

The Deception of Stand for Salmon

By Curtis Thayer

The Alaska Chamber has long been an outspoken voice for pro-business policies that grow our economy and create economic opportunities for Alaskans. For several years, especially during the recent economic slump, we've advocated for a state fiscal plan that limits government spending and supports private sector growth.

Our annual public opinion survey found that 60 percent of Alaskans rate the state's economy as poor. It's a shocking number, and an indicator of how pessimistic Alaskans are about their ability to work and make a living here. Alaska already has the unwanted distinction of having the highest unemployment rate in the country. Getting our economy and our state back on track requires some hard decisions and a vision for the future, but, in the short term, we have some serious obstacles right before us.

Alarms now are sounding on an issue which few Alaskans are aware of. The Stand for Salmon ballot measure, a misguided attempt to improve salmon habitat protections, is slated to be on the November General Election ballot. Alaskans will get to decide on this issue that Chamber members believe to be among the most serious threats to our state economy in years.

It only takes one read of the eight-page document to convince most Alaskans that this ballot measure is both un-Alaskan and unsound. Legal experts have analyzed the ballot measure's language and are shocked by its breadth, complexity, vague undefined terms and its unstated presumptions. Alaska is already home to a world-class permitting system that allows responsible development and successful fish habitat management to co-exist. This ballot measure is a radical overhaul of a system that works, and it provides no additional benefit to the environment.

But that isn't surprising since neither Alaska businesses nor leaders were consulted in the drafting of the measure.

Outside money and outside influence led to the creation of this measure and the result is a dumpster fire. It is unwieldy, unpredictable, and dangerous. The fish habitat measure ensures that our economy will continue to shrink, joblessness will grow, and our state will continue to see an out migration of people.

Outside environmental groups and their wealthy outside benefactors are not the people who should be weighing in on policies in Alaska. These are people with a longstanding agenda, and they don't care if they sabotage economic growth and jobs in their misguided mission to enforce extreme fish habitat regulations to the exclusion of everything else. These activists, whose single largest donor is a Boston billionaire, don't



live here, so why would they care if our current economic recession deepens? They would rather turn Alaska into one giant, inaccessible national park.

When the leader of an Alaska Native corporation warns the public, “there will not be another significant project built in rural Alaska if this ballot measure passes,” that’s a serious matter.

When the construction industry says that building or improving roads, bridges, and runways will become exorbitantly expensive or impossible if this measure passes, that should provoke a sustained outcry.

When the president of the proposed Alaska LNG project says that passage of this ballot measure would make the gas line project “darn near impossible” to build, that should convince us to take action now.

And, when all four leading candidates running for governor, including our current governor, are unified in stating their opposition to this measure, that must motivate us to band together to ensure its defeat in November. Alaskan voters need to get up to speed on this issue. Once they do, I believe they will firmly reject it.

You can learn more about this misguided ballot measure at standforak.com.

Curtis W. Thayer is lifelong Alaskan and serves as president and CEO of the Alaska Chamber

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Curtis W. Thayer'.