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Progressive Alaska

Spreading the word about the growing presence of progressive Alaskans and their powerful ideas on the web

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2008

The Final Days



This coming Wednesday, at 10:00 a.m. EST, the U.S. Supreme Court will change the lives of over 30,000 Alaskans hurt by Exxon's negligence in failing to monitor the job performance of a relapsed alcoholic on a par with the

maritime industry at that time.

In 1988, Exxon had in place an Employee Assistance Program, or EAP, designed similarly to that of Crowley Maritime's. Crowley's was and is regarded as the gold standard of the industry. Essentially, any employee who had an identified substance abuse problem was expected to comply to strict abstinence rules at all times. To assure compliance, Crowley - and Exxon, until 1988 - could send an employee of their EAP, trained as a substance abuse counselor, to any port on the planet, at any time to see "how the subject employee is doing."

Exxon ended that program in 1988. Between the termination of the comprehensive EAP and skipper Joe Hazelwood's relapse which led to the *Exxon Valdez* catastrophe, Hazelwood knew he would only be monitored when his ship tied up at Alameda or Long Beach, California. This was because Exxon preferred saving a few hundred thousand dollars to having a program that worked. It was one of the dumbest corporate decisions in recent history.

I could have been a plaintiff in this class-action suit, but chose not to be. One of my rules is that *a day spent worrying about lawyers is a day erased from the book of life*. When the class-action suit began, there were over 36,000 plaintiffs. Since then around 6,000 have died, some taking their own lives. Erased from the book of life.

Iraq War Death Counter



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Last night, in spite of my efforts last week on behalf of friends who are plaintiffs in the suit, the Anchorage Symphony Orchestra's Bob Arms - a longtime friend of mine too - asked about 2,000 people to applaud Exxon for contributing \$10,000 toward the event's production costs. Most applauded. Some, like my wife and a few friends, kept their hands folded across their laps. I boomed, probably alone.

I don't blame the Anchorage Symphony for how or why this went down so close to the Supreme Court hearing. But people need to realize how cheaply Exxon has bought a piece of the ensemble's soul over the years since the spill. In those 19 years, Exxon has contributed \$190,000 toward concerts, perhaps more. Each DAY since the *Exxon Valdez* tragedy, the plaintiffs have lost \$360,490.

At the time of the spill, people were concerned about the incredible losses in the oil stream to wildlife and fish. Millions of creatures died. But in the generation since, those of us who live or have lived in the effected zone have seen the human costs mount, one casualty or death at a time.

Update - 4:45 p.m. Sunday: Steve Aufrecht at *What Do I Know?* [writes from Thailand about my letter](#) to the ASO and their reaction. My favorite thought from Steve's essay:

Now Exxon's 2007 [after tax profits](#) were about \$40 Billion. Let's say they kicked in \$40,000 (I'm guessing it might not be that much, but it's easier to calculate. Someone making \$100,000 before taxes, if I calculated this right, would have to donate 10 cents to donate an equivalent percent of their income. [We're working with a lot of zeros here and it's late, so someone check the math.]

Do we applaud those who worked hard last year and gave ten cents to the Orchestra, the same percentage of his net profit that Exxon gave?

image by Bob Martinson of the shame totem pole created by Mike Webber for Bob Henrichs

Posted by Philip Munger at [10:54 AM](#)

3 comments:

Todd P. said...

Punitive damages are quasi-criminal punishment for **intentional** wrong doing. Exxon didn't deliberately hit Bligh Reef.

Shame on you for booing Exxon's donation.

February 24, 2008 11:39 PM

[Philip Munger](#) said...

Exxon deliberately ended an employee assistance program designed to both protect the company's interest when

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