



Legislators side with Cissna in airport screening incident

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Legislators side with Cissna in airport screening incident
By Pat Forgey | JUNEAU EMPIRE

As Rep. Sharon Cissna travels back to Alaska on a state ferry instead of an airplane, Alaska's elected officials are speaking out on her behalf.

"I feel really proud of Sharon, I think she stood up for thousands of Americans," said Rep. Beth Kerttula, D-Juneau. Kerttula is leader of the House Democratic Caucus of which Cissna, an Anchorage Democrat, is a member.

Cissna Sunday was barred from her flight back to Alaska after she refused to undergo a pat-down body search following a body scan.

Cissna's chief of staff, Michelle Scannell, issued a press release explaining the encounter but did not say what Cissna's objection to the search was.

Scannell's statement said Cissna was a breast cancer survivor and "a well-known champion for the rights of sexual assault survivors."

Kerttula called Cissna "a remarkable woman," and said the fact that she'd undergone a mastectomy seemed to have triggered the demand for a more intrusive search from the Transportation Security Administration staff at the Seattle airport.

Rep. Alan Dick, R-Stony River, took to the House floor to honor Cissna for her stand.

The Anchorage representative, he said "chose to maintain her honor and dignity," by not going through the search, despite the inconvenience and discomfort of the longer trip back to Alaska.

Legislators cheered Dick's comments by pounding on their desks, as he said he hoped others would do the same thing.

"My hope is that every one of us would take an equal stand whenever we feel that government is being invasive and intrusive," he said.

Gov. Sean Parnell was asked about the incident at a press conference Tuesday.

"I'm incredibly sorry it happened to her," he said.

Parnell said he'd be happy to meet with Cissna when she returns to Juneau.

Rep. Berta Gardner, a fellow Anchorage Democrat, said many other travelers have felt the same frustration as did Cissna.

"We've all fantasized about doing the same thing," she said.

Cissna is expected to return to Juneau on Thursday morning aboard the ferry Matanuska.

- Contact reporter Pat Forgey at 523-2250 or patrick.forgey@juneauempire.com.

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