



My turn: Mine development in British Columbia raises concerns

Posted: March 29, 2015 - 12:07am

By [ABE TANHA](#)

FOR THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

As owner of a sportfishing business based in Juneau, I join a large group of Alaskans including Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, Rep. Don Young, 11 municipalities including CBJ and the Southeast Conference of Mayors, tribes, fishermen and tourism operators who are deeply concerned with the scale and speed of mine development in British Columbia. Thank you, Juneau Empire, for a thorough job documenting this issue for your readers.

Last week the Empire responded to a litany of outrageous claims from B.C.'s Minister of Energy and Mines, Bill Bennett, about the Mount Polley mine tailings dam failure and development in the transboundary region. Bennett's remarks are a total mischaracterization of Alaskans' concerns and the widespread call from Alaskans for International Joint Commission involvement.

As unprecedented as the Mount Polley catastrophe may have been, the tailings dam failed because of regulatory oversight. Bennett claimed government inspectors could not have detected the glacial silt layer; however, they did identify a plethora of issues related to poor design and maintenance of the dam. These went unaddressed by Imperial Metals.

Bennett has the audacity to claim Alaskans are "not right" in their concerns regarding Canada's capacity to oversee these projects. Bennett wants to earn trust from Alaskans and provide us with reassurances. Trust is built with transparency and communication, so I ask: Where was the communication from B.C. to Alaska when Red Chris Mine, in the headwaters of the Stikine, opened three days after Bennett claimed B.C. would be "accepting all of the recommendations of the independent panel that investigated the Mount Polley failure..."? Red Chris Mine received an interim permit for its tailings facility without implementing any recommendations.

Thousands of concerned Alaskans feel slighted by the B.C. government, and we await the moment when our own state government stands up and speaks on behalf of its constituents. We hope that moment comes soon.

The state of Alaska needs to stand up and represent the concerns of Alaskans. Our concerns should be taken to the Canadian government without being watered down by the Department

of Natural Resources. It is well known by all that the Canadian government does not have comparable water quality and mining regulations, and environmental review. Canada has significantly reduced the stringency of its environmental assessment processes and denied requests by the state of Alaska, Alaska's congressional delegation, as well as thousands of Alaskans and Canadians, to give the KSM mine, which rivals the proposed Pebble Mine in size and threat, a more thorough environmental review.

While thousands of Alaskans, dozens of municipalities and organizations have commented on Canadian mine proposals, I am perplexed as to how the DNR submitted two pages of comments for the largest proposed mine in North America. That is a far cry from adequately representing the magnitude of Alaska's concerns.

If the Walker administration wants to distinguish itself from the Parnell legacy of development, it must redefine "business as usual." Passivity on this issue sells out Alaskans to foreign mining interests. While DNR officials are in Vancouver eating steak with mining executives, those of us at home have real concerns about impacts to our lives and are wondering if we are going to see true leadership from the state.

To end, I want to remind government leaders in Canada that trust only comes with respect. This is the time for Canadian officials to respect Alaska and our shared waters, and we will trust them to manage resources in the future. Alaskans don't need reassurance — Alaskans need guarantees.

- Abe Tanha is owner and operator of Hooked On Juneau, a locally operated fishing tour company.

<http://juneauempire.com/opinion/2015-03-29/my-turn-mine-development-british-columbia-raises-concerns>