



Governor Michael J. Dunleavy  
STATE OF ALASKA

October 6, 2020

The Honorable Bryce Edgmon  
Speaker of the House  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 208  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

The Honorable Louise Stutes  
House of Representatives  
Alaska State Legislature  
305 Center Avenue, Suite 1  
Kodiak, AK 99615

Dear Speaker Edgmon and Representative Stutes,

As governor of Alaska, one of my duties is to create economic opportunity for the benefit of all Alaskans, utilizing every available resource within our borders. No serious person would disagree that accessing the mineral deposits within the Bristol Bay Mining District, if done in a way that protects the watershed, would transform the lives of Alaskans living in the region. My role is to ensure that each project is subject to a fair and rigorous review process, and that every opportunity to create thousands of jobs is fully explored. Preemptive vetoes, particularly in a region suffering from generational poverty and a chronic lack of economic options, have no place in Alaska.

In addition to the economic benefits, mineral development in Alaska has the potential to improve our nation's security. Just last week, the President declared a national emergency relating to our nation's lack of domestic mineral production.<sup>1</sup> As demand for strategic minerals and geopolitical instability increases, Alaska has the ability to secure supply lines that presently depend on hostile powers.

I cannot accept your argument that I should not, in my role as governor, seek to move viable projects forward for the benefit of economically-depressed regions and our national security, particularly when my only act of "promotion," both privately and publicly, has been to call for a fair federal review and permitting process. You are no doubt aware of this fact given that you cite a letter, drafted based on my conversations with Pebble project stakeholders, which stated exactly that.

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<sup>1</sup> White House, September 30, 2020

You are also aware that, at every juncture of this process, I have stated the best available science will determine the future of the Pebble project. This is true of every resource development project in the state of Alaska. No resource will be sacrificed for the benefit of another. Like Kensington and Greens Creek mines in Southeast Alaska, any proposal within the Bristol Bay Mining District must demonstrate that it can operate in harmony with our fisheries.

Regardless of the fate of the Pebble project, let me be absolutely clear: I will not stop fighting for the people of the Bristol Bay region who continue to suffer from an acute lack of economic opportunity. The wild salmon fishery, which I am unwilling to jeopardize, does not operate year-around. Most of the income it generates does not fall into the hands of those who live in the Bristol Bay region. Only 76 local workers filled the 5,471 processing jobs in 2017.<sup>2</sup> Those who do fish, earn less than outside crews and comprise only 25 percent of permit holders.<sup>3</sup> In the off season, year-around residents are left to cope with unemployment rates that often exceed 12 percent and poverty levels<sup>4</sup> that are more than double the statewide average.<sup>5</sup>

Worse, these economic impacts quickly lead to real human tragedies. Residents of Southwest Alaska, the vast majority of whom are Alaska Natives, are plagued by the highest suicide rate in the state<sup>6</sup> at more than three and one-half times the national average. This crisis is compounded by a regional life expectancy of only 69 years among Alaska Natives.<sup>7</sup> High school graduation rates are equally disappointing, reaching only 77 percent in 2019.<sup>8</sup>

I trust these statistics are as unacceptable to you as they are to me. It is disheartening that a representative of this economically depressed region, with so many of their residents deprived of meaningful opportunities to improve their life, would foment opposition to plans to address these inequalities. The American dream cannot be realized while constrained by dependency on government. I have yet to meet any Alaskan who wishes to live in this manner. A lack of regional development only prolongs this dependency and denies Alaskans their natural right to self-determination.

It is in this spirit that I ask you to share your plans for the future of Bristol Bay's economy. As you know, our legislative session is just months away, and Alaskans are in desperate need of our help. I stand ready and willing to join you in support of resource development projects that provide the year-around jobs and the opportunities needed to ensure the region's long-term success.

The economic adversity facing Bristol Bay poses a steep challenge, but the odds are far from insurmountable if we take action today. Many years ago, residents of the North Slope faced similar problems. However, thanks to responsible resource development, they have seen

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<sup>2</sup> Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, 2019

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, July 1, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> State of Alaska Epidemiology, January 2, 2019

<sup>7</sup> Alaska Native Epidemiology Center, 2013-2017

<sup>8</sup> Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, 2019

Speaker Edgmon/Representative Stutes

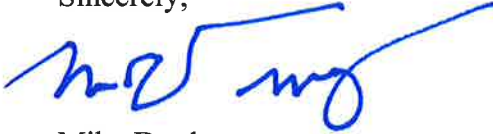
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significant and ongoing improvements to life expectancy, healthcare capacity, and education.<sup>9</sup> The environment has also thrived, with the Central Arctic Herd expanding from 6,000 to 30,000 caribou<sup>10</sup>, and traditional whaling activities continuing unabated. In fact, several corporations in the Bristol Bay area have made investments in these very same oil fields.

It is my hope that we can work together to create this same type of success in Bristol Bay. In the meantime, I will continue to advocate for responsible resource development projects for the benefit of all Alaskans.

Sincerely,



Mike Dunleavy  
Governor

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<sup>9</sup> Anchorage Daily News, May 9, 2017

<sup>10</sup> Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation, Summer 2020