



Senate Majority News

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RCA To Get One More Year Plus Review **Republican Majority Staves Off Governor's Unreasonable Demands**

(JUNEAU) – Staving off unreasonable demands by the Knowles/Ulmer administration to blindly reauthorize the state's Regulatory Commission for an additional four years, lawmakers approved a one year extension of the RCA and implemented new guidelines and oversight concerning the operation of the commission.

Although the RCA could have operated unhindered for the next 12 months without this year's reauthorization, it became clear that the administration and the RCA was willing to either slow down their work or stop all together to send a political message, therefore the Republican majority decided to give them one more year and in that time address a number of the commissions short comings.

“The Knowles/Ulmer administration wanted us to blindly rubber stamp a four year reauthorization without addressing the real concerns of RCA's operation which have been negatively impacting Alaska's consumers,” said Sen. Robin Taylor (R-Wrangell). “The reason for going through all of this was to protect the consumers of Alaska who ultimately pay the bill for the commission's inefficiencies.”

During the one year extension, which expires June 30, 2003, a seven member task force will be appointed (with three members being appointed by the Senate President, three from the House Speaker and one by the governor), to look into the concerns raised about the RCA's operation and to make suggestion as to how it can operate more efficiently. That report will be due to the legislature by January 30, 2003.

“We have had several utilities and co-operatives raise numerous concerns about how the RCA operates,” said Sen. Dave Donley (R-Anchorage). “We hope this task force will be able to make suggestions as to how to make the commission run more efficiently and reduce costs to consumers.”

The one-year extension also lays out a new timeline in which the RCA must hand down decisions. According to Tayler, failing to hand down timely decisions is probably the single biggest complaint against the current RCA make-up.

“Six years! We had one utility co-operative testify that after six years they are still waiting on a decision from the RCA,” said Taylor. “Six years equates to millions of dollars in lost revenue and man hours. Expenses which get passed down to consumers like me and you.”

Also the commission will now be allowed to elect a new chair every year, beginning with this upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1. A commission chair will not be allowed to serve more than three consecutive terms.

(MORE)

Page 2
RCA
June 27, 2002

Taylor says he is happy that the next governor and the members of the 23rd Alaska Legislature now have the ability to make informed decisions about the state's regulatory commission. He says it was worthwhile to hold hearings to identify more specifically some of the general complaints his office had received, but says he is still perplexed as to why the governor would spend so much of the state's money (nearly \$200,000) to hold a special session to get for the RCA what they already had, another year.

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