

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

March 19, 2025

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair
Senator Matt Claman
Senator Forrest Dunbar
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Robert Myers

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

REGULATORY COMMISSION OF ALASKA

John Springsteen - Anchorage
Mark A. Johnston - Anchorage
Steven DeVries - Anchorage

- ADVANCED

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 8

Relating to strengthening international relations with Taiwan.

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SJR 8

SHORT TITLE: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) GRAY-JACKSON

02/14/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/14/25	(S)	RES
03/19/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

JOHN SPRINGSTEEN, Appointee
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

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

MARK JOHNSTON Appointee
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

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

STEVEN DEVRIES, Appointee
Regulatory Commission of Alaska
Anchorage, Alaska

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

RAY LATCHAM, President
Norgasco Alaska CNG
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointees to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, District G
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SJR 8.

CLARK BICKFORD, Staff
Senator Gray-Jackson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on SJR 8.

DANIEL CHEN, Director
Taipei Economic and Cultural Office
Seattle, Washington

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of SJR 8.

CAMERON CARLSON, Dean
College of Business and Security Management
University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of SJR 8.

EMILY KLOC, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 8.

JEFF CHEN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 8.

TRACY FAN, representing self
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 8.

KEY MA, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 8.

CALVIN CHANG, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 8.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:11 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Myers, Kawasaki, Claman, Wielechowski, and Chair Giessel. Senator Wielechowski arrived immediately thereafter. Senators Hughes and Dunbar arrived shortly thereafter.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S): Regulatory Commission of Alaska

[3:31:04 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of the governor's appointees John Springsteen, Steven DeVries and Mark Johnston to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska. She briefly reviewed AS 42.04.020 highlighting the following points describing the requirements for commissioner to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska:

- The commission has five members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the legislature in a joint session.
- Commissioners must either be in good standing with the Alaska Bar Association or hold a degree (or equivalent professional experience of at least five years) in fields such as engineering, finance, economics, accounting, business administration, or public administration.
- Commissioners serve six-year terms.

- The salary for commissioners was increased in recent legislation and is set at step 27 of the Juneau salary schedule.
- Commissioners are prohibited from having official connections to, or financial interests in, public utilities or pipeline carriers in Alaska.

[3:32:05 PM](#)

Senators Hughes and Dunbar arrived.

[3:33:39 PM](#)

JOHN SPRINGSTEEN, Appointee, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, testified as one of the governor's appointees to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska, and that he was currently serving a term that would end in March 2030.

MR. SPRINGSTEEN began state service in 2014 with the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), gaining firsthand experience in rural Alaska, including subsistence lifestyles, native culture and the challenges around building local economies, creating job opportunities and overcoming the high cost of energy. From 2015 to 2019, he served as AIDEA's Executive Director, where he developed project finance framework and evaluation processes, evaluated the quality of partners and appropriate distribution of risks and rewards, supported major infrastructure and healthcare financing projects for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation in Bethel, advanced the Ambler Mining District Industrial Access Project, and led efforts to reduce energy costs in Interior Alaska.

[3:35:24 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN served as Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, from 2019 to 2021, focusing on economic development and later on administering COVID-19 relief to small businesses statewide. In 2021, he joined the governor's office as a policy advisor and liaison to multiple state-owned corporations and authorities, working broadly on economic development initiatives.

MR. SPRINGSTEEN was appointed to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska in May 2024 and began serving as a commissioner in July 2024. He said he also served on several public and nonprofit boards.

[3:36:59 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN said, prior to state service, he spent two decades in the private sector as an environmental engineer,

management consultant, economic advisor, and chief financial officer of a publicly traded natural gas exploration company, with extensive experience across the energy value chain.

MR. SPRINGSTEEN said he held a civil engineering degree from MIT and an MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. He noted his long-term personal ties to Alaska through raising his family in the state and planning to remain there permanently.

[3:38:50 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS asked Mr. Springsteen to reflect on his experience working with an energy company during the deregulation period of the mid to late 1990s, noting that some states handled deregulation successfully while others did not. He sought insights on lessons learned about what makes deregulation effective or ineffective.

[3:39:17 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN explained that early energy deregulation was challenging and experimental. In one case, the utility focused on serving profitable commercial and industrial customers while leaving residential service to others. This approach led to poorly coordinated generation development, weak regulatory oversight, and ultimately higher costs for residential consumers. He noted that the client involved continues to struggle with finding the appropriate balance between regulation and deregulation.

[3:40:27 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how long Mr. Springsteen had served on the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

[3:40:34 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN said he began in July 2024.

[3:40:44 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI referenced a letter from the Alaska Public Interest Research Group (AKPIRG) raising concerns about staffing and leadership at the Regulatory Commission of Alaska. He cited reported long-term vacancies, declining proposed staffing levels, high staff turnover, frequent commissioner turnover, and the expiration of the current chair's term without reappointment. He asked Mr. Springsteen whether these claims were accurate and to explain what is happening at the commission.

[3:41:57 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN responded that staffing and turnover challenges at the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) were similar to those faced across state government. He said RCA invested in training and developing staff, but as their skills increased, some left for higher-paying private-sector jobs or other positions within state government. He said this created ongoing difficulties with training and transitions. He emphasized that the issue was not unique to RCA and compared it to workforce challenges in rural Alaska, where skilled workers were often recruited away once they gained valuable experience.

[3:43:33 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI expressed concern about the very high turnover rate at the Regulatory Commission of Alaska, around 50 percent since 2023, and sought clarification. He said he was particularly worried about staff leaving for the private sector and questioned whether adequate ethics rules or safeguards existed to prevent regulators from seeking or accepting jobs with industries they oversee while still in regulatory roles.

[3:44:16 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN acknowledged the presentation of conflict-of-interest issues. He said there were statutes and regulations in place barring RCA personnel staff from employment shifts to regulated entities.

[3:44:43 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether there was a list available of the jobs to which approximately 20 former RCA staff member moved and if that list could be provided to the committee.

[3:45:06 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN said he would make the request. He said he was not in an administrative position with RCA but could convey the request.

[3:45:22 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL said the committee would make the request in writing.

[3:45:50 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked Mr. Springsteen to share his perspective on the independence of the Regulatory Commission of Alaska, given his prior experience in executive branch roles, including with AIDEA, which has a degree of independence but is part of the executive branch.

[3:46:12 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN explained that the [Regulatory Commission of Alaska] had a unique, quasi-judicial role that required independence. While personal views may initially influence his thinking during deliberations, he emphasized that discussions with fellow commissioners helped reinforce the commission's proper quasi-judicial role.

[3:46:44 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI noted that in the case of judges, no ex parte communications were allowed at all. He asked whether similar exparte rules applied between commissioners and parties or people trying to influence their decisions.

[3:47:07 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN explained that the commissioners' goal was to handle communications publicly and avoid ex parte contacts. He described receiving an email about a matter not before the commission and said it was his practice to forward the email, inform the other commissioners, and properly document the communication.

[3:47:35 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether he extended that practice to legislators or people from the executive branch attempting to influence his decision-making.

[3:47:46 PM](#)

MR. SPRINGSTEEN said he believed the same rules would apply but deferred to a fellow commissioner with a deep legal background.

[3:48:08 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL advanced to testimony by Mark A. Johnston.

[3:48:29 PM](#)

MARK JOHNSTON, Appointee, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, said he was appointed to fill the remaining term of Robert Doyle, expiring March 1, 2028. He moved to Alaska in 1964, attended local schools and the University of Alaska, and had been married for nearly 22 years with two children and four grandchildren.

MR. JOHNSTON said his qualifications included a bachelor's degree in business administration with an accounting emphasis from the University of Nevada, over 40 years of experience in accounting, auditing, finance, insurance, and management,

including 25 years in executive roles as Senior Vice President or Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and licensure as a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) in Alaska. He had five years of regulatory experience, including with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and as Director of Finance at the Alaska Public Utilities Commission (APUC), and over 10 years consulting for utilities, consumer groups, and the APUC.

MR. JOHNSTON said he was the CEO of two electric utilities—Municipal Light and Power in Alaska and Mountain Parks Electric Cooperative in Colorado for eight years, gaining experience in utility management and negotiations, including the sale of Municipal Light and Power. He emphasized his broad expertise and readiness to serve the people of Alaska.

[3:51:08 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked whether Mr. Johnston thought there were any ongoing challenges from the sale and integration of Municipal Light and Power with Chugach for Anchorage residents; and second, what the commissioner saw as the primary challenges or regulatory issues likely to come before the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) in the coming years.

[3:51:56 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON said the sale of Municipal Light and Power largely met its intended goals, including staff reductions and integration savings, but also created challenges, particularly the debt Chugach incurred to complete the acquisition. He also said a significant issue was the loss of institutional knowledge as many retirement-eligible employees left following the merger, leaving staffing capacity strained. Chugach has also faced rising costs and declining electric load, though the use of simplified rate filings is helping reduce regulatory lag in recovering operating costs.

MR. JOHNSTON identified, natural gas supply as the most critical regulatory challenge looking forward, especially in Southcentral Alaska. He said there was no single solution; rather, a mix of approaches was needed, including energy efficiency, demand-side management, renewable energy, continued Cook Inlet gas development, and likely some use of LNG. He cautioned that any LNG solution must carefully manage capital costs to avoid excessive sunk investments if a lower-cost North Slope gas pipeline became available.

MR. JOHNSTON emphasized the broader problem of high energy costs statewide, particularly in rural communities, which constrained

economic growth. He suggested that potential solutions included adopting cost-reducing technologies such as cold-climate heat pumps, expanding renewables, improving transmission through the Railbelt Transmission Organization, and upgrading infrastructure to better distribute low-cost power like Bradley Lake hydropower. Additional opportunities included restoring economy energy transfers between regions when gas supply allowed and implementing standardized operating and reliability standards through the Railbelt Reliability Council to improve efficiency, safety, and affordability.

[4:00:06 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked Mr. Johnston to share his perspective on the independence of the RCA.

[4:00:14 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON asserted that the commission operated independently as authorized by statute and was not influenced by industry, legislators, or the administration, despite receiving inquiries from them. He said such inquiries were addressed, but the commission made a concerted effort to ensure they do not affect adjudicatory decision-making. He emphasized adherence to ex parte communication rules, citing an example in which commissioners visited a utility's facilities only after clearly stating that no pending matters could be discussed and then fully disclosing the contact through required filings. He expressed confidence that the legislature has granted the commission independence and that it actively exercised that independence in practice.

[4:01:38 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS asked whether the simplified rate filing process, which has been advantageous for Chugach but would require statutory changes, could also be beneficial if applied to industries beyond the electric sector.

[4:02:01 PM](#)

MR. JOHNSTON said a simplified rate filing process could be applied to other industries, provided there were appropriate safeguards. He noted that existing revenue limits, many set in 1995, were outdated and could be revised to reflect current costs, enabling smaller utilities to opt for deregulation or a simplified rate process. However, he stressed the importance of maintaining regulatory oversight, explaining that full rate cases allow for greater scrutiny by commission staff and other stakeholders, including customers. Under a simplified system, limits such as capped annual and multi-year rate increases would

remain, with larger increases triggering a full rate case to ensure adequate review and protection of the public interest.

[4:03:52 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL advanced to testimony by Steven DeVries.

[4:04:07 PM](#)

STEVEN DEVRIES, Appointee, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska, outlined his qualifications and extensive legal experience, emphasizing over 30 years with the Alaska Department of Law and membership in good standing with the Alaska Bar Association. He said he represented numerous state agencies and spent more than a decade as public advocate before the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA), gaining deep familiarity with its duties and procedures, including during the transition from the Alaska Public Utilities Commission (APUC) to the RCA. After additional leadership roles, including supervising regulatory affairs and serving as Civil Division Director until retiring in 2018, he was asked to return to public service, which he described as an honor. He highlighted the professional fulfillment of protecting consumers while ensuring utilities functioned effectively, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve as a decision-maker, and requested endorsement for confirmation, briefly sharing his personal background and willingness to answer questions.

[4:07:51 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked whether Mr. DeVries had additional comments regarding the sale and integration of Municipal Light and Power with Chugach; and second, what he saw as potential challenges or regulatory issues likely to come before the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) in the coming years.

[4:08:08 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES identified two major challenges facing the RCA:

- First, he said the looming gas supply shortfall, which threatened the ability of Railbelt utilities and Enstar to meet demand had broader statewide consequences, as higher Railbelt energy costs directly reduced Personal Consumption Expenditure (PCE) subsidies for high-cost rural communities.
- Second were Railbelt transmission issues, where he said recent legislative tools such as eliminating wheeling charges or pancake rates, were seen as important mechanisms to improve economic dispatch and ensure that energy could be delivered efficiently where it was needed.

[4:09:57 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN asked Mr. DeVries to share his perspective on the independence of the RCA.

[4:10:06 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES emphasized that the commission operated independently and was not influenced by outside parties. During active adjudications, he said commissioners were strictly prohibited from discussing open cases with anyone outside the commission, consistent with confidentiality and ethics requirements, and only communicated about such matters with commission staff and fellow commissioners.

[4:10:42 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI thanked the commissioners for their service and qualifications. He then expresses concern about high staff turnover and unfilled positions at the RCA. He emphasized the commission's critical role and significant impact on Alaskans' lives, noting that it was often underappreciated. He asked for the appointees' thoughts on how to address the staffing and retention challenges.

[4:11:38 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES expressed his hope that the current appointments would strengthen mentoring at the RCA and improve support for staff. He acknowledged this may not significantly resolve the retention challenges. He explained that the commission's staffing difficulties mirrored those faced statewide, particularly competition from private industry offering better compensation, a long-standing issue. He emphasized creating a collegial and supportive work environment, and commended staff for handling heavy workloads exacerbated by vacancies and noted that having a full complement of five commissioners would reduce workload strain and allow experienced commissioners to better mentor less experienced staff. However, he concluded that these steps were not a complete solution and that addressing systemic vacancy and retention issues would likely require action by the legislature.

[4:14:22 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI noted legislative effort and asked how the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) envisioned its role in addressing two major energy challenges: the gas supply shortfall and the integration of more renewable energy onto the grid. He asked whether the commission saw itself as primarily reactive, responding to applications as they come, or more proactive,

actively encouraging and guiding stakeholders to address these issues.

[4:15:10 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES explained that the commission was primarily reactive due to jurisdictional limits. He noted RCA could only act within the powers granted by law. He said most of its work involved reviewing filings, petitions, and tariffs submitted by utilities. He said the commission did engage in community outreach and public meetings to gather information and ask utilities about their plans, allowing for limited proactive engagement.

[4:16:22 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES responded that, regarding the natural gas issue, the commission had minimal authority. RCA could not manage production, negotiate supply contracts, or oversee wells because those roles fell to agencies like DNR and Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (AOGCC). He said RCA only reviewed gas supply contracts after utilities negotiated them, so its tools for addressing gas supply challenges were limited.

[4:17:28 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI noted that RCA-related bills came before the committee occasionally and that the state sometimes provided financing or tax incentives for developments, such as for independent power producers or infrastructure. He cited the Fire Island undersea cable. He asked whether the RCA considered these contributions when assessing rate fairness. He recalled that he had advocated for passing any savings to consumers and inquired whether RCA could do so under current authority or if they would need additional statutory power.

[4:18:13 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES said savings from state-funded infrastructure were effectively passed on to consumers because utilities cannot include the cost of grant-funded assets, such as an undersea cable, in their rate base. He explained that utilities may recover ongoing operational expenses through rates, but the capital cost of the asset itself would be excluded. He noted however, that when grant funding supported an independent power producer (IPP) that sold electricity to a regulated utility, the situation differed, as consumer rates were influenced by the negotiated power purchase agreement between the utility and the producer, which the RCA then reviewed for reasonableness.

[4:19:20 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI said recent legislation included a requirement to pass IPP tax break savings on to consumers and was later removed. He asked whether reinstating such a requirement would require a statutory change.

[4:19:41 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES said he thought so, but would need more information about the exact scenario suggested to offer an opinion.

[4:19:56 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN revisited concerns about hiring and retention at the RCA and asked whether the commissioners had the authority and capacity to research comparable salary levels and formally request legislative consideration of staff pay increases as part of managing an independent agency.

[4:20:34 PM](#)

MR. DEVRIES said he was unsure whether the RCA could formally pursue salary changes, noting he had only been on the commission for four months and that administrative matters were handled by the chair. He acknowledged that higher salaries would likely improve recruitment and retention but did not know how such changes would be implemented. In the meantime, he said the agency was trying to be creative within existing constraints, including implementing flexible, tiered positions that allowed staff to be hired at entry levels and promoted internally as they gained experience.

[4:22:36 PM](#)

SENATOR CLAMAN observed that, because the RCA was intended to be independent, the legislature may not be well positioned to proactively assess or intervene in staff salary levels, nor would that typically fall to another executive branch entity. He suggested that commissioners themselves might consider evaluating whether compensation was affecting recruitment and retention and whether it was within their authority, as a potential tool to address staffing challenges. The speaker emphasizes that maintaining a well-functioning RCA staff is essential to protecting Alaskan consumers.

[4:23:40 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL opened public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska.

[4:24:05 PM](#)

RAY LATCHEM, President, Norgasco LLC, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of the appointees to the Regulatory

Commission of Alaska. He praised their qualifications and the importance of having competent people on the commission.

[4:26:38 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL closed public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Regulatory Commission of Alaska and solicited a motion.

[4:26:44 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI 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 Springsteen - Anchorage, Alaska

Steven DeVries - Anchorage, Alaska

Mark Johnston - Anchorage, Alaska

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI 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.

[4:27:07 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL thanked the appointees for their service and for the qualifications they brought to the commission. She noted changes to the statute identifying the qualifications and the pay scale for these positions and expressed hope that qualified applicants would continue to apply and serve.

SJR 8-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS WITH TAIWAN

[4:27:55 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 8 Relating to strengthening international relations with Taiwan. She invited the sponsor and her staff to present the resolution.

[4:28:21 PM](#)

SENATOR ELVI GRAY-JACKSON, District G, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, introduced SJR 8:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Senate Joint Resolution 8 reaffirms Alaska's commitment to strengthening its relationship with Taiwan, highlighting the deep economic, cultural, and educational ties between the two nations. Taiwan is a key economic partner for Alaska, ranking as the state's eighth-largest export market in 2023 and fourth-largest market in Asia. The resolution emphasizes the importance of expanding trade relations, particularly in Alaska's seafood industry, which benefits from Taiwan's high-quality seafood market.

In 1989, the first Alaska-Taiwan trade office opened in Taipei. The trade office was a success in promoting international trade and growth between Alaska and Taiwan. The organization worked to promote trade and cultural contacts between residents of Alaska and Taiwan, and this proposed legislation before us today would promote the same meaningful relationship. Taiwan is a country with a voracious appetite for natural resources, fish, timber, oil, and many other resources that Alaska has on abundance. In 1988, before the trade office was established, sales of fish products were only \$300,000 annually. After the office was established, the sale of seafood between Alaska and Taiwan rose to \$6 million annually, confirming that the presence of an Alaskan trade office will help with the promotion of Alaska's current abundant resources.

[4:30:06 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON continued to introduce SJR 8.

Alaska and Taiwan have a long history of cultural and educational exchanges, with sister-city partnerships between Fairbanks and Tainan City, Juneau and Chiayi City, and Anchorage and Taipei City. Reestablishing an Alaska Trade Office in Taiwan would further strengthen these connections and create a foundation for collaboration in technology, international seafood sales, education, tourism, and much more.

SJR 8 supports Taiwan's efforts in maintaining a strong relationship with the State of Alaska.

[4:30:50 PM](#)

CLARK BICKFORD, Staff, Senator Gray-Jackson, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said he was available to answer questions on SJR 8.

[4:31:22 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced invited testimony on SJR 8.

There was a period of technical difficulty with the testifiers' connections.

[4:32:46 PM](#)

DANIEL CHEN, Director, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, Seattle, Washington, testified by invitation in support of SJR 8. He thanked Senator Gray-Jackson for introducing SJR 8 and for her research in Taiwan to identify opportunities for cooperation with Alaska. He emphasized the long-standing relationship between Alaska and Taiwan, including the sister-state relationship established in 1988 and city partnerships between Anchorage-Taipei, Fairbanks-Tainan, and Juneau-Chiayi.

MR. CHEN said Taiwan was Alaska's largest export destination as of 2023 and ranked fourth in the Indo-Pacific, with total bilateral trade of approximately \$188 million. He outlined several areas where Taiwan can further support Alaska's economy:

- **Energy cooperation:** Alaska's natural gas resources align with Taiwan's efforts to strengthen energy resilience and diversification. He noted that discussions were already underway regarding LNG exports to Taiwan.
- **Seafood exports:** Taiwan imported \$1.9 billion in seafood in 2023, but the United States ranks only 10th as a supplier, with about 1.5 percent market share. Alaska's premium seafood presents significant growth potential.
- **Technology and innovation:** Taiwan's Smart City and AI initiatives create opportunities for collaboration in digital infrastructure, urban efficiency, and innovation.
- **Education exchanges:** Taiwan's globally recognized advanced technology education system offers strong potential for expanded educational exchange programs with Alaska.
- **Tourism and cultural exchange:** Post-COVID growth in U.S.-Taiwan tourism, including new Seattle-Taipei direct flights, opened opportunities to increase tourism to Alaska.

[4:36:37 PM](#)

MR. CHEN urged that reopening an Alaska trade office in Taiwan would deepen economic ties, build on existing trade performance, and provide access to broader Asia-Pacific markets, including

Indonesia and the Philippines. He cited examples from other states: Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, showing significant export growth after establishing or reopening trade offices in Taiwan.

MR. CHEN concluded by committing continued support from his Seattle-based team to work with Alaska state government and stakeholders to reopen the Alaska trade office in Taiwan, strengthen small business connections, and expand economic opportunities.

[4:39:45 PM](#)

CAMERON CARLSON, Dean, College of Business and Security Management, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), Fairbanks, Alaska, testified by invitation in support of SJR 8, which he said aimed to strengthen Alaska's economic and trade relationship with Taiwan. He described how the College of Business and Security Management (CBSM) was actively advancing this goal through efforts to establish a partnership with the National Kaohsiung University of Science and Technology (NKUST), specifically its Colleges of Management and Marine Commerce.

MR. CARLSON said the proposed partnership would focus on educational and research collaboration in business and marine commerce—sectors central to Alaska's economic future and its trade relationship with Taiwan. He emphasized that this initiative would go beyond academic exchange and reflected Alaska's broader commitment to building meaningful, long-term international partnerships that could support trade and investment growth.

He underscored Taiwan's importance to Alaska's economy, noting that in 2023, Taiwan was Alaska's eighth-largest export market and the fourth largest in Asia, with the seafood industry standing to benefit significantly from expanded trade. He said reopening an Alaska trade office in Taiwan was a key opportunity to enhance trade, as well as economic and cultural exchange.

He noted that SJR 8 was timely given shifting global supply chains and the growing importance of partnerships with reliable trade partners. He said Taiwan's track record in responsible global trade, combined with expanded educational exchanges and joint research, would support workforce development and reinforce Alaska's leadership in maritime commerce and international business.

He concluded that the CBSM-NKUST partnership was a concrete example of Alaska-Taiwan engagement, and that SJR 8 would

strengthen the foundation for deeper educational, cultural, and economic ties and increased mutual trade and investment.

[4:43:00 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL closed invited testimony and opened public testimony.

[4:43:44 PM](#)

EMILY KLOC, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, urged the committee to pass SJR 8, emphasizing that both Alaska and Taiwan stood to benefit from expanded trade and educational exchanges. She expressed concern about the impacts of global trade negotiations on Alaska's economy and argued that resuming an Alaska trade office in Taiwan would help mitigate those effects. She said increased trade with Taiwan could help lower the cost of goods for Alaskans and noted that the Alaska seafood industry would benefit from a stronger trade relationship. She strongly encouraged the committee to support SJR 8.

[4:45:10 PM](#)

JEFF CHEN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SJR 8. As a multimedia producer, small business owner, and former Anchorage Sister Cities commissioner, he emphasized the mutual benefits Alaska and Taiwan could gain through expanded trade, education, tourism, and cultural exchange. He cited examples of cooperation, including facilitating critical PPE shipments from Taiwan to Alaska during the pandemic and U.S. vaccine assistance to Taiwan. He highlighted personal and cultural ties between Alaska and Taiwan, and current trade as well as potential for the future. He advocated for establishing an Alaska trade office in Taiwan, restoring direct flights, and expanding cultural exchanges, concluding that closer ties with Taiwan would help Alaska build economic opportunity and democratic partnerships across the Pacific.

[4:48:20 PM](#)

TRACY FAN, representing self, Eagle River, Alaska, testified in support of SJR 8. She said increased trade and cultural exchange between Alaska and Taiwan would be mutually beneficial. She expressed particular interest in restoring direct flights between Alaska and Taiwan to strengthen traditional, economic, and cultural ties, and thanked the committee for considering her testimony.

[4:49:33 PM](#)

KEY MA, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SJR 8. Drawing on 30 years of aviation experience, he emphasized Alaska's strategic geographic position for trans-Pacific aviation and noted existing connections between Alaska Airlines and Taiwan through Starlux. He argued that establishing direct flights to Taiwan would significantly strengthen business ties with Taiwan and Asia more broadly and expressed strong support for advancing Alaska's aviation role.

[4:51:10 PM](#)

CALVIN CHANG, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SJR 8. He noted that he was an Alaska resident of Taiwanese descent and stated that strengthening ties between Alaska and Taiwan would be mutually beneficial, particularly through expanded tourism and trade. He concurred with previous testimony that direct flights would be very convenient. He expressed appreciation for SJR 8 and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

[4:52:31 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL closed public testimony on SJR 8.

[4:52:40 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR referenced a discussion earlier that day with the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) about restoring direct flights to Asia. He said DOTPF leadership expressed doubts about sufficient market demand. He argued that decisions should consider broader economic, trade, and strategic benefits beyond passenger numbers, such as time savings and stronger international connections. He asked whether direct flights to Asia, including Taipei, were encompassed within the resolution's goals for economic and trade partnerships, and whether the resolution could be shared with airport directors to support those efforts.

[4:53:49 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON concurred.

[4:53:58 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI referred to SJR 8, page 3, lines 1 through 3, and asked for clarification on the fourth "further resolved" clause of SJR 8, specifically whether it referred to any trade or tax agreement currently under consideration in Congress. He noted the provision seemed vague and sought more specificity on what agreements were being contemplated.

[4:54:28 PM](#)

MR. BICKFORD expressed appreciation for the inquiry and committed to a prompt answer following the meeting.

4:54:53 PM

CHAIR GIESSEL held SJR 8 in committee.

4:55:14 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Giessel adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:55 p.m.