

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 14, 2011

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Dirksen Senate Office Building RM 508
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller:

As you develop the agenda for the Senate Commerce Committee for 2011, and begin to put together a schedule of hearings, I write to suggest that the Committee hold a hearing on issues related to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) in the first half of 2011.

You may be aware that TAPS recently sustained a small leak inside Pump Station One adjacent to Prudhoe Bay production facilities. This and the threat of a subsequent "cold startup" highlight a serious concern to the economy of Alaska and the nation, given the importance of Alaska's North Slope to overall domestic oil production and refined gasoline markets. Now 33 years old, TAPS operates in a reduced throughput environment, down from a peak of 2 million barrels per day in the late 1980s to approximately 630,000 barrels/day at present.

In a matter of weeks, Alyeska Pipeline Company, the owner and manager of TAPS which is, in turn, owned by oil and gas production companies and refiners, will issue a report on the technical and economic challenges of operating the pipeline as production and throughput continue to decrease. We all have a stake in how this key piece of national infrastructure will fare with reduced throughput and the need for increased funds for maintenance and operations. This report and the subject in general demand thorough understanding and appropriate Congressional oversight.

I understand the Commerce Committee will have a number of pressing and organizational issues to attend to over the coming months. I anticipate that scheduling a hearing in late March or April would provide Alyeska and interested parties sufficient time to review the forthcoming report.

Admiral Tom Barrett, as the new president of Alyeska, comes to the position with great depth and judgment. His selection to direct the company gives me confidence that, while

Admiral Thomas Barrett

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challenging, these problems are surmountable as the company seeks to seriously deal with them.

Thanks for your assistance with this issue and your thoughtful leadership of the Senate Commerce Committee.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich
United States Senator

cc: Admiral Thomas Barrett