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Transboundary Issues

By Rep. Dan Ortiz

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Letter to the Editor: A Response to Mr. Dirom's Letter regarding Transboundary Issues
I recently introduced a House Joint Resolution regarding Transboundary Mining, and I was pleased to see that it is generating conversation with our B.C. neighbors. On February 26th, an opinion piece by Gavin Dirom was published in SitNews. As President of the B.C. Association for Mineral Exploration, his response focused on the benefits of the B.C. mining industry. I have read his letter and I respect his intent, but there are a few points I would like to clear up.

First, this resolution differs from the Statement of Cooperation signed by Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott, B.C. Minister of Environment Mary Polak, and B.C. Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett in October of 2016. The Statement of Cooperation, although a step toward progress in our relationship with B.C., has the primary intent of opening communication and the sharing of stream monitoring data, etc. It does not guarantee financial protection or ensure the mitigation resources of the potential long-term effects of mining on the downstream user groups, primarily S.E. Alaskans who have a vested economic and cultural interest in seeing that these rivers remain in pristine condition. The current Memorandum of Understanding and Statement of Cooperation are non-binding and unenforceable, whereas House Joint Resolution 9 is asking for action. I want to be proactive in protecting our rivers and fish, not reactive in cleaning our watersheds if there is serious long-term negative effects.

Second, my goal with the resolution is to protect our state resources by investigating the potential long-term downstream effects of proposed and existing industrial development in B.C. We currently have little information regarding the potential negative effects of mines on our watersheds. The one study Mr. Dirom mentioned – completed by the ERA – was haphazardly compiled and methodologically unsound, according to a review of the study by Dr. Sarah O'Neal. I want to fill in those gaps of knowledge. An investigation, if mine production is as exacting as Mr. Dirom claims, would only show results favoring mines.

Third, Alaskans do not benefit economically from B.C. mines. Alaskans do benefit hugely from our rivers and the fishing industry. Combined, the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers produce over \$48 million in annual economic impact and over 400 year round jobs. Let me be clear: I do not oppose the mining industry, nor do I oppose the jobs and resources it supports. However, I am concerned about the potential negative impacts mining may have on our fishing industry and our necessity for clean watersheds. The fishing industry is vital to our Southeast communities and I will continue the fight to protect it.

Respectfully,

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