

Waiver for Wickersham

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congressman Nick Begich of Alaska has announced that his bill (HR 10834) to provide a waiver of the Jones Act for operation of the Alaska ferry vessel Wickersham has passed today in the U.S. House of Representatives.

This is the first waiver of the Jones Act ever secured for Alaska, and the Alaska freshman termed its passage to be "landmark legislation in response to a very serious marine transportation problem in Alaska."

Begich's bill provides a temporary waiver for the Wickersham beginning when the State of Alaska signs a binding contract for an American-built replacement vessel, and ending when the vessel is complete, but in no event later than 36 months.

During this time, the Wickersham will be able to run between Alaskan ports and direct to Seattle, which is now forbidden by the Jones Act because the vessel is foreign built.

In a lengthy statement, Begich credited the unprecedented success of his bill to the mutual efforts of many people.

He mentioned specifically House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee Chairman Edward Garmatz, Alaska Governor William A. Egan, and Alaska Commissioner of Public Works, George Easley.

Begich predicted that the Senate will act on his bill very soon, and stated: "The practical effect of this bill will be to vastly improve service on the Alaska Marine Highway.

"The M.V. Wickersham can at last become an asset for the State of Alaska rather than a liability. All those who depend on the Marine Highway will begin to get the service they need and deserve."