

Palin, Murkowski, Oesting React To Exxon Ruling

Wednesday, 25 June 2008

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The United

States Supreme Court this morning reduced the amount of punitive damages Exxon Mobil must pay for the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Instead of the 2.5 billion dollars that the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the company should pay in 2006, the high court set the amount at 507.5 million dollars--equal to the compensatory damages victims of the spill have already received.

The court

was divided 5-3 on the decision. Justice David Souter wrote in the majority opinion that the court believed, "the punitive damages award against Exxon was excessive as a matter of maritime common law." Justice Samuel Alito didn't take part in the decision, because he owns stock in Exxon Mobil.

Kodiak

attorney Matt Jamin, who represents plaintiffs in the case, called the decision "A terrible blow to the people of Alaska." He said he expects the award to include interest and believes it will be three months before any money will be available to the victims.

David Oesting (ess-ting), another one of the attorneys who represented the 32 and a half thousand fishermen, workers and other damaged parties, said the court seemed to confine itself to technicalities rather than looking at what was just for the plaintiffs

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Jacobs, a Kodiak salmon fisherman at the time of the oil spill, said this morning the decision was "disappointing" and said she had hoped the court would at least keep the damages above a billion dollars.

Alaska
Governor Sarah Palin said she was disappointed with the Supreme Court's decision "and she's sad for the people in the communities who had counted on the damages that had been awarded by the jury in the case. She says Alaskans had anticipated better treatment.

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She says
the state will have to assess if it can do anything further as people work through the disappointment with the decision.

Alaska
Senator Lisa Murkowski criticized the high court's slashing of the damage award:

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More than 32-thousand victims of the spill will divide the settlement. The original punitive damages amount of 5-billion dollars was set by an Anchorage jury in 1994, and cut in half by the 9th Circuit in 2006.

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