

Letter to Governor

Hon. Walter J. Hickel
Governor of Alaska
Pouch A
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Governor Hickel:

As you may know, Senator Bartlett is away from the office. Before he left he asked me to prepare a chronological report on efforts made to enact a bill extending the period the state has for selecting federally leased land.

In light of the current public discussion about this bill, we thought it would be helpful to share with you the same information that report contains.

On April 30, Senator Bartlett introduced S.3406, a bill extending the right of the state to select land under federal lease for 15 years or, in other words, through the entire period the state was given for selecting land under the Statehood Act.

Senator Bartlett immediately contacted the chairman of the Senate and House Interior Committees urging prompt action on the bill.

Senator Bartlett wrote you on May 6 suggesting that you also write the committee chairmen about the importance of the bill. You did so on May 13.

Responding to Senator Bartlett's request, Senator Jackson, chairman of the Senate Interior Committee, scheduled a hearing on S. 3406 for June 7. The assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy on June 6 caused the hearings to be cancelled.

At that time there was considerable talk that Congress would attempt to adjourn by the end of July before the Republican National Convention. The House Rules Committee, which must clear bills before they can come to the floor of the House for a vote, announced it would consider no new rule requests after July 1. In order to speed consideration of the bill in face of that possible deadline, this office mailed to Congressman Pollock a copy of Senator Bartlett's bill and information explaining the need for the bill.

Congressman Pollock introduced Senator Bartlett's bill in the House on June 13.

It was not possible to arrange hearings before the Congress recessed for the national political conventions. Close cooperation with both the Senate and House Interior Committees made it possible to schedule a House hearing on September 5 and a Senate hearing on September 6.

Shortly before the House hearing, we learned that the Bureau of the Budget, which had previously indicated approval of a five-year extension, would oppose any extension. We believe it is accurate to state that only through the intervention of the Senator's office was the Bureau finally persuaded to accept any extension and even then it insisted that it be less than one year.

With that agreement in mind, the chairman of the House Interior Committee pressed for and received committee approval of a nine-month extension.

The Senate Interior Committee, at Senator Bartlett's urging, reported out a bill with a five-year extension. It was hoped that we could get the Senate bill approved before or on the same day the House consideration and for calling a conference. It was further hoped that the House conferees could be persuaded to accept the Senate bill or at least compromise on a longer extension than nine months.

The House bill came up and was passed by unanimous consent on September 16. The Senate bill was to be brought up the same day in the Senate, after apparently having been cleared for unanimous consent approval by both sides of the aisle. At the last minute, however, Senator John J. Williams, Republican of Delaware, made it known that he would object to the bill, thus preventing any chance of passing the bill by unanimous consent.

Later that week Senator Williams was informed that the Senate Interior Committee and Senator Bartlett would accept the House version of the bill rather than push for the five-year extension. Senator Williams would not lift his objection.

Shortly thereafter, the Senate became embroiled in a filibuster on the nomination of Mr. Justice Abe Fortas to become Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

When the Fortas confirmation fight was dropped, the Senate was faced with a number of appropriation and other bills of national importance to pass and with an increasingly difficult time in achieving quorums. Therefore, neither the House nor the Senate bill was brought up for a vote.

I understand that on Thursday, October 10, Senator Bartlett called you and suggested that you contact Senator Williams about the bill. We understand that you tried, but were unable to do so.

Senator Bartlett talked with Senator Williams by telephone and in person about Senator Williams' objections to the bill.

Unfortunately, Senator Williams never lifted his objections to the bill before Congress adjourned.

Needless to say, Senator Bartlett shares your great disappointment that his bill was not enacted. Depending on what may transpire between now and the beginning of the next session, he is planning on reintroducing his bill when the Congress reconvenes.

Sincerely yours,

Jack Cornman
Legislative Assistant to
Senator E.L. Bartlett