

Outside Investments in Alaska's Permanent Fund

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Governor Murkowski has taken, unfairly I think, a small amount of heat for his recent suggestion that companies which Alaskans partly own – through investment in the Permanent Fund – examine how they might benefit through greater involvement in this state and its people.

In no way is the Governor suggesting the Permanent Fund alter its investment strategy to somehow reward any company which might open an office in Anchorage, or endow a professorship at the University of Alaska.

The Governor has been quite clear that decisions made by fund managers be based entirely and without exception on the strength of an investment and thus its benefit to the fund's bottom line.

The Permanent Fund owns a small but not insignificant portion of companies such as Disney, IBM, Ingersoll Rand and Intel. Alaskans, through the fund, own a percentage of J.P. Morgan Chase Bank and dozens of other major financial institutions.

What the governor suggests is, why not seek some access to the boardrooms of these many large companies we – the people of Alaska – through Permanent Fund investments, partly own?

There's plenty of precedent. For example, companies such as Conoco/Phillips and Alaska Airlines actively contribute to causes such as arts or education programs, or through sponsorship of sports events such as the Iditarod or Great Alaska Shootout.

Reminded of our state's large investment, a company's board or CEO may be convinced to add Alaska to their own "good neighbor" programs.

In no way should this be a one-way line of communication.

Companies ought to find they have much to gain through new investment or economic activity of their own in Alaska.

For example, we know Alaska is rich in natural resources and opportunities for recreation. Alaska has fine universities and facilities for research, such as the super computer center in Fairbanks.

Many companies with no tie to Alaska – except through our investment in them – may not know this, and that's where the governor's suggestion comes in. Why not inform these many, many companies of what's common knowledge here in the Last Frontier?

These newly-pioneered contacts could also be used to inform companies of Alaska's advantageous geographical position within the Pacific Rim.

These, and the fact that Alaskans are invested in the success of these many companies, should be a strong basis for this new campaign. Even the smallest new investment can make a difference, whether it be purchasing Alaska seafood for a company function or opening a new airline route.

Let's start by suggesting to the many air transportation companies on the fund's portfolio that wild Alaskan seafood be served (or increasingly served) to passengers. The first visits should be to the airlines which serve Alaska: United, Korean Air, Japan Air, Northwest, Alaska Airlines, for example. The proud symbol of Alaska borne on the tailfin of Alaska Airlines jets can now be seen in Chicago, Denver, New York City, Washington DC and soon Miami. Lets boost the use of another great symbol of Alaska: wild seafood – and other agricultural products, for that matter.

The permanent fund dividend has contributed mightily to Alaska's economy. Alaska's permanent fund has contributed mightily to the growth of many, many companies across the nation and the world. Adding new voices and ideas to this strong and established relationship can only bring a positive return all the way around.

Governor Murkowski should be thanked for his vision.