

TRIP REPORT

Traveler Name: Shari Coleman

Department: City Council

Dates Traveled: 27 - 28 February 2019

Destination: Anchorage, Alaska

PURPOSE OF TRIP:

Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMC)
2019 Economic Summit and Membership Meeting

NARRATIVE:

Much like the AML meetings just a week prior, the tone of these meetings was somewhere between somber and pandemonium (okay, I might be exaggerating here a little bit). The governor's proposed budget sure directed the course of the conversations, no matter what the intended subject, especially the morning sessions. Ben Stevens from the governor's office gave a rather sterile speech early on, addressing the state of the fisheries business. As a former Bering Sea fisherman, he was reluctant to engage in the emotional epitome, and seemed to stick just to the primal rhetoric that has been coming from the governor's office.

Speaker Edgmon spoke via satellite, and Senator Stevens and Representative Stutes followed with their own discussions on the proposed budget impacts to our communities. This lead nicely into the rest of the morning's topic: the impact of fish taxes on the local economy, as well as a presentation by the McDowell Group and the role of the industry in the global market.

I usually don't comment on the lunch menu, but I did partake of the surimi flat noodles, showcased by the Alaska Symphony of Seafood. Pretty tasty, though I'm unlikely to run out and buy some for my setting. The afternoon continued with the seafood theme; advanced manufacturing in seafood processing. A fare amount of emphasis was put on the role of robotics, though on several strong points emphasized that it would not take the place of human labor; just change the dynamics of what the labor would do.

Somewhere early in the mix of the guest speakers was an update on the 2020 census and the efforts to get local auditors for the rural communities. Applications are currently being accepted online.

The next day started out with energy programing and audits. An emphasis was placed on grant and aid assistance, especially when it comes to relevant green energy sources. Communities were encouraged to reach out to SWAMC for assistance, though their federal funding sources have expired. Small business energy audits were discussed. From energy, we jumped in economics development strategies, and consequently more coffee. The morning rapped up with the SWAMC membership meeting.

The afternoon sessions began with two roundtable discussions; one on community resilience and the other on infrastructure. The second discussion group got a little lively with a fair amount of banter between guests speakers, and tension between state and civic leadership was evident. And the frustration from the previous day continues.

The conference wrapped up with the seemingly dismal outlook of the effects of global warming on our fisheries. Lots of discussion about the effect of the blob in the Pacific, and the warming trend with ocean water in the Bering Sea, and how that affects P.cod and other species, especially salmon and how to predict salmon returns. What a great subject to end the day: about as cheerless as our economic future. To end on a positive note, the weather in Anchorage was great all week!