

Trip Report: 2023 Washington DC Lobbying Trip

Councilman: Looby

Dates: 12/11/23 – 12/13/23

The Washington DC Lobbying trip every year is important to garner support from our federal agencies, elected officials and representatives for projects and issues important to the City of Unalaska and our Tri-lateral group, which is made up of the City of Unalaska, Ounalashka Corporation and the Qawalangin Tribe. The one thing that we heard repeatedly was how impressed everyone was with our Tri-lateral group and how it makes it so much easier to support our projects and issues without having to worry about how the other entities will react. We were told that other communities are starting to follow our lead and create their own groups as well.

For me personally this was a great opportunity to see how government works firsthand and how important it is for municipalities to go in person to be heard and bring to light the importance of issues that concern them. This being my first lobbying experience I found it to be very informative on matters of government and the processes that take place to garner support. I felt like we were heard and had the support of our government agencies and elected officials. All in all, I felt like it was a very productive trip.

Below is a list of attendees, meetings, and subjects we talked about.

Attendees

This was a coordinated effort of the Unalaska Tri-lateral group which included the following individuals from each entity.

The City of Unalaska

Mayor Tutiakoff

Council member Thom Bell

Council member Shari Coleman

Council member Daneen Looby

City Manager Bil Homka

City consultant Chris Hladick

Ounalashka Corporation

CEO/COO Natalie Cale

Qawalangin Tribe

CEO Chris Price

Our state and federal lobbyists Diane Blumer, Sebastian O'Kelly & Rick Marks also joined us, and I cannot thank them enough for all the work they have done for the City of Unalaska and our tri-lateral group. Their work and dedication coordinating everything made for a very successful trip.

Meetings

Each morning we started our day with a coordination meeting to review who we were meeting with and the subjects we would cover at each meeting. Due to space constraints all attendees were not able to attend all the meetings, but most were attended by all. Sebastian was instrumental in setting the following meetings up.

U.S. Coast Guard Director of Maritime Security at St. Elizabeth Campus
Office of Loan Programs at the Department of Energy Forrestal Building
Asst. Secretary of the Army for Civil Works at the Pentagon Army Corps of Engineers
Senator Joe Manchin at the Hart Senate Office Building
Office of Land and Emergency Management at the Environmental Protection Agency West Building
Senator Dan Sullivan at the Hart Senate Office Building
Pacific Ocean Division Regional Integration Team at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Chief of Sustainable Fisheries, NMFS at the U.S. Dept of Commerce
Fuds & Nalemp at the Pentagon Army Corps of Engineers
Senator Lisa Murkowski at the Hart Senate Office Building
Representative Mary Peltola at the Cannon House Office Building

Subjects Discussed

We discussed numerous subjects that are important to the City of Unalaska and the Tri-lateral group, which included the following.

Fisheries Disasters & Loss of Revenue- We discussed the processes and length of time it takes before stakeholders receive disaster funds. We tried to bring home the idea that a disaster is a disaster and funds are needed much more quickly than the process allows. We are currently still waiting for funds from 2019 declared disasters.

Importance of Pollock to Unalaska & Trawl Bycatch Issues- We discussed the importance of the pollock fishery to Unalaska and its commerce. We encouraged the delegation to help protect our fisheries from MSA legislative and agency-led efforts to alter national bycatch standards. We supported a reasonable salmon bycatch reduction approach by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and efforts by NOAA and the state of Alaska to better understand and address bycatch issues and the work of the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force.

North Pacific Right Whale Critical Habitat- We discussed the affects on Unalaska and surrounding communities if the critical habitat area is overly broad and encouraged all decisions be science-based and that only current, key, actively used areas are included and avoid inclusion of Unimak Pass for economic concerns.

Heart of the Ocean Sanctuary- We expressed concerns that even though NOAA was no longer considering this they had not taken it completely off the table and we encouraged it to completely go away.

Russian Seafood Imports- We expressed our concerns about Russian Seafood being imported through the back door of China and other countries and encouraged our delegation to continue efforts to restrict Russian seafood from entering the U.S. Markets.

Makushin Geothermal Project Funding- In some of the meetings we discussed this project's importance to Unalaska and how it could potentially benefit the State of Alaska as a whole. I did not participate in the meeting that addressed the funding for this project.

Environmental cleanup of Native and City Lands- This has been an ongoing issue for the Tri-lateral group, and we are making headway with some funds being disbursed to clean up the lands. We touched on the importance of continuing to support our cleanup efforts during a few of the meetings I attended but I did not participate in the meeting that specifically addressed the issues with the Corps of Engineers.

Dredging of Unalaska Bay Entrance Channel, UMC & Light Cargo Docks- We thanked the delegation for their support of the project to dredge the Unalaska Bay Entrance Channel and discussed opportunities that the city may participate in to take advantage of the equipment that will be mobilized for the project to cut the city's costs to dredge in front of the UMC and Light Cargo docks at the same time.

Repairs to the Carl Moses Boat Harbor Floating Breakwaters- We discussed the issues with the floating breakwaters and how their anchor systems are failing since the Army Corps built the harbor. We asked for support in granting the funds to the Army Corps for redesign and repair of the breakwaters to complete this project after 10 years in the works.

Arctic Port and Homeland Security infrastructure- We discussed the natural assets The Port of Dutch Harbor holds as the only ice-free deep-water port in the region and has been designated as a port of refuge. We made the points that The Port of Dutch Harbor is strategically located and sits on the great circle route for maritime commerce and the opening of the Arctic as well as protecting our borders.

Coast Guard, Navy, and a general military presence- We discussed the increased presence of foreign vessels in the area performing military exercises and expressed the need for better information on the military's plans to combat any threats these exercises may pose so we can be prepared to support our military when needed.

Unalaska's Airport and need for expansion- We discussed concerns over the Unalaska Airport Master Plan released by the State of Alaska and although there are many improvements the plan is based on; it only maintains existing aircraft types and does not address the lack of avionics controls which cause numerous cancellations. We recommended to our delegates that they monitor the NEPA analysis that will be conducted and ensure the city's concerns are addressed.

Captains Bay Road Improvements- We discussed the need to improve Captains Bay Road. The building of the new Trident plant will make it even more important with increased traffic and services needed. We encouraged our delegation to support the project's funding.