

Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority: warrant for execution?

Lots of readers, having read last week's story on the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA) [see [Bridge bill plows out of Finance, muddy road ahead](#), *ALASKA BUDGET REPORT*, April 5, 2013] have been wondering about the salaries of the authority's employees. We invite them to see Table 2, and wonder no more.

Employees with Annual Salaries Over \$72,000 Knik Arm Bridge & Toll Authority

Job title	Employee	Salary
Chief Financial Officer	Kevin Hemenway	\$152,628
Executive Director	Andrew Niemiec	\$152,208
Deputy Exec Director	Judy Dougherty	\$131,544
Project Manager	Shannon McCarthy	\$80,220
Liaison Officer	Michael Rovito	\$75,060

Table 2

KABATA started this session asking for

- An increase of its bonding authority from \$500 million to \$600 million,
- An expansive exemption from state and local taxes, and

- A state pledge to cover payments to a private builder-operator if events don't unfold as KABATA plans.

Project opponents claimed KABATA was seeking a "blank check" on the state treasury. Nevertheless – given the backing of Gov. Sean Parnell and influential Mat-Su legislators – the happy few at KABATA thought their bill, HB 23, or companion SB 13, would be approved. What looks to be approved now is a warrant for the authority's execution.

A Legislative Audit Division analysis released on Saturday said KABATA's projections of toll revenue were "unreasonably optimistic." The Audit Division's report eroded legislative confidence the KABATA organization. Late Thursday evening the House Rules Committee passed and sent to the House floor a committee substitute abolishing KABATA and transferring its functions and employees to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC). Early Friday morning, the bill passed the House by a vote of 24-15. The agency could still survive, but its plans to go to bid on the bridge project later this year appear fully derailed.

reported that in recent days they had received communications critical of Webster from sportfishing interests.

"It is disappointing, discouraging and disheartening when bad information or politics prevent a qualified Alaskan from serving our state," Parnell said in a statement Monday afternoon. "I appreciate Vince's willingness to serve these past six years."

The Kenai River Sportfishing Association last week issued a call to action from their executive director, Ricky Gease, leveling several accusations against Webster, including that he "participated in precariously and unnecessarily lowering the escapement goal of Kenai River king salmon during a time of record low abundance and uncertain future production."

A number of legislators, both Republicans and Democrats, pointed out that the decision in question was reached by a 7-0 vote of the board, and argued that Webster was being unfairly singled out for a decision of the full board.