

Trip Report

Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMC)

March 1st and 2nd 2018

Dennis Robinson

Attending SWAMC's 30th annual conference was pretty amazing as I was on the Unalaska City Council when SWAMC was started. I also had the pleasure of attending the 20th annual conference. The thing that struck me about the 20th conference is that it held the same format for so long. We were talking about the same things as we did in year one. The conferences used to be 3 days long and this year they switched it to two days. What an improvement as it is pretty tough for most to sit through the third day. The content and presentations at this conference were varied, up to date and well presented as one can see by visiting the SWAMC website. You can view all of the content of the conference as presented as they claim to post the power point presentations.

The conference opened with a welcome from Mayor Ethan Berkowitz speaking mostly about the dire financial situation of the State and lack of new revenues. One thing he pointed out is that Anchorage needs Rural Alaska. This is a point that the Unalaska City Council first brought to the attention of Anchorage lawmakers in the 80's. It still holds true today.

There was a brief strategy update on the Alaska Marine Highway provided by Robert Venables, Executive director of the South East conference. He spoke of the fiscal shortfalls and maintenance issues of an aging fleet of the States ferry's

The Sponsors and Exhibitors had a 2 minute window each for updates. Mayor Kelty filled the conference in on the on goings in Unalaska.

Shifting the Services-Filling the Vital Service Gap was the first panel of the day. For the Department of Corrections was Claire Sullivan filling in for Commissioner Dean Williams who wasn't able to attend, for the Alaska State Troopers/VPSO Program was Captain Andrew Merrill, for The Department of Law and DA's Office was Richard Allen and filling in for Commissioner Valerie Davidson of The

Department of Health and Social Services was Christine Laughtin. The panel focused mostly on providing services on reduced budgets and how communities might help in providing the required services.

Fish Take Flight-Growing Importance of Air Cargo in Marketing Seafood- The panel consisted of Dr. Darren Prokop, Professor of Logistics, U of A, Shannon Stevens of Alaska Airlines, Garrett Parker , Manager of Golden Harvest Seafoods and Troy Larue, Statewide Aviation Operations Manager, Alaska DOT/PF. We heard of the importance of Alaska's airports and how it will benefit from our global position, how Adak is trying to become viable, how Alaska Airlines is addressing air cargo and what the outlook is for airport projects around the State are.

LUNCH: Human-Centered Automation- This panel was Doug Johnson, President and CEO of Professional Growth Systems, H. Holland, Alaska Accelerator Fund and Craig Tomita, Western Area Sales Manager for Universal Robots. They spoke of automation of various businesses and Mr. Tomita even brought a small table top robot for demonstration. As it was lunch time I didn't sit all of the way through it. I had to seek a gluten free lunch.

Gold Sponsor's Update-GCI-

Alaska's Opioid Crisis-Cause, Enforcement, Treatment, Community Response- Davy Jones sat in for Dr. Jay Butler, Alaska Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health and Social Services, Lt. Steven Adam, Alaska State troopers, Department of Public Safety, Dr. Shane Coleman and Dr. David Lessons, Southcentral Foundation and Carol Wren, Vice President of Shareholder Development, Bristol Bay Native Corporation. The panel spoke of how opioids affect communities and the States crime rate, treatment and counseling and the medical woes created by runaway abuse. They pointed out how communities could help and become involved. My belief is that this crisis is born solely by the Pharmaceutical companies.

Gold Sponsor's Update – PenAir

Federal Issues for SW Alaska – Trump Administration- The panel was Jerry Ward (his hair piece still doesn't fit) State Director USDA, Rural Development, Alaska Region and Steve Wackowski, Senior Advisor for Alaskan Affairs, Department of Interior. They spoke of the opportunities for the State in the oil and mining sectors if a major infrastructure bill is passed by the administration. Nothing seemed to be about Southwest Alaska.

U.S. Census Bureau- Charmaine V Ramos, Partner Specialist, U.S. Census Bureau gave the Bureaus typical speech on the importance of a census.

Broadband in SW Alaska – Seeking Connection to the Digital World- The panel presenting this was Dan Boyette, Vice President , GCI, Kristina Woolston, Vice President for External Relations, Quintillion and Tom Brady, Chief Technical Officer and Founder, Pacific Datapoint. The panel spoke of the importance of broadband in rural Alaska. GCI would like to get funding to run a fiber cable from Kodiak to Unalaska. Quintillion is still trying to connect Japan to Europe. The most promising was from Pacific Datapoint which will launch another satellite. The other two can't seem to raise enough capital to obtain their goals.

President's Reception – Quarter Deck- I did not attend

Day Two

Opening and Welcome – Governor Bill Walker

Board and Commission Involvement – Shirley Marquardt, Office of the Governor- Shirley spoke on how to become involved and appointed to the various boards and commissions of the state.

Legislative Update – Focus on Fiscal Plan and Other legislative Matters – This panel was Senator Lyman Hoffman, Senator Gary Stevens, Representative Bryce Edgmon and Representative Louise Stutes. They gave an overview of what the State is faced with having a \$2.8 billion shortfall and what that means and the importance of creating new revenue. They talked of budget cuts, using the PFD earnings reserve and the prospect of an income tax or sales tax.

SWAMC's 2018 Membership Meeting – Staff reported on the past years business, passed the financial report, elected officers and representatives, passed resolutions.

Lunch: SWAMC 30 Years Later – Incorporators of SWAMC in 1988: Jerome Selby, Former Mayor Kodiak Island Borough couldn't make it, Glenn Reed filled in for Paul Fuhs, former Mayor of Unalaska, Lamar Cotton, Former Lake and Peninsula Borough manager and Leon Braswell, former Mayor city of Dillingham. The panel discussed where SWAMC came from and where the organization is today.

Supporting a \$4.2 Billion Fishing Industry with Diminishing State Budgets – The panel, John Whiddon, Chair, Kodiak Fisheries Working Group, John Gauvin, Fisheries Science Director, Alaska Seafood Cooperative, Representative Jonathon Kreiss-Tomkins, District 35, Sitka Area, Shannon Carroll, Deputy Director, Alaska Marine Conservation Council. The panel talked about various topics in the fishing industry from bycatch issues and the advancement of methods to reduce it, Value added processing as well as involving all sectors of communities in the Industry to the importance of the small boat s and how they are involved.

SWAMC Energy Update: Laura Vaught, Energy Coordinator gave an update.

Managing a \$4.2 Billion Fishing Industry in Times of Change – Presented by Glenn Merrill, National Marine Fisheries, Commissioner Sam Cotton, Alaska Department of Fishing Game, Commander James Binniker, Response Department Head for Sector Anchorage, USCG couldn't make it. Discussed were issues before the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council mostly focused on bycatch and reduced quotas as well as the ever dwindling crab fleet and the lack of salmon making it back to the river systems.

Adding Value in Alaska to Grow a \$4.2 Billion Industry- The panel consisted of Paula Cullenberg, Director, Alaska Sea Grant, University of Alaska, Jeremy Woodrow, Communications Director, Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, Garrett Evridge, Economist, McDowell Group and Stefanie Moreland, Director of Gov't Relations and Seafood Sustainability, Trident Seafoods. This panel spoke about the conservation of our fish resources, marketing strategies, value added

secondary processing, cold storage, competing in a worldwide market to the modernization of seafood processing as well as the fleet.