foreign visitors by 10,000. Slide 29 titled, "Alaska Adventure Center Attraction Focus and Content," listed preferred tourism activities.

[11:04:53 AM](#)

MR. COE envisioned the center would be a new structure that symbolizes Alaska with a wilderness lodge concept - authentic and of high quality. Slides 32-34 were depictions of a center based on a wilderness lodge theme that is magical and competes with the other attractions in Las Vegas. Design elements of the building were: the wonders of Alaska; wild animals; photo-opportunities; Native culture; sounds of nature; historic

replicas. He assured the committee this would not be a phony experience, but a multi-dimensional entertainment attraction, with four stand-alone attractions: theatre, restaurant, retail shops, and vacation planning. In a 300-seat theatre there will be live shows and a free movie. At the Fur Rendezvous Trading Post, there would be seven retail businesses. At the restaurant there would be wilderness lodge dining. At the vacation planning zones there would be information on sightseeing, adventures outdoors, culture and history, and cruises. The planning zones would provide videos, consultations with trained staff, computerized vacation planning, print materials, and sales.

[11:14:12 AM](#)

MR. COE presented slide 52 titled, "Alaska Business Participation," which listed the benefits to business and how small and large businesses can be a part of the vacation planning zones by sponsorship and advertising. Slide 54 displayed a plan for "Alaska Visitor Dollars," intended to offset the perception of the high cost of travel in Alaska and to increase visitors' spending. Slide 56 was the beginning of Phase 1, Development Feasibility, which is scheduled for August 2011 to March 2012. Slide 57 was a timeline beginning with the feasibility phase in 2011, and continuing to opening in 2013. Mr. Coe concluded his presentation, saying that timing is key because of the following: depressed real estate in Las Vegas; national interest in Alaska; the Travel Promotion Act; support for tourism by leaders in Alaska.

[11:18:23 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE GARDNER asked whether the presentation is available online.

MR. COE indicated no. In further response to Representative Gardner he agreed that the Alaska Railroad belongs in the presentation. In further response, he said the Travel Promotion Act is an economic benefit plan by the federal government to bring foreign tourists to America.

[11:20:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ asked whether Mr. Coe has a specific proposal.

MR. COE expressed the need for money for the feasibility study. He opined the center has a good chance of working; however, feasibility studies are needed to determine the square footage and the location, to determine what attractions would be successful, to conduct customer surveys, and to determine the costs.

[11:22:19 AM](#)

CHAIR HERRON asked whether there are other partners involved at this point that would match state funds.

MR. COE indicated this is "a solo act." The project must be proven viable and then, typically, a hardcore group of people "will drive it through."

CHAIR HERRON surmised the Alaska Railroad, the cruise industry, the governor, and Alaska Airlines could partner with the legislature.

[11:23:46 AM](#)

MR. GREEN indicated that the legislature must take the lead and show confidence in the project after the feasibility study is done. He said he and others have spent \$250,000 so far, and Mr. Coe has donated \$100,000 of consulting work. Without partners throughout Alaska and Yukon, Canada, the center cannot be built. Currently, major "players" are lined up with supportive letters and contacts. Mr. Green opined the building will be wildly successful and will sustain itself once it is funded, without further support from the legislature. He restated the strengths of the Las Vegas location; in fact, having a base in Las Vegas means more economical visitor marketing for Alaska.

[11:28:52 AM](#)

CHAIR HERRON observed the members of the committee represent interests throughout the state, and said that the committee will work with the presenters on the project.

[11:29:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MUNOZ asked whether the Alaska Adventure Exhibition Center has a lease-option on the property.

[11:29:46 AM](#)

MR. GREEN responded that a real estate agent has quoted a price, and the availability of the property. Because of the depressed real estate market in Las Vegas, this is an opportune time to buy. He reminded the committee that there is parking nearby and the property is a large parcel in an ideal location with neighboring attractions to bring people in. In further response to Representative Munoz, he said, "It's a short window for an exclusive option."

[11:32:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOULE asked for the length of time needed to complete a feasibility study.

MR. COE estimated one year. In further response to Representative Joule, he said the estimated cost of the study is \$4 million.

[11:34:19 AM](#)

HB 191-DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

[11:34:58 AM](#)

CHAIR HERRON announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 191, "An Act establishing a state department of agriculture and food and relating to its powers and duties; relating to the powers and duties of the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Natural Resources; and providing for an effective date."

[11:35:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE THOMPSON, as the sponsor, introduced HB 191. Representative Thompson said he is a businessman who supports a strong, diversified Alaska economy. He heard from the agriculture community concerns about agricultural projects and the ability to provide a safe, long-term food supply. In the '70s, Governor Hammond established goals for the state: broaden the economic base of the state through agricultural production; stabilize food costs by increasing local food; provide alternative job opportunities through expanded agriculture; improve rural life by developing an economic base through agriculture. Currently, there is renewed interest in growing food locally; there are markets for farmers' produce, Alaska's disease-free potatoes, and greenhouse products. House Bill 191 will enable farmers to communicate their ideas for the

enhancement of agriculture in the state. He pointed out that only Rhode Island and Alaska do not have a department of agriculture. Representative Thompson acknowledged that the bill is "a work in progress," and asked the committee to assist in strengthening the agriculture industry for the benefit of all Alaskans.

11:37:31 AM

PETE FELLMAN, Representative, Alaska Farm Bureau, Inc., gave a brief discussion of the history of the state's agricultural policy. He referred to efforts - spanning over 20 years - to stabilize the state policy on agriculture from one administration to the next. However, Mr. Fellman has been involved in this effort during many changes in administration, and some administrations did not support agriculture in any way. He opined the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is not serious in supporting agriculture; in fact, \$12 million from the Agriculture Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF) has been tapped to run the Division of Agriculture within DNR. Because of the restriction preventing farmers from borrowing money against agricultural land, the ARLF at the division is the only source of loans for operating money for farmers. He asked whether the committee wants agriculture in Alaska to die a slow death.

11:42:06 AM

LYALL BRASIER, Owner, Brasier Farms, stated his farm has been in operation for 40 years raising potatoes, livestock, forage, and grain. He expressed his support of HB 191 because the state needs a strong food security program, and should eliminate the multi-layers of bureaucracy between agriculture, the governor, and the legislature.

11:44:02 AM

BRYCE WRIGLEY, President, Alaska Farm Bureau, Inc., stated that food production and food security need to become a top priority. There is only a three to nine day supply of food in the state, and Alaska's food distribution system is vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters. Farmers and ranchers are thwarted by regulations that prohibit the growth of the industry; for example, agencies providing inspection services, veterinary services, oversight of land, and other issues, are functions of several different departments, and would be more efficient if located in a single department of agriculture. The Alaska Farm Bureau proposes a 10-year goal of increased food production to a

level that would provide for the population for 90 days. If created, the department of agriculture would be funded as is the Division of Agriculture, and critical agricultural functions would move from the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and DNR to one department. He offered help from the agricultural community to develop and focus the department. Mr. Wrigley advised that for three decades the needs of the division have been sidetracked by the size of DNR and its other large and important priorities; in fact, DNR does not have the capacity for an appropriate level of management to provide food security, which is something that has been possible for many years. A dynamic agricultural industry would benefit Alaska by growing local food, reducing social ills in rural areas, and fostering good work ethics in young people. He urged support for the creation of a department of agriculture that will be efficient, responsive, proactive, empowered, and positively involved with many facets of life in Alaska.

[11:48:15 AM](#)

RUBY HOLLEMBAEK, Owner-Operator, Alaska Interior Game Ranch; President, Alaska Diversified Livestock Association, Inc. (ADLA), said she is a life-long Alaskan resident and noted her support for several agricultural organizations around the state. She provided a brief personal history. In her role as president of ADLA, she expressed support for the creation of a department of agriculture and food. A department of agriculture was formed under the territorial constitution, but unfortunately was not retained at statehood. This department should be reinstated to supply resources for Alaskans who produce food, fiber, and fuel. Ms. Hollembaek advised that there was a 15 percent decrease in the amount of land in production from 1987 to 2007; in fact, Alaska is ranked 50th in the amount of land in production of all of the states, due not to a lack of land, water, or an acceptable growing season, but because of the political outlook toward agriculture in Alaska. As a matter of fact, ADLA was formed in 2001 to bring unity and a voice to livestock producers who are encouraged by the public's interest in eating locally, alternative energy products, and Alaskan-made fiber. She said livestock businesses are thriving, although fuel and fertilizer prices are high. Livestock producers are looking for the same consideration from state government as oil, gas, fisheries, and other resources receive, and "to sit at the table and conduct business about our product ... we want a cabinet-level seat." She stated the purpose of the department of agriculture created by the territorial constitution, and relayed that the ARLF was created in 1953 with an authorization of \$1 million.

[11:52:40 AM](#)

LYNN GATTIS, Owner, Gattis Farm, observed that as a life-long Alaskan she continues to be interested in how residents get their food. Ms. Gattis is a farmer in Port MacKenzie and supports HB 191 because the attention to agriculture in Alaska is lacking, which she attributed to DNR's other responsibilities. Furthermore, this situation reflects a lack of a true plan for the needs of Alaska and its farmers. Although she did not agree with all aspects of the bill, the bill will address the issue of inattention to agriculture. Ms. Gattis expressed her preference for less government, not more, but she said agriculture struggles to be heard by state government, and instead the state should support agriculture so its businesses can be profitable.

[11:54:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE TUCK asked which aspects of the bill Ms. Gattis did not support.

MS. GATTIS explained that the bill adds a layer of government and cost, but will allow agriculture to have "a seat at the table." She opined DNR cannot provide a "direction" for agriculture, such as small farms and niche markets, or huge tracts of land.

[11:56:28 AM](#)

PAUL HUPPERT, Owner, Palmer Produce, Inc., informed the committee his family and he are involved in agriculture in many ways, and he has served on industry-related councils and boards. Mr. Huppert supported the testimony of the previous speakers, and added that an additional problem with DNR is its negativity towards agricultural issues. He opined if there is no department of agriculture, the industry will continue to decline. Mr. Huppert is also upset by the inappropriate use of the ARLF. He concluded, saying that Alaska's isolation is a protection from agricultural diseases and that creates many opportunities for agriculture in Delta Junction and Port MacKenzie.

[11:59:03 AM](#)

MICHAEL NEECE, President, Homer Grange, expressed his support of HB 191. He informed the committee that the Grange is a national

organization established in 1867 to help provide support for farmers throughout the U.S.

[11:59:52 AM](#)

BRUCE WILLARD, Director, Alaska Farm Bureau, Inc., said he has been involved in commercial agriculture in the state since 1959. Mr. Willard expressed his support of HB 191, and described some of the problems surrounding the marketing of livestock. Although there is a slaughterhouse in Palmer, it is threatened with closure, and then conditions would revert to "butchering under a tree." He reiterated that agriculture needs a direction and a voice, and the state does not need more fisheries.

[12:02:01 PM](#)

MARIE RICE had her testimony read by Bill Burton as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I've been involved in the agriculture community in Kodiak since 1963 when we purchased a cattle ranch at Kalsin Bay. We took a big hit in the 1964 tidal wave, [losing] many of our purebred Scottish Highland cattle we had shipped all the way from Colorado. We revived and added a large lease and cattle from the adjoining ranch a few years later that resulted in a cattle ranch encompassing 50,000 acres of lease and we ran nearly 1,000 head of cattle. At the time agriculture was at its peak with seven large cattle operations on the road system on Kodiak.

I remember when the transition was made from the Department of Agriculture to the Division of Agriculture and the great concern the ranchers had about the change. The fear at the time was that the emphasis on support for agriculture in Alaska would be greatly diminished. The timing of this was also coupled with the Native Land Claim Settlement Act that allowed for native selection of land that encroached on some of the leasehold interest. Those fears have come to reality in the place agriculture has been able to hold in the state.

I strongly support the switch back to the Department of Agriculture. Agriculture in our state needs renewed emphasis and support if we are to increase the level of production to serve our needs. I recently

saw a statistic that said we produce 3% of our food. I have recently taken part in the USDA hoop house project which is very exciting in trying to increase local production of vegetables. Please support the move to the Department of Agriculture.

BILL BURTON said that ranchers in Kodiak have lost land due to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and a department of agriculture is needed to help promote agriculture in the event of a disruption in the delivery of food.

[12:06:03 PM](#)

GAYLE EASTWOOD disclosed she was a member of the Alaska Farm Bureau and that she was testifying on her own behalf. Ms. Eastwood and her husband have imported different species of trees for future sale in Southeast Alaska. At their ranch in Delta Junction, they can grow and sell hay cheaper than buying imported hay, thus they are proponents of Alaska-grown products. Ms. Eastwood expressed her support for HB 191, restating that the department was originally created in 1945 and the ARLS was authorized in 1953. She further explained that the ARLS intended to help farmers control animal diseases and plant pests, and for other agricultural endeavors. Agriculture in Alaska extends beyond garden-grown vegetables to the barley project in Delta Junction where farmers are growing barley, wheat, oats, canola, and potatoes on a commercial scale. Also, farmers are raising sheep, cattle, yak, bison, and other animals for commercial sale. In Southeast Alaska, on a smaller scale, sheep and cattle are raised, and there are nurseries and Farmer's Markets. Ms. Eastwood opined a department of agriculture will benefit farmers and consumers by assisting farmers to improve products, thus providing a locally produced product reducing freight costs and increasing the vitamin content of food. She concluded that agriculture is the poor relation of oil, gas, and coal at DNR.

[12:09:14 PM](#)

DELBERT SIMINEO, Palmer, Alaska (Indisc.).

[12:11:46 PM](#)

ED FOGELS, Deputy Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources, advised that the administration has no position on the bill at this time; however, as long as the division is located within DNR, he and the commissioner are

committed to making it more effective. Mr. Fogel recognized the true value of agriculture to Alaska and the issues of food security, and agreed with the need to strengthen the agricultural plan for the state. In fact, the commissioner has a strong connection to the agricultural industry, and Mr. Fogel has met with the farming community on numerous occasions. Referring to the bill, he agreed that state agencies need to collaborate on agricultural issues, and said DNR will work toward that goal.

[12:13:46 PM](#)

CHAIR HERRON referred to the passion of the previous testimony and asked for clarification on whether Mr. Fogel felt that the division needs to become a department of agriculture.

MR. FOGEL stated that his intent was to inform the committee that there is new management at DNR, thus the division will be given a "fresh look".

CHAIR HERRON observed the newest member of the legislature from Fairbanks was listening to the deep-rooted concern of his constituents.

[12:15:43 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KELLER appreciated the department's commitment to examine the issue.

[12:16:15 PM](#)

[HB 191 was held for further testimony.]

[12:16:43 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Economic Development, International Trade and Tourism meeting was adjourned at 12:16 p.m.