Commercial Fisherman Booted from BoF

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Yesterday, by the slimmest of margins, two-term Alaska Board of Fisheries member Vince Webster’s reappointment was rejected by a joint session of the Alaska House and Senate.

After attacks on him by the Kenai River Sportfishing Association stretching into last week, Webster was voted down 30-to-29. A commercial fisherman from King Salmon, Webster got the support of legislators from much of coastal Alaska, though failed to get enough support from the powerful Southcentral region.

Representative Bill Stoltze of Chugiak was just one of two legislators who rose to speak against reappointment. He criticized Webster for basically being too skilled at the process of fish board politics:

-- (Webster 1 36 sec “If Mr. Webster was a legislator … but not always right.”)

Anchorage Representative Les Gara, a Democrat, said he was voting against Webster to send a signal to the entire Board of Fish:

-- (Webster 2 15 sec “This is almost in part a message … on the high side of escapement.”)

Representative Beth Kerttula, Democrat minority leader, criticized Gara for wanting to punishing the entire board of fisheries by voting against Webster.

Republican Senator Peter Micciche, the former mayor of Soldotna, where KRSA is based, supported Webster’s reappointment:

-- (Webster 3 25 sec “It’s difficult this morning … good man named Vince Webster.”)

Webster’s support – like his opposition – crossed party lines. Democratic Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tompkins of Sitka supported reappointment, and decried what he called a troubling late-hour smear campaign by the sportsfishing lobby:

-- (Webster 4 45 sec “There’s been an avalanche … I also find troubling.”)

Representative Eric Feige (fy-ghee) of Chickaloon agreed, saying he did not appreciate the pressure the powerful sportsfishing lobby put on him and others.

-- (Webster 5 26 sec “I kinda felt I was being intimidated … to the Board of Fish.”)

After the vote, Governor Parnell said the Legislature’s rejection was "disappointing, discouraging and disheartening when bad information or politics prevent a qualified Alaskan from serving" the state.

Kodiak’s delegation of Representative Alan Austerman and Senator Gary Stevens voted to support Webster. The governor will now have to come up with another appointee, who will be seated, but remain unconfirmed until next year’s legislative session. ###