

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ENERGY

April 11, 2023  
10:18 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative George Rauscher, Chair  
Representative Tom McKay  
Representative Stanley Wright  
Representative Mike Prax  
Representative Ashley Carrick

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Josiah Patkotak  
Representative Calvin Schrage

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

PRESENTATION: LAUNCH ALASKA AND THE HOUSTON ALASKA SOLAR FARM

- HEARD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

No previous action to record

**WITNESS REGISTER**

ISAAC VANDERBERG, CEO  
Launch Alaska  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Launch Alaska," which included a discussion of the Houston Alaska Solar Farm.

JON POWERS, Co-Founder and President  
CleanCapital  
Buffalo, New York

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "CleanCapital."

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:17:52 AM](#)

**CHAIR GEORGE RAUSCHER** called the House Special Committee on Energy meeting to order at 10:18 a.m. Representatives McKay, Wright, Prax, Carrick, and Rauscher were present at the call to order.

**PRESENTATION: LAUNCH ALASKA AND THE HOUSTON ALASKA SOLAR FARM**

[10:19:18 AM](#)

CHAIR RAUSCHER announced that the only order of business would be the presentations, titled "Launch Alaska" [and "CleanCapital"].

[10:20:06 AM](#)

ISAAC VANDERBERG, CEO, Launch Alaska, gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "Launch Alaska" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He began his presentation on slide 2, introducing Launch Alaska, which is a nonprofit organization with the mission to "accelerate the energy transition and decarbonize the globe, starting in Alaska." He stated that Launch Alaska builds partnerships between climate tech companies and customers to build Alaska's clean energy economy.

MR. VANDERBERG moved to slide 3 and slide 4, displaying Launch Alaska's Board of Directors and team. Slide 5 displayed its organizational partners. He stated that Launch Alaska receives significant support from the U.S. Office of Naval Research, U.S. Department of Energy, and McKinley Alaska.

[10:24:43 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG continued to slide 6, stating that Launch Alaska seeks to deploy \$1 billion worth of renewable energy projects by 2030. He said that the goal was created in 2020. He advised that currently good progress is being made, as between \$55 million to \$60 million has already been invested, with an additional \$100 million in projects in the process.

[10:26:53 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG, in response to a question from Representative Wright, stated that to meet its goal Launch Alaska has both portfolio and innovation projects planned. He added that he would present more details on this later in the presentation.

[10:27:56 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG continued to slide 7 and slide 8, stating that the tech deployment track is an eight-month long process, in which Launch Alaska finds partners for projects and works on a plan for deployment. He stated that Launch Alaska recruits in the technology areas of energy, transportation, and industry. If companies move through the program and sign an agreement for a project, he said, it is considered a success, and the company is added to Launch Alaska's portfolio.

[10:30:48 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG moved to slide 9, showing a chart with examples of companies which fall under the three categories of energy, transportation, and industry. He said that currently there are 24 companies in Launch Alaska's portfolio, with an additional 8 to be added soon. The energy companies represent technology areas such as microgrids, decarbonization, natural gas, wind power, electric vehicle charging, wastewater treatment, and the treatment of polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

[10:33:07 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG, in response to a question from Chair Rauscher, stated that Launch Alaska does work with the government on projects. He provided that the renewable energy projects in Kotzebue are an example.

[10:34:54 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG continued to slide 10, giving an overview of Launch Alaska's portfolio. He stated that in 2022, six projects in eight Alaskan communities were deployed, garnering \$320,000 in revenue for the companies involved in the projects. He stated that through the projects worked on by Launch Alaska, there has been a reduction of 80,000 metric tons of carbon emissions.

[10:36:41 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG, in response to a question from Representative McKay, stated that carbon was reduced. He added that Launch Alaska is not currently involved in carbon capture or removal.

[10:38:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX questioned what the 80,000 number was being compared to.

MR. VANDERBERG answered that it is the amount of carbon emissions which have been reduced. In response to a follow-up question, he said that there is not currently a complete goal of how much carbon emissions reduction can be done in Alaska.

[10:41:39 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG, in response to a question from Representative Wright, stated that Aquagga and ecoSPEARS work with PFAS. He added that Aquagga has roots in Alaska and has received an award to test its technology on the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

[10:43:54 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG continued to slide 11, stating that in 2020 Launch Alaska recognized many projects being studied were not actually receiving funding. At this point, he said, Launch Alaska began work to help get more of these projects running. He said that those projects include the Shungnak Community Microgrid, the Port of Alaska microgrid, and support for the Municipality of Anchorage Solid Waste Services moving to a fleet of electric vehicles.

MR. VANDERBERG moved to slide 12 and gave a summary of the Houston Solar Farm. He stated that at 8.5 megawatts, it is Alaska's largest solar project. He stated that it can provide power for 1,400 homes, generating electricity at a lower cost than natural gas. He provided that the project creates up to 40 construction jobs and up to 20 full-time maintenance jobs.

[10:51:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked what role Launch Alaska has beyond breaking ground.

MR. VANDERBERG answered that Launch Alaska focuses on getting projects running and leaving the management to the private sector.

[10:53:42 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG, in response to a question from Representative McKay, stated that IPP means independent power producer. He added that the organization behind the Houston Solar Farm is an

IPP. In response to a follow-up question, he said that the organization is a private company created by former oil and gas engineers. In response to a follow-up question concerning how PFAS remediation relates to renewable energy transition, he stated that the current method of PFAS remediation is to ship it to a facility, bury it in soil, incinerate it, and then bury the left-over soil. He stated that Aquagga and ecoSPEARS are both working on more efficient ways to deal with PFAS.

[10:58:36 AM](#)

MR. VANDERBERG, concluding the presentation, expressed gratitude for IPPs.

[11:00:20 AM](#)

JON POWERS, Co-Founder and President, CleanCapital, gave a PowerPoint presentation, titled "CleanCapital" [hard copy included in the committee packet]. He shared that he had been deployed in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and this is when he first became interested in energy related issues. He began on slide 2 and slide 3, stating that, founded in 2015, CleanCapital has the mission of increasing investment into clean energy in order to further the transition to renewable sources of energy. He explained that one of the biggest factors driving the energy transition is cost, with renewable energy becoming less expensive to produce.

[11:05:42 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked whether the price of solar panels would begin to increase as the demand for the materials used to make them increases.

MR. POWERS answered that energy storage is currently a bigger issue, as the price of solar panels is expected to remain the same. He added that solar panels are increasing in efficiency. In response to a follow-up question, he said that the solar panel industry is working to recycle rare earth minerals from old solar panels, and mining for those materials is expected to increase.

[11:11:51 AM](#)

MR. POWERS continued to slide 4, stating that in 2022 there were record levels of private investment in the clean energy transition, with a significant portion of the change being

driven by major corporations. He said that renewable energy sources are less susceptible to events, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

[11:14:51 AM](#)

CHAIR RAUSCHER asked whether there has been a significant increase in mining investment to produce the materials needed for renewable energy projects.

MR. POWERS answered that CleanCapital is not involved in mining, but the federal government has invested significant amounts of money into domestic mining.

[11:16:35 AM](#)

MR. POWERS continued to slide 5 and slide 6, displaying a chart showing the increase in solar panel use and installation. In many places in the U.S., he said, solar has the most efficient price per kilowatt hour because of policies, such as tax rebates for up to 20 years, and this provides long-term cash flow for solar panel projects. He gave a brief explanation of community solar programs, saying that they are built with future customers in mind.

[11:22:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK asked whether CleanCapital is involved in Golden Valley Electric Association's community solar program.

MR. POWERS answered no. He added that CleanCapital is involved in community solar projects in other states. In response to a follow-up question, he said that CleanCapital does not work on residential solar projects.

[11:25:08 AM](#)

MR. POWERS continued to slide 7 and slide 8, stating that solar panels are responsible for 40 percent of newly created jobs in the renewable energy industry. He displayed a chart with the number of jobs in each sector of energy generation.

[11:26:53 AM](#)

CHAIR RAUSCHER asked if the chart included jobs nationwide.

MR. POWERS answered yes. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that the wages being paid for these jobs depend on the specific job within the industry.

[11:29:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARRICK questioned whether solar jobs have increased.

MR. POWERS answered that most of the jobs have been created in the past few years.

[11:32:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX asked if the chart displaying the number of jobs is the raw number of jobs in these sectors.

MR. POWERS answered yes. In response to a follow-up question, he said that the amount of energy being produced is increasing for solar and decreasing for coal.

REPRESENTATIVE PRAX expressed the opinion that because coal is still responsible for a greater amount of energy being produced, the jobs being created in solar energy could be less productive jobs.

MR. POWERS responded that as the number of solar projects increases, the difference in the gap of energy being produced by these sources will decrease.

[11:37:00 AM](#)

MR. POWERS moved to slide 9, showing a map with the locations of projects with CleanCapital involvement. He said that there are 200 projects across 26 different U.S. states and territories. He stated that policy decisions favoring energy transition are necessary to increase investment in each jurisdiction.

[11:39:28 AM](#)

CHAIR RAUSCHER asked why there is not more investment in Texas, as it has significant sun and wind levels.

MR. POWERS answered that there is a significant number of solar and wind farms in Texas. He stated that CleanCapital does not have as much investment in Texas because of the uniqueness of its grid and subsequent policy decisions.

[11:42:09 AM](#)

MR. POWERS continued to slide 10, stating that CleanCapital is investing in an 8.5-megawatt solar project which will supply the MEA [Energy Association]. He stated that when completed the project will be the largest solar project in the state. He stated that CleanCapital is working with IPPs to increase renewable energy in Alaska. One of CleanCapital's goals in Alaska is to help smaller communities stop relying on diesel generation.

[11:45:40 AM](#)

CHAIR RAUSCHER asked whether CleanCapital owns the land the projects are being built on.

MR. POWERS answered that there are some cases in which CleanCapital owns the land, and others in which it leases the land as part of a long-term lease. In response to a follow-up question, he said that Launch Alaska invests in the companies themselves, whereas CleanCapital invests in the clean energy infrastructure being built.

MR. VANDERBERG added that Launch Alaska was approached by renewable IPPs for assistance, and the three organizations worked together on the Houston Solar Farm.

MR. POWERS added that Silicon Valley has a unique environment for being able to find investors which are not present in many other places in the U.S., and Launch Alaska works to bring this to the renewable energy sector.

[11:54:34 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Energy meeting was adjourned at 11:54 p.m.