

Opinion

**WALLY
HICKEL**
COMMENT



Alaska has no reason to roll over for Outsiders

Any day now, the U.S. Supreme Court will make a decision that threatens our very democracy. "Citizens United versus Federal Elections Commission" seeks to allow financial contributions by corporations to candidates running for federal office. The current ban has been in place since 1907.

If the court lifts the ban, there will be an even greater flood of money into national politics and even more pressure on those we elect to federal office.

In 1910, Teddy Roosevelt spoke out forcefully on this issue. "Every special interest," he said, "is entitled to justice, but not one is entitled to a vote in Congress." He called on all Americans to rally to a "New Nationalism" and put the country first. We could use that same unity of purpose today.

"Laws should be passed," he continued, "to prohibit the use of corporate funds directly or indirectly for political purpose. Corporate expenditures ... have supplied one of the principal sources of corruption in our political affairs." Alaskans know exactly what he was talking about. In no state is this issue more important. Our election process of both federal and state officials is the key to our freedom and our success.

As an owner state, we welcome companies that specialize in responsible resource development. We benefit from their exper-

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tise and the jobs they provide.

But they don't own us. We, not they, own our state lands and resources. It is our country, not theirs. If we give that away, we will once again become a colony controlled by Outside interests.

Legislature who will do their bidding.

That's why I was shocked to learn that the deal struck last year between ExxonMobil and TransCanada, the company that received a license from the Palin administration to determine how to use our natural gas, cannot be seen by the public. The agreement is deemed "proprietary" and off-limits to the people.

At issue is whether we, as Alaskans, who own the resource-rich lands at Prudhoe Bay, are able to judge whether our resources are managed responsibly or if we are being ripped off. So much for the transparency promised by Governor Palin!

At stake are billions of revenue dollars that should go to our state treasury and billions more that should be dedicated to the Permanent Fund.

Meanwhile, the oil industry and the companies that depend on them are flocking to support candidates for governor and the Legislature who will do their bidding. Pressure is already being applied to current legislators to rewrite the 2007 oil and gas tax called ACES, one of Palin's solid achievements.

Unless we have a change of direction in the coming election, we will return to the closed-door negotiations that Gov. Frank Murkowski utilized to guarantee "fiscal certainty" (locked-in tax rates) for the world's largest corporations. The terms of the gas line contract he negotiated were so skewed to benefit the producers that the Legislature, to its credit, wouldn't even take a vote on it.

Fortunately, Bill Walker, the most knowledgeable person I know when it comes to the All-Alaska natural gas pipeline, has entered the race for governor. Both a builder and an attorney, Bill knows the oil and gas industry well, gets along with it, but is unafraid to stand up for Alaska.

His first priority will be to implement the law overwhelmingly passed by Alaska's voters in 2002 to build a state-owned gas line from Prudhoe to Valdez. That is the surest and fastest way to get Alaska's vast energy supplies to Alaskans and to sell the additional trillions of cubic feet of gas to the most lucrative markets in the world.

Each year, the oil flowing through the trans-Alaska oil pipeline is dropping by roughly 6 percent. When it comes to the gas line, if we allow the current charade of "study and delay" to continue, the state will soon be in deep trouble.

Fortunately, there is an alternative. We may not be able to influence the decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court, but whom we elect in Alaska is completely up to us.

Walter J. Hickel with Malcolm Roberts. Hickel served as governor of Alaska from 1966 to 1968 and from 1990 to 1994 and as U.S. secretary of the Interior from 1969 to 1970. Founder of the Institute of the North, he can be reached at wjhickel@gnl.net.