



Rep. Austerman's Legislative Newsletter

FEBRUARY 21st, 2011

We have just rolled through the 35th day of the 2011 legislative session. More than one-third of the way to the end mark.

It has been a very busy session so far. As Majority Leader for the House, I have a new set of responsibilities this year. One of them is to work with the 26 Republicans and Democrats in our Majority Caucus to identify our major goals and shared direction for the next two years. We spent a lot of time together during the first three weeks of session meeting regularly and talking out our concerns and interests. I really appreciated the time my colleagues put into this effort with me. It was a significant commitment of time during an already busy time of the year. We realized that there are five major principles that unite our caucus.

- **Fiscal Responsibility**
- **Access to Affordable Energy**
- **Responsible Resource Development**
- **Safe and Healthy Communities**
- **Excellent Schools and Workforce Development**

To find out more about what these principles mean to our caucus, go to www.housemajority.org and click the button for "Key Issues."

LEGISLATION--HB141

For a number of years I have been concerned about the federal government's fishery regulatory changes—programs like IFQs for halibut and sablefish, IFQs for Bering Sea crab, and other programs that consolidate fishing rights and access. Over the years these programs have been in place, we have seen a steady trend of ownership migrating away from smaller Alaska communities to larger urban areas, and a lot of ownership moving straight out of the state.

As a state lawmaker I'm continually frustrated by these trends, and by the fact that there is no role whatsoever in this federal process for the Alaska State Legislature to help shape these policies that impact Alaskans. Once the federal government has made its programs and rules, we are left to try to cobble together tools to help tip the balance toward Alaskans and Alaska communities. This year I've introduced House Bill 141, which is an effort to put one more piece in that puzzle.

In 2004, the federal government created the Commercial Quota Entity (CQE) program, which provided an opportunity for rural Alaska communities to form a non-profit to buy and hold halibut and sablefish quota. The program was intended to anchor some fishing rights in Alaska communities, and use the renewable resource in the waters off our shores to benefit Alaska communities. In the same year, the Alaska Governor introduced legislation that made Community Quota Entities eligible to take low-interest loans from the Commercial Fisheries Revolving Loan Fund (CFRLF).

I believe there is value in anchoring quota in Alaska's small coastal communities. Over the long-term, I believe that Alaska will be a better place if rural towns are strong, and I believe that our renewable resource can be used to help that happen. But to date, only 1 of 42 eligible CQE communities has been able to purchase IFQs. So obviously, the tool the Legislature put in place in 2004 isn't working.

My proposed legislation removes the CQE loan program from the Commercial Fisheries Revolving Loan Fund, where it has languished unsuccessfully for eight years. It creates a separate loan fund which would be newly capitalized with state general funds, protecting the existing capital in the CFRLF. This has two benefits. First, it allows the Division of Investments to work with Community Quota Entities to establish program terms that make it possible to bring quota into Alaska's coastal communities. Second, it allows the entirety of the Commercial Fishing Revolving Loan Fund to be used for its original purposes—to provide loans to individual Alaskan fishermen.

This bill moved out of the House Fisheries Committee last week and heads to the House Finance Committee next. I plan to continue to work with my peers in the Legislature to make this the best possible bill. I am already working on several possible amendments to help level the playing field for more Alaskan fishermen. I would ask people at home to let me know of any questions or concerns so we can make sure that this legislation serves the

[Rep Alan Austerman@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Rep_Alan_Austerman@legis.state.ak.us).

FISH CAUCUS

As one of the few coastal legislators in the building, I organize a weekly Fish Caucus to serve as an educational forum for various fisheries issues. Last week at Fish Caucus, Greg Kessler from Totem Ocean Trailer gave a captivating presentation on the statewide impacts of the seafood transportation. It was well attended and insightful. This week we are having Don McManman, the editor of Pacific Fishing Magazine. He will be talking about fisheries journalism and the role it plays in shaping policy conversations around fisheries issues. Pacific Fishing has been one of leading fisheries news outlets for the West Coast. Join us next week to learn about mariculture operations throughout Alaska. Rodger Painter owns and operates a mariculture farm in Southeast Alaska, and is active in the promotion of the industry.

We will continue to have Fish Caucus presentations every week through mid-March. If you are interested in the line-up or have any questions, please call our office. If you are not able to be here in Juneau, Fish Caucus will be streamed live every Tuesday at noon at www.alaskalegislature.tv or available by teleconference at 877-763-5073.

Sincerely,



Representative Alan Austerman
Alaska State House Majority Leader
State Capitol, Room 204
Juneau, Alaska 99801
(907) 465-2487 (t) | (907) 465-4956 (f) | (800) 865-2487
www.alanausterman.com

DISTRICT VISITORS



Jeffrey Clay, a Close-up Student visiting our office, talking about his experiences with the program.



Valerie Davidson, Don Kashaveroff and Andy Teuber





Brenda Friend from the Kodiak Community Health Center



Nicholas Pennington from Kodiak, LeAndra Macauley and Aaron Owen on behalf of the Alaska Coalition of State Government

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