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Alaska State Legislature

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TRANSCRIPT OF TESTIMONY OF

MILTON LIPTON

March 15, 1978

BEFORE THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ROYALTY OIL AND GAS

Committee:

Senators:	Representatives:
Chairman Mike Colletta	Chairman Bill Miles
Pat Rodey	Chat Chatterton
Bill Sumner	Joe McKinnon
John Sackett	Charlie Parr
Kay Poland	Al Osterback

CHAIRMAN MILES:

I'll call the committee to order. Senator Hackney, would you care to join us? Senator Sackett? We'd be more than pleased to have you. We have with us tonight Mr. Milton Lipton. He's going to give us some of his observations on the contract. He's certainly well known to all of us. So with that, Mr. Lipton, please --.

MR. LIPTON:

I'd like to ask Mr. Lilgore Kildrum (ph) my ass~~essor~~ociate, to join me. I don't mind volunteering observations to the committee but if the questions get too difficult, I'm going to throw them at Dick.

Your committee's obviously been close to this issue for a long time, a lot closer than we have been and when we met the latter part of January, you asked me if I would comment on the subject of the oil royalty contract. At that time it was still in the competitive stage and I offered some very general observations on what I saw were the critical considerations involved. I will not repeat myself to you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Mr. Lipton, I'm having a little bit of trouble hearing in the

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back.

MR. LIPTON:

Well I'd be glad to address myself to the ALPETCO group, but that would mean turning my back on the committee. Does this do it, does this help?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

No, I think that's just a tape recorder. You have to move forward.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

You just come on up.

MR. LIPTON:

I'll try to talk louder, not better but louder. Really, we have put together, I think, three observations about the contract that is now in front of you. And I think one footnote to the three observations, and I'll try not to be long-winded about these, and then place myself at your mercy for whatever questions you would like to ask.

I start with the first observation which is that if the royalty contract placed before you is approved by the legislature and if it comes to fruition, there are some very definite advantages for Alaska. And I see these as especially significant in the light of the fact that when the issue or the subject or the possibility of the sale of royalty oil as the basis for some kind of industrial establishment was first (indisc. - cough). The companies that are most likely to be parties of the first part, rather they are oil companies or chemical companies, were extremely reluctant to come forward with positive commitments. We know this because among our clients were companies that really discussed the prospect and many of them looked at it, some seriously, some less than seriously. But in light of the fact that the companies who might have had the best controlled markets for the disposal of either energy products or chemical products were themselves reluctant or didn't visualize the prospects as particularly conducive or were reluctant to make the investment, that in consideration of all of this, it stands as significant that there is a contract before you with a group who if they can perform and if it comes to fruition would contribute something that otherwise you have been unable thus far to get. And that in itself I consider to be a plus for what has been the process of investigation, discussion and negotiation up to date. That's my first observation.

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I skip to my third observation, and that has to do with how we see the prospects for success. Now I speak of this, not in terms of the probability, it is no part of our role to tell you what the chances are of this thing coming to fruition, but I think it is important to evaluate again what the difficulties and what the problems are. Particularly, because in all of the discussion and in all of the representation there has been a great deal of possibly and probably, and sometimes not coming to what we think are the realities of the project, or any project faces.

The disposition of chemical products on the West Coast is, I think, a reasonable possibility; that is to say there is a great market at the present time which is supplied by indirection out of capacity in the Gulf area. The market is undoubtedly growing. One can argue about rates of growth in the United States or in world markets, and I put that aside. I don't think this is a numbers game. But there is a potential market on the West Coast.

The difficulty, of course, is that the companies who are in most direct control of the market are not the ones who are participating here. It becomes a matter of whether one can establish the relationship which makes it possible to do.

I think that the foreign market, which is discussed, which is essentially the western perimeter of the Pacific, is probably the most elusive and the most difficult one. It's not because there isn't going to be a growth in chemical demand in Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific basin as a whole; there will be a considerable increase in demand. But the areas from which that chemical demand can be supplied looks to be ever so much more attractive than out of Alaska. I'll give you our quick thinking on this.

The expansion of chemical capacity to serve the markets by Japanese chemical companies is undoubted. It is going to happen. The question is from where. For a lot of reasons we think that the major expansion of chemical capacity by Japanese companies will not be in Japan. It will be outside of Japan. There are limitations on what can be done in Japan for a lot of reasons, not the least of which has to do with siting problems, has to do with environmental problems that are very, very real. But it means that if the Japanese chemical companies are going to export capacity, they will export capacity to those areas where it is most strategic for them to do so. And that means either exporting the capacities, say, into Southeastern Asia, the whole range of areas all the way from Taiwan, through Singapore, potentially through Indonesia, where in a sense they are in the direct line of the main flow of feedstocks from the Persian Gulf area, the Arabian Gulf area, to their markets. Or, they will participate directly, or indirectly, in the expansion of

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petro-chemical capacity in the Middle East itself.

I think there's some misunderstanding about what the incentives are for investment in the Middle East. It's true that capital costs are relatively high there, but the decisions of companies whether or not they put their capacity into the Middle East, where capital costs are high and where transportation costs to market for petro-chemicals are high, better moving the crude oil from the Middle East to Southeast Asia, the naphtha that comes with the crude oil, you process the naphtha. Given the transportation disadvantages and given the capital disadvantages, the reason that the companies are considering going in there is not just that they get an assured supply of petro-chemical feed stocks (ph), which is the argument in behalf of the Alaskan facility, if in the future period of time there is question about the continuous availablity of feed stocks (ph), shouldn't you go where it is available - Alaska or Middle East? It is more than that. It's that there is a political thrust on the part of Middle East governments - Iran, Saudi Arabia, especially - to develop an industrial profile for reasons that are difficult to follow. I don't know the reasons for it, but to develop an industrial profile which somehow is a reflection, also, of their importance in the world at large. They aren't important in the world, because Saudi Arabia is going to be pivotal to the supply of oil and gas for the world. Why an industrial profile that reflects it? Certainly not to create unemployment. They don't want unemployment of Arabs, and they have great concern about the importation of foreign labor that might work there. But I think there's an important psychological urge that, if Saudi Arabia is to occupy as pivotal an economical and political role in the world as they now believe they can, and as the world outside tells them they must, that somehow they ought to look the role as well as play the role, and this involves some kind of an industrial profile which fits in with everything else.

Now, to do that, they have not only to offer the feed stock (ph) for the petro-chemical plants, and as a considerable negotiation, what price ethylene to an ethylene operation, and how do you handle financing, more important than that, and this is what brings in the Shells and the Mobils and the Dows and, in due course, the Japanese, that they're prepared to offer, in addition to the assured feed stock (ph) near the petrochemical plant, a collateral supply of crude oil for export purposes. The investment in the petrochemical facility will not only directly or indirectly overcome the competitive disadvantages, which you have in Alaska and which they have also (high capital cost, high transportation cost), they can put in the at a very low price if they will, they can offer low-cost capital advances, but there is a hundred to a hundred and fifty thousand barrels a day of crude oil, which in the late 1980's will be available to the company that is willing to make the petrochemical or the refining investment. And this is what is bringing the facilities into it. And this means you will have, not as quickly as we had anticipated had been brooded about,

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and not on the scale that originally went into the Saudi-Arab investment program. And, in view of the surpluses, neither the companies nor Saudi Arabia are that anxious to push the thing along, which is one of the reasons the negotiations proceed.

But there will be, in due course, a reasonable expansion of petrochemical facility in the Arabian Gulf and in the Persian Gulf, because the Shah will have at least one major facility. This expansion, which willy-nilly is going to have to move to world markets and which faces special competitive disadvantages in the European market, or the U. S. market, transportation problems, no quick mode of transportation, the kind of ocean-going carriers that are lowest cost probably couldn't go through the Suez Canal - what goes through the Suez Canal is higher cost transportation - plus protection in Europe by the Common Market for their own chemical industry, so worthily (ph) you are looking at the western rim of the Pacific, which is precisely what Alaska would hope to get to augment whatever the potential is in California. And if the export of processing capacity by the Japanese chemical industry to Southeast Asia, coupled with the competitive supplies out of the Persian Gulf are put together, what it means, in effect, is that the present capacity in Japan, which is both for domestic and export markets, becomes increasingly available for domestic markets, because the export markets get served out of the export capacity to other areas.

This is why we feel that it is extremely difficult to visualize the (indisc.) of commitment of Japanese, because given the proper terms and conditions, there may be certain commitments. But the way in which the competitive environment operates in '85 and '87 and in '89 when an Alaskan facility comes on (indisc.) and they may have to supply parts at not stipulated prices, but at what are called competitive prices, I think both volume and price-realizations are questionable. The point of what I'm saying here is not that I'm trying to tell you the odds of the project coming to fruition, that's not my point. I think that you've got negotiated, both by the State and by the ALPETCO group, as an imaginative combination of factors into a contract as you could get, particularly in view of the fact that nobody else was forthcoming. What I'm concerned about is my point two, which I now come back to. Namely, what are the risks for Alaska? Because, if the project can be put to fruition, but if the economics should turn out as complicated and as difficult as we think they will, then this raises the whole question of what the risk is for Alaska. So I come back to this, which is the in-between thing.

Yes, it's a heroic effort on both parties' parts, and I think a very carefully drawn contract.

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Number three - we think there are problems, And, if we are right about the problems, but meanwhile the contract is moving forward, what are the risks for the State of Alaska?

I suppose that in the interim period. they are pretty much minimized by the terms of the contract. There are due dates and performance commitments right down the line. So how can Alaska really lose on it? For example, the ALPETCO group, which for reasons that I can only partly interpret, would like to have prior access to the crude oil before the facility is completed. Obviously, if they have that option, and in eighteen months they have met their commitments, they would only exercise their option for the crude oil if it turns out to be profitable for them to do so.

But, how much protection does Alaska have in this interim period? Well, the due dates are very clearly specified. There are certain allowances to the Commissioner six months at various dates (indisc.). But, you know, I rather suspect that if this group works as hard as they obviously intend to, that if there comes a due date and there is evidence of sincere effort, will Alaska at that time say, "Cut them off because they haven't met their commitment," or will you be more inclined to say, "Well, look, all the evidence of effort is there - one is on the verge, shouldn't we go?" Which means one may extend all of these due dates somewhat beyond the contractual terms, which may not be bad. The only question then is, for how long a period of time has Alaska, in a sense, given the first option for all proposals to this selected group and, during this interim period which may be assured is eighteen months, but may be as long as two years or two-and-a-half years, which in effect blocks out any alternative proposal. I have no idea if alternative proposals come in, and I don't weigh this very heavily. But in my own mind, as I visualize the progression through which one goes, one has to ask realistically whether a due date at which point performance has been completed or the contract is voided is really realistic. If in fact this group will perform, as I expect they will; that is, with diligent effort and always with the expectation that things will be coming through. But more importantly, your contract is a contract contingent upon a whole series of performance. The ALPETCO group must also look for the contracts which they need, both for off-take of products and for the commitment of funds, which, in a sense, are contingent,too. That is to say, as long as things continue to look prospective, one goes along.

What is a contract for the off-take of products? Specified products, specified quantity into a certain market at what? At a guaranteed price? Never. It's also got to be at a price which allows the buyer to be competitive in his own markets. Call it what you will - world market prices, competitive prices, whatever it is. And so long as things are running this course,

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and in every stage of the game there may very well be a feasibility study, one goes along; which means the lenders do, the ALPETCO people do, and the buyers do. But, if, finally, this facility is built and if you have five difficult years in which the lenders can be satisfied but the profitability of the refining bill really isn't there, that is to say, there would have to be capital infusions to keep it running, does the group have the financial capabilities to weather five or six years of difficulty beyond which the project may work out fairly well? Maybe not, but it could very well be. Or, does it become the responsibility of Alaska, in a sense, to provide them with essential support in the expectation that things will be better. The light at the end of the tunnel and the way you do it is you turn the equation around. The equation today is that the feed stock (ph) costs are fixed. They'll make a profit by selling competitively. You may have to turn it around that the selling price of the products is determined, and in order for the thing to survive, you have to adjust the feed stock (ph) costs to what the market looks like. This, I think, is the risk of Alaska. I'm not trying to pre-judge it. This is not a forecast, but I think that if you look at the combination of realities which the group faces, it is less disadvantageous for Alaska, but the realities stop the project, in a sense, and made a good pass at a Royalty crude contract but it hasn't worked out. Then that always the prospect is leading you one step further and then Alaska gets in the position where it, willy-nilly, is party to the equity position of the project because it will be very, very difficult for a billion, a billion-and-a-half, two billion dollar project in which the state has a vital interest to suffer financial disabilities and maybe threathen some future viability, which is only two years down the road, a few years down the road, or four years down the road. This, I think, is what you must assess.

And, as I said last time, and I simply quickly summarize. In the state of the circumstances, if you the Legislators have significant doubts about the balance between the benefit to Alaska and the risk, I don't think Alaska loses too much by deferring the decision. This, of course, is contingent upon whether you think royalty oil will be available in the future, whether you think one or two years or three years of draw-down of reserves is going to prejudice your ability later on. But the way in which one sees the future suggests that the perception of all parties as to the value of assured access may improve over time. And, there's no question about it, that the success of this project depends upon the participation of other participants, and the stronger the other participants are, the more closely entwined they are, the more they appear as a party of the first part, the more chances there are for success.

What you are wrestling with here is outside financing, outside marketing, all contingent upon the performance of other parties

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and with an imaginative and an agressive effort by the ALPETCO group, but with limited capabilities on their own, as we see it.

Now, just one footnote to all of this, and then I give you your crack at me. I say this because we have just come this visit and the previous January visit and last year and the year before with long discussions about the adequacy or inadequacy of the state's income tax. In reaching out at the income generated by operations here in Alaska, and there are bills to change the income tax - I have no idea where they are going - but let's assume now that the income tax remains as it is, which means that for any multi-state corporation the income which you can tax here in Alaska is not measured by the profits in Alaska but is measured by the allocation of their overall profits earnings allocated by formula through Alaska. And, as you know from long dicussions, the big deficiency in the formula is that the sales factor gives you virtually nothing. You produce a lot of oil, or you might refine a lot of oil, or refine a lot of petrochemicals, but very little of it is sold in Alaska. So the proportion of a corporation's, of a multi-state corporation's total sales, which are sold in Alaska and become very small. So little of the income is allocated here.

I know very little about the internal structure of ALPETCO now, let alone what it may be by the time the project comes to fruition. But to my mind it is quite conceivable that it will be engaged besides petrochemical operations in Alaska with at least transportation and perhaps some satellite projects. They would like to get as much of the down-stream investment up here in Alaska, but they may be involved in California. I don't know.

What I'm suggesting is you might want to consider that if the state feels positively inclined that you might at least consider that part of the arrangement between the state and the group shall be that the first sale of products out of the facility shall be made in Alaska. It doesn't mean it stays in Alaska, but it can very well be exported. But if the first sale, whether it's to a trading company or to whoever, takes place in Alaska so that one comes to reckon what the earnings are, subject to tax, apportionments, or anything else, that at least you have under your present income tax statute and under your present allocation formula, at least you have a leg-up that there is a reasonable proportion of the product produced in Alaska is also sold in Alaska so that for tax purposes at least it get allocated back here. Which means you're not increasing the tax burden on it, but what you're saying is you have at least a chance to identify and reach out and tax it. This is a footnote, and it comes up only because this whole issue of the income tax has been so much in the fore for such a long time and we've been pivotal to that discussion. So I think you may want to consider that.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Thank you very much. It's always a pleasure to have you come before us. Are there any questions from the committee?

MR. CHATTERTON:

Yes. I'll strike out first, Mr. Chairman, if I may.

Unequivocably, Mr. Lipton, you feel that a sale of our one-eighth royalty oil, that there is a risk attached to it. A risk that we might end up getting less for that one-eighth than if we took it back.

MR. LIPTON:

There is a risk. There surely is a risk.

MR. CHATTERTON:

I'm curious if you are somewhat acquainted with the State of Alaska's Constitution. Over the years you've been coming up here, it more less states that the resources of the state belong to the people. I'm wondering if you would care to make a comment as to whether or not we, as a Legislative body, have the moral or even consitutional right to take a risk with the peoples' money, or would the people go after it.

MR. LIPTON:

Well, you put your questions very, very directly, and it's awfully hard for me to equivocate when you put them that way, and I can't. Yes, I think you have a right to take the risk because you always take the risk. You take the risk in every kind of a lease sale. You take a risk when you select the bidding variable for a lease sale. You take a risk when you decide on how you choose among tax alternatives. These are all risks. I guess, unequivocably, I've got to say yes you have a right to take a risk on this, also.

MR. CHATTERTON:

Okay, fine. Fine. Thank you.

MR. PARR:

Mr. Lipton, if I understood you correctly, I think what you saw as the main advantage of this whole contract operation is that you got a breakthrough. You finally find someone who is willing to stick his neck out and go for a petrochemical complex in the West.

MR. LIPTON:

Gee, you put it so simply, and I was so complicated. Yes.

MR. PARR:

Okay.

MR. LIPTON:

That's it.

MR. PARR:

The second thing. . . I'd like to paraphrase what you said to make sure I've understood it all. There's going to be growth in the Japanese petrochemical industry. Most of it is going to be exported capital growth. They're going to build the plants either in Southeast Asia or in the East. And those . . .

MR. LIPTON:

For a specific market. For a specific market.

MR. PARR:

And those plants are going to take care of the export business. The plants that have been formed that are rather old-fashioned, using naphtha which are now in Japan itself will be servicing their domestic market.

MR. LIPTON:

Increasingly, yes.

MR. PARR:

Yes. What is the general status of the ability of those plants remaining in Japan? Those domestic plants we have been told, at least, are rather old-fashioned, to compete with a modern plant now coming on the line; but coming on line in 1983? Given their advantage of being on the spot.

MR. LIPTON:

Well, look, it depends upon what the ingredient of the competition is. Uh, in many respects a depreciated plant has a tremendous competitive advantage over a new plant if you're talking about relative costs of production, relative costs of processing. It depends how you calculate the costs. If you're saying, if you're looking just at operating costs, they may not be that competitive. But if you're looking at the whole complex of costs that go in with a great deal of the capital investment written off, and

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you're looking only at the incremental cost of operation, they can compete. Hell, some of our oldest plants in the U. S. Gulf are competing in world markets today. And, so

MR. PARR:

You mean, in that case, that the advantage of having depreciated their plants already outweighs their technological backwardness. Is that what you are saying?

MR. LIPTON:

I'm not even sure how technologically backward they are. You know, it's an interesting question as to which technology is going to be the most competitive. Because technology is also a function of the feedstock that you use. Now, you know the new generation of ethylene plants, which are coming on stream in the U. S. Gulf and which is proposed here, are gas-oil plants which, basically, have a somewhat higher capital investment required relative to a somewhat different mix. But it's not at all clear that the direction in which the world petrochemical capacity is moving is going to move more and more towards the heavier feedstocks rather than the lighter feedstocks. Because if you go towards the Persian Gulf or the Arabian Gulf, you're talking about a fantastic availability of ethane, which is lighter material. If you look . . . I don't want to get more complicated than is necessary, but, if you look at the projects for the development of natural gas and natural. . . LPG liquids. Now there's talk about can you have an LPG base petrochemical operation here in Alaska? It's one of the things that's been considered. The amount of LPGs which are coming out of the Arabian Gulf between now and the early 1980's firm, and prospectively by '85, '87, and '88 suggests that propane, which has never been the basis for petrochemical processing in the whole Eastern hemisphere, although there has been to an extent in the U. S. Gulf, may become a competitive factor for petrochemical processing.

So, it's very difficult. I really don't want to substitute my judgment for somebody elses. All I see are so many uncertainties in the picture. But it's very, very hard to say with the kind of confidence that I would like to say that if only you have an assured source of feedstock here in Alaska, that outweighs your competitive disadvantages. And your competitive disadvantages are very clear. You heard . . . I don't even want to repeat it. . . you've heard this so much. The question is, does the assured availability outweight the competitive disadvantage. It may for the Western hemisphere, and you may even get Japanese participation here for world markets, not on the Pacific rim - the Western Pacific rim, but for the world markets in the Western hemisphere. The Japanese are very active here.

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They want to make an investment, which would be fine because they like to diversify their investment, and the Western hemisphere looks very good to them. But that's not the marketing output over there. And any way you look at it, you're moving against the mainstream of the flow of energy commodities and the buildup of energy values. You're pricing . . .

MR. PARR:

I'm sorry, I don't follow you.

MR. LIPTON:

The center of pricing for energy commodities and derivatives will be increasingly, it almost is today, but not quite, increasingly out of the Arabian Gulf. And as you move eastward, it builds up in cost. True. But, if you're going to move against that, it builds up in cost more and more as it comes toward the U. S. East Coast. And if you have crude oil out of Saudi Arabia, or whatever else, or the naphtha which is derived from the crude oil, or the gas oil which is derived from it, it all builds up in cost and, therefore, in value as you reach the U. S. West Coast. Well, you have a better competitive value in the U. S. West Coast, but if you start moving with transportation costs against that flow, you're moving further and further in the direction in lower cost feedstock (indisc. - cough) cost alternative feedstocks. Whether they are naphtha or whether they are gas oil or whether they are ethane in the Persian Gulf area, (indisc.) the Arabian Gulf itself, or whether they are LPGs.

MR. PARR:

You say moving against that flow you are talking about, in other words, trying to supply markets which are nearer to the Mid East. .

MR. LIPTON:

Nearer to the place where the price originates. That's right.

MR. PARR:

Now I'm with you. I think I'd like to look at this a little further.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Mr. Lipton, in there, speaking directly to the contract, as you are aware the contract does commit some future unknown reserves. In light of the risks that we understand (indisc.) ALPETCO and the State of Alaska will be taking should it go ahead with the project, can you comment on the (indisc. - cough) that the State might have in committing those unknown reserves, the non-Prudhoe reserves?

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MR. LIPTON:

Insofar as there is a question whether you will have adequate royalty oil out of Prudhoe over the duration of this contract, whether it's this contract or any other contract, if, in fact, it's the assured availability which offsets the known disadvantages, then nothing's going to fly unless you're prepared to commit the hundred of a hundred and twenty-five of a hundred and fifty. Which means also the right of first refusal over any deficiency out of the royalty oil from Prudhoe out of other royalty oil anywhere else in the state. That is, whether it's this particular project, or whether you say no to this, and Dow Chemical comes back three years from now. If you're going to offset competitive disadvantages by assured availability, you've got to assure availability.

Is there a risk in this? Sure, this is another one of the risks. And the risk is that, in effect, you are committing this oil to a particular project under specified contractual price arrangements, which may by 1988 or 1989, 1990, or 1992 look to be far more attractive than other alternative in uses. It is difficult to say. And again, all . . . I think if you want this kind of a project, whether it's this group or another group, you're going to have to give assurance of supply. It's a risk you take. I don't know how high I would count that risk. I think, in many respects, the contract is as carefully worded as it can be to minimize the State's risk. I mean,you're not going to get any bargains on the royalty oil, although in the light of unknown circumstances it may be that they will still be able to get it at a price for their facility, which is less than what the State might otherwise later on may have been able to negotiate.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Let's talk about pricing for just a bit. When you've come down and talked to us before, you have explained your theory about the, and I can remember you doing it, . . the surpluses like this now, when it's going to be like this a little bit later on, and it was the availability versus the price, and you really didn't, we didn't have a contract before us. Can you comment on that theory insofar as this contract is concerned?

MR. LIPTON:

Oh, I still think it's the case. This group. . . again, I think imaginatively has foreseen what the world is going to look like in '85, '89, and '90, '95. Which means they are presuming they can take your royalty oil today, within twenty-four hours construct a facility, and sell the products in a world in which petrochemical capacity is way at surplus. So, therefore, seeing the time when, one, there will be less surplus capacity in the

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chemical industry, a greater demand from products from new facilities at a time when the new facility, which has assured access, has got a leg up over a new facility that doesn't have assured access. So, they're willing to take their chances on the price equation because they think that this is . . . . So, they are looking very, very far ahead.

I guess what I said to you last time that the way in which corporations react to this future, and virtually everybody sees the future the same way. They have different years that they put onto it. The C.I.A. says a catastrophe by 1982- - - we're all going to run short of oil. The O.E.C.D. says well, by 1988 - '89 it's going to be tight, but there's going to be enough oil left. Everybody sees the due date as somewhat different, but everybody sees the probability of a tighter supply situation in the world of oil than (indisc.) is today even if there aren't acute shortages.

Now, when investment decisions are made with a sense of urgency, or when prices start getting bid up, doesn't depend upon the shortage being there. It depends upon how soon companies begin to see the shortage within there planning periods. If you've got a five-year planning period, and you see the shortage coming up within five years, well, that's at hand. So, what we're talking about is not shortages in the early 1980's but when companies will have to make investment decisions and begin to say, we'd better start worrying about what our position is going to be within the period of time that we make capital commitments for capacity. And there are very few that are doing it today. The ALPETCO group is saying that, essentially. I believe so. What they are saying is, we're not building for today's chemical market, we're building for tomorrow's chemical market. And, if we've got this thing timed right, we come on-stream at the right time. And they are saying it.

But, you know, none of us know when year "x" is going to come, and you are being asked to make a decision on the same basis as the ALPETCO group has made their decision. That is to say, make your commitments now well in anticipation for a facility which will come on-stream when '83, '84, '85, at the best, and will run for about twenty-seven years more. Than whether that's the best time to make that decision, it's hard to say. And, if you're convinced that you have a limited amount of royalty oil with which you would like to achieve a purpose, and if you don't do it within this year, or at least a couple of years, you may not have the same oil to bargain with. Then, perhaps the time is now.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

What you're saying is that we are at a very similar investment decision crossroads that ALPETCO or anybody else is.

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MR. LIPTON:

Absolutely.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

And we have to make a decision if the time is right for us to invest.

MR. LIPTON:

Sure. And, truly, if you want a facility which has to depend upon assured availability, and you think that all you've got is 12 1/2 percent of something under ten billion dollars at Prudhoe, and you've got to strike your bargain with that before too much of that runs out, then you don't have that much time. If you think that you've got a future here in Alaska, and it's not just Prudhoe Bay, but a lot of other things coming on, then the cost of waiting is perhaps not that great.

MR. OSTERBACK:

Is there anything else they could do with this crude oil? Would it be feasible for putting in a plant for rope and (indisc.)?

MR. LIPTON:

For what? I'm sorry.

MR. OSTERBACK:

For rope. You know, like nylon rope, poly-rope, web . . . Has anybody ever talked about that? The price has been doubling on that.

MR. LIPTON:

Not that I'm aware of, but if you have an aromatics plant, you've got the basis of nylon. Now how far you go. . . You know what the problem in Alaska is? That the closer. . . you have a very limited market here, a very limited market, so the more you go into finished products, you know. . . . To satisfy the Alaskan market is really the best thing that could happen to Alaska. Whether it's nylon rope or garbage bags, or almost anything which is petrochemical-based. This becomes a tremendous advantage for Alaska, because otherwise you ship out and you ship back and forth, but there is a real problem involved - how far you can push the downstream processing into finished products.

MR. OSTERBACK:

I'm not talking about shipping, but most of our rope now comes from Japan, Norway, Sweden, and that's a hell of a lot further than Alaska, if you're talking about shipping down to Washington, Oregon, and California. It's a lot closer.

I mean, I was just asking if that would be feasible to put these plants up.

MR. LIPTON:

I don't know. From the standpoint of any group itself insofar as they can satisfy the Japanese market, if they can satisfy the Alaskan market, which otherwise is served from Japan, it's all to their advantage. It's all to their. . . The question comes down to scale and how they are going to put it all together. I really don't know.

MR. OSTERBACK:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR HACKNEY:

Mr. Lipton, the prospect of not having to make a decision is always something that is dear to a Legislator's heart. Did I understand you to say that the sky would not fall if we were not to accept this contract and were to wait say, a year, two years? And, if we were to wait, how long should we wait?

MR. LIPTON:

With a certain amount of confidence, I will answer, the sky will not fall. Now that I answer the other part of your question, I have more difficulty. But, really, what is now being proposed? The sense of urgency is because of the availability of the oil. If you don't commit it, then whoever wants to put together a project has more and more difficulty of telling his customers and his financiers that the one thing I've got that other people don't have is the short availability. 'Cause the further you postpone it, the less assurance there is of availability, unless, come '79 and an open-lease sale and some successful drilling, and then everything gets turned all around.

But, I would think that a year or two is not going to be tragic for Alaska, except that, in a sense, what you're saying is we are turning our back on what has come to us in good faith, because we are hoping for something more. I would. . . This has to do with the psychological. But, the companies who might otherwise be involved with the ALPETCO group are not going to disappear in a year or two. They are still going to be there for ALPETCO or anybody else, or maybe come in as a party of the first part. I don't know, and I certainly don't hold this out as something of great promise.

I really don't think that . . . It's one set of uncertains against the other. There are risks in this; there are uncertainties if you say no. At least what you've got here is certainly a promise of sincere and major effort. I think that that's about the best that I could. . . There are uncertainties all over the place for them, for the State of Alaska.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Can I follow up on that, Senator Hackney, if I may?

If the risks are there, I suspect similar risks will be there in a year or two. But, don't we come down to a situation where the oil becomes more valuable to the State of Alaska and, therefore, to any potential purchasers in a year or in two years?

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MR. LIPTON:

Well, I think that out of a combination of world developments and U. S. policy, your oil will become more valuable. It will become more valuable as royalty oil and it will become more valuable for whatever purpose. The only question is whether you have dissipated a sufficient quantity of the Prudhoe Bay reserves and what you have left is royalty oil, looks to be less and less sufficient as the basis for a short availability. One can't turn his back on that. If it's assured availability that's going to overcome competitive disadvantages, then the longer you hold out the less you have to offer as assured advailability and the more it becomes speculative. The next time around, and the third time around, and the fourth time around you would have to offer an option on what comes up.

The other things come through relatively quickly, you're in great shape. Absolutely in great shape. I would say that if there were another major discovery in Alaska, so that you see your future further down the road than you do today, then you will have lost nothing. Except you will have lost the effort of a very determined group that are pushing like all hell, and that doesn't (indisc.).

MR. CHATTERTON:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Lipton, I've been trying to figure out how to get to this question. I think I finally may have. If you were a party, the buyer party, to the contract as you have seen and probably understand, and everything in that contract remained constant, but gave you one option not in that contract now. . . say we could give you this option. . . to locate this complex that you are going to build in Valdez or someplace on the West Coast of the contiguous "forty-eight", what would be your choice?

MR. LIPTON:

The West Coast, beyond any doubt. If you had the same assured access to Alaska's royalty crude for a project on the West Coast, I don't think anybody would consider Alaska.

It's not a natural location for a petrochemical facility, anymore than Puerto Rico is.

MR. CHATTERTON:

If I heard the testimony on the last couple of days correctly and the answers to questions correctly, I think that the solitary, single big apple is the (indisc.) one that you mentioned, and I think that ALPETCO fully recognizes, and this is the long-term twenty-seven-year (indisc. - cough).

MR. LIPTON:

Of course, of course. Surely, surely.

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MR. CHATTERTON:

And if we could keep the same supply, if we could lock it up right, or we could replenish it from new discoveries, would not a person be willing to make even greater sacrifices as the buyer may possibly be willing to make greater sacrifices in years from now than you are today, with the same guarantee....

MR. LIPTON:

Well, I think that, if you are right in our perception of the future, the closer we come to the time when the buyer sees close at hand the tightness, the more valuable assured access becomes. Yes. In the same sense that the parties that are negotiating in the Middle East today, on both sides of the fence, are rather prepared to drag the thing out and let it go, so, instead of coming onstream in 1981, it comes onstream in 1984 or 1986. There is no sense of urgency if they can keep negotiating, but get the thing going at a time when it's closer to when everything looks to be relatively more assured than at the present time. I think that's right.

MR. CHATTERTON:

Anyone in our case, with the contract we have, anything we can do to, and I can't remember the terms of the contract so this may be in order, but, if it's possible, why we would....you as the (indisc.) would certainly be interested in trying to extend so far as possible into the future the date that triggers off the twenty-seven-year period. And it may be the contract starts....

MR. LIPTON:

I'm talking now as a buyer, not as an investor. But it depends upon the buyer's circumstances. He has his own conception of when he needs products for further processing for integration into his markets. And, if he foresees that he is going to need new capacity either by construction or by purchase for 1983, he would just as soon start a contract in 1983. But given the way the surpluses are going, if you want to generalize, I would say, yes, you're better off later down than line than earlier.

MR. CHATTERTON:

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. MCKINNON:

Mr. Lipton, to what extent does Article 2.3 preclude any other in-state use of royalty oil? It's the article that gives up ALPETCO's first option.

MR. LIPTON:

Yes.

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MR. MCKINNON:

Another (indisc.)

MR. LIPTON:

As I read the.... As I read Article 2.3, this, in a sense, gives the group the right of first refusal over other oil insofar as is necessary to make up any deficiency out of Prudhoe. They are not entitled to more than 150,000 barrels a day. So, it depends on what your total volume of oil.... it doesn't preclude other sales necessarily, but it gives them, you know, the right of first refusal.

MR. MCKINNON:

Is that only for a deficiency out of Prudhoe?

MR. LIPTON:

I think so. Either a deficiency or, in the context of the other articles, if the other oil is priced lower in royalty value, then they substitute royalty oil from Prudhoe.

(indisc.), do you read that....?

MR. MCKINNON:

Yes, that's the way I interpret it.

MR. LIPTON:

This is the way that I interpret it. But, basically, the state is not committing more than 150,000 barrels of oil a day.

MR. MCKINNON:

It's my understanding that the provision, assuming that ALPETCO was taking out 150,000 barrels a day, well, say, 100,00 barrels (indisc.) at a cheaper price, that ALPETCO would have the option of replacing 100,000 barrels of their 150,000 (indisc.) under Prudhoe, with the other 100,000 being offered at a cheaper price.

MR. LIPTON:

I think that's right. They may have the right to substitue. But, in toto, not more than 150,000 barrels a day.

MR. MCKINNON:

To what extent does that serve to extend this contract beyond its twenty-seven year deadline?

MR. LIPTON:

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I don't believe it does.

MR. MCKINNON:

Well, the provision is that they all shall be offered to the buyer at the same price on the same terms and conditions as offered to third parties. Twenty years into this contract, the State makes an offer at a certain price with a twenty-year term....does that mean that ALPETCO gets the option to....

MR. LIPTON:

I would assume not. But, look, this is a legal interpretation of the contract. I would think that any reasonable man, which means not necessarily and attorney, would interpret this to mean the right to lift the twenty-seven year duration of the contract, and not because there is an offer of royalty oil elsewhere which may be available in the twentieth year of the contract, then for fifteen years they would have the right to extend it.

But, this is a legal interpretation of the contract. I would certainly not think that this is the intention of the drafters, either way.

MR. MCKINNON:

I didn't think it was, but I'm certain that it may have that effect.

MR. LIPTON:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Mr. Lipton, you mentioned before, and again tonight, that in any project of this particular nature the first five years may be rocky from a financial standpoint. They may be fairly tough.

MR. LIPTON:

Well, not necessarily. I mean there are capacities that come on-stream that are just at the right time of the cycle, and the first five years are magnificent. It's just that, again, I'm not making this as a prediction, I'm saying this is what the risk is for Alaska. But, if it works out that way, then it's a risk.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

I know you're not making that as a prediction, but you indicated that is a possibility and you use a five-year term (indisc.). When exactly does that five-year rought period begin? Does it begin after Legislative approval?

MR. LIPTON:

No, no. The five years I'm concerned about is the five years after coming on-stream, after starting. Because this is the time when all of the work has been done, the capital has been invested,when the contracts are beginning to be supplied. And then when you're worried about do you have

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the volume to get optimum utilization of your capacity and, therefore, relatively low unit costs so you're getting the prices you had anticipated. And, in the first five or six years, at the start of an operation like this, the cash flow can be decisive for the survival of an operation.

MR. PARR:

Mr. Lipton, I'd like to make some rather flat statements in coming back to things that have been (indisc.) before (indisc.) things that I've understood from you cannot, as near as possible, get yes or no answers (indisc.). If I understood you correctly, one of the risks to the State is that this refinery, or this petrochemical plant, may have difficulties somewhere along, (indisc.). And the State is going to have to wind up getting to bail it out by going in and putting in equity into the petrochemical plant.

MR. LIPTON:

No, I didn't say putting in equity. I thought maybe modify the price at which the royalty oil is being delivered to enable them to survive in the face of a difficult cash (indisc.).

MR. PARR:

I thought that you had said both of those. I misunderstood you, then....only the one of having to lower the price of the feedstock....that's the only one.

MR. LIPTON:

That's the most immediate one that occurs to me.

MR. PARR:

Looking ahead to 1983 or '84, or whenever (indisc. - cough), in petrochemicals, we are looking at a seller's market rather than a buyer's?

MR. LIPTON:

I'm not at all sure of that. Not at all convinced.

I know why. Because what you have is a projection of chemical demand, and, if you're projecting demand at six or seven percent, which is sometimes done, then what you speculate is that it needs so much capacity and, if it isn't forthcoming, you've got a seller's market. But turn it around. Let the expectation of a lot of companies in the chemical industry bid the demand goes up six or seven percent, and let demand go up four or five percent. The expectation of a six - seven percent growth means a lot of investment capacity. And the growth of four or five percent means you've got a buyer's market, not a seller's market.

It's very.... You know, the chemical industry, among others, goes through fantastic swings. And one of the reasons that it does - one - not all of the reasons it does, is that you tend to have a lot of companies make simultaneous investment on the basis of the same expectation. And, if enough of them expect the same thing to happen, then all of them become frustrated because the capacity goes in.

MR. PARR:

Has that resulted in, let's say, petrochemical plants being built in bunches and skipping a number of years and being built in another bunch?

MR. LIPTON:

They tended to be, yes. Very definitely.

MR. PARR:

Everybody has seen the possibility all at once?

MR. LIPTON:

Pretty much so. There's a lot of that. There's a great deal of that. It's not.... As I said, that's one factor - far and away from the whole story. A lot of it has got to do with when oil companies went into the chemical industry and why they did and under what circumstances, and changes in technology. A lot of these things happen.

But, certainly, one of them is that, if you've got a competitive industry that sees things through the same set of glasses.

MR. PARR:

Another thing we've been told and, again, I'm using my own words, which may not be exactly the words that were used, but is it because of the imbalance in trade between Japan and the United States and the strong economic pressures that make Japan interested in taking a U. S. export of this sort? Now the question of the dollar and the yen thing didn't even come into this, this was even disregarding the dollar and the yen....

MR. LIPTON:

Yeah, sure, but there are a lot of ways Japan can do it. One way is to buy petrochemicals from Alaska, another way is to build automobile factories in the United States.

MR. PARR:

I didn't say, necessarily, in this particular instance....

MR. LIPTON:

I think it's a factor, but with all of the direction you have over industry from government in Japan, there's a limit to the extent to which public policy is going to lose to uneconomical commercial decisions.

MR. PARR:

I had gotten the impression from the testimony we had before that it's not such a marriage between government and big business in Japan, but it is a Siamese twin relationship. Which means that political decisions might well govern.

MR. LIPTON:

Well, maybe commercial decisions and government-political decisions?

MR. PARR:

Possibly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. LIPTON:

Excuse me, can I just expand on that for a moment?

The Japanese have always been interested in security of supply, and that's a combination of commercial and political decisions. And Japan has looked at Canada many times, under many different circumstances as a potential secure source of petroleum. Not necessarily to export to Japan because, come an emergency, they're not likely to, but if they have their own position, it becomes the basis for an exchange, or international balance of oil flows may be affected by their position. And there's no question but that it is widely believed, and the Japanese have held it out, that they will pay premiums for security of supply.

But, when it comes down to it, we've been involved in several of these projects. They will. But, the amount of premium that they are prepared to pay for security of supply is within manageable commercial limits. There is a limit to what they will do for it. And this had to do with the question of the Japanese investment in the (indisc.), that's all. All right?

CHAIRMAN MILES:

I'd like for you to go back over the industrial profile of the point that you made with respect to Saudi Arabia. I think I understand the situation on the West Coast and what large producers' situation is. I didn't fully understand the industrial profile point that you made.

MR. LIPTON:

On the petrochemical investment there?

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Right. Insofar as it may, or may not, relate to Japan and the other Pacific (indisc.).

MR. LIPTON:

First, let me start with the competitive disadvantages of a petrochemical facility in Saudi Arabia, which are very similar to the problem of Alaska. One is that construction costs and capital requirements are very, very high. Secondly, your market is a distant market. Therefore, if you have to move your chemical products to the market, it costs more to move the chemical products to the market than to move the feedstock embodied in the crude oil. So, you're bucking up against a transportation disadvantage.

Now, the starting point to overcome that is, particularly in Saudi Arabia, is the availability of huge quantities of ethane, associated with their whole gas-gathering system, all of which they've been flaring gas at a fantastic rate. Now, if you look realistically at a world-scale ethane and ethylene-related operations in Saudi Arabia, and try to calculate at what price the ethane would have to go into an ethylene operation in order that the combination of feedstock cost, capital cost, and transportation cost would allow you to sell competitively in Europe or Japan, you come up almost inevitably with negative prices on the ethane. In other words, the Saudi Arabian government would have to supply the ethane at zero price and maybe pay to take the ethane. But the Saudi Arabs, from the very beginning, negotiated not in simplistic terms. They were talking in terms of a combination of operations in which the ethylene project would be jointly owned, they would put capital into it, your derivatives would have a different financial structure. And, in fact, if you put together everything, which is a very low price on the ethane, and a very, very low price on the capital, which the Saudi Arabs would largely provide, you'd begin to get close, maybe, to a competitive situation. But, probably not. I doubt very much if, at least what we have seen, anybody would voluntarily move into Saudi Arabia and, even on that basis, just build a plant.

But what they have to offer in addition to that, and they've held this out since 1975, not in 1974 - in 1974 everybody was coming to Saudi Arabia and begging them - and by 1975 they were asking Saudi Arabia, if you want to marry us, what kind of a dowry do you have? You know, the things had turned around by then. Well what they have to offer is this. Look, if you won't do this on the terms and circumstances which we will together negotiate. In addition, the way we sweeten the whole investment project is by making available to you, not as feedstock to the project but for export purposes, for a given amount of capital investment, say a hundred thousand barrels a day of crude. Now, the further you push this project down the road, if it comes on-stream in 1985, you still may be in a difficult chemical environment. But, sooner or later, the project will pay out. But, meanwhile, if you can start gaining access to a hundred thousand barrels a day, a hundred-fifty thousand barrels of Saudi Arab crude, which is the most important and predictable source of world oil reserves for the long-run, over a period of time this becomes tremendously valuable. In the same sense, if you had said to a developer here in Alaska that we will sell you a hundred and fifty thousand barrels a day of royalty crude to do this investment, but, on top of that we will give you for export, beginning in 1990, another 50,000 barrels a day of Alaskan crude that you can do anything you want with, you've created an entirely different situation. This is what the Saudi Arabs are doing.

And this is why, what is essentially non-economic chemical capacity to a limited extent, and I don't think everything that's been booted about will not come to fruition, but I would guess three world-scale projects are reasonably well-assured at this date. It may come in largely because the Arabs have something else to offer, which is access to what will in the future be, scarce world oil reserves when the rest of the world is close to operating at productive capacity. The exspansible source of crude oil reserves production for the world will be Saudi Arabia.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Let's just speak in terms of Japan now. From Japan's standpoint, would Japan rather have a source of Saudi Arabia or a source of Alaska?

MR. LIPTON:

Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia. You're talking about finite reserves here in Alaska. Unless, if things really work in exploration and turn Alaska into a fantastic producing province, is one thing, but we're worried about whether or not Prudhoe Bay will support twenty-seven years of a hundred-fifty thousand barrels a day (indisc.) crude. I'm not talking about Saudi Arabia producing a twenty million barrels a day, which was the expectation some years back, but whatever the demands upon Saudi Arabia, we are facing the year "x", and I don't know exactly when it is, when virtually most of the world will be operating at very close to capacity. And if the world is looking and saying, where will the next barrel of oil come from? - it will come from the reserves in Saudi Arabia.

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And this is the most precious commodity they have, an expansible source of supply. It's not a bottomless barrel the way we thought in the 1950's, but it is, for the rest of the world, an expansible source of supply. And it becomes an extremely critical place for companies to go, and, if you'll notice, most of them go through Asia, which are going on into Saudi Arabia. They are companies that want either to improve or establish an off-take position in Saudi Arabia, which heretofore had been dominated by the members of ARAMCO (ph).

CHAIRMAN MILES:

I don't understand that. If we can assume for a moment we are talking about a hundred-and-fifty thousand barrels of oil from Alaska and a hundred-and-fifty thousand barrels from Saudi Arabia, I don't know if it's reasonable to make that kind of very narrow assumption. It would seem to me that, and again, relating to Japan, that they would rather have Alaskan source, if they could get the long-term commitment of.... mainly because of political stability.

MR. LIPTON:

I'm sorry, I misunderstood you.

If it's nothing more involved than an "x" number of barrels, and a price and competitive situation is about equal, they would rather have it Alaska, and they might even pay a premium... some premium for Alaska, but not very much. What I'm saying is it's not "x" barrels against "x" barrels. In Saudi Arabia it's "x" barrels plus. This is basically what they are getting in Saudi Arabia. They are establishing a position which gives them preferred access, not according to their feedstocks, but the off-take of crude oil for export purposes. This is the big thing. And in Iran, where so far the Shah has been unwilling to do this, the Japanese have been negotiating the petrochemical operation for years and years, and they haven't been coming anywhere on it. And only, I think, if they're going to be something which gives them more than just access to feedstock, because Iran is as unattractive a place to put export capacity and chemical industry as Alaska or Saudi Arabia. One doesn't go into these areas just on a purely commercial basis, I don't believe.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Thank you.

MR. CHATTERTON:

Excepting the news of the last thirty-six hours or so, do you rate the "economic climate" in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia any less stable than the economic climate in the State of Alaska?

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MR. LIPTON:

It's a damn sight less stable than the climate of Alaska. Sure. I mean, if you're assessing political risks, there's just no question about it. No question about it.

MR. CHATTERTON:

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR HACKNEY:

Mr. Chairman, the only time I ever heard Mr. Lipton really put in a box was the time when somebody sat at a position just about like this and they said, "Mr. Lipton, if you were sitting in my seat in the Senate, and this (indisc.) before you at the present time, and you had a green button and you had a red button, which button would you push?"

MR. LIPTON:

Remember what I said?

SENATOR HACKNEY:

Yes, I do. Push the green button. Would you push to green button in this case?

MR. LIPTON:

I don't remember saying push the green button. I think what I said was, if you'll give me a vote on everything else you can vote on the Alaska Legislature, then I'll vote on that issue.

MR. PARR:

Mr. Lipton, what you said, in effect, I think, greatly oversimplified, is we accept this deal. It's a pretty good contract. The real thing is ALPETCO is taking some calculated risks, and they are using their best judgment in this area. And the State, of course, if we go over the contract, essentially takes the same kind of risks. And you have not said whether you think it's a good risk or not. Maybe it's not in your field, I don't know.

MR. LIPTON:

See, I can't say that without being a Legislator who weighs everything in the balance. That's the difficulty. I don't want to overplay the risks here. And I do think it's a contract which, under the circumstances, was started from very little interest from anywhere around. It represents a maximum effort on the part the group, and it represents a maximum effort on the part of the people who drafted the contract to protect the State.

The question is, how do you assess the value of the whole thing? There are risks.

MR. PARR:

Nobody, who is very much interested in security, comes to Alaska in the first place. If they do, they don't stay. It isn't that kind of place. On the other hand, what I think most of us try to do is try to assess the risks as carefully as we can, and which, I think, is where we are hoping you can help us. If the gamble seems like a good gamble, we will go. If it's a poor gamble....

MR. LIPTON:

Let me try. You're asking me very straight-forward questions, and I try to give you straight-forward answers, but does it make my answers correct? Then I give you a judgment.

I think the biggest risk is that the contract will collapse, as we personally assess the probability of success as not all that great. And this is the risk. Now, what's the cost to Alaska if it does? That is, if an honest effort has been made and you've got this protection, and, whether it's eighteen months or twenty-four months, the ALPETCO group will be out a considerable amount of money. What has Alaska lost? It's a subtle thing. I guess you don't have the answer to that, but let me tell you the impression I have.

Alaska has been involved now in a series of episodes involving contracts with off-takers. And, first, it was on the joint resolution of the Legislature and then it was on the sale of the royalty gas - all for a specific purpose. Has Alaska suffered because of this? Well, at some point, if there is misadventure after misadventure, questions begin to arise about how solid is the thinking up there in Alaska about these things. If the contract doesn't come to fruition in the nineteen months or the twenty-four months, I don't think Alaska has lost a great deal. But, it's just become one more episode. But, I think that's about the greatest risk.

The other risk is that everything is going to go, and the investment's all going to be made, and it may lead to a very, very difficult time. And you may be faced with things which, under the contract, you do not anticipate; that is to say, a real sense of responsibility on the then-administration in the State of Alaska and the Legislature at that time that, hell, we can't let this go down the drain. Maybe that's not all so bad, because, if the thing does come to fruition - if

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you have to hold for five years or seven years - that's not in the contract, but that's a risk you may have to do this, and it may not even be all that bad.

But, if you're asking me honestly to give you a personal judgment, that we've all discussed, it seems this is the way we assess it. Now you've got to decide whether, if the worst of these come to fruition, how much does Alaska suffer by it? I can't answer that question, but this is about the way which we will try to evaluate. The biggest risk and the highest probability, I think, is that it will not come to pass. What does it cost you? You decide now.

The other risk is way down the road, and then you may face things that your successors will feel obligated to do, even though the contract doesn't call for it. They may not be so terrible, if worse comes to worse, and if it turns out to be only a short holding operation. But, these are risks.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

You're talking about another set of risks if everything goes, and then some new unforeseen, or heretofore undiscussed, problems (indisc.). What does.... Okay, what are some of those that you haven't yet discussed?

MR. LIPTON:

Well, look....that every step along the line the project looks like it's working out, then the fact you do have off-take contracts. And on the basis of the off-take contracts, commitments are made to finance, whether it's net capital or whether it's equity capital and joint ventures, but commitments are made, because everybody perceives step by step down the line that it's working out. And on that basis, ALPETCO has performed according to the due dates of the contract. But, then, about the time when.... While all of this is going on, other people are making their own investment decisions, too, in similar expectations, and it turns out that, when the first crude oil is being processed, and the first gas oil from the refinery is going into an ethylene operation, and naphtha is being cracked, and products are coming out, all of a sudden you don't have as firm volumes, which changes your average cost of processing, and the prices are somewhat lower than have been anticipated in all of the calculations, because nobody is committing you to a firm price in the future. You are going to have to meet competitive prices, whoever is doing this operation. This could put an on-going operation in a cash bind for some time. And that's not a matter of something unforeseen happening. Everybody who is looking at this is willing to acknowledge that this could happen. These are the

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imponderables that happen in the world chemical industry. All I'm saying is that at that point the State of Alaska may be faced with commitments they feel obliged to undertake, which go beyond that of the contract, simply because this is one of your major investment projects in Alaska. And, one way or another, you are not going to allow it to founder for the lack of cash flow.

MR. CHATTERTON:

Then the obvious way to help it out is to reduce the cost of the feedstock.

MR. LIPTON:

Yes. Sure.

MR. CHATTERTON:

Thank you. Mr. Chairman, if I may continue....

This point that you raised earlier of petrochemical plants, etc., even product refineries, "they sort of come in bunches like grapes - they're all built".... The possibility that you pointed out of getting into a cash flow problem after this deal is on-stream, was it in the late fifties or early sixties where there was a situation - as far as I know in Canada and also (indisc.) - with the market for sulfur (indisc.) out of gas?

MR. LIPTON:

Oh, yes....the sulfur problem. Yes....sure. Just let me say this, too. It's not my purpose to put a dark light on this, because none of these things might happen. But, if you've gotten beyond what is the point of no return on the project, you can even, the ALPETCO people or anybody else, foresee problems ahead. But, once you've passed the point of no return, the work having been done, you don't stop the project. One goes ahead.

There is a point at which capital has been committed and construction is going that one goes ahead and completes the project. Look, I don't mean.... I know I sound like.... I don't mean to come here, you know, and preach Doomsday here. It could work out just the opposite way, but my responsibility is to the Legislature, and I feel one of the things I must do is discuss what the uncertainties and what the risks are.

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MR. CHATTERTON:

Mr. Chairman, I guess it's just human nature, even though you see if by any chance things look rocky ahead, why you can proceed to build your mind up until you want that (indisc.) as large and as glistening as possible, because that may be the last way to do it right.

MR. LIPTON:

I wasn't really thinking of that. That's probable. But, what I was really thinking was that in an investment process the way in which you evaluate the profitability of an investment decision is always what is the incremental investment and what we will get back from that. And there comes a point when you've sunk so much money that it's not a matter of whether what you've already invested pays out, but it's the incremental investment, and what do we get in return for that.

Of course, the classic story of that, and forgive me for bringing a New York episode into it, but this goes back to the 1930's when one of our most famous public servants, Bob Moses, was at that time - later on he built everything - but, at that time, he was in charge of the New York State Recreation Department, and he decided to build Jones Beach, which has become a monument in due course. He asked for an appropriation for Jones Beach, and there was no way in which the state legislature was going to give him those funds. They gave him the funds which they thought were appropriate. And he took all those funds, and he built the foundation for Jones Beach. Then he said, "Now I've got the foundation - give me the rest of it." This is incremental investment decision-making.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

The (indisc.) is alive and well and living in Alaska.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Can you give us an over-view of how this decision, Mr. Lipton, might relate to the other decisions regarding financing of gas line, gas liquids, the structure in which we might be viewing those various decisions? As you know, we are being asked to participate in - the Northwest Gas Line - make a decision whether to (indisc.). Can you kind of give us your over-view?

MR. LIPTON:

I don't think that your decision on the royalty crude contract ought to be contingent upon what may, or may not, happen on the gas. I think that the probabilities of being able to use gas liquids as the basis for industrial development as an alternative to this are really not much more exciting. I think probably they are more difficult. I think they are more difficult.

You've got a lot of problems on what you're going to do with your gas, when is it stripped, who's going to strip it, is it (indisc.). These are a lot of very difficult problems. They are too elusive right now to try to come to grips with all of them. I would say that we don't feel that your decision on the royalty crude contract now ought to be conditioned in the probability or improbability of what may happen to the gas liquids.

We have been very excited about what may be done with gas liquids. As you know, for many years we first talked about gas liquids probably being of greater significance to Alaska, per se, than the natural gas itself. It's not as though you are going to be energy-short in Alaska. But when you start looking at the specifics of it and, even what we have mentioned on several occasions, which is thinking small instead of big at Fairbanks, there are a hell of a lot of problems that show up. Now, things may still be done, and there are a lot of permutations and combinations, but I think you would be ill-advised at this stage of the legislative process, or the royalty disposition process, to try to condition your decision on this project in terms of what may, or may not, be done with natural gas.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Thank you. Mr. Lipton, thank you very much. Do you have any closing remarks?

MR. LIPTON:

No, except to express my appreciation for the courtesy you have extended, and I have enjoyed this conversation very much.

CHAIRMAN MILES:

Thank you very much.

Shall we adjourn until tomorrow night - same time, same place?

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