

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

February 11, 2011

3:32 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Joe Paskvan, Co-Chair
Senator Thomas Wagoner, Co-Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice-Chair - via teleconference
Senator Bert Stedman
Senator Hollis French

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Lesil McGuire
Senator Gary Stevens

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel
Senator Joe Thomas

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 42

"An Act relating to the procurement of supplies, services, professional services, and construction for the Alaska Energy Authority; establishing the Alaska Railbelt energy fund and relating to the fund; relating to and repealing the Railbelt energy fund; relating to the quorum of the board of the Alaska Energy Authority; relating to the powers of the Alaska Energy Authority regarding employees and the transfer of certain employees of the Alaska Industrial Development Export Authority to the Alaska Energy Authority; relating to acquiring or constructing certain projects by the Alaska Energy Authority; relating to the definition of 'feasibility study' in the Alaska Energy Authority Act; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 42

SHORT TITLE: POWER PROJECT; ALASKA ENERGY AUTHORITY

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/19/11 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/11 (S) RES, FIN
02/09/11 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/09/11 (S) Heard & Held
02/09/11 (S) MINUTE(RES)
02/11/11 (S) RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

SARA FISHER-GOAD, Executive Director
Alaska Energy Authority
Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development
(DCCED)
Anchorage, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 42.

BRYAN CAREY, Technical Engineer and Project Manager
Alaska Energy Authority (AEA)
Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development
(DCCED)
Anchorage, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 42.

HOWARD LEE, Engineer
Montgomery Watson Harza (MWH)
Consultants to AEA
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about SB 42.

CHRIS RUTZ, Procurement Officer
Alaska Energy Authority (AEA)
Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development
(DCCED)
Anchorage, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 42.

BRIAN BJORKQUIST, Assistant Attorney General
Alaska Department of Law (DOL)
Anchorage, AK
POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on SB 42.

JOE GRIFFITH, General Manager
Matanuska Electric Association
President, ARCTEC
POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 42.

GARVIN BUCARIA, representing himself
Mat-Su Valley, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Urged thorough vetting of procurement issues relative to SB 42.

GENE THERRIAULT, Vice President
Resource Development
Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA)
Fairbanks, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported SB 42.

STEVEN BOYD, Manager
Alaska Chapter
National Electrical Contractors Association

POSITION STATEMENT: Opposed SB 42 and urged thorough vetting of procurement issues.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:32:31 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOE PASKVAN called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators French, Stedman, Co-Chair Wagoner and Co-Chair Paskvan. Senator Wielechowski was present via teleconference.

SB 42-POWER PROJECT; ALASKA ENERGY AUTHORITY

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN announced the consideration of SB 42.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER moved to bring SB 42 before the committee. There was no objection.

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At ease from 3:34 to 3:37.

[3:37:33 PM](#)

SARA FISHER-GOAD, Executive Director, Alaska Energy Authority, emphasized the need to file for a preliminary permit application with FERC. This signals intent to build the project; their consultants, MWH, were on line to answer questions.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what MWH would do as part of the permitting process.

BRYAN CAREY, Technical Engineer and Project Manager, Alaska Energy Authority (AEA), explained that the preliminary permit process is a long one, but it forces the FERC, that has over 50

applications before it, to take the project seriously. Following the application they would receive a number; after that MWH would work with various agencies to move forward and do the required studies.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked if AEA needs authority to present the preliminary permit application to FERC.

MR. CAREY replied that FERC won't care what organization presents the preliminary permit application to it, but Alaska statutes don't presently give that authority to AEA.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked the estimated time of getting the permit once the application is submitted.

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HOWARD LEE, Engineer, Montgomery Watson Harza (MWH), consultants to AEA, said they are doing engineering studies and FERC licensing work on AEA's behalf. He elaborated that from the time of filing, they would receive the permit in 6-8 months, and that permit would last 3 years. During that period they would conduct studies and the work necessary to file a license application, and that would signal the start of processing for FERC. Then it could take another 2 years before they issue a license to construct the project.

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked during the three-year period after the permit is obtained, what substantive studies are required to submit the license application.

MR. LEE replied that preparing the environmental documentation and make the filing is an extensive and intensive process of engineering, onsite geotechnical investigations, and environmental studies involving hundreds of people.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what participation MWH would have in that three-year period.

MR. LEE replied that right now they are under contract to start work on the engineering conceptual design studies and the site geotechnical investigation for the project. MWH would support the AEA with the public outreach program and ultimately preparation of the application for license that would include overseeing preparation of the environmental report, which would ultimately become an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared by FERC.

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked who would prepare the comparison of lowest cost power from an alternative power source.

BRIAN SADDEN, Project Manager for AEA, MWH responded that since FERC requires an applicant to provide alternative options, AEA would need to show that other sources of power had been considered and compared to this hydro option. FERC would determine whether deductions were correct.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what license contingents FERC might impose.

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MR. CAREY replied that conditions on many licenses in regards to fish and wildlife will likely specify the minimum and maximum flows for any one month of the year, recreational opportunities, and erosion control. Bradley Lake has 50 conditions; Susitna would have at least that number of conditions.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked what is done in the three-year period between receipt of the permit and license application and what is done after it.

MR. CAREY explained that once they have the preliminary permit they will work with the resource agencies to determine what study gaps need to be answered in terms of how the project will affect fish and wildlife, and those will likely require several years. At the same time, they will do geotechnical and engineering studies. Everything will go into the license document that will specify what the effects will be and how the project is to be built.

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked if they were talking potentially 5.5 years for actually receiving the license.

MR. CAREY answered, "That is a possibility."

HOWARD LEE, Montgomery Watson Harza, consultants for AEA, also responded that the FERC licensing process for large projects such as this is uncertain at best, so the licensing timeline is uncertain also. Every project has to go through this prescribed process that is subject to a great deal of collaboration with resource agencies, interested parties, and stake holders; everyone who has an interest in the outcome of the project gets

a chance to weigh in on the plans for studies that are conducted as well as the outcome of those studies, the negotiation, and the proposed environmental protection and mitigation measures. The 5.5 years could be extended after that collaborative process.

MR. SADDEN added that they will try and use the previous studies from the 80s as much as possible and do new ones when needed. The FERC's interim document, called a "PAD," sets out how this happens by referencing previous studies and focusing on the gaps to try and minimize the studies the agencies "sort of hold us to."

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked when the decision would be made on which type of dam to build relative to the preliminary permit application as compared to the license application.

MR. CAREY replied during the first couple of years they would follow both construction methods in parallel to determine which one is the most cost-effective. This is the ordinary process for licensees around the US. The lowest cost construction method is the one they would go with at the time of final application.

CO-CHAIR WAGONER asked Mr. Carey to explain the difference between the two processes.

MR. CAREY replied an abatement dam is the older more traditional method and requires a lot of rock or earthen material; Watana might be around 33 billion yards of material. The roller compacted concrete (RCC) dam is a method of concrete construction, which started about 20-30 years ago, and several hundred dams have been constructed or refurbished using RCC technology to date. "It is a mature technology," he explained, that can be built up much narrower and much quicker by using concrete that can be placed in high lifts and compacted down with a roller machine, similar to wet sand in the back of a dump truck.

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SENATOR THOMAS asked him to comment on the potential savings that comes from building an RCC dam as an expandable dam at a later date as opposed to an embankment dam.

MR. CAREY responded that an embankment dam uses a large amount of material for each foot in height. In the case of Watana, going from 700 feet to 885 feet, a quarter increase in height

(what they were looking at in the 1980s), almost doubles the volume of material. The RCC method would use less material initially, and increasing the height at a later date would require about one-tenth or one-twentieth the amount of material needed for an embankment dam.

SENATOR THOMAS asked if they would look at the potential cost for expansion and the ability to generate more electricity going forward as it relates to the two dam designs.

MR. CAREY replied that they would look at expansion in the initial design period.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked if geopolymer concrete can be used for the RCC method.

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MR. SADDEN said he wasn't that familiar with geopolymer. But with an RCC mix, one tries to minimize the cement by using other cementitious materials such as posilan or flyash concrete to minimize the heat of hydration, which causes problems in large concrete structures. When that happens, you end up with concrete that is more difficult to handle. Various polymers are added to the concrete mix itself to make it more workable in general. In particular with the upstream and downstream faces, geopolymer used as a topic - probably no; but polymers as an additive - definitely yes.

[4:01:37 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked Ms. Fisher-Goad to comment on how the proposed Susitna project relates to AEA's proposal in SB 42.

MS. FISHER-GOAD emphasized this legislation is critical to AEA being able to file the preliminary permit application with the FERC. AEA needs to have the ability to construct and own projects in order to move forward. She hoped all their answers provided the committee some assurance that they are ready to take this project on.

She said this is not an abandonment of the procurement process, but AEA needs to have the ability to consolidate its procurement processes into one concise code that would go through a public process, which would be through adopting regulations according to the Administrative Procedures Act.

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SENATOR FRENCH asked the cost of filing the FERC application.

MR. CAREY replied that filing the preliminary application would cost less than \$100,000 and a couple of week's time.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN asked how much it would cost to get it from the preliminary process to the license application process.

MR. CAREY replied that their timeline is very conceptual at this point. Until they are able to talk to the resource agencies, it's hard to know what studies they want. Based on their estimates from other projects, they are putting about \$71 million aside for it.

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CHRIS RUTZ, Procurement Officer, AEA, said he wanted to make three points and add some clarification. One, this would allow AEA to be treated as other public corporations that have their own regulations. AEA is not looking to be exempt from the Procurement Code, but wants to establish regulations through a public process that will bring it in alignment with the code. They currently do a substantial amount of procurement that is outside the code relating to construction on behalf of communities for a number of years. In fact, over half of AEA's procurements over the past 10 years have been outside the Procurement Code.

Passing SB 42 would help eliminate questions about which rules to follow and whose money is being used when they are partnering with other entities. For example, they are now a member of the Bradley Lake Operating Committee, but the funds come from other sources and often other utilities (that aren't subject to the Procurement Code) are the ones that carry out some of the functions. This would allow them to simplify internal processes and standardize their internal procedures for other procurements so they could be in compliance with AS 36.30 as well as current best practices in the procurement world.

MR. RUTZ added that a question arose regarding the use of Davis Bacon funds and Alaska bidder preferences. Checks and balances would be in place for approvals of single sources, and that would either be at the executive director or board level depending on the nature of the request. Davis Bacon would continue to be used on all public works projects (as it currently is), and as the statute is proposed, they would also be adopting all the Alaska bidder preferences.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI noted that a 2008-legislative audit was very critical of AEA's procurement process, and they had just heard testimony there has been a lot of procurement outside of state policies. That is exactly what AEA was criticized for. In fact, the first two recommendations talk about how procurements should be made in accordance with the required policies and procedures, and that the executive director of the AEA should undertake revisions to the rural energy group procurement policies and procedures to more closely align with state-developed policies and procedures. It seems like this bill does the opposite from this legislative audit report, and he said he had grave concerns about it.

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MR. RUTZ responded that he came to AEA in 2004 and prior to his arrival he had spent about 20 years as the procurement officer for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and he welcomed Legislative Audit coming in and providing recommendations to AEA. He said AEA has been moving in exactly the direction the audit requested in terms of adopting AS 36.30 guidelines within their policies and procedures. He explained the issue is not that AEA does not want to follow AS 36.30. It is that these guidelines are only in policies and procedures, and they believe having them in regulation would be better, particularly in areas where AS 36.30 doesn't apply, like when AEA is spending grant money on behalf of a community or other entities.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said he would provide a copy of the audit to distribute to the committee.

MS. FISHER-GOAD said on Wednesday Senator French asked about the inclusion of "person" in the powers of authority to issue bonds, and explained that AEA has already exercised its power in the past to issue revenue bonds for the City of Sitka's Blue Lake project on behalf of a person.

She noted a side-by-side comparison of the RCA versus FERC oversight process that was prepared by Mr. Bjorkquist, Department of Law (DOL). He and MWH could answer some of the practical questions that come up with respect to FERC oversight and its lack of jurisdiction related to project development costs and, ultimately, power rates.

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BRIAN BJORKQUIST, Assistant Attorney General, Alaska Department of Law (DOL), said that FERC oversight in at least one component of what it analyzes in the licensing processes looks at the projected cost of power of the proposed project and compares it to the lowest cost reasonable alternative source of power. But FERC's focus is much broader than just impacts to the ratepayers. It looks at the broader public interest from environmental to navigation issues and all of those in the context of the licensing process. The license itself will have conditions that deal with some of the broader public interests and some of those conditions will necessarily increase the cost of the power. In the post-licensing activities, FERC is focused mainly on insuring compliance with the license and dealing with amendments to it. The expectation is that AEA will own the project and sell power to the utilities on a wholesale basis. Therefore, RCA's involvement will be in approving those wholesale power sales agreements.

He said the RCA may not invalidate a power sales agreement under an approved contract, and it generally doesn't do any economic regulation of the operations under the contract. But if a utility's rates are found to be unjust or unreasonable based on a contract, the RCA can order renegotiation or dispute resolution amongst the parties. But this goes back to the beginning point that RCA cannot invalidate power sales agreements; so the power sales continue.

MR. BJORKQUIST explained that the RCA does have certain powers to do investigations to look at non-economic regulation of activities of services and facilities of public utilities to assure that they are safe, reasonable, adequate, and non-discriminatory. Under economic regulation, RCA's primary job is to look at rates (for retail customers) to ensure they are just and reasonable and non-discriminatory. This doesn't apply to wholesale power sales agreements.

The other thing that RCA has the ability to do under economic regulation is potentially to investigate utility management for inefficient or unreasonable practices. This is a statutory requirement that is necessary for the state in this context with the RCA to be able to have some influence (or oversight) over what management is doing.

In contrast, the AEA is a public corporation of the state. There are ways the legislature or the state can deal with the AEA in that context without having to have the RCA involved. It's one state agency looking at a public corporation of the state, and

the AEA has the statutory obligation to make sure the management is done efficiently and can do that through its own statutory direction.

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MR. BJORKQUIST went to the second page that had comments on rate regulation and the ability to obtain financing. Someone suggested relief for ratepayers for cost overruns, but the concern there is you have to find somebody else to pay for those cost overruns, and putting the risk on the lenders or bondholders is not a good idea because that the project would either never get financing or the financing costs would increase and be passed on to ratepayers anyhow.

With respect to utilities, arguably you would be shifting the cost from the same people but in different contexts. For municipalities it would be ratepayers to the taxpayers and for cooperatives it would be from the ratepayers to the members of the utilities, because the utility is the member or the municipality is ultimately the taxpayers that pay. Future legislatures could choose to appropriate money if there are cost overruns to maintain the costs or reduce the costs of a project so that those cost overruns would not pass through to ratepayers.

Finally, he said RCA statutes are set up in recognition of these issues dealing with financing to protect the lenders and bondholders, particularly of municipal and cooperative utilities. RCA statutes provide that if there are rate covenants made in the context of municipalities issuing bonds or cooperatives obtaining debt that RCA must, in setting rates, provide for adequate rates to pay those debts. So assurance is given to the lenders and bondholders, which makes it easier for the municipal and cooperative utilities to obtain financing on the best possible rates.

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SENATOR GIESSEL asked if one of the alternative power comparisons would be nuclear.

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MR. SADDEN responded that it has been so long since a nuclear power plant had been designed and built in the US, that he couldn't recall using nuclear as an alternative. Gas turbines and that sort of project are used. For this license application he couldn't see a condition under which they would have to use nuclear power as a comparison.

MS. FISHER-GOAD said AEA is ready to work with the committee on addressing appropriate legislative oversight of expenditures of the new Alaska Railbelt Energy Fund that is the subject of the legislation.

She said that Senator French had expressed a desire to limit AEA's ability to create a subsidiary corporation to perhaps have it be specific to a Susitna project, and she said they are happy to work with them on that language. But she emphasized that it's very important for AEA to have the power to acquire and construct new projects. She said that AEA has become a key agency in the planning of energy infrastructure and financing, and having to receive project-specific authority if they were to pursue another preliminary permit application would cause delay in the development of potentially needed energy projects. The issue with respect to that is once they do start this preliminary permit application they need additional information through the FERC process from the resource agencies to determine what needs to be done on the studies to then be able refine the schedule on how long a project will take to build or go through a licensing process and also what the cost specifications would be and any type of design limits, which both AEA engineers and consultants have discussed today.

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JOE GRIFFITH, General Manager, Matanuska Electric and President, ARCTEC (the recently formed group of five Railbelt utilities), said while the discussion on Susitna was interesting, this bill doesn't say anything about Susitna. That doesn't mean he is not a strong supporter of it, but he said his comments would concentrate on the bill that is before them.

He said the fun part of the business is building something like Susitna and then watching them work, and AEA in the past did those kinds of things. It built Bradley Lake on schedule and on budget with the help of the utilities in the Railbelt. They put together the body that governs it today. They also built the Alaska Intertie which connected Willow with Fairbanks and that has benefited Southcentral Alaska and Fairbanks by keeping the power costs controlled for 25 years. He said the old AEA provided energy policy and leadership in the business; but since 1993 when the legislature "disestablished" them for all practical purposes, the industry hasn't accomplished anything. He said the state is at a crossroads; first on the economy, because it is electricity that greases the economy. And if that doesn't work, the economy doesn't work.

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He said AEA did a regional integrated resource plan that mentioned the utilities face about a \$15-billion problem between now and 2025 (timeframe for meeting 50 percent renewable energy set by the former governor). He remarked, "There's no way on God's green earth that we're going to be able to come up with that kind of money to build the generation and transmission we have to have."

He related how the five Railbelt utilities recently formed ARCTEC and that he is the sole staff member. ARCTEC marches in lock step with AEA in supporting this bill and figure the ball is now in the state's court. They have done what has been asked of them for 20 years by pulling together into a single entity, but they need some help to make projects like Susitna happen along with \$1 billion-worth of transmission projects in various spots. SB 42 will help AEA rise from the ashes to help ensure that the state's electrical energy future is sound.

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GARVIN BUCARIA, representing himself, Mat-Su Valley, recalled past AIDEA projects that spent a lot of state money with "disastrous results," particularly with the grain depots in Valdez and elsewhere. Thus he was particularly concerned that with large projects like Susitna, that the consultant might have underrated the significance of the flows, temperatures, nutrient reductions and such, and that may influence the Susitna River based on completion of this project. He was surprised that no one has mentioned reregulating reservoirs or temperature regimes. And while this bill is about providing the mechanisms to spend the money, he didn't think they knew what this project would really cost. In addition there are legitimate questions about oversight - and there is no doubt that a project like this needs to have maximum oversight.

He referred to terms on page 2 where "shall" is in two locations in terms of adopting regulations, and then the regulations "must" reflect competitive bidding and "must" include procurement methods to meet emergency and extraordinary circumstances. He thought "shall" should be used in those "must" cases, because oversight is the major issue.

MR. BUCARIA said that he worked as a biologist at the Federal Power Commission many years ago, had participated in field studies at Chakachamna Lake in 1961, and he has a Master's degree from a sockeye salmon project at Auke Lake. He taught

school in the central Oregon area around the Deschutes River and knows the failure of some of the fisheries because of the reservoirs on that system. He learned about mercury contamination which prevent pregnant women from consuming fish from a North Carolina reservoir and about the danger of consuming more than minimal amounts of fish because of the mercury contamination from cinnabar they exposed to during the felling of trees and removal of other debris in that impoundment. He said, "There are surprises, which many of us don't expect which often times are exposed many years after." So, there is a need for oversight and managing this project with great care and concern for the future. He added that the salmon runs on the Susitna River are more than significant.

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GENE THERRIAULT, Vice President, Resource Development, Golden Valley Electric Association (GVEA), spoke in support of SB 42, because it will enhance AEA's ability to work with utilities in a manner similar to the working relationship that resulted in the completion of the Bradley Lake project and Railbelt Intertie that were both on time, on budget, and beneficial to ratepayers. He said when Bradley Lake was first brought on line it was not the cheapest source of power in Interior Alaska, but since the residents of Southcentral were included the cost of the generation can be spread over a larger user base.

He said completion of a large scale hydro electric project will be very beneficial to ratepayers, but one like Susitna is too large for any of the Railbelt utilities to take on separately or collectively or by working with the state as was done with Bradley Lake. But they believe the project can be constructed in a manner that would provide an increased degree of affordability and stability to their cooperative members in the future.

MR. THERRIAULT said GVEA supports the restoration of AEA's ability to bond for energy projects as they were able to do prior to 1993 and the language to allow establishment of subsidiary corporations. They agree that the projects constructed by AEA or its subsidiary should be exempt from RCA rate regulation. This would mirror the current operation structure for Bradley Lake, which is currently one of the cheapest sources of electric generation for Interior residents.

They believe the appropriate place for RCA oversight is when the individual utilities enter into power purchase agreements on behalf of their consumers. He said while they initially had concerns with wording of Section 8 dealing with AEA subsidiary

corporations operating power projects, this concern was partially mitigated by the wording of AS 44.83.396 that requires AEA to enter into contracts with a utility purchasing power from the AEA project for the actual operation of the project. The language goes on to mandate a process for selecting an operator when there are more than one wholesale power consumers to be served by a power project. He asked them to make sure this section of law will be applicable to the new subsidiaries that AEA would be able to form.

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STEVEN BOYD, Manager, Alaska Chapter, National Electrical Contractors Association, said they opposed the bill last year based on the 2008 and 2009 Legislative Budget and Audit reports (specifically the procurement processes), and they continue to have the same concerns with the SB 42. He said he met with Mr. Rutz today and he understands their concerns. At the current time they oppose movement of the bill, and support a thorough vetting of the procurement process within AEA. Other than that, they support the legislature and AEA in the development and delivery of power supply and transmission distribution projects.

CO-CHAIR PASKVAN said he would not close public testimony, but he asked Ms. Fisher-Goad for concluding comments.

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MS. FISHER-GOAD said she hoped the committee found that AEA has helped develop this legislation carefully and that their engineering consultants are qualified to make this project a reality. This bill is about more than the Susitna project; it is also about the AEA getting power back that it had prior to 1993. AEA needs to be an authority that is separate and distinct from AIDEA. AEA wants to be the agency that is key for energy planning.

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CO-CHAIR PASKVAN said the committee appreciates AEA's responsiveness. Finding no further business to come before the committee, he adjourned the meeting at 4:51 p.m.