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Cruise Ship Ballot Initiative Certified for Signature Gathering

After more than five months of review, the Murkowski administration has certified the Cruise Ship Ballot Initiative (CSBI) sponsored by Juneau-based Responsible Cruising in Alaska (RCA), the Campaign to Safeguard America's Waters (C-SAW – an Alaska-based project of the Earth Island Institute), Karen Jettmar (Equinox Wilderness Expeditions) and Bluewater Network (BN – a national organization that protects marine resources.) The goal of the CSBI is to level the economic and environmental playing fields between the cruise ships and other industrial dischargers of polluted wastes into Alaska waters. Supporters will now begin gathering the ~24,000 signatures needed by the start of the 2004 Legislative Session to put the measure onto the November 2004 ballot.

According to Joe Geldhof of RCA, a sponsor and co-drafter of the initiative, "It makes no sense for Alaskans to sit by and watch our budget deficit grow while one of the largest and fastest growing industries operating in Alaska makes billions of dollars of profits without paying their fair share of taxes." The CSBI will reinstate an apportioned income tax on the cruise industry at the same rate paid by other major industries, require cruise ships to pay the same percentage of gambling proceeds to Alaska paid by other gaming operators, and establish an excise tax based on berth capacity of \$46/passenger. The excise tax will be distributed among communities impacted by cruise ship activities to cover the costs of harbor and infrastructure improvements and other related expenditures that communities now pay from local taxes to host the fleet.

The CSBI will also plug the pollution leaks that remain in Alaska law in the wake of the special session action by the Alaska Legislature in 2001. According to C-SAW Director Gershon Cohen Ph.D., co-drafter of the CSBI, "...federal law requires every oil, mining, timber, and seafood processing operation to have a permit to discharge polluted wastewater. Foreign flagged cruise ships transport thousands of passengers and crew and generate millions of gallons of contaminated wastewater, yet they have hidden for over 20 years behind a Clean Water Act permit exemption intended for vessels with a handful of crewmen aboard. Cruise ship lobbyists have successfully extended that exemption from federal permitting to Alaska law – even though virtually every major cruise line has been convicted of multiple felony charges for dumping in the last decade." In addition to applying equivalent pollution control measures to cruise ships that apply to other dischargers, the CSBI will institute a \$4 passenger fee to support placing an independent licensed marine engineer aboard every ship in Alaska waters to observe wastewater treatment practices, inspect pollution control equipment and sample all ship discharges.

Co-sponsor Karen Jettmar, an eco-tour operator based in Anchorage, states; "Our tourism and fishing economies, and ability to harvest healthy foods depend upon everyone meeting minimal pollution standards. The foreign-based cruise ship industry violates Alaska pollution laws, owns the hotels and bus lines used by their passengers, and scratches the backs of tour operators that give a big kickback on their ticket sales. This is wrong – and we all know they can afford to do it right."

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