

**From:** [Steve Heckman](#)  
**To:** [Senate Finance Committee](#)  
**Subject:** Alaska State Trooper Program  
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To The Finance Committee and The Finance Committee Chair

My name is Stephen J. Heckman. I live at 2560 Allen Adale Road in Fairbanks. I retired from the Alaska State Troopers in 1996.

For approximately three years beginning in 1993 I was AST's Fairbanks Rural Unit supervisor. In that position I exercised considerable operational control of two of the detachment's aircraft, a fixed wing and a helicopter. Both aircraft were used extensively to serve rural communities in Alaska's interior as well as Fairbanks proper. During my career it became apparent that there were many missions only the state helicopter could accomplish.

At Manly Hot Springs mass murderer Mike Silka was located and stopped by Troopers utilizing both of the department's helicopters, however not before Trooper Troy Duncan was shot and killed exchanging gunfire while he rode in one of those aircraft.

The state's helicopters have been routinely utilized for search and rescue missions under conditions that would have grounded a fixed wing aircraft. A helicopter can obviously access sites that a fixed wing cannot. It can hover and fly low and slow to search wooded areas looking for missing persons as well as suspects.

Utilizing a state helicopter I helped locate an aircraft crash site on a mountain side in the Alaska Range and was landed at that location to investigate. I have recovered a body from a Brook's Range mountain crater lake aircraft crash site. The only way there was in a helicopter flown by a trooper pilot accustomed to that type of mission.

If not being maintained, the department's helicopters are always available for quick response. An emergency search for a missing child in a Fairbanks wooded neighborhood, hold up suspects fleeing on foot or by roadway, or a search and rescue attempt by rushing trooper divers to The Chena Lakes Project for a drown teenager.

Lastly I remember a time when the helicopter was not available because the pilot was flying a fixed wing aircraft on another mission. I found myself isolated and alone in foot pursuit of a fleeing burglar south of Fairbanks in knee deep snow for four hours. It was a dangerous situation. Had the helicopter been available that day, it would have been very much a non event.

I thank you for taking the time to read this. I wish you well in your deliberations at this critical time. I hope it will be possible for you take into consideration the observations I've made concerning AST's helicopter program.

Sincerely,  
Stephen J. Heckman (AST retired)