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Legislators Advise Russian Counterparts **Khabarovsk Officials Learning about Public-Private Relations**

(JUNEAU) – Alaska legislators today extended a telephonic hand to counterparts in the Russian Far East city of Khabarovsk seeking to learn from Alaska’s example how government can encourage private business.

Ten members of the House and Senate met to speak by teleconference and through an interpreter with participants in a conference of government officials in Khabarovsk seeking ways to develop private business. The Russians extended the invitation as part of a continuing effort by the Alaska and Russian governments to exchange information and experience for their mutual benefit.

Participating from the House were: House Speaker Brian Porter (R-Anchorage), Majority Leader Jeannette James (R-North Pole), Rep. Con Bunde (R-Anchorage), Rep. Joe Green (R-Anchorage) and Rep. Lesil McGuire (R-Anchorage). Participating from the Senate were: Sen. Alan Austerman (R-Kodiak), Sen. John Cowdery (R-Anchorage), Sen. Loren Leman (R-Anchorage), Sen. Donald Olson (D-Nome) and Sen. Drue Pearce (R-Anchorage).

Assembled on the Russian side were members of the Khabarovsk *krai* Duma, roughly equivalent to the state legislature, municipal authorities from the Khabarovsk *krai* and its two largest cities, and other officials representing nearby regions and groups. The Russian Far East lies west of Alaska across the Bering Sea, and resembles Alaska in its cold climate, sparse population, mineral wealth and distance from its federal government.

Amid the numerous exchanges of good wishes and personal greetings, many between officials who have become personally acquainted during past diplomatic exchanges, the participants shared insights as to how government encourages private businesses in Alaska and how it might do so in Russia.

James shared a broad outline of how development of state resources generates revenue that the state then shares with local municipalities through revenue sharing, capital funding, and use of state bonding authority to build local infrastructure. She also explained that, while state decisions do impact local governments, such decisions are made with input from local officials.

Ivan Beldy, administrator of a Russian indigenous people’s organization, expressed admiration for the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and explained that while there are some national and regional laws respecting Native autonomy in his region, they are not always fully enforced. He also said that while some lands near Native settlements are set aside for economic development, overlogging and other overutilization strains the ability of local lands to generate revenue. He also lamented the fact that while Russian Native artisans are very skillful, they are unable to find markets for their products.

The Russians agreed to send copies of the conference proceedings to the Alaska Legislature, and both sides agreed to maintain similar contacts in the future.

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