

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

May 1, 2025

1:39 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senator Löki Tobin, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Kiehl

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman
Senator Mike Shower

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF MARINE PILOTS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DON HABEGER, Appointee
Board of Marine Pilots
Juneau, Alaska

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

JAMES CUNNINGHAM, Appointee
Board of Marine Pilots
Homer, Alaska

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

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:39:49 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN called the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:39 p.m. Present at the call to

order were Senator Tobin and Chair Bjorkman. Senator Kiehl arrived thereafter.

CONFIRMATION HEARING: BOARD OF MARINE PILOTS

[1:40:43 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced the consideration of the governor's appointees to the Board of Marine Pilots.

[1:41:13 PM](#)

DON HABEGER, Appointee, Board of Marine Pilots, Juneau, Alaska, testified as a governor's appointee to the Board of Marine Pilots. He said he has been involved in the marine industry for decades. He briefly discussed his current work, which includes a contract with the Juneau Reentry Coalition and a fishing lure for which he holds the patent. He acknowledged that his resume is industry-centric. He said he was previously the director of the Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing (CBPL). He was also deputy commissioner of the Department of Administration for a short time. He noted his past work in the cruise industry and stated that, while he previously worked for a company that utilized pilotage services, he no longer has a connection to the industry or those companies. He referred to AS 08.62.010, which specifies the makeup of the Board of Marine Pilots and AS 08.01.025, which details the qualifications for the public members. He reiterated that he is not working in pilotage or any marine industry. He stated that he has no contracts with the industry. He stated that he has no direct financial or contractual interest in pilot businesses or associations.

[1:45:41 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN asked to which seat on the Board of Marine Pilots Mr. Habeger was appointed.

MR. HABEGER answered that he was appointed to one of the two public member seats.

[1:46:05 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN invited Mr. Cunnigham to introduce himself.

[1:46:25 PM](#)

JAMES CUNNINGHAM, Appointee, Board of Marine Pilots, Homer, Alaska, testified as a governor's appointee to the Board of Marine Pilots. He said he was initially appointed in June of 2022, and is seeking reappointment. He noted his relevant experience as shown on his resume and said he found Alaska to be

a great place to live with his family. He said serving on the board gave him the chance to see the interface between the marine industry and government. He expressed hope that his perspective would be useful as he serves on the board.

[1:48:53 PM](#)

SENATOR TOBIN thanked Mr. Cunningham for his service and willingness to renew his appointment. She noted that in 2023 he explained that it was a challenge to attract and retain marine pilots. She asked whether the board has made any progress in its efforts to address those challenges or if he had new insight to share concerning the challenges faced by marine pilots around the state.

[1:49:35 PM](#)

MR. CUNNINGHAM said the state is actively bringing in more pilots. He explained that nationwide, the marine pilot industry is shifting as older pilots retire and there is an increasing demand for new pilots to fill those positions. He said Alaska has been "the edge of the map" - especially when compared with larger ports like San Francisco and New York. As Alaska becomes more well-known, more energetic, enthusiastic pilots are coming to the state. He noted the various opportunities that draw new pilots to the state. He indicated that the board has increased outreach, which has resulted in greater visibility.

[1:52:27 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN opened public testimony on the governor's appointees to the Board of Marine Pilots; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[1:53:00 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN thanked the appointees for their willingness and commitment to serve the state.

[1:53:13 PM](#)

At ease.

[2:00:27 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced the arrival of Senator Kiehl.

[2:00:37 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN solicited the will of the committee.

[2:00:39 PM](#)

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

Board of Marine Pilots

Don Habeger - Juneau

James Cunningham - Homer

[2:00:56 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN found no objection. He 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 advanced to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[2:01:23 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bjorkman adjourned the Senate Transportation Standing Committee meeting at 2:01 p.m.