ENVIR 450B: Alaska Comes of Age
Radio spot assignment for Tongass case study

Following our Tongass stakeholder discussion in class on May 26, each stakeholder (pair of students) will create a proposed solution to the Tongass conflict. These proposed solutions must be designed with two components in mind:

1. The solution should primarily serve to **meet the needs and goals of the stakeholder that** you have been assigned to represent.

2. The solution should ideally be **politically viable** – that is, it should be a solution that the other stakeholders **might** be willing to accept. However, this requirement is **secondary** to the first.

You will present your proposal in two forms – in a 30-60 second **radio spot** and in a 1-2 page **press release**. This document describes the radio spot assignment.

Radio advertisements (or “spots”) have existed since the 1920s – that’s almost 100 years of promoting things on the radio. Most radio spots are for products and businesses, but a reasonable proportion of them are for political causes (especially during election season). The fact that public support for government action on a controversial issue can sometimes be garnered via advertisements (including print, radio, and television) is a basic principal of the way our democracy currently functions.

In creating the radio spot for your proposed Tongass solution, you will have several tasks to accomplish in 60 seconds or less. These include:

- **Choose your audience** – It’s up to you to decide what kind of radio station your spot is designed for, and you’ll share this information with the class when you present your spot on June 8th. Is your spot designed to air on NPR? During a football game on KJR Sports Radio? On KEXP? On The End?

- **Provide context** – imagine someone driving in their car and all of a sudden your spot comes on the radio. How can you draw the listener in quickly? How can you pique the listener’s interest? How will the listener know right away what the spot is about? (This last point is somewhat optional – some ads are effective because the listener **doesn’t know** what they’re about until the end. But these kinds of ads are less common.)

- **Present your solution** – the Tongass is a complex issue, and you’ll have to describe the key details of your proposal quickly.

- **Sell your solution** – in addition to telling your listeners what you want to do to solve the Tongass issue, you want to convince your listeners that they should support this proposal. Maybe you’ll even encourage your listeners to take some kind of action.

- **Satisfy campaign finance laws** – in the real world, there are various laws that govern when and how an advertiser must disclose their identity or source of funding. In this assignment, you are required to choose an entity from within your
stakeholder group and disclose somewhere in your spot the entity that made the spot. “This message was brought to you by XYZ,” for example. The exact wording is up to you, and you can put this disclosure anywhere in the spot – beginning, middle, end, wherever.

As you’ll quickly realize, the hardest part about the radio spot will be writing the script. I encourage you to spend lots of time writing and editing your script (and testing out how long it takes to read aloud) before you start to record anything.

In addition to meeting the goals detailed above, there are some more technical requirements of this assignment. These are:

1. The radio spot must have some kind of soundtrack – a musical background. If you listen to radio spots or watch television ads, you’ll notice that there is always music. Otherwise it’s boring. Your soundtrack can be anything you want, and you don’t have to worry about copyright laws. Because this is a project for a college course, you can use any copyrighted music in your radio spot and it’s protected by the “fair use” exemption to copyright law.

2. During the radio spot, the voices of both students must each be audible at some point. You don’t both have to speak at once, but at least some portion of the narration or script must be spoken by each student.

3. The radio spot must be between 30 and 60 seconds in length.

4. The actual file that you turn in should be an mp3 file, the most common file format for consumer audio.

5. The radio spot shouldn’t be boring. Really. It should make us laugh, or grimace, or be shocked, or something.

I encourage you to be innovative with these radio spots and to have fun. All I’m going to grade on are the simple details listed above. I’m not going to grade on audio quality or strength of argument or evidence. In the paper assignments for this class, I insist on a clear argument and lots of evidence. In the radio spots, by contrast, you’re trying to sway public opinion. Sometimes clear arguments and lots of evidence work in this regard, but not always. So you’re not as restricted, and you don’t have to worry about “citations” and “proof.” Actually, many forms of political advertisement stretch the truth pretty thinly. So even though I don’t want you to just make stuff up, you’re welcome to choose your facts selectively.

Finally, a word about format. There are lots of different formats for radio spots – there can be a single narrator over a soundtrack (the simplest), or there can be two voices engaged in a conversation, or there can be a bunch of sound effects (chainsaw, anyone?). You really have no limits here, so try to come up with something catchy.

As always, let me know if you have questions, problems, frustrations, or concerns. Especially with regard to the audio production side of things – I’m happy to help you with this. I recognize that for most of you, this will be your first experience creating audio content.