

Need 'Cold, Hard Facts'

June 5, 1968

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

Dear Governor Hickel:

This is in reference to your letter of May 28 concerning the Swedish ship STENNA BRITANNICA and the Jones Act. As you released your letter to the press so, too, will I release my reply.

You very aptly compare the difficulty of amending the Jones Act to the stand the Greeks made against the Persians at Marathon. The odds in favor of a Greek victory then were very poor. The odds in favor of the amendment of the Jones Act now do not appear to be much better.

As I explained in my letter of May 29, the amendment which you desire will need the approval of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee before it becomes law. Certainly the House Committee appears unwilling and unlikely to amend quickly the Jones Act.

If the amendment is to become law the combined weight of important elements of the American Merchant Marine, both labor and industry must be overcome. This is not an easy task.

If the amendment is to become law the state must present the facts of the matter—and its plans for the future—in a clear and straightforward manner. The Congress, the industry, and especially the people of Alaska have a right to know precisely what the state wants and precisely what the state plans. Without such information—and we do not now have such information—the chances of congressional approval appear remote.

The following questions are among those which must be answered.

1. Does the STENNA BRITANNICA meet the safety standards required of American ships?
2. If the ship does not, does the state intend to operate it without a certificate of safety?
3. Or does the state intend to remodel the BRITANNICA so that it will conform to American safety standards?
4. If so, how much money will this remodeling cost and how long will it take to remodel?
5. When you appeared before members of the House and Senate merchant marine committees and representatives of the administration at the informal meeting in February, you emphasized that the Jones Act waiver which you sought was to be a temporary one, operative only until the new U.S. built Alaska ferries would be ready for use.

The fact that these ferries were to be constructed in the U.S. was offered as a sign of the good faith intentions of the State of Alaska.

Now I am informed the State of Alaska has rejected all bids on the new ships, even though they were within price. Has the state now dropped its plans to construct new ferry ships to replace the STENNA BRITANNICA within a two or three year period as originally planned?

6. Is the State of Alaska now seeking a permanent waiver of the Jones Act?
7. Does the State of Alaska intend that the BRITANNICA become a permanent part of the Alaska Marine Highway system?
8. If the act is now amended in the closing days of this session—and as I have said it appears extremely unlikely to be so amended—is it the intention of the State of Alaska to operate the BRITANNICA this summer under a foreign flag? With a foreign crew? Sailing from a foreign port?
9. If the ship can operate successfully in this manner this summer will the state continue to press for a Jones Act exemption and, if so, on what grounds?
10. American crewmen serving on a ship operating under a foreign flag are not eligible for the public health care accorded American seamen sailing under the American flag. What are your plans in this regard?

We must have the answers to questions such as these. The future of the Alaska tourist industry is of very great importance to the future of our state. The continued and expanding operation of the Alaska Marine Highway is of very great importance to the growth of the tourist industry. This is a time for hard, cold facts. We do not now have these facts.

Sincerely yours,

E. L. Bartlett