

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

April 12, 2024

3:57 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel, Co-Chair
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Senator James Kaufman
Senator Forrest Dunbar
Senator Matt Claman

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Click Bishop, Co-Chair

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 171

"An Act changing the residency requirements for sport fishing, hunting, and trapping privileges; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED SB 171 OUT OF COMMITTEE

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Regulatory Commission of Alaska
John Espindola - Eagle River

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

Board of Fisheries
Marit Carlson-Van Dort - Anchorage

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 171

SHORT TITLE: RESIDENCY REQ: HUNTING, TRAPPING, FISHING

SPONSOR(S) : SENATOR(S) BJORKMAN

01/16/24 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/24

01/16/24 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS

01/16/24	(S)	RES, FIN
02/16/24	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/16/24	(S)	Heard & Held
02/16/24	(S)	(RES)
03/01/24	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
03/01/24	(S)	Heard & Held
03/01/24	(S)	MINUTE (RES)
04/12/24	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

JOHN ESPINDOLA, Appointee
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

MARIT CARLSON-VAN DORT, Chair
Board of Fisheries
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as the governor's appointee to the Board of Fisheries.

THOMAS TILDEN, representing self
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

MONTE ROBERTS, Kenai River Professional Guide Association
Soldotna, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

BILL STOLTZE, representing self
Chugiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

CHARLES LEAN, Northern Norton Sound F&G Advisory Committee
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

HAL SHEPHERD, Consultant
Norton Bay Watershed Council
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

GALE VICK, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

GAYLE HOSETH, Curyung Tribal Council
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

GARVIN FEDERENKO, President and CEO
Bristol Bay Native Association
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

FORREST BRADEN, Executive Director
Southeast Alaska Guides Organization
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

RACHEL DONKERSLOOT, Fishery Policy Advisor
Lake and Peninsula Borough
Aniak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

BENJAMIN MALLOT, Alaska Federation of Natives
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

NANCY HILSTRAND, Pioneer Alaskan Fisheries, Inc.
Seldovia, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

ALLAN CROOKSTON, Tide Chaser Fisheries
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:57:44 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR CATHY GIESSEL called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:57 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Claman, Kawasaki, Kaufman, Dunbar, and Co-Chair Giessel. Senator Wielechowski arrived thereafter.

SB 171-RESIDENCY REQ: HUNTING, TRAPPING, FISHING

[3:58:18 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 171 "An Act changing the residency requirements for sport fishing, hunting, and trapping privileges; and providing for an effective date."

[3:58:56 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL solicited the will of the committee.

[3:58:59 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN moved to report SB 171, work order 33-LS1123\A, from committee with individual recommendations and attached fiscal note(s).

[3:59:13 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL found no objection and SB 171 was reported from the Senate Resources Standing Committee.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)
REGULATORY COMMISSION OF ALASKA
BOARD OF FISHERIES

[3:59:25 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of the governor's appointee for the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA).

[4:00:03 PM](#)

JOHN ESPINDOLA, Appointee, Eagle River, Alaska, Testified as the governor's appointee to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska. He said he was appointed to serve the remainder of Commissioner Dan Sullivan's term, which expires March 1, 2025. He shared a brief life and work history, noting his membership in the Pueblo of Laguna tribe and 18 years spent living on the Laguna reservation in New Mexico. He shared that he attended the University of New Mexico and received a bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in Native American studies. He and his family moved to Eagle River, Alaska in 2015. He shared his experience working for a residential and commercial plumbing and heating contractor. He became a journeyman gasfitter and was promoted to

company vice president. He briefly described the work he did while in this position. He was later recruited to a large International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) electrical contractor, where he managed a newly established mechanical division. He briefly described the work done while in this position.

[4:01:31 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI joined the meeting.

[4:01:40 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA listed the professional licenses he has received and noted active licenses. He said he was appointed to the Albuquerque Energy Council in 2008 and briefly described the work he did while in this position. He said that, throughout his professional career in New Mexico, he was actively involved with his tribe and briefly described the positions he held on a variety of tribal boards. He resigned from his position with the Pueblo of Laguna Utility Authority in 2018 to take a position with the Dunleavy administration. He was appointed to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) in 2023. He briefly described his work in the governor's office.

[4:03:54 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA discussed how his prior work experience has qualified him for the role of RCA Commissioner. He directed attention to his management experience in both the private sector and within tribal agencies. He highlighted his financial aptitude, a proficiency in reviewing legal, operational, and regulatory documents, as well as his experience navigating discussions between tribal governments and federal agencies. He then discussed how his work in the governor's office helped to prepare him for the role of RCA Commissioner. He explained that, while much of the work was behind the scenes, he supported efforts to manage every natural disaster and community emergency that impacted the state and offered several examples. He shared his vision for Alaska, which includes a focus on diversifying energy resources and economic drivers. He shared his belief that the key to a diverse economy is energy availability, reliability, and affordability. He briefly discussed the importance of curbing outmigration and providing Alaskans with a stable cost of living and economic certainty. He stated that, as RCA commissioner, he would continue to balance the public interest with the matters that come before the commission.

[4:06:40 PM](#)

SENATOR KAUFMAN said that he received an excellent letter of recommendation for Mr. Espindola's ability to absorb the complexities that come before RCA. He expressed his belief that this appointee is the right person for the position.

[4:07:48 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI pointed out the qualification requirements for this role and asked whether Mr. Espindola's experience fits these requirements.

[4:08:33 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that he meets the minimum requirements of AS 42.04.020 and pointed to more than ten years of executive management in business, as well as nearly five years working in public administration for the executive branch. He also highlighted eighteen years of experience serving on government boards.

[4:09:09 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked for additional detail on the work Mr. Espindola did for the City of Albuquerque Energy Council.

[4:09:26 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that he helped the city decide which projects to pursue when utilizing American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding and offered examples.

[4:09:57 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how often the board met and if it was a paid position.

[4:10:05 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that it was an unpaid position and the board met once per month. Meetings lasted approximately 4-6 hours.

[4:10:21 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked about the work done for the Pueblo of Laguna Utility Authority.

[4:10:33 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that this was a more involved role. He explained that the Pueblo of Laguna Utility Authority sometimes met weekly and he received a small stipend.

[4:10:50 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked for additional information regarding his work for the Pueblo of Laguna Utility Authority.

[4:10:54 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA briefly described the work he did for the Utility Authority. This included helping the tribe develop its own internet service provider and procure a \$70 million grant to rework the tribe's water system.

[4:11:39 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked what the appointment process for these boards entailed.

[4:11:49 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that for the Pueblo of Laguna Utility Authority, he was appointed by the village council, and this was approved by the governor of the pueblo.

[4:11:59 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked about the process for the City of Albuquerque Energy Council.

[4:12:05 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that he was nominated by a department within the City of Albuquerque and was then appointed by the mayor and confirmed by city council.

[4:12:20 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked how long he has served on RCA.

[4:12:33 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that he has been serving on RCA since June 12, 2023.

[4:12:40 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked about his experience on RCA.

[4:12:46 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that it has been a phenomenal experience that has allowed him to take a deep dive into all aspects of the state's utilities. He commented that there are hundreds of pages in statute and regulation that dictate what is done - and he has been working his way through these.

[4:13:22 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked if it has been a steep learning curve or if he has been familiar with some topics as a result of past board service.

[4:13:40 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that there has been a learning curve with respect to understanding statutes and regulations; however, he would not characterize it as "steep."

[4:13:55 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR said he has heard of a number of professional staff vacancies at RCA. He asked how this has impacted RCA and whether there are plans to resolve the issue.

[4:14:28 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied that managing operations of the commission falls to the chairman, not to the commissioner. However, he asked to be more involved with recruitment and public outreach efforts. He said that RCA has been actively looking at job fairs in an attempt to recruit for open positions. He pointed out that this is an industry-wide issue that also effects many other sectors. He stated that Alaska offers schedule flexibility and hybrid work and RCA is working to incentivize more staff to join the commission. He commented that all industries are facing similar staffing challenges.

[4:15:18 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked if all the vacant positions were put out for hire.

[4:15:24 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied no.

[4:15:39 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL directed attention to the RCA Commissioner qualification requirements and asked if there are any other commissioners serving with the required law experience.

[4:16:17 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied no.

[4:16:25 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL asked if there are any commissioners serving with the required engineering experience.

[4:16:32 PM](#)

MR. ESPINDOLA replied he does not believe so.

[4:16:44 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL commented that this may highlight the concerns that some have with respect to RCA and the qualifications for filling seats on the commission.

[4:17:12 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL opened public testimony on the confirmation of Mr. Espindola; finding none, she closed public testimony.

[4:17:51 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of a governor's appointee to the Board of Fisheries.

[4:18:25 PM](#)

MARIT CARLSON-VAN DORT, Chair, Board of Fisheries, Anchorage, Alaska, testified as the governor's appointee to the Board of Fisheries. She said she is a lifelong Alaskan and shared a brief life history, including 13 summers spent working on seine boats. She shared that this, along with her experience as a lifelong subsistence user, inspired her interest in ecology and the science of the natural world. She detailed her educational background and work experience. She stated that Alaska's methods of protection, management, and use of natural resources has long been of particular interest and she worked on these issues during her tenure as a legislative staffer and later as a legislative liaison for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. She said her work has switched to the private sector but she continues to focus on public and government affairs. She briefly listed the areas she focuses on in her work and described her role in her current position as the President and chief executive officer (CEO) of Far West, Inc.

[4:21:00 PM](#)

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT said that her interest in serving on the Board of Fisheries (BOF) stems from the significant changes in Alaskan fish populations - and their behaviors - in recent years. She expressed interest in understanding what is causing these changes and ensuring that fisheries management policies are appropriately responsive to local observations and scientific data. She emphasized the importance of managing for long-term sustainability. She said that this means ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of fish returning and reproducing to replenish wild populations; managing for a sustainable surplus, and upholding Alaskans' subsistence use priority. She expressed full support of Alaska's commercial fishing industry. She stated that she understands the importance of subsistence,

commercial, sport fishing, and personal use fisheries to the culture and economies of Alaska's communities - particularly in rural communities.

[4:22:25 PM](#)

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT said that, during her time on the board, she worked hard to develop relationships with resource users and make herself available to individuals and groups. She detailed the various organizations, groups, and individuals that she has met with. She said that fisheries participants - and those concerned about Alaska's fisheries - deserve no less than someone who is going to do their best to be available to them.

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT said that this can be a very daunting task, often fraught with disagreement and disappointment; however, the best she can do is to communicate, remain honest, and maintain focus on what is best for the fish. She opined that the board's greatest challenge is how to manage in the interest of conservation while satisfying the needs of various user groups. She stated that decisions need to be based on sound, defensible science in addition to valuable local and traditional knowledge. She shared her belief that local and traditional knowledge is an important part of the best available science. She stated that collective goals need to ensure healthy ecosystems and long-term sustainability of Alaska's resources. She stated that Alaska's fish have provided her with a great deal and she expressed a desire to give back by continuing service on the board.

[4:24:45 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked if this would be her second term on the board.

[4:24:53 PM](#)

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT replied that it would be her second full term on the board and explained that in 2019 she was appointed and completed a partial (2-year) term.

[4:25:12 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN surmised that she understands the work required and would not seek reappointment if she was not willing to continue.

[4:25:35 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR expressed concern with the collapse in fish stocks across the state and asked what this could be attributed to.

[4:26:03 PM](#)

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT replied that this is a complex question with a multi-faceted answer. She shared her belief that there is a lot that is unknown. She said she feels encouraged by the work the department is doing to better understand what is happening in the marine environment during the life cycle of the effected salmon species. She referred to Dr. Katie Howard's work with chum and king salmon and stated that this is much needed and fascinating. She suggested that a better understanding of genetics would provide much needed information for future planning and sustainability. She surmised that ecological concerns (e.g. climate change) and fisheries have an impact; however, she reiterated that there is a lot that is unknown that the board must continue to explore.

[4:27:29 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL opened public testimony on the confirmation of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

[4:28:09 PM](#)

THOMAS TILDEN, representing self, Dillingham, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He said he has been a commercial fishing since 1963 and is a subsistence fisherman. He gave a brief history of his fishing experience. He expressed support for the confirmation and shared his belief that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort is qualified to make important fisheries decisions. He stated that Alaskan fisheries are changing and need someone like Ms. Carlson-Van Dort to make the right decisions that will ensure fisheries remain a renewable resource. He expressed concern with various fisheries across the state. He reiterated that Alaskan fisheries need someone who is qualified and knowledgeable about the issues.

[4:29:52 PM](#)

MONTE ROBERTS, Kenai River Professional Guide Association, Soldotna, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He said that she has been accessible and puts in the work required. He referred to an Upper Cook Inlet board meeting in which she championed the chinook species management concern recovery plan - for which she carried much of the burden. He emphasized that she was able to successfully work with all user groups. He shared his belief that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort should be held as the example of what the board needs and referred to her knowledge, experience, hard work, and process experience as evidence that she is an asset to the board. He added that not all board appointees fit this description.

[4:31:41 PM](#)

BILL STOLTZE, representing self, Chugiak, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He said she "merit" is a good word to describe her and the work she has done. He said he has participated in three Cook Inlet cycles while she has been on the board, along with other issues and fisheries issues. He stated that, even if he disagrees with her on a particular issue, she reaches her decisions based on thoughtfulness, deliberation, science-based research. He commented that her decisions are not always popular; however, she is a guardian of the resource. He commented that she is skilled at holding businesslike, efficient board meetings.

[4:33:44 PM](#)

CHARLES LEAN, Northern Norton Sound F&G Advisory Committee, Nome, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He said he is a retired fisheries biologist and has been participating in fisheries board meetings for 45 years. He said Ms. Carlson-Van Dort is a respected and experienced board member who has the necessary credentials and knowledge. He added that she has made a strong effort to make board meetings accessible to all, including those who have little experience of board meetings. He noted that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort has made an effort to incorporate traditional knowledge into the Northern Fisheries management practices, which strengthens the peer-review process and keeps the management on track with what the public would like to see from the fisheries resources. He stated that her efforts have helped to build confidence in the BOF process and in the decisions made by the board.

[4:35:44 PM](#)

HAL SHEPHERD, Consultant, Norton Bay Watershed Council, Homer, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He spoke to Ms. Carlson-Van Dort's extensive work experience, leadership, and strategic vision, as well as her ability to navigate extremely complex fisheries management issues. He said that she is an expert in Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation and previously worked with the state legislature. He continued to list several more areas of expertise, including regional affairs, external relations, and environmental management. He noted that she has worked in both the private and public sectors. He emphasized the crisis faced by fisheries in Alaska and the concerns this raises. He stated that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort is able to bring in a unique perspective that is much needed.

[4:37:55 PM](#)

GALE VICK, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. She said she is a fisheries policy consultant and former commercial fisherman who has lived in Alaska for 65 years. She added that she is on two committees that are supportive of appointing Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. She shared that she has worked with her for several years and expressed confidence in her abilities and knowledge of fisheries issues.

[4:39:32 PM](#)

GAYLE HOSETH, Curyung Tribal Council, Dillingham, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. She said that the Curyung Tribal Council also supported Ms. Carlson-Van Dort's appointment in 2021. She shared her belief that she is an exceptional candidate and reiterated her support.

[4:41:09 PM](#)

GARVIN FEDERENKO, President and CEO, Bristol Bay Native Association, Dillingham, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He said that, as a member of the BOF, she has handled demanding situations with professionalism and tact. He briefly shared the various reasons why he believes she is a good candidate.

[4:42:10 PM](#)

FORREST BRADEN, Executive Director, Southeast Alaska Guides Organization, Ketchikan, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He said that Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (SEGO) represents around 300 saltwater guided sport fishing and lodge businesses, with over 600 active charter boats from Yakutat to Ketchikan. He stated that it is important for BOF to function well. He shared his belief that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort has served the board extremely well and briefly described her abilities, emphasizing her knowledge of fisheries issues.

[4:44:18 PM](#)

RACHEL DONKERSLOOT, Fishery Policy Advisor, Lake and Peninsula Borough, Aniak, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. She shared her understanding that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort is now the longest serving member of BOF. She expressed appreciation for her leadership and emphasized the value of including traditional knowledge and diversity to the board. She said that she is highly qualified and reiterated support for her confirmation to BOF.

[4:45:42 PM](#)

BENJAMIN MALLOT, Alaska Federation of Natives, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He gave a brief explanation of Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and the populations served. He shared several reasons for AFNs support of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort and emphasized the value of the incorporation of traditional knowledge into the BOF process.

[4:47:03 PM](#)

NANCY HILSTRAND, Pioneer Alaskan Fisheries, Inc., Seldovia, Alaska, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. She said she has participated in the BOF process since 1982 and shared a brief history of her experience in the Alaskan fishing industry. She shared her belief that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort's actions on BOF have been very thoughtful, balanced, and fair. She added that she asks complex questions to ensure that BOF decisions are well-researched and emphasized the importance of this practice. She shared her belief that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort is an asset to BOF and the state of Alaska.

[4:48:07 PM](#)

ALLAN CROOKSTON, Tide Chaser Fisheries, Kenai, Alaska, testified in opposition to the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He briefly shared a history of his work in Alaskan fisheries. He said he has met with Ms. Carlson-Van Dort several times and expressed appreciation for those dialogues. However, he shared his belief that she has been strongly opposed to working with setnetters. He offered several examples to support this claim, including decreases to mesh size, number of nets, and number of nets per permit holder, and number of hours fished. He stated that this has been detrimental to east side setnetters and reiterated his opposition to this appointment.

[4:50:15 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GIESSEL closed public testimony on the confirmation of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort.

[4:50:25 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the Senate Resources Standing Committee reviewed the following and recommends the appointments be forwarded to a joint session for consideration:

Regulatory Commission of Alaska
John Espindola - Eagle River

Board of Fisheries

Marit Carlson-Van Dort - Anchorage

SENATOR CLAMAN reminded members that signing the report(s) regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees; the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[4:51:21 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Co-Chair Giessel adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:51 p.m.