**An Open Letter to the Alaska Legislature from Kristie Babcock, Appointee to the Alaska Judicial Council**

I have watched the Alaska Judicial Council appointment process since 1990, including serving as Director of Boards and Commissions under Governors Hickel and Murkowski. I was responsible for reviewing dozens of applicants to the council. Never in these 32 years has there been the level of attention given geographic representation discussed now. I find this curious.

This council started in 1959, and has only 3 public seats (out of seven total seats).

There have been numerous times in history where certain regions don’t have a representative.   There has never been any problem identified with that.

I would like to give four examples.  During the council’s 62-year history there have been only 18 of 62 years that someone from rural western Alaska or rural northwest Alaska served. There have been 14 total years, including a 10-year period and a 4-year period, in which there was no public member from the greater Anchorage municipality. There was a total of 17 years in which there was no public member from Fairbanks or the Interior, including a 7-year stretch and a 10-year stretch.

There has never been a woman from the Kenai Peninsula appointed. Where was the outage then? Where was the outrage over this ‘lack of geographical representation’ over the past 62 years?  There wasn’t any.  Is the outrage being voiced now by a small but vocal number of attorneys and retired judges really about geography?

I’m really not sure why any lawyers or former judges feel they should weigh in on this public seat when the private Bar Association already control three seats directly, which are not even subject to legislative confirmation. Maybe there is some merit to pressing the Bar Association to have at least one of their three members come from rural Alaska, because since statehood they have never done so.  In fact, the Bar has never selected members from anywhere other than Fairbanks Anchorage, and Southeast.

Frankly, as a private citizen willing to volunteer and asked to do this job, I find these new arguments from a small but loud group of lawyers undignified and inappropriate. Doesn’t the Bar Association already appoint 3 attorneys to the council, not subject to legislative confirmation.  Do they really need to choose the public members too?

I would ask that my qualifications be judged on their own merit. I ask that my competence and character be judged, I ask that the respectful consideration I give to my customers, my neighbors, my colleagues and friends be shown to me.  I ask that the care I have for all of Alaska be judged for itself — that we not pit region against region, rural against urban, Alaskan against Alaskan. I have lived in Anchorage, Juneau, Wasilla, Kenai, Soldotna and the town of Ninilchik (pop. 836).  I love the small coastal community I call home (Soldotna pop. 4649, Kenai pop. 7742).  My children and immediate family members have gone to school at UA Southeast, Fairbanks and Anchorage. Alaska has my heart, all of Alaska has my heart.

To all sixty legislators representing our vast and wonderfully diverse state, I ask you to judge me and my qualifications alone, as you decide your vote for the Judicial Council.

*Kristie Babcock was appointed by Governor Michael Dunleavy to the Alaska Judicial Council effective March 1, 2021.  Kristie is a business owner in Kenai, holding securities, insurance, and mortgage originator licenses. She is also a mother, grandmother, community volunteer and 50-year Alaskan resident.*