

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ARCTIC POLICY,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND TOURISM**

April 16, 2019
12:26 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Sara Hannan, Chair
Representative John Lincoln
Representative Josh Revak

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Zack Fields
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins
Representative Chris Tuck
Representative Sara Rasmussen

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: NOME BENEFITS OF AN ARCTIC DEEP DRAFT PORT

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

RICHARD BENEVILLE, Mayor
City of Nome
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on the benefits of an Arctic deep draft port in Nome.

JOY BAKER, Port Director
City of Nome
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented on the benefits of an Arctic deep draft port in Nome.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CHAIR SARA HANNAN called the House Special Committee On Arctic Policy, Economic Development, and Tourism meeting to order at 12:26 p.m. Representatives Revak, Lincoln, and Hannan were present at the call to order. Also present was Representative Foster.

PRESENTATION: Nome Benefits of an Arctic Deep Draft Port

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CHAIR HANNAN announced that the only order of business would be a presentation by Richard Beneville, Mayor of the City of Nome, and Joy Baker, Port Director.

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RICHARD BENEVILLE, Mayor, City of Nome, began his PowerPoint presentation [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He declared his intention to bring a deep-water draft port to Nome. He shared details about his life, including time spent in Barrow and the 30 years he has lived in Nome. He stated that he is familiar with the high Arctic and noted that he has long been involved with the Port of Nome. He expressed excitement at watching the Far North come of age.

MAYOR BENEVILLE noted that the City of Nome is less than 100 miles from the Bering Strait. He remarked that the Bering Strait, along with the Panama Canal, is the Northern Hemisphere's only passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. He said weaker, reduced ice has increased accessibility to the Arctic Ocean. He recounted that there was open water in Nome during the end of the recent Iditarod, which is atypical. "What is happening," he stressed, "is happening so quickly."

MAYOR BENEVILLE recounted trips he has taken to Iceland, Greenland, and Norway. He stated that those countries are not looking at the future, they are actively in it. He noted that Alaska has over half of the nation's coastline. He stressed that the coastline is vulnerable, and actions must be taken to protect it. He mused that there is very little infrastructure north of Dutch Harbor.

MAYOR BENEVILLE gave a brief background of the City of Nome, which incorporated in 1901. He spoke to the history of the Inupiat people, as well as the Nome Gold Rush. He said Native Alaskans make up 58 percent of Nome's current population, which includes 3,800 residents. He observed that many more vessels are calling on the Port of Nome. He relayed a quote from an admiral about the opening of the North being akin to discovering the Mediterranean Sea. He noted that relatively little is known about the Arctic Ocean, "but we are learning fast." He shared that Nome is a home port for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

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MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slide 2. He said Nome is a hub for over 20 communities on the Seward Peninsula. He noted that there are over 350 miles of roads in the area. He said 53 villages depend on the Port of Nome ranging from near Bethel to near [Utqiagvik]. He remarked that commercial transit of goods in the region had previously been limited due to inaccessibility, but that is changing now. He spoke to the high cost of living in Western Alaska. A new port, he argued, would bolster the regional economy and reduce costs. He discussed the considerable growth of tourism in Nome and noted that if the Arctic is available to people, people will come. He shared that the Norwegian cruise company Hurtigruten is bringing its hybrid-powered ship, MS Roald Amundsen, to Nome. He remarked that the things "that make the world tick" are coming to Nome. He stressed, "We need to be ready."

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MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slide 3. He relayed that the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) conducted a study earlier in the decade to identify the optimal location for an Arctic deep draft port. He said Nome was selected based on its location and existing infrastructure. He predicted that one day there will be "a series of infrastructure going north," noting that maritime traffic will demand it. He shared his experience having grown up during the Cold War and argued that the United States must increase its watch on its Arctic Coast. He spoke to the shared culture between Western Alaska and Siberia. He noted that there is an intact White Alice Communications System site located outside Nome. He shared details about its history and the history of communications in rural Alaska during the Cold War. He restated the need for a deep-water draft port.

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MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slide 4. He mentioned that the federal Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act) of 2016 addressed the Port of Nome feasibility study and adjusted certain definitions to account for the interests of the surrounding villages. "It's more than just Nome," remarked Mayor Beneville, "it's about Western Alaska." He said USACE and the Department of Defense (DOD) have found that an Arctic deep draft port in Nome is feasible. He noted that a report on the study is to come. He relayed the remaining steps until construction, including the need for the United States Congress to provide funding. He expressed hope that a public-private partnership will form.

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MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slide 5, which featured a chart displaying traffic patterns through the Bering Strait. He reminded the committee that the Bering Strait is only approximately 50 miles wide. He referenced a group that wants to build a railroad beneath the strait. He said the group suspects that, in 75 years, 20 to 30 percent of the freight traffic that goes through the Panama Canal will instead go through the North. Mayor Beneville said infrastructure improvements in the North would expand the horizon for both Alaska and the world. He spoke to efforts to improve communication between ships and land. He relayed how villages in the region are able to alert ships to the location of subsistence whalers. He spoke to the importance of protecting the subsistence lifestyle of Alaska Natives. He listed additional benefits to developing maritime infrastructure in the Arctic, including to national security, life safety, economic viability, and environmental safety. He commented on the effects of warming in the region and how he tracks climate through flowers, birds, and berries. He relayed lessons he learned by listening to Alaska Native elders. He called the Alaska Native people "the most adaptive people on the planet."

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MAYOR BENEVILLE address slide 6. He spoke to the possibility of Nome accommodating larger tour ships. He presented a hypothetical situation in which a 1,000-person ship becomes involved in a maritime disaster. He asked, "Where do you send them? What do you do with these people that are in dire need?" He stressed the importance of preparedness. He discussed

Crystal Serenity, an 820-foot ship that called on Nome in 2016 and 2017. He distinguished between the Northwest Passage and the Northeast Passage, the latter of which is used by the Russians and Chinese. He compared the Bering Strait to "the eye of the needle." He stressed the need to share the strait.

MAYOR BENEVILLE discussed the Polar Code, adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) which regulates what can and cannot be taken into the Arctic Ocean. He said this includes fuel restrictions. He spoke to the revenue opportunities associated with being an Arctic reception area. He noted that certain wastes cannot be carried by ships into the Arctic Ocean. He suggested that Nome could expand its waste facilities to accept restricted wastes from ships heading North. He said this would be good for the region, good for Nome, and good for maritime transportation. He relayed that accessibility to the Arctic is to be the major topic of a large meeting in Singapore this spring. He spoke to the economic and environmental benefits of reducing the miles required for a journey.

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MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slide 7. He said the opening of the North is good for the people who live there. He relayed a discussion he had with First Nations leaders from the High Arctic about "what's in it for them." Mayor Beneville said that is a very fair question. He said it is important to connect people who wish to be connected and respect those who do not. He discussed measures to increase tourism in Greenland and spoke to the thirst for learning that he sees from modern tourists. He described infrastructural improvements on Alaska's North Slope as a result of development and investment. He said he wants Nome to similarly look toward the future. He pointed to industrial support and the harnessing of natural resources as additional benefits to Arctic development. He discussed arguments in favor of mining and resource development in the region. He spoke to efforts by Russia to claim natural resources in the Arctic.

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MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slides 8 and 9. He summarized potential benefits to economic/cultural sustainability and environmental safety. He revisited the topic of national security. He said the United States Coast Guard (USCG) loves coming to Nome. He described services provided by the Port of

Nome to USCG and NOAA vessels. He said Nome is also a port of refuge during storms.

MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slides 10 and 11, which featured a satellite photo displaying proposed development at the Port of Nome. He said the plan is to extend the existing causeway 3,500 feet and construct an arm to protect it from winds and tides. He added that the breakwater would also be moved with three new piers constructed upon it. He said the development plan supports both people who wish to visit Nome and the goods, such as rock and gravel, exported out of Nome. He said the expanded port could be completed by 2027 and digging could commence as early as 2023. He spoke to the importance of getting the project started.

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MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slide 12, which featured a list of requests relating to project support from the City of Nome to the Alaska State Legislature. He referenced HJR 14, which urges support for the port. He said the legislation would assist in bringing more jobs to Alaskans, help sustain Alaska Native culture, help the environment, and attract investment capital. He stressed that the benefits of the port would extend to the region, the state, and the nation.

MAYOR BENEVILLE addressed slide 13, which featured a photo of Nome in the winter. He pointed out a vessel, MT Renda, which brought fuel to Nome in 2012.

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JOY BAKER, Port Director, City of Nome, said there are huge benefits to expanding the Port of Nome. She said one specific benefit would be the ability to refuel and resupply National Security Cutters, icebreakers, and United States Navy vessels. She noted that vessels invested in securing the region would find it easier to obtain these services in Nome rather than journey to Dutch Harbor. She said a port expansion would also expand search and rescue capabilities as well as the ability to respond to an oil spill. She stated that the expanded port would provide port of refuge conditions for national security vessels and other large ships during a Bering Sea storm. She opined that the Port of Nome is not just a community or regional port, rather that it supports the entire state and the entire nation. She noted that it would be the only maritime

infrastructure in the United States Arctic. She requested the legislature's support.

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MAYOR BENEVILLE listed various dignitaries who have recently visited Nome. He relayed a quote from Richard V. Spencer, United States Secretary of the Navy, who stated that there needs to be "big gray ships in the Far North." He thanked the committee for its time and support.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee On Arctic Policy, Economic Development, and Tourism meeting was adjourned at 1:01 p.m.