

Fishing Industry Reacts To Stevens Indictment

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Casey Kelly/KMXT

In Kodiak, home to the largest fishing fleet in the state, Senator Ted Stevens's indictment on seven counts of making false statements is drawing mixed reaction. Some say he is innocent and will be proven so. But others are openly wondering about his involvement with the state's seafood industry. KMXT's Casey Kelly has more.

The ongoing federal corruption probe in Alaska has included subpoenas of seafood companies, although none were mentioned in the indictment. Stephen Taufen of the Groundswell Fisheries Movement has been a vocal critic of Senator Stevens and some of those same companies.

1 (Taufen :11s "does involve VECO and others.")

Over the years, Taufen says Stevens has pushed legislation that directly benefited companies that hired the Senator's son, Ben, as a consultant and lobbyist. He also has questions about the Alaska Fisheries Marketing Board, an agency created by a Stevens's earmark to administer tens of millions of dollars in grants to salmon processors following an industry downturn. Ben Stevens is the former chairman of the board, which has several critics, including current Republican presidential hopeful John McCain. Taufen says all of this should still be under investigation by the justice department.

2 (Taufen :12s "we're just getting started there.")

But Al Burch, executive director of the Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association and a member of the marketing board, says the charges against Senator Stevens are baseless.

1 (Burch :14s "that are correct and needed.")

Burch says the trawlers association stands by its recent endorsement of the senator in his reelection bid. He says Stevens has done a lot for the seafood industry

in the state, and he hopes that he can continue to do so in the future.

2 (Burch :20s “…accomplished under his watch.”)

Melanie Sloan, a former federal prosecutor with the watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, says it’s still possible for the justice department to issue what’s called a superceding indictment that could include more charges against Stevens. But she says that it is unlikely. Ben Stevens still has not been charged with a crime.

In Kodiak, I’m Casey Kelly.

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