

Peters promotes Great Lakes, unmanned aircraft

May 3, 2016

Steve Schulwitz - News Staff Writer , Alpena News

ALPENA - Monday afternoon students at Alpena Community College got a brief glimpse of an unmanned aircraft flying just below the tree line on campus. What they probably didn't realize is who the pilot was - Sen. Gary Peters.

The college was one of several stops in Northeast Michigan where Peters was taken on tours in part promoting his agenda of helping to protect and preserve the Great Lakes and ease burdensome restrictions on colleges who have unmanned aircraft programs.

Peters co-sponsored a bill, which has passed the Senate, that would reduce the red tape a school would face in order to have students pilot drones for educational purposes. He said Michigan and Alpena are on the cutting edge in the blossoming industry and cutting through red tape is important because jobs in this new sector will be in demand in the not-too-distant future. Peters said regulation placed on colleges are the same as on businesses and he believes the rules should be a little more lenient.

"If you're a private individual you don't have any of the regulations commercial users have," Peters said. "This will seek to find some middle ground. We're confident the colleges will put in the type of policies that will protect their students and the airspace, but still allow opportunity to operate them in an instructional format."

The new law is included as an amendment to a larger Federal Aviation Administration bill. Peters said he expects little opposition to the amendment because it is bi-partisan, but admits there may have to be some give and take on the overall package in the House of Representatives.

Peters second stop was at the Hammond Bay Biological Station. He introduced the Great Lakes Fishery Research Authorization Act, which is also a bi-partisan bill that if passed would help ensure financial support for Great Lakes fisheries and research done to it.

"We want to make sure there is a dedicated funding stream for that type of research, which really doesn't exist in the Great Lakes at the level it does for salt water," Peters said. "We think it is important that research here continues and I have put in language that would make sure funding be put permanently into the budget."

In Michigan there has been no shortage of debate on what should be done about Enbridge's Line 5, which transports light crude oil through the Straits of Mackinac. Peters sits on the Commerce Committee, which has jurisdiction over pipeline safety and he was involved in the Safe Pipes Act that strengthened safeguards for pipelines. He said he will continue to lead the effort to help protect the Great Lakes, and all of the nation's natural resources, from the damage an oil spill can cause. Peters made his thoughts on what needs to be done with Line 5 crystal clear.

"It would be absolutely catastrophic. There is no doubt about it," Peters said. "We need to have an alternative to Line 5, so I would like to see it disappear. I'm working on this process so we are sure we are doing it in a way that works in a thoughtful way, but eventually I think Line 5 should go away."

Steve Schulwitz can be reached via email at ssschulwitz@thealpenanews.com or by phone at 358-5689. Follow Steve on Twitter [ss_alpenanews](https://twitter.com/ss_alpenanews). Read his blog, Upon Further Review ... at www.thealpenanews.com.

- See more at: <http://www.thealpenanews.com/page/content.detail/id/554303/Peters-promotes-Great-Lakes--unmanned-aircraft.html#sthash.rLqkvBJj.oEbXqXgf.dpuf>