



# Alaska Arctic Policy Commission

CO-CHAIR: SENATOR LESIL MCGUIRE, ANCHORAGE, 907.465.2995

CO-CHAIR: REPRESENTATIVE BOB HERRON, BETHEL, 907.465.4942

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October 6, 2014

Admiral Bob Papp, USCG (Ret.)  
U. S. Special Representative for the Arctic  
U. S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20522-0112

Ambassador David Balton  
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Oceans and Fisheries  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20522-0112

Dear Admiral Papp and Ambassador Balton,

It was great to see you both in DC at the CSIS Passing the Arctic Council Torch conference on September 30.

As you heard at the conference, both Canadian and Alaskan officials are very keen on the U.S. chairmanship working to promote economic development for the benefit of Arctic residents. Canada made this preference quite clear when it included as part of its chairmanship theme “development for the people of the North,” with a focus on responsible Arctic resource development, safe Arctic shipping and sustainable circumpolar communities. In addition to speaking out at various fora such as this conference, Alaska has made its preference for US chairmanship themes known through a 2012 letter from Governor Sean Parnell to the State Department, and through the Alaska Legislature’s HJR 24 in 2014.

We reiterate here what was said in Governor Parnell’s letter of December 2012 with the following suggested priorities for United States Arctic Council chairmanship:

- Jobs and economic opportunity for Arctic residents;
- Preventing suicide;
- Developing safe and sustainable sanitation facilities for small, isolated Arctic communities; and
- Securing safe and reliable shipping, with an emphasis on oil spill prevention and response.

The recommendations in this letter were supported by the Alaska Legislature through the vehicle of HJR 24 – a resolution whose recommendations were detailed in an April 11, 2014 letter from the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission (AAPC) co-chairs to Ambassador David Balton.

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While we are hearing some proposals we like for US chairmanship on the last three bullet points above (suicide prevention, improved sanitation technology, and safe Arctic shipping) we are very concerned that our number one priority, jobs and economic opportunity for Arctic residents, is being ignored. Without this vital component, other US chair priorities will also suffer – lack of job opportunities has been cited as a major impediment to suicide prevention, for example.

In addition, your recent speeches at CSIS and CAP are concerning; you both identified climate change and ocean stewardship as being on the forefront of the US chairmanship agenda. Continuing some major initiative(s) related to Canada's Arctic Council chairmanship theme of "development for the people of the North" came across as not very important to the State Department. We believe that jobs and economic development for the people that actually live in the Arctic is a high priority and not an afterthought for Alaskans. We continue to advocate for diversifying investment in U.S. Arctic resources and creating a positive investment climate in Alaska. All the Arctic states are rich in resources and aim to support these goals; one way to do so is by actively participating in the Arctic Economic Council and for the U.S. to help foster its work in these critical early years of establishment.

Alaskans' voices in this matter of promoting resource and economic development are being overlooked and greater effort should be made to ensure our voices are considered. As we suggested at the CSIS event, we would like to see an Arctic Council Advisory Committee with state of Alaska, local government, and Alaska Native participation to guide the U.S. chairmanship that is before us and also to continue to work beyond that to create a strong domestic process to support your work.

While we can all agree on the need to identify the "national imperative" that will motivate all Americans in supporting Arctic endeavors, your recent comments on this being a "moral obligation to protect the region and preserve it for future generations" dismisses the fact that Alaskans have been doing just that, and quite well, for many decades. We already have that moral obligation, because the American Arctic is our home. We are not supportive of locking up the Arctic or designating additional wilderness areas; Alaskans should have access to the development lands that we were promised. Instead, we hope you will focus on the important goal of supporting a vibrant economy through resource development, a simplified permitting regime and a positive investment arena, which has the potential to deliver social benefits while responding to the need for a healthy environment.

The Commission is building on a legacy of state efforts responding to change and increased activity in Alaska's Arctic. The subject of climate change and its importance to the people of the north is not lost on us, as it is here that the rapidly changing climate is being witnessed first-hand. In the coming years Alaskans will be among the first climate change refugees in the world due to increasingly erratic weather, melting permafrost and eroding shorelines.

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Obviously, it is impossible to mitigate climate change from within Alaska. Instead, your focus should be on adaptations that will promote resilient communities.

Adaptation to a changing climate is the key to creating the resilient communities in the north that we all seek. However, without economic development for the people, that should necessarily include resource development, the funding for that adaptation, as well as the necessary infrastructure to respond to search and rescue (SAR) agreements or oil and gas emergencies, will be unattainable. If one really wanted to move forward with adaptation to a changing climate, economic development that recognizes the need for a healthy environment should be paramount.

As co-chairs of the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission and authors of HJR 24, we encourage you to continue to consider adopting “jobs and economic opportunity for Arctic residents” as a major focus of the upcoming US chairmanship of the Arctic Council. And to seriously consider our recommendation to establish a domestic Arctic Council Advisory Committee.

Ambassador Balton, you said that the most important quality that the chair of the Arctic Council can bring is to listen to many voices. We respectfully request that you listen to us now.

In summary, our primary concern is for the well-being of those that live in the Arctic. Life for many of these people is already difficult – we believe economic development policies designed to benefit Arctic residents is the best way to increase their well-being. In addition, any policies addressing climate change or management of Arctic waters must not negatively impact the people. In short, we believe your priorities should be in this order: jobs and economic development for Arctic people, changing Arctic climate, and safe Arctic waters.

Sincerely,



Senator Lesil McGuire

Sincerely,



Representative Bob Herron

cc:

- Fran Ulmer, Advisor to the Secretary of State for Arctic Policy and Science
- Rear Admiral Daniel Abel, District 17, USCG
- Julia Gourley, United States Senior Arctic Official
- Stefanie Moreland, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game
- Members of the AAPC