

ACV Conservation Score Card >>

24th legislature | session 2, 2006

CONSERVATION RATINGS >> Rather than single out conservation supporters based simply on floor votes, we thought it would be more useful and accurate to once again provide a qualitative ranking that better captures the nuances of the Alaska legislature. Given the legislative successes and establishment of some new relationships, we also opted to focus on the positive more than the negative attributes of our legislators. As such, we are purposely not including an antagonist category for this past legislative session.

The following are legislators whose actions in this legislative session merit acknowledgement as a champion, ally or potential ally. **It is important to note that most legislators acknowledged last year as an advocate or ally remained a supporter. These legislators are Senator Gretchen Guess, Senator Albert Kookesh, Rep. Sharon Cissna, Rep. Kevin Meyer, Rep. Harry Crawford, Rep. Berta Gardner, Rep. Gabrielle LeDoux and Rep. Woodie Salmon.** Please visit our website at www.acvoters.org for more information on conservation legislation.

CHAMPION

Some are true promoters of conservation, friends you can rely on to safeguard the real Alaska and our quality of life. Others are willing to take a risk by sponsoring and/or advancing pro-conservation legislation. Advocates also take pride in their efforts to inject balance and accountability into government decision making.

ALLY

These independent lawmakers frequently vote for conservation in Alaska and are often the sponsors of important pro-conservation legislation.

POTENTIAL ALLY

These lawmakers have been known to show independence from industry influence or voting along party lines and on occasion take a stand for pro-conservation legislation.

The Senate

CHAMPIONS



Senator Johnny Ellis (D-Anchorage)

Senator Ellis, minority leader for many years, has continually remained a tried and true conservation champion and a strong but pragmatic voice for the Democratic caucus. He is quick to support pro-conservation issues such as the Climate Change (HCR30) and Exxon Valdez (HJR9) bills and encourages no less than the same from his fellow legislators. His dedication to safeguard the interests of Alaska is to be commended and we appreciate his support.

Senator Kim Elton (D-Juneau)

Known for asking questions that get to the heart of contentious issues, Senator Elton is, as ever, a strong voice for conservation in the Democratic caucus and has an open door to the conservation community. As a Resources committee member, his strong sense of reason and careful consideration of anti-conservation bills such as the Fish and Game overhaul (SB170) further underscore his commitment to protecting Alaska. Among other things, he cross sponsored the Climate Change resolution (HCR30) in the Senate and also backed the Exxon Valdez bill (HJR9).



Senator Hollis French (D-Anchorage)

Senator French continually acts as a strong voice for reason in the Senate. Whether on the floor or in the Judiciary committee, he is recognized for asking tough questions and for trying to encourage balance in the legislative process. Among other things, he sponsored and pushed for Exxon to be held accountable for the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez spill (SJR17, HJR9) and pursued good changes to recreational provisions in the Eminent Domain bill (HB318).

The Senate

ALLIES



Senator Donny Olson (D-Nome)

As the sponsor of the Climate Change Task Force bill (SB278), Senator Olson led the charge in the Senate to take a closer look at the impacts and solutions for climate change in Alaska. He also attempted to insert an amendment on the Senate floor to the infamous Dalton Highway ORV bill (SB85) that would not allow the bill to take effect unless a management plan was developed and agreed upon by impacted groups.

POTENTIAL ALLIES

Senator Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak)

Though his floor votes tend to fall along party lines, Senate Majority leader Gary Stevens sponsored Senate versions of the mixing zones (SB225) and the invasive species (SB245) bills which, though they failed to move, show promise for his desire to advance legislation that will safeguard Alaska's natural environment and protect clean water. Senator Stevens also cross sponsored one of the Exxon Valdez resolutions (HJR9).



Senator Thomas Wagoner (R-Kenai)

Generally not seen as a conservationist, Senator Wagoner's opposition to the controversial SB85 as the sole Republican vote against the bill in the Senate and his opposition to key elements of the new mixing zone regulations demonstrate his strong sense of reason in an often partisan body. As the Resources committee chair, Senator Wagoner tries to promote balanced discussion of bills and is someone we can talk to who is often sympathetic to our causes. He was very helpful with the climate change bill and was sensitive to the Knik Arm Public Use Area (HB307) enforcement concerns raised by locals and users. His careful consideration and failure to move a controversial Fish & Game Overhaul (SB170) in the final, rushed weeks of the session was also notable.



The House of Representatives

CHAMPIONS



Representative Les Gara (D-Anchorage)

Rep. Gara's telling questions and debates in the Education and Judiciary committees and on the House floor are known to get to the heart of issues and highlight him as a champion of conservation issues. His endorsement of the Exxon Valdez bill (HJR9) and the Pebble Mine Management Plan (HCR29) underscore his role as a clean water and fish advocate. His attempts to clarify legislative intent on the Knik River bill (HB 307) to protect the interests of non-motorized users and insert amendments in the Eminent Domain bill (HB318) and University Lands resolution (HCR14) to protect recreational access to streams and other resources were noteworthy.

Representative Beth Kerttula (D-Juneau)

Time and time again, Rep. Kerttula proves herself to be a true champion for conservation issues. Her accessibility and tireless motivation to act on the concerns of the conservation community on key issues such as the Knik River Public Use Area (HB307) and to kill the Hatcher Pass bill (HB306) are exemplary. Her long list of co-sponsored and sponsored conservation bills—including the Pebble Mine management plan (HCR29), the mixing zones bill (HB328), the Climate Change resolution (HCR30), and a slew of renewable energy bills (HB445, HB335)—are a testament to her dedication to protect Alaska.



The House of Representatives

CHAMPIONS

Representative Paul Seaton (R-Homer)

Rep. Seaton proved himself, once again, to be an important and fearless ally to the conservation community by sponsoring a bill and leading an uphill effort to prevent a regulatory roll back of the former ban on mixing zones in spawning streams (HB328). As chair of the State Affairs Committee, he took a stand to stop the Public Interest Litigants bill (SB86) despite significant pressure from the administration. His willingness to listen and take risks is appreciated. His sponsorship of bills to safeguard recreational use of private lands (HB415) and to revamp a weak mining tax structure (HB418) show him as legislator that works to protect the interests of Alaskans.



ALLIES



Representative David Guttenberg (D-Fairbanks)

Rep. Guttenberg worked tirelessly to remove additional as well as previous funding for the ill-planned Stampede Road project and was a willing and friendly leader for both his constituents and the conservation community. His pro-conservation voting record as well as his support of legislation such as the Climate Impact (HCR30) and Exxon Valdez (HJR9) resolutions further highlight his concern for the future of Alaska. He is always there when we need him.

Representative Reggie Joule (D-Kotzebue)

As the primary sponsor of the Climate Impact Assessment Commission (HCR30), Rep. Joule stood out this session as an individual that was more than willing to work with and listen to the concerns of the conservation community. His passion and dedication to addressing the concerns of people living in the Arctic likewise deserves special recognition.



Representative Mary Kapsner (D-Bethel)

As a member of the House Resources, Transportation, and Fisheries committees and as a steadfast advocate for native, subsistence and rural issues, Rep. Kapsner distinguished herself by voting to close loopholes for mixing zones in spawning streams (HB328) and by giving a strong thumbs down to legislation that would open the Dalton Highway to ORV use (SB85). She is also to be commended for her co-sponsorship of renewable energy bills (HB335, HB196) and the climate change commission resolution (HCR30). Rep. Kapsner is another good friend.

POTENTIAL ALLIES

Representative Jim Elkins (R-Ketchikan)

As the co-chair of the Transportation committee, Rep. Elkins took a strong stance as one of the votes to stop the Dalton Highway from being opened to ORV use (SB85). His support of renewable energy (HB445) and the Exxon Valdez bill (HJR9) is also commendable, but we were sorry to see him co-sponsor the bill to expand bonding authority for building the Knik Arm "Bridge to Nowhere" (HB471).



Representative Carl Gatto (R-Palmer)

We were proud to see Rep. Gatto's stance to safeguard salmon streams and promote clean water through his sponsorship of the Mixing Zones bill (HB328). In the face of strong pressure from the administration, the independent thinking Rep. Gatto also made a difference as one of the key votes on the State Affairs committee to not pass the Public Interest Litigants bill (SB86). However, his vote to move SB 85 from the Transportation Committee to open the Dalton corridor to ORV use was disappointing.

The House of Representatives

POTENTIAL ALLIES

Representative Mike Hawker (R-Anchorage)

As an individual whose floor voting record has not historically pointed to a strong conservation ethic, we were notably impressed by Rep. Hawker's decision to sponsor a controversial resolution (HCR29) calling for a "closer look" at the proposed Pebble Mine. While the bill failed to move from House Resources, his initiative to delve into the issue in the face of intense industry pressure was notable.



Representative Bill Stoltze (R-Chugiak)

This Finance committee vice-chair distinguished himself this session through his willingness to listen carefully to his critics and to find and support reasonable compromises for the Knik River Public Use Area bill (HB307). Despite pressure to the contrary, Rep. Stoltze also withdrew his highly controversial bill to convey Hatcher Pass Public Use Area to the Mat-Su Borough (HB306), citing the many unanswered questions on the potential adverse effects from private developers' plans for the area. His sponsorship of a bill that would increase bonding authority for the entity that would push to build the Knik Arm "Bridge to Nowhere" (HB471) raises concerns.



Representative Bill Thomas (R-Chugiak)

We were encouraged to see his strong support for Renewable Energy (HB445) and greatly appreciated his firm stance and hard work to block funding for the Juneau "Dead-End" Road Extension. Though his initial version of the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve bill (HB378) raised hackles, we were encouraged by his eventual willingness to listen to the concerns of constituents and the conservation community in reaching a compromise.



Worth Noting

Every legislative year there are surprises when it comes to conservation issues. Some are surprisingly supportive; some not. While their legislative actions fall outside this ranking system, they are very much worth noting.

Senator Lyda Green (R-Wasilla)

While Senator Green's voting record does not point to a strong pro-conservation ethic, she deserves a hearty thanks for her willingness to listen to the concerns of the citizens of the Knik River area on HB307. Had it not been for her efforts to increase funding in the bill, the outlook for this dangerous area would have been bleak. She also moved the Climate change bill out of Finance despite some initial concerns expressed by co-chair Wilken. As co-chair of Senate Finance, she presided over a Capital Budget that removed funding for the Stampede Road, but ultimately kept in money for the "Bridges to Nowhere" and the Juneau Road Extension.



Senator Ralph Seekins (R-Fairbanks)

This Senate Judiciary chair, who runs a very good and fair meeting, and member of the Senate Resources committee is an emerging Republican leader known in the conservation community for sponsoring controversial bills such as SB85, which would open the Dalton Highway corridor to ORV use, and SB170, a 26-page overhaul of Fish & Game's authority that would make drastic—and often ill-conceived—changes to game management. Despite "anti-greenie" tendencies and a voting record slanted heavily towards less than conservation-friendly legislation, Senator Seekins should be given a pat on the back for opposing funding in the capital budget for the Stampede Road extension.



Representative Jay Ramras (R-Fairbanks)

House Resources co-chair Ramras held a couple of hearings but ultimately refused to move the mixing zones bill (HB328) from his committee due to concerns about impacts on the placer mining industry. We were disappointed by this decision but we also want to acknowledge and thank Rep. Ramras for his strong support or sponsorship of the Climate Change resolution (HCR30) and renewable energy initiatives (HB196, HCR3, HB335, HB196, HB9).

