

# Turning Down the Heat: Negotiating Wildfire Prevention and Recovery Confidential Information for Staffer for Representative Alex Alvarez

## Character Sheet

Democrat Professional Staffer for House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member, Rep. Alex Alvarez (D-Washgon-12<sup>th</sup>).

### Rep. Alex Alvarez (D-WN-12th)

You work for Representative Alvarez, Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee. At 40 years old, Alvarez is relatively young compared to fellow members in the House. Nevertheless, Alvarez has been a loud and influential voice among House Democrats since day one, rising to become Ranking Member of the powerful House Ag Committee only recently.

Representative Alvarez was also recently awarded the Environmental Pact's 2017 Champion of the Year Award, in recognition of Alvarez's strong voting record on environmental and endangered species protections. Not surprisingly, Rep. Alvarez did not vote for the House-amended *Wildfire Prevention & Recovery Act* (WPRA) in committee or on the House floor. Your boss recognizes a need for fixing the wildfire budget and other related issues, but the House amendments prohibited him from supporting the package. Instead, he gave a floor speech opposing the "partisan amendments" that were added to the Senate bill.

### Washgon 12th

Washgon is situated along the northern border of the Western coastline. The state is home to millions of square miles of national forests. While no stranger to the occasional wildfire, the state's forests are generally considered geographically insulated from conditions conducive to far more dangerous wildfires. Residents of the 12<sup>th</sup> district regularly enjoy outdoor activities, they appreciate the high quality of air and water available, and they recognize the bounty of the region's ecosystem.

*This simulation was written by Kessely Hong, Lecturer in Public Policy, John Fogarty, Monica Giannone, and Emily Schlichting at the Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University (HKS) as part of the Harvard Kennedy School's "Teaching Legislative Negotiation Project." These materials were developed with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. HKS simulations are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. They are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.*

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Residents of the 12<sup>th</sup> are proud of their home, and of their Representative's work on sustainability and environmental protection.

## Your Background

You are new to the House Agriculture Committee. Since starting in this role, you have taken your boss' ability to incorporate environmentally-friendly policies into agriculture legislation to the next level. This has garnered significant acclaim among the environmental community so far. You are proud to have been able to push other Democrats – who sometimes cave on sustainability – to hold their ground more strongly.

Your boss' re-election is in 6 months, and there will be pressure from all sides entering the conference negotiation. Alvarez felt that the original Senate bill was only "marginally OK" due to some environmental protection provisions being stripped out during the Senate Ag committee negotiations. However, after passing the Senate on a strongly bipartisan basis, your boss would ideally support a clean Senate Bill without the House amendments. While his constituents back home were proud of Alvarez's speech on the floor of the House, it is unknown what the critical reaction will be if your boss fails to prevent this "egregious" bill from being passed. Your boss would likely face blowback if the bill that comes out of Conference Committee doesn't remove any House Amendments and/or doesn't include any additional environmental protections.

## Supplemental Background Emails

**To:** You (Alvarez's Office, House Ag)  
**CC:** Winsted, Sasha (Alvarez's Office, House Ag)  
**From:** Xin, Jamie (Alvarez's Office, House Ag)  
**Date:** May 25<sup>th</sup>  
**Subject:** WPRA Conference

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Rep. Alvarez has made it clear that we need to push back against all House amendments to the Senate bill. These provisions pose potential unnecessary harm to national forests, endangered species, and residents. The boss is still displeased with the Chair for pushing through the addition of so many of these amendments. There was room to strengthen the bill (through forest thinning, etc.) when it came to the House but instead we ended up with this.

- **Amendment 1:** Republicans will argue that rural communities are cut off from critical infrastructure and resources and that this amendment reduces those barriers and helps the rural populations. While this is an issue we also care about, introducing new roads through protected and fragile environments is not the solution. Removing rules is a very slippery slope to a giant uptick in illegal logging and timber interests. If there is a problem, we need a very narrow carefully crafted express solution.
- **Amendment 2:** This amendment is completely counter to what the boss has long been fighting for. As you may know, Alvarez' predecessor built a legacy by protecting endangered species and

the environment, and members of Washgon expect Alvarez to uphold that legacy. What are the benefits of logging companies getting approval a couple days faster at the expense of driving some species into extinction?

- **Amendment 3:** We should be horrified to be associated with a congress that would pass something that changes funding priorities within the Secure Rural Schools program and gives it to the timber industry. We're a rural district and we too count on programs like this to offset declining timber revenues on our federal land! Republicans may try to convince us that this shift is still *mostly* going to watershed protection, infrastructure investment, etc. Try to nail them down on numbers of what percentage of \$ is being redirected to "reducing fires," "improving water supplies," or "stewardship projects," and how much \$ is going to timber production-related efforts.

Keep in mind, it might also be better to threaten to walk away than to support a bill that so clearly, and gravely, hurts the environment and the boss' reputation. Passing the Senate version would be fine – but better if you can include additional environmental protections or re-negotiate terms around forest thinning (I think we spoke to someone in Rep. Smith's office about that – cc'ing Sasha to see if she remembers). We definitely cannot allow a bill that includes all 3 terrible House provisions as-is to come out of this conference. I think it's important that, even if we can't ultimately support the bill, we change a lot of this toxic language.

The boss recognizes the need for wildfire modernization/budget increases and is sympathetic to states battling the increasing number of wildfires across the country. While Danvers will desperately need this to pass, Danvers is also likely trying to avoid the appearance of caving-in to House Republicans and the House Speaker. You should use this opportunity to push Danvers for harder environmental protections, stripping out House amendments, and getting "global warming" into final bill text.

#### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Rep. Alvarez will NOT negotiate on Amdt1 or accept this. We have enough problems with illegal logging in the district and increasing road access will only exacerbate it. There is also low trust that this won't devolve into a legal logging free-for-all in the future.
- We could stomach potential negotiations on Amdt2, if it can be demonstrated that no significant harm will be done to wildlife, and the potential scope of areas impacted is narrowed.
- We could stomach potential negotiations on Amdt3, if funding for rural schools itself is not decreased, and the funds that are redirected go largely towards reducing fire risks or improving water supplies.
- OUR BEST OUTCOME = strip House amendments and increase/insert language around environmental protections.

Keep me posted on how things are going and let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,

Jamie Xin, Minority Staff Director, House Agriculture Committee  
Office of Congressman Alex Alvarez (D-WN-12<sup>th</sup>)

**To:** You (Alvarez's Office, House Ag)

**From:** Winsted, Sasha (Alvarez's Office, House Ag)

**Date:** May 25<sup>th</sup>

**Subject:** RE: WPRA Conference

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Hey –

Quickly – I did talk to someone in Smith's office about forest thinning and they seemed open to it as a potential bipartisan win. No idea if there's still interest there since they added so much other stuff in the House version.

FYI: Forest Thinning is the process where you remove certain trees in order to increase the health of the overall forest. In this case, removal of trees and thinning of the forest has been found to decrease the risk of different environmental stressors – including wildfire. It's found support among members of both parties and even between environmental groups and loggers in certain scenarios.

Hope this helps.

Sasha

Sasha Winsted  
Minority Staff Assistant  
House Agriculture Committee  
Office of Congressman Alex Alvarez (D-WN-12<sup>th</sup>)

**To:** You (Alvarez's Office, House Ag)

**From:** josie\_kendall@enviropact.org (The Environment Pact)

**Date:** May 21<sup>st</sup>

**Subject:** Sierra Club Mtg Follow-Up

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Hey!

Please tell Rep. Alvarez thank you for meeting with us on such short notice, again. We continue to look forward to working with the Chair on our mutual goals of creating greater protections of our communities and environment through innovation and legislation.

To follow-up on our meeting yesterday regarding the WPRA conference negotiation, we strongly oppose all three House amendments as passed. Specifically, we see a lot of problems with Amdt1 and Amdt3, which affect funding and precedent. We are still currently examining the extent of Amdt2's less-restrictive effect on more recently implemented regulation.

I've attached a photo we wanted to share from earlier this year with the Congressman and staff receiving the Environment Pact 2017 Champion of the Year Award!

We hope to support your boss in the future! And we will be scoring votes on WPRA in both House and Senate! Good work and good luck!

Best Regards,

Josie

Josie Kendall  
Director, Federal Affairs  
The Environment Pact

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