



Senator Scott Jiu Wo Kawasaki

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Supporting Data Sources — Senate Joint Resolution 30

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ALASKA ECONOMIC **TRENDS** NOVEMBER 2025



Fishing jobs down for a 5th year

ALSO INSIDE Veterans in Alaska

FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Partnering to help villages rebuild after catastrophic flood

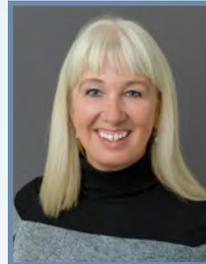
By Catherine Muñoz, Commissioner

In times of crisis, it is inspiring how Alaskans come together to help friends and neighbors. State and local agencies, the U.S. Army National Guard, tribal entities, the University of Alaska, and community organizations are coordinating efforts to help residents of the storm-ravaged Yukon Kuskokwim region. Financial donations continue to be accepted through the [Red Cross for Western Alaska](#) to assist with meals, congregate care, and hotel placement, and to provide individual financial assistance.

Governor Dunleavy has directed state agencies to assist impacted communities and remove any barriers to a rapid response. Boardwalks and roadways are being rebuilt, schools are housing relief workers, and wastewater and oil cleanup are in progress. Impacted K-12 students have enrolled at schools at Bethel, Anchorage, and other communities. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is authorizing emergency hunting to allow communities to rebuild lost food stores.

The federal disaster declaration allows greater flexibility in the rebuilding phases and unlocks a range of federal support for community needs, including workforce training and employment.

The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development is submitting two federal applications for disaster assistance under the federal Dislocated Worker program. These funds would support disaster relief, humanitarian support services, and



training for impacted residents.

To ensure access to training, we are collaborating with Alaska's regional training providers, including Yuut Elitnaurviat Training Center in Bethel, on short-term skilled trades trainings.

Alaska Works Partnership is offering carpentry training specifically for the people of the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta region that will focus on wood framing, floors, walls, windows, doors, and roofing. Training is free and will begin on November 17 in Anchorage. For more information, call (907) 569-4711. You can apply at www.alaskaworks.org or in person at 161 Klewin Street in Anchorage.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to visit one of the affected communities, Kipnuk, and Yuut Elitnaurviat. My pilot on the flight to Kipnuk was a young man who had been trained at Yuut, one of our longtime regional training partners.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of the Yukon Kuskokwim region and the communities of Kipnuk, Kwigillingok, and Nightmute as we work together to navigate enormous loss and rebuild.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Muñoz".

Contact Commissioner Catherine Muñoz at (907) 465-2700 or commissioner.labor@alaska.gov.



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ON THE COVER:

Fishing boats docked in Seward,
photo by Flickr user [Matteo X](#)

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ALASKA
DEPARTMENT of LABOR
and WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT

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Trends is a nonpartisan, data-driven magazine that
covers a variety of economic topics in Alaska.

ON THIS SPREAD: The background image for 2025 is a panorama of snowy tundra at Selawik National Wildlife Refuge.
Photo by Lisa Hupp, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

If you have questions or comments, contact the authors listed at the end of each article or the editor at sara.whitney@alaska.gov or (907) 465-6561. This material is public information, and with appropriate credit it may be reproduced without permission. To sign up for a free electronic subscription, read past issues, or purchase a print subscription, visit labor.alaska.gov/trends.

Fishing jobs down for a 5th year

7.6 percent loss in 2024 pushes total count to record low

By JOSHUA WARREN

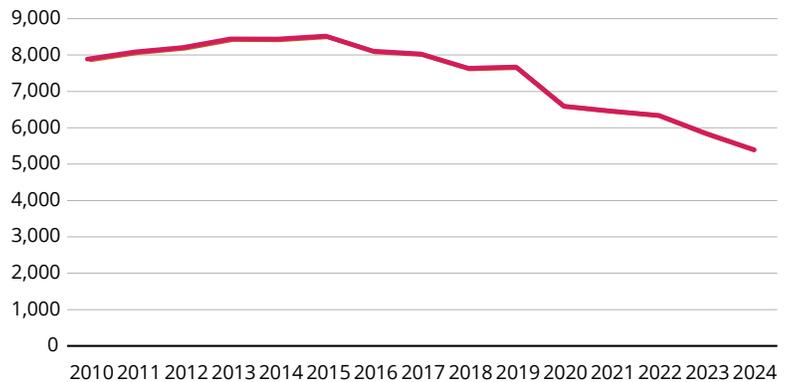
Alaska lost seafood harvesting jobs for a fifth straight year in 2024, bringing the industry to its lowest job count since data collection began in 2001.

The loss of 443 jobs, a 7.6 percent drop, was similar to the previous year's -7.8 percent.

November and December showed strong employment growth, but other than a minor gain in September, all other months were lower in 2024.

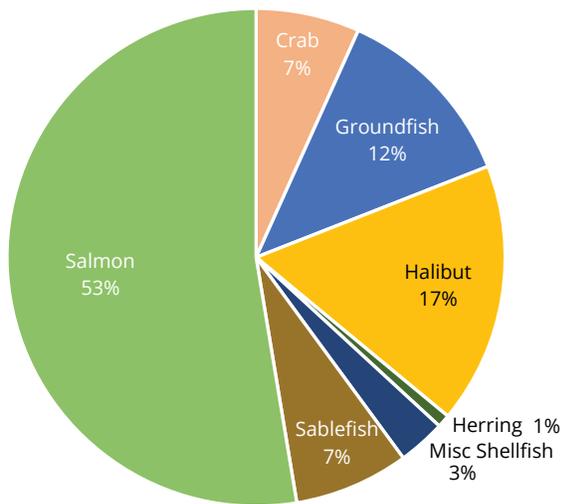
The late-year growth came across several species' harvests and regions, suggesting some recovery is possible in 2025, but those numbers won't be available until next year.

Alaska fishing employment continues to decline



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Work-intensive salmon harvesting represents majority of jobs, 2024



Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, and National Marine Fisheries Service

The decade loss and what's dragging on the industry

Seafood harvesting has lost more than a third of its total jobs in a decade, with fishing employment down every year of the last 10 except for 2019. The summer peak has fallen about 30 percent, from 24,600 jobs in July 2014 to 17,400 in July 2024.

The biggest declines came during the pandemic, but most other Alaska industries, including seasonal ones, have bounced back. Seafood harvesting has continued to struggle, facing several substantial obstacles.

Rising costs are one factor, and while high startup costs have likely deterred some new entrants, even current permit holders are fishing less as it becomes less profitable. The number of permit holders fishing has steadily declined since 2019, compounding job losses when related crew aren't needed.

The fleet has also gotten older over a decade, with permit holders' average age rising by 3.6 years to 53.4.

This article doesn't capture the U.S. tariffs that began in mid-2025, but the U.S. had already been losing global fisheries market share for several years. Countries such as Russia, which have lower costs,

have flooded the international market with competitively priced products. Seafood prices have been on a three-year slide, especially for high-value catches such as chinook salmon.

International trade is still shifting; for example, China is now purchasing more fish from Vietnam than from the United States. How the tariffs will affect these relationships isn't clear, but they will likely put additional pressure on prices as U.S. harvesters compete with countries that have more favorable trade deals.

On top of lower prices for their catches and rising costs, Alaska seafood harvesters continue to grapple with unpredictable runs, the volatility of climate change, seafood processing plant closures and sales, and disrupted fisheries.

Stocks of some species, such as sablefish, have boomed in recent years, but prices were too low to make large harvests worth the costs. Similarly, changing market demands have disrupted the economics of herring fisheries.

Some fisheries have closed earlier than usual in recent years or entirely, a list that varies from year to year. For example, the Bering Sea crab fisheries closed in 2022 and 2023 after stocks crashed 90 percent, then reopened in 2024 but with greatly reduced catch limits.

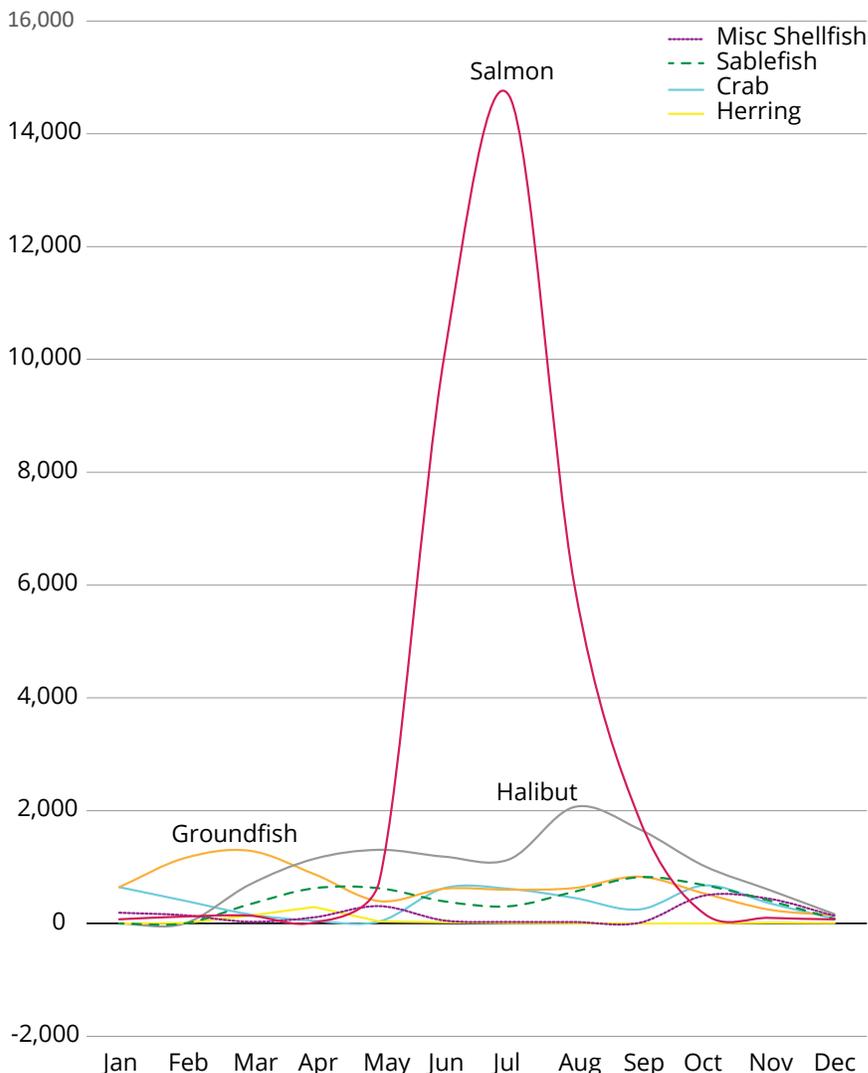
Another example is Yukon Delta salmon, which bottomed out this decade, eliminating those jobs. The fish still have not returned in sufficient numbers, even for subsistence fishing.

Fishing jobs by species harvested

Salmon 2nd for value, at a new low for jobs

Salmon harvesting had long been Alaska's

How fishing jobs are spread over the year, 2024



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

highest-value catch, but dramatically lower harvests in recent years pulled its value down to second place in 2023, where it remained in 2024.

Salmon fishing continues to drive the industry, however. It's so labor-intensive compared to other harvests that it represents more than half of fishing jobs. As a result, losses in salmon harvesting often drive the statewide losses, especially when declines are as sharp as they've been recently.

Like many of Alaska's fisheries, salmon harvesting hit a new employment low in 2024, at 2,837 total jobs — a decline of over 8 percent from 2023. The loss from 2022-2023 was even more dramatic at almost 11 percent.

Salmon harvesting employment has been dwindling for years, rising in only two of the last 10. Over the last decade, the total job count dropped 40 percent, and the monthly peak in July fell by 31 percent (from more than 21,000 jobs to under 15,000).

November and December job counts ticked up in 2024, suggesting gains for salmon in the early months of 2025 are likely. However, the winter salmon catches are typically in smaller fisheries than the harvests that generate the massive summer peaks.

Sablefish harvesting was down 9.3 percent

Sablefish, or black cod, followed the statewide downward trend, with employment falling 9.3 percent. That loss of 41 jobs brought the total to a new low.

Decreases came mostly in the summer, with June employment down by almost a third. Late-year gains eased that loss somewhat.

While sablefish is a groundfish, it's discussed separately from other groundfish because its workforce is so large relative to the other groundfish harvests.

Ongoing losses in other groundfish

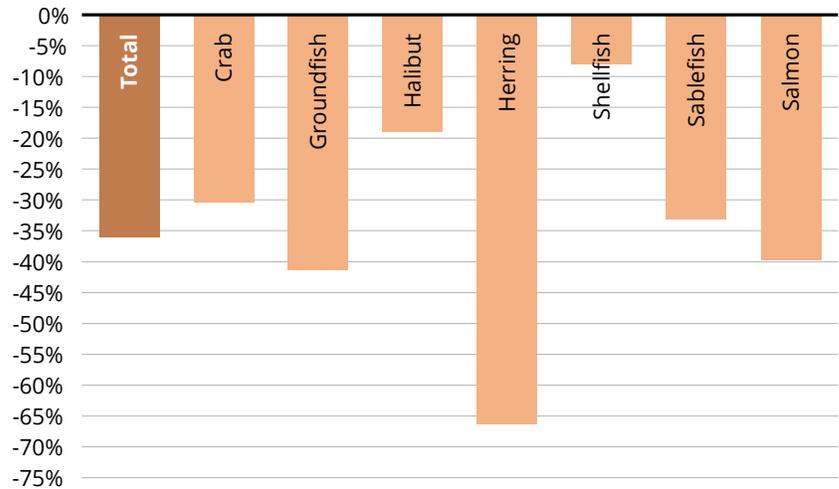
Groundfish makes up the majority of harvested poundage in Alaska, at around 5 billion in 2024, even with sablefish excluded. The "other groundfish" category is mainly pollock.

Groundfish harvesting dropped to a record low of 664 jobs in 2024, a loss of 11 percent from the previous year. The March peak was down by almost 300 jobs.

This category also showed end-of-the-year employment growth, with more groundfish harvesters working late in the year than ever. But even with those increases, aside from a small exception in 2022, groundfish harvesting has lost jobs every year since 2016. The decade's loss exceeded 41 percent.

Employment declines were due in part to large harvesters becoming more efficient, needing fewer jobs to bring in the same catch.

Decade change in harvesting jobs by species



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Monthly peak for herring harvesters was half of what it was in April 2022

Herring harvests represent the smallest number of jobs. Most come in April, with minor activity the rest of the year. The April 2024 count was the lowest on record at just 294 jobs, down from more than 600 in April 2022.

With the peak month down so much, the yearly average also hit a low of 45 jobs, which was almost 22 percent lower than the previous year.

Herring harvesting has seen its ups and downs, with some high years during and after the pandemic. In general, though, the fishery has trended downward, generating 66 percent fewer jobs in 2024 than it did 10 years earlier.

Most herring is harvested in Southeast, and Southeast herring permits declined the most in 2024.

Halibut harvesting rose in the winter, but yearly job count began to decrease

Halibut was one of just two fisheries — herring being the other — to spring back from pandemic job lows quickly and approach normal levels in 2022.

Also like herring, halibut harvesting has begun to slide. Halibut fishing employment was 4.7 percent lower in 2024, a loss of 45 jobs.

The winter was again a bright spot, with halibut

Alaska seafood harvesting employment by month, 2001 to 2024

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Monthly Average
2001	2,972	4,286	4,505	4,681	7,053	18,884	21,571	13,921	8,095	6,194	2,617	726	7,959
2002	3,590	4,047	4,334	4,913	6,715	16,292	18,224	11,975	6,983	5,794	2,632	524	7,168
2003	3,284	3,609	4,378	5,797	6,233	17,610	19,670	11,922	7,191	5,969	2,660	526	7,404
2004	3,594	3,492	4,110	5,050	6,476	17,139	19,634	12,308	7,371	6,023	2,259	509	7,330
2005	3,561	3,150	4,227	5,115	6,283	18,169	20,566	12,889	7,192	4,958	2,768	953	7,486
2006	2,700	3,038	4,573	4,293	5,709	17,748	20,066	13,700	7,719	5,003	2,507	720	7,314
2007	2,584	2,966	3,930	4,348	5,949	17,528	20,137	13,567	7,500	4,738	3,080	791	7,260
2008	2,738	3,138	4,511	4,445	5,572	17,022	20,446	13,633	8,225	4,202	2,708	602	7,270
2009	2,527	3,817	3,126	4,874	5,693	17,609	20,076	13,687	7,148	4,593	2,388	507	7,087
2010	2,668	3,060	4,005	5,255	5,685	18,878	23,128	15,287	7,759	4,992	2,887	850	7,871
2011	2,898	3,214	4,010	4,729	5,642	20,112	23,824	15,586	7,918	5,721	2,303	849	8,067
2012	2,923	3,409	4,609	5,402	6,163	19,237	24,761	16,191	6,988	5,453	2,274	853	8,189
2013	2,736	2,930	4,091	5,516	6,270	22,012	25,351	15,419	7,559	5,496	2,780	930	8,424
2014	2,242	2,776	4,879	5,407	6,489	21,167	24,594	16,593	8,018	5,190	2,596	1,097	8,421
2015	2,520	3,247	4,961	5,029	6,749	21,164	24,649	16,283	8,232	5,252	2,661	1,264	8,501
2016	2,678	3,374	5,222	5,363	6,329	18,840	23,695	16,055	7,909	4,953	1,886	765	8,089
2017	2,205	3,076	4,444	5,026	5,646	19,881	23,541	15,407	8,562	5,334	2,292	754	8,014
2018	2,126	2,538	3,379	4,310	5,166	18,942	22,790	14,763	9,211	4,849	2,681	689	7,620
2019	2,347	2,548	3,637	4,372	4,721	18,154	23,440	15,632	8,664	5,201	2,468	689	7,658
2020	1,975	2,296	2,983	3,113	4,020	16,286	20,917	12,325	7,310	5,104	2,193	473	6,583
2021	1,573	2,339	3,305	4,017	3,997	15,732	20,627	11,616	6,995	4,017	2,268	902	6,449
2022	1,853	2,312	3,085	3,908	4,244	16,210	20,241	11,172	6,203	3,534	2,269	953	6,332
2023	1,643	2,313	3,184	3,583	4,152	14,540	18,204	11,055	5,286	3,742	1,757	571	5,836
2024	1,558	1,847	2,792	3,120	3,466	12,972	17,361	9,739	5,434	3,571	2,156	702	5,393

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

harvesting jobs recovering seasonally from the previous year’s losses. November and December job counts both jumped by over 40 percent from 2023. Those are generally the smallest months; with zero activity in January and February, the late-year increases are unlikely to have continued into 2025.

Crab harvests bucked the trend, adding a modest number of jobs in 2024

Crab fisheries broke the loss trend in 2024, adding 17 jobs over the year — just over 5 percent growth — although the peak declined when Kodiak fisheries moved back to January and Bering Sea fisheries continued to shed jobs. Strong gains across most months made up for the February plunge, however.

While Bering Sea and Kodiak limits or closures had dragged on crab harvesting over the previous few years, 2024 showed signs of recovery. Bering Sea crab fisheries were closed in 2022 and 2023 after a 90 percent drop in biomass. They reopened in 2024, albeit with a drastically reduced catch limit, after stocks recovered somewhat.

For context, the typical limit for Bering Sea snow crab in years past was about 45 million. The 2024 limit was 4.72 million. However, that was bumped up to 9.3 million for 2025.

For detailed harvesting data, visit: live.laborstats.alaska.gov/seafood

The Kodiak tanner crab fishery’s catch limits have also tightened considerably in recent years.

Aside from the year’s small overall employment gain, statewide crab harvesting has trended downward long-term, losing over 30 percent of its jobs from 2014 to 2024.

Big loss for shellfish, but decade decline was smaller than for other harvests

Shellfish harvesting covers shrimp, clams, scallops, octopus, squid, and sea cucumbers, and it is one of the smallest categories, representing about 500 jobs each October. Averaged over the year, that was 166 jobs for 2024, down 11.7 percent from 2023.

January and February fisheries added jobs with the February return of a geoduck fishery that had opened later in the year in 2023, generating jobs in the latter month.

Most of 2024's losses stemmed from exceptionally high employment in 2023. However, despite the decline, shellfish harvesting maintained a significant share of the previous year's job gains.

Unlike most species categories, shellfish harvesting employment remained above 2022 levels last year and has been comparatively stable over the long term, likely because of its variety of products and species. Over 10 years, its employment only declined by about 8 percent.

Fishing employment by region

Yukon Delta remained near zero

The Yukon Delta fisheries have evaporated over the last few years, and the remaining salmon harvesting jobs disappeared in 2021. The area's salmon fisheries have been essentially closed in recent years because escapement — the number of fish counted as they move upstream to spawn — has been too low to meet international treaty requirements.

Regional fishing employment continued to limp along with groundfish harvesting for a few years, but those jobs also vanished in 2024. That left the region with just two jobs in a single month, July, which used to have more than 1,600 people fishing.

Because subsistence fishing would be prioritized after being severely curtailed in the region, commercial fishing jobs appear unlikely to return any time soon.

Southeast lost 8 percent of its harvesting jobs after a flat 2023

Southeast is the only region with harvesting in all of the major species categories, including large salmon hauls. It provides the most commercial fishing jobs among regions, and its harvest diversity somewhat shelters the region from volatility.

Southeast's losses in 2024 were in line with the statewide numbers. The region lost 142 jobs over the year (-8 percent), including over 300 fewer jobs at the summer peak.

After a flat 2023, the 2024 loss brought Southeast to a record low. Regional harvesting employment has dropped almost 30 percent since 2014, with much of that over the COVID years, from which Southeast harvesting hasn't recovered despite a bump in 2021.

In Southeast, only the crab harvest added jobs in 2024, driven by a summer employment recovery and summer and winter harvests both stretching into additional months for some permit holders.

How we use landings to estimate seafood harvesting jobs

Unlike the wage and salary job numbers we and our federal partner the Bureau of Labor Statistics publish each month, data on the employment fish harvesting generates are not readily available. Harvesters considered are self-employed, and permit holders aren't required to report the number of people they hire in the same way as employers subject to state unemployment insurance laws.

To estimate fisheries employment that's roughly comparable to wage and salary job numbers, we infer jobs in a given month from landings. A landing, or the initial sale of the catch, signals recent fishing activity.

Because fishing permits are associated with a specific type of gear, including boat size, we know roughly how many people a landing requires under various types of permits. The number of people associated with a certain permit is called the crew factor.

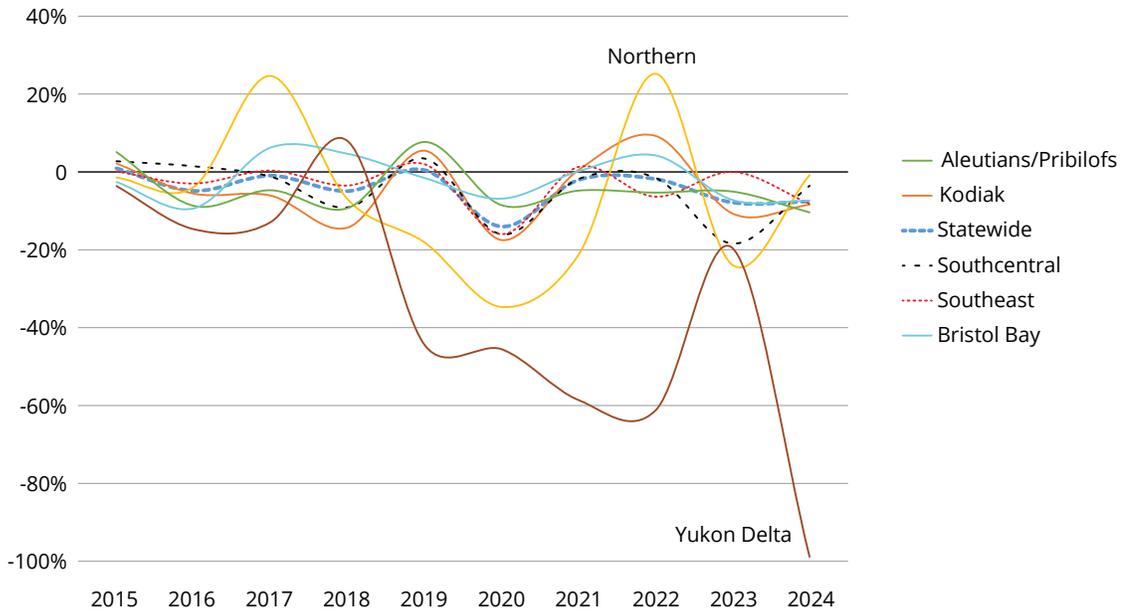
For example, a permit to catch king crab in Bristol Bay with pot gear on a vessel more than 60 feet long requires about six people, according to a survey of

those permit holders. So when crab is landed under that permit, we assume it generated six jobs that month. We count each permit once per month regardless of the number of landings, which is similar to the way wage and salary employees work different numbers of hours.

Most permits designate where specific species can be harvested, so we assign jobs to the harvest location rather than the residence of the permit holder. This approach also best approximates wage and salary employment, which is categorized by place of work rather than residence. Jobs generated under permits that allow fishing anywhere in Alaska receive a special harvest area code and are estimated and allocated differently.

We produce the job counts by month because, as with location, that comes closest to wage and salary employment data. And because seafood harvesting employment is much higher in summer than winter, similar to tourism and construction, averaging employment across all 12 months allows for more meaningful comparisons among job counts in different industries.

Percent change in regional fishing employment, 2015 to 2024



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

While summer employment sometimes doesn't bleed into August, which can lower the year's job count, August showed some activity in 2024, and Southeast's crabbing employment jumped by over 13 percent for the year.

All of Southeast's other fisheries lost jobs, with some hitting new lows, including salmon, sablefish, and herring. The reductions came through widespread decreases in total harvest volume as well as jobs.

Each Southeast species category showed job growth in just a few months last year while shrinking overall. In the past, sharp decreases tended to come from a specific fishery closure, but 2024 losses were widespread.

Southcentral's decline was relatively minor, and some fisheries grew

Southcentral's loss was the smallest of the top three fishing regions at -3.5 percent, or 39 fewer jobs over the year. Several Southcentral fisheries added jobs in 2024, which dulled the impact of the larger fisheries' reductions.

Salmon is the region's powerhouse, and it produced a mix of job losses and gains over the summer. Unlike most regions, July's peak was higher than in 2023 (300 jobs). Months on either side of that peak were lower, however, reflecting a more focused season and a lower average for the year.

Despite the higher salmon harvesting peak, salmon fishing in Southcentral hit a record employment low in 2024, as did sablefish. While the sablefish fishery added some jobs late in the year, it declined in almost every other month. The total loss topped 18 percent.

Job losses were also steep for other groundfish, but some small species showed recovery. Miscellaneous shellfish and herring harvesting both recovered from their 2023 job losses. Halibut didn't quite reach previous levels, but its Southcentral job count still grew almost 3 percent in 2024.

Crab closures in the area continued, so its job count remained at zero.

Kodiak fishing employment dropped by over 8 percent, mainly because of salmon

Kodiak lost 8.4 percent of its seafood harvesting jobs in 2024 (-45). While some of the smaller fisheries bounced back from the previous year, the fisheries that provide the lion's share of employment, such as salmon, fell to record lows.

Kodiak salmon fishing employment plunged almost 23 percent in 2024 after dropping nearly 10 percent the year before. As recently as 2019, July and August salmon harvests both topped 1,000 jobs, but the current high-water mark is 761.

Over the last 10 years, Kodiak salmon fishing has

lost over 40 percent of its jobs.

The second-largest category, other groundfish, fell 12 percent over the year. Although that loss was smaller in comparison to larger Kodiak fisheries, it still brought groundfish harvesting jobs to a new low.

The remaining Kodiak species saw mostly strong recovery after losses in 2023. Halibut harvesting employment increased by 8.5 percent, and sablefish by a whopping 63 percent, with the return of winter longline fishing. That marked a complete recovery from the previous year's loss.

While crab harvesting didn't rise as much as it did in other regions, it held steady. The local Bairdi tanner crab fishery moved one month earlier, which shifted the distribution but didn't change the total job count.

Small Northern job count barely budged

The Northern Region has little seafood harvesting, 69 jobs in 2024, and it's mainly in the summer. Most harvesters catch salmon and crab, but the halibut fishery's growth was almost enough to cancel out the salmon losses, making the region's annual decline just -0.8 percent.

Northern salmon harvesting lost almost 13 percent of its jobs over the year, with decreases in every month but one, and the September increase only came from a few harvesters extending their season further than the previous year.

Northern crab harvesting was strong in most months, pushing the job count to its highest level since 2018. Crabbing hasn't yet regained the heights of the early 2010s, but it has increased every year for the last four. The Northern Region's small crab harvest has remained insulated from the closures that have hit most of its southern neighbors.

Bristol Bay took another big hit in 2024

Last November's report noted Bristol Bay had lost its remaining harvesting jobs outside of salmon, and that remained true in 2024.

Salmon is caught in Bristol Bay for just a few months, and employment was lower in all of them. The July peak fell 400 jobs below 2023, with fewer set net and drift net permits.

The region is typically known for its fishing stability, but jobs hit a new low in 2024 after dropping 7.4 percent on top of the previous year's 6.9 percent loss.

The number of Bristol Bay permits fished in 2024 was more than 100 below 2023, with harvesters likely dissuaded by low salmon prices and declines or closures of other fisheries. In the past, some harvesters with permits for other areas and species have fished on their way to Bristol Bay, but it appears fewer decided to make the trip last year.

Aleutians/Pribilofs lost 10 percent in a year

Groundfish is the dominant species in the Aleutians and Pribilof Islands, the only region where salmon harvesting isn't the top fishing employer.

Jobs in all of the region's fisheries decreased in 2024, with a 10.4 percent loss pulling employment down to the lowest level on record. Harvesting dipped below 1,000 jobs in 2024 for the first time.

Sablefish and halibut are among the largest regional fisheries, and they were also the hardest hit. Both had at least 20 percent fewer harvesters in 2024.

Other groundfish didn't fare much better, with a 7.4 percent loss on top of the 6.5 percent drop the year before, also bringing the area's largest fishery to its lowest-ever level.

While salmon is a smaller fishery in the Aleutians, it represents the most jobs during the summer. The summer salmon peak has fallen from almost 1,100 jobs a decade ago to below 900 in 2024.

Salmon fishing employment has declined every year for the last three years and by 20.4 percent over the decade.

Joshua Warren is an economist in Juneau. Reach him at (907) 465-6032 or joshua.warren@alaska.gov.

Alaska's veteran share ranks first

8 percent of Alaskans, 5 percent nationally have served

By DAN ROBINSON and GUNNAR SCHULTZ

About 8 percent of Alaskans are veterans, a higher concentration than in any other state. Big Army and Air Force bases in Anchorage and Fairbanks and Coast Guard stations in several coastal locations bring large numbers of active-duty personnel to the state, some of whom stay in the state after their service ends.

Another factor in Alaska's No. 1 ranking is that enlistment rates are relatively high here. In 2022, according to USA Facts' analysis of Department of Defense data, Alaska tied with Texas for the seventh highest percentage of young adults who enlist in the military.

Higher enlistment rates for a state likely lead to a higher percentage of veterans, assuming many of the enlistees return to their home state after completing their military careers.

Alaska veterans by era served

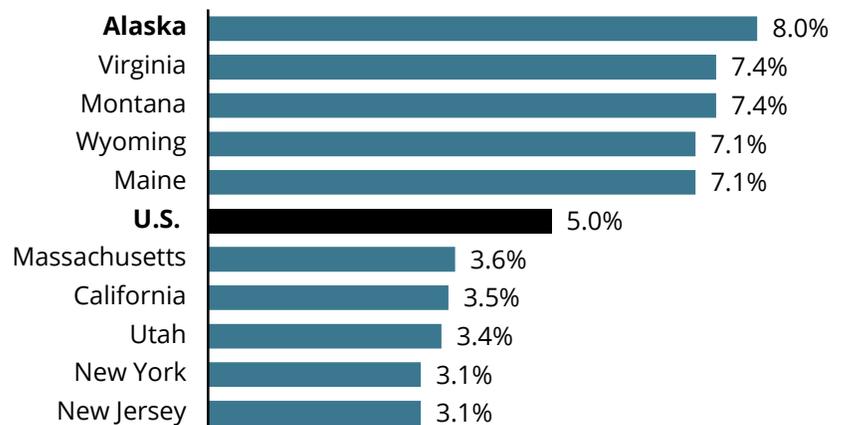
Veterans in Alaska, 2019-2023	Estimate
Second Gulf War Era (9/2001 or later)	22,406
First Gulf War Era (8/1990 to 8/2001)	18,546
Vietnam War Era (8/1964 to 4/1975)	16,948
Between named periods only*	10,011
Korean War Era (7/1950 to 1/1955)	1,376
World War II Era (12/1941 to 12/1946)	268

*Many Alaska veterans served in multiple wars/eras, but this group served only in periods between those named.

Note: As some veterans are listed in more than one category, numbers will not sum to the veteran total of about 59,000. See the text on the right for more on who served in multiple wars.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2019-2023

Highest, lowest veteran percentages by state



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2019-2023

Nationwide, about 5 percent of the population are veterans. Other states with high per-capita veteran populations include Montana, Virginia, Maine, and Wyoming. States with relatively low concentrations include New Jersey, New York, Utah, California, and Massachusetts.

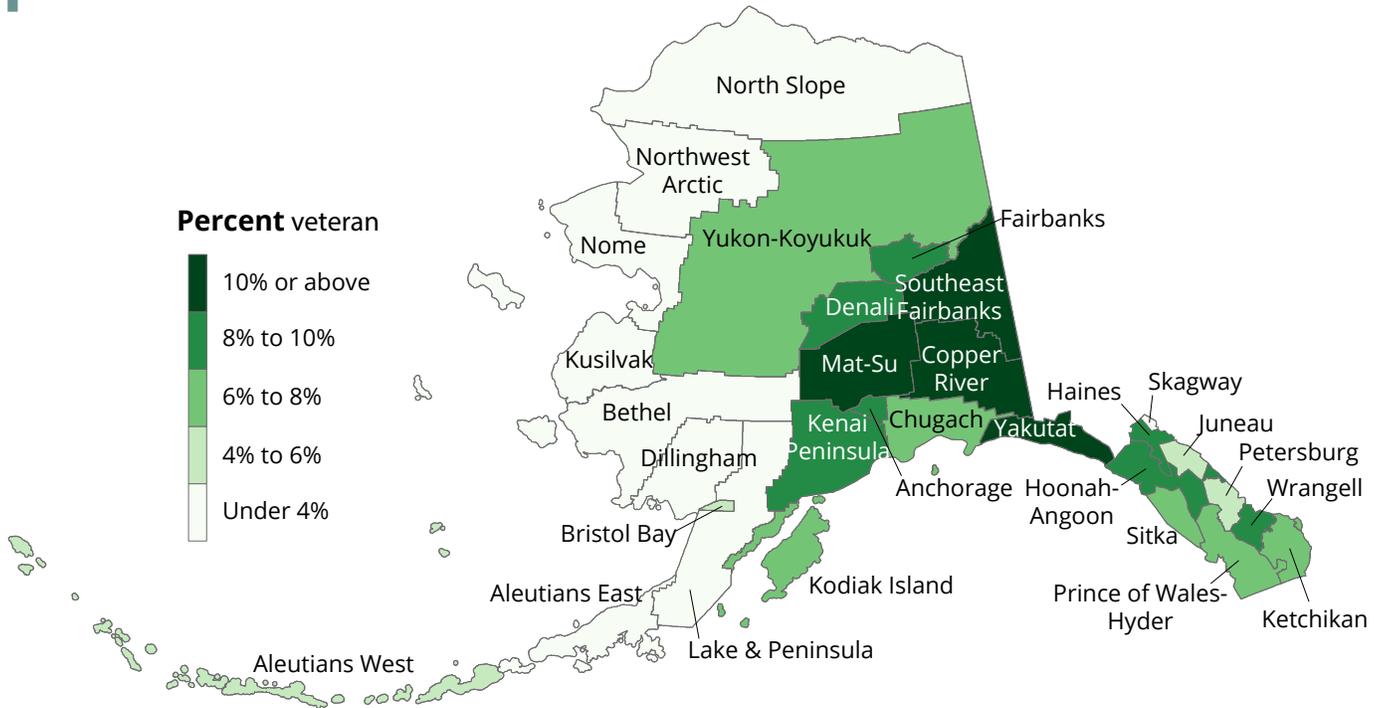
Many served in more than one war

The largest number of Alaska's roughly 59,000 veterans served during one or both Gulf Wars. About 14,000 served after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and another 8,000 served during that period plus the earlier Gulf War that dated back to 1990. About 500 veterans served during those two periods *and* the Vietnam War era.

Roughly 15,000 Alaska veterans served during the Vietnam War era only. The U.S. ended the military draft in 1973, and the military has been an all-volunteer force ever since.

Much smaller numbers of Alaskans served in both the Vietnam era and in one or both of the Gulf War periods (1,700) and in both the Vietnam era and either the Korean War or World War II (300).

Concentration of veterans by Alaska borough or census area



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2019-2023; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Many settle near the installations

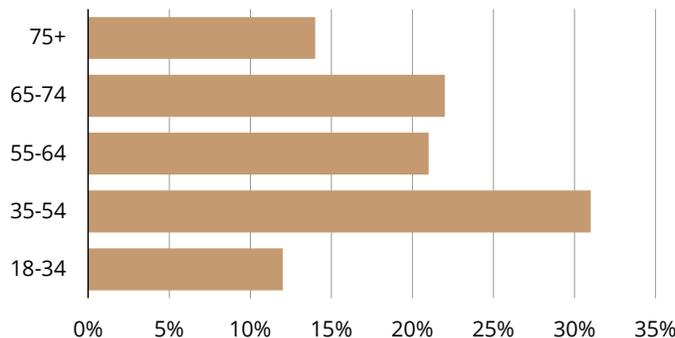
Some patterns emerge when looking at the places in Alaska with large and small concentrations of veterans, although big margins of error are inherent in sample-based data for areas with very small populations, such as Yakutat.

The Southeast Fairbanks Census Area (where Fort Greely, a military launch site, is located), the

Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the Fairbanks North Star Borough have higher per-capita shares of veterans than the statewide average of 8 percent.

One likely scenario is that veterans in those areas were stationed there or nearby during their service and decided to stay or return when they finished, for reasons that include employment, family connections, and quality of life preferences.

Age ranges of Alaska veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2019-2023

Three of the other states with top-five veteran percentages — Montana, Wyoming, and Maine — are similar to Alaska in that they're rural, sparsely populated, and rich in outdoor recreation opportunities, especially hunting and fishing.

About a third are ages 35-54

About 7,000 Alaska veterans — 12 percent of the total — are 18 to 34 years old, meaning they have many potential working years ahead of them.

Around 18,000 are from 35 to 54, and that age group combined with the 55-64 age

Who is a veteran

A civilian veteran is 18 or older and served on active duty, even for a short time, in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard, or in the U.S. Merchant Marines during World War II.

People who served in the National Guard or military reserves are only considered veterans if they were ever called or ordered to active duty, not counting the 4-6 months for initial training or yearly summer camps.

group makes up roughly half of Alaska's total veteran population.

As with the general population, the state also has notable percentages of veterans over age 65. Twenty-two percent of Alaska vets are 65 to 74, and 14 percent are 75 or older.

Higher incomes and labor force participation rates

Alaska veterans' median income of \$66,000 is substantially higher than the nonveteran median income of \$42,000.

Veterans from 18 to 64 are also slightly more likely than others to be either working or actively seeking work. Veterans' labor force participation rate is 80 percent. For nonveterans, it's 76 percent.

Not surprisingly, higher incomes and labor force participation rates lead to lower poverty rates. About 6 percent of Alaska veterans' incomes are below the federal poverty level compared to 10 percent for nonveterans.

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Gunnar Schultz is an economist in Juneau. Reach him at (907) 465-6038 or gunnar.schultz@alaska.gov.

Alaska veterans by borough or census area

Borough or census area	Estimate	Margin of error	Percent veteran	Margin of error
Yakutat City and Borough	80	+/- 36	15.8%	+/- 7.1%
Copper River Census Area	280	+/- 65	10.7%	+/- 2.5%
Southeast Fairbanks CA	726	+/- 144	10.5%	+/- 2.1%
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	11,042	+/- 551	10.0%	+/- 0.5%
Haines Borough	204	+/- 68	9.8%	+/- 3.3%
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	221	+/- 48	9.6%	+/- 2.1%
Fairbanks North Star Borough	9,038	+/- 866	9.5%	+/- 0.9%
Wrangell City and Borough	195	+/- 49	9.3%	+/- 2.3%
Denali Borough	175	+/- 80	8.6%	+/- 3.9%
Anchorage, Municipality	23,940	+/- 1,798	8.3%	+/- 0.6%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	4,806	+/- 375	8.0%	+/- 0.6%
Kodiak Island Borough	1,017	+/- 271	7.9%	+/- 2.1%
Chugach Census Area	545	+/- 152	7.8%	+/- 2.2%
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	377	+/- 111	7.2%	+/- 2.1%
Prince of Wales-Hyder CA	393	+/- 50	6.9%	+/- 0.9%
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	946	+/- 140	6.8%	+/- 1.0%
Sitka City and Borough	505	+/- 96	6.0%	+/- 1.1%
Bristol Bay Borough	50	+/- 18	5.7%	+/- 2.1%
Juneau City and Borough	1,729	+/- 279	5.4%	+/- 0.9%
Petersburg Borough	174	+/- 44	5.1%	+/- 1.3%
Aleutians West Census Area	239	+/- 141	4.6%	+/- 2.7%
Bethel Census Area	725	+/- 182	3.9%	+/- 1.0%
Skagway, Municipality	50	+/- 38	3.8%	+/- 2.9%
Aleutians East Borough	127	+/- 32	3.7%	+/- 0.9%
Nome Census Area	357	+/- 55	3.6%	+/- 0.6%
Northwest Arctic Borough	258	+/- 144	3.4%	+/- 1.9%
North Slope Borough	362	+/- 125	3.3%	+/- 1.1%
Lake and Peninsula Borough	31	+/- 13	3.1%	+/- 1.3%
Kusilvak Census Area	219	+/- 54	2.6%	+/- 0.7%
Dillingham Census Area	99	+/- 58	2.1%	+/- 1.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2019-2023

Gauging The Economy



Where are the new numbers?

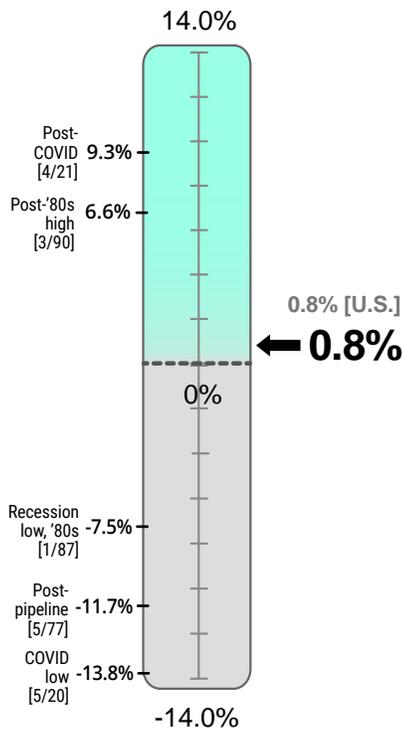
Because the federal government shut down on October 1, the data we typically use to generate the employment numbers and unemployment rate each month in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics were not produced or not available.

Wage Growth

1st Quarter 2025
Over-the-year percent change

Job Growth

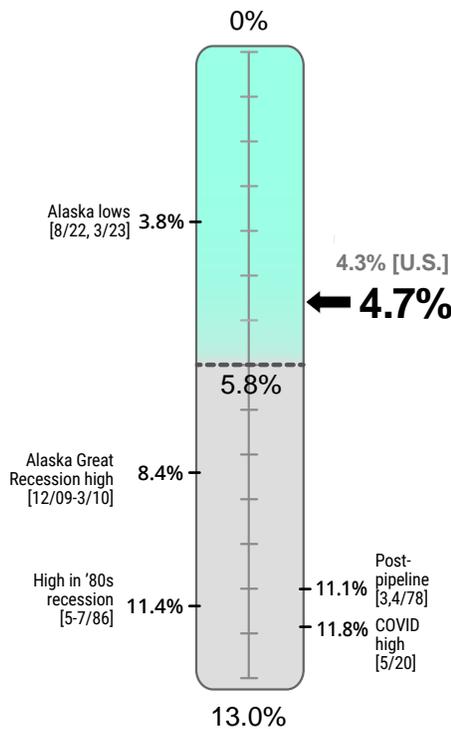
August 2025
Over-the-year percent change



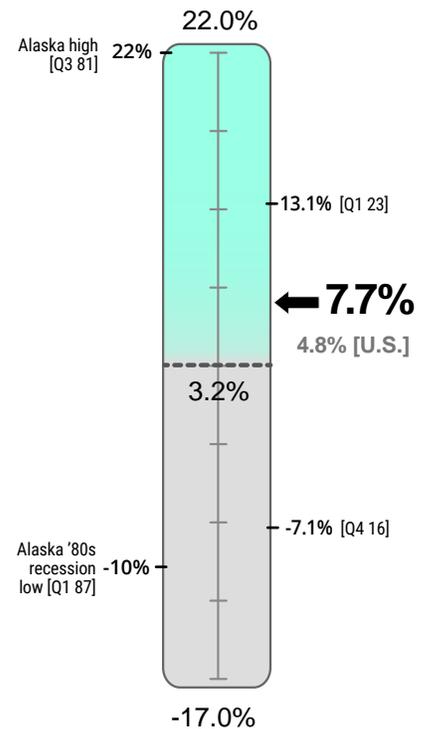
Alaska's August employment was 0.8 percent above last August. National employment was up by 0.8 percent.

Unemployment Rate

August 2025
Seasonally adjusted



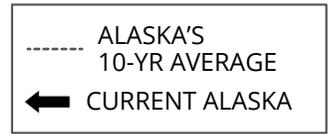
Alaska's unemployment rate has climbed about one percentage point since mid-2022 but remains well below its 10-year average.



Total wages paid by Alaska employers have shown strong growth in recent quarters.

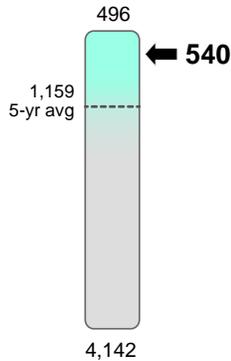
Wages were up 7.7 percent from year-ago levels in the first quarter of 2025 and 35.6 percent above the first quarter of 2019, before the pandemic.

Gauging The Economy



Initial Claims

Unemployment, week ending Oct. 11, 2025*

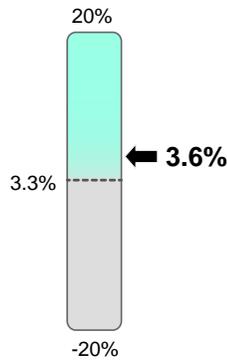


Pandemic-driven high claims loads have fallen, and new claims for benefits are well below their long-term average.

*Four-week moving average ending with specified week

GDP Growth

2nd Quarter 2025
Over-the-year percent change*

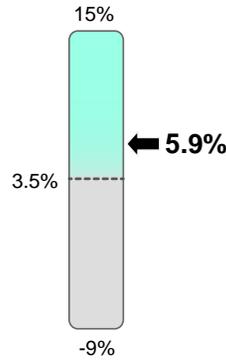


Gross domestic product is the value of the goods and services a state produces. It's an important economic measure but also a volatile one for Alaska because commodity prices influence the numbers so much — especially oil prices.

*In current dollars

Personal Income Growth

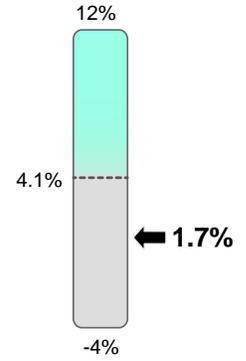
1st Quarter 2025
Over-the-year percent change



Personal income consists of three main parts: 1) wages and salaries; 2) dividends, interest, and rents; and 3) transfer payments (payments from governments to individuals).

Change in Home Prices

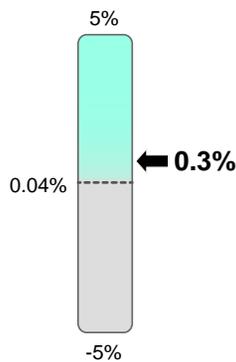
Single-family, percent change from prior year, Q1 2025



Home prices shown include only those for which a commercial loan was used. This indicator tends to be volatile from quarter to quarter.

Population Growth

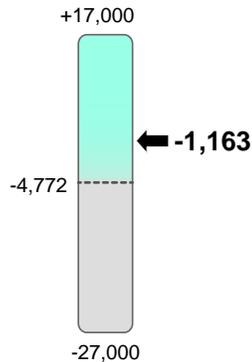
2023 to 2024



After four years of decline, Alaska's population has grown slightly in each of the last four years as natural increase (births minus deaths) has slightly exceeded migration losses.

Net Migration

2023 to 2024



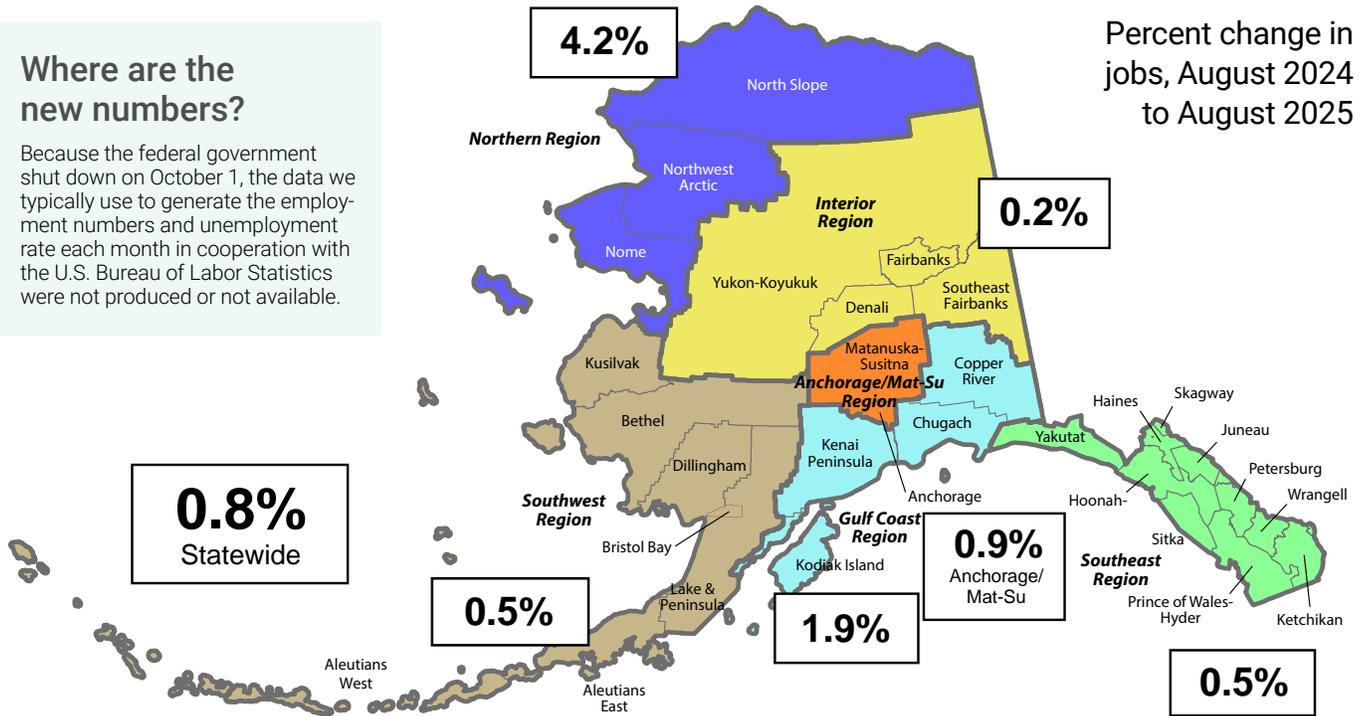
The state had net migration losses for the 12th consecutive year in 2024. Losses were on par with 2023 and significantly smaller than the late 2010s. Net migration is the number who moved to Alaska minus the number who left.

Employment Growth by Region

Where are the new numbers?

Because the federal government shut down on October 1, the data we typically use to generate the employment numbers and unemployment rate each month in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics were not produced or not available.

Percent change in jobs, August 2024 to August 2025



Unemployment Rates

Seasonally adjusted

	Prelim.	Revised	
	8/25	7/25	8/24
United States	4.3	4.2	4.2
Alaska	4.7	4.8	4.7

Not seasonally adjusted

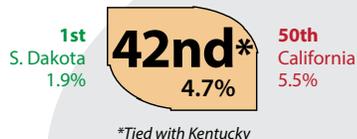
	Prelim.	Revised	
	8/25	7/25	8/24
United States	4.5	4.6	4.4
Alaska	3.9	4.5	4.1

Regional, not seasonally adjusted

	Prelim.	Revised			Prelim.	Revised			Prelim.	Revised	
	8/25	7/25	8/24		8/25	7/25	8/24		8/25	7/25	8/24
Interior Region	3.5	4.2	3.7	Southwest Region	8.3	8.7	8.3	Southeast Region	3.2	3.6	3.3
Denali Borough	1.5	1.6	1.7	Aleutians East Borough	1.9	1.9	2.8	Haines Borough	5.6	6.0	4.5
Fairbanks N Star Borough	3.1	3.8	3.5	Aleutians West Census Area	2.3	2.4	2.6	Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	3.7	4.0	2.7
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	5.8	6.5	5.2	Bethel Census Area	12.0	13.3	11.4	Juneau, City and Borough	2.6	3.1	2.8
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	8.9	9.3	7.0	Bristol Bay Borough	1.6	0.9	2.0	Ketchikan Gateway Borough	3.3	3.4	3.3
Northern Region	7.0	7.5	6.4	Dillingham Census Area	5.8	6.3	7.1	Petersburg Borough	3.8	4.7	4.3
Nome Census Area	10.1	10.7	8.8	Kusilvak Census Area	19.6	24.0	18.8	Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	7.9	8.6	7.6
North Slope Borough	3.1	3.7	3.3	Lake and Peninsula Borough	5.4	4.4	5.5	Sitka, City and Borough	1.9	2.2	2.7
Northwest Arctic Borough	9.8	10.2	8.9	Gulf Coast Region	3.8	4.5	4.1	Skagway, Municipality	1.7	2.6	1.4
Anchorage/Mat-Su Region	3.5	4.1	3.8	Kenai Peninsula Borough	3.9	4.7	4.2	Wrangell, City and Borough	5.0	4.6	4.8
Anchorage, Municipality	3.3	3.8	3.6	Kodiak Island Borough	3.2	3.5	3.9	Yakutat, City and Borough	2.5	3.6	5.0
Mat-Su Borough	4.1	5.0	4.3	Chugach Census Area	3.3	3.7	3.1				
				Copper River Census Area	5.9	6.8	4.8				

How Alaska Ranks

Unemployment Rate¹



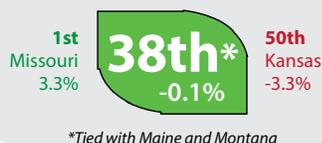
Job Growth²



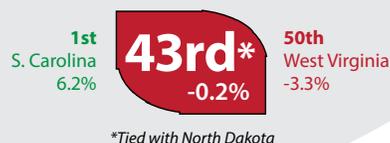
Job Growth, Private²



Job Growth, Government²



Job Growth, Leisure and Hospitality²



Note: Government employment includes federal, state, and local government plus public schools and universities.

¹August seasonally adjusted unemployment rates

²August employment, over-the-year percent change

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Other Economic Indicators

	Current		Year ago	Change
Urban Alaska Consumer Price Index (CPI-U, base: 1982-84=100)	270.441	1st half 2025	264.376	+2.3%
Commodity prices				
Crude oil, Alaska North Slope,* per barrel	\$68.89	Sept 2025	\$74.07	-7.0%
Natural gas, Henry Hub, per thousand cubic feet (mcf)	\$3.03	Sept 2025	\$2.41	+25.6%
Gold, per oz. COMEX	\$4,044.40	10/22/25	\$2,744.20	+47.4%
Silver, per oz. COMEX	\$47.46	10/22/25	\$34.83	+36.3%
Copper, per lb. COMEX	\$4.96	10/22/25	\$4.35	+14.0%
Bankruptcies				
	54	Q2 2025	69	-21.7%
Business	7	Q2 2025	6	+16.7%
Personal	47	Q2 2025	63	-25.4%
Unemployment insurance claims				
Initial filings	2,627	Sep 2025	2,958	-11.2%
Continued filings	12,445	Sep 2025	13,252	-6.1%
Claimant count	3,635	Sep 2025	3,762	-3.4%

*Department of Revenue estimate

Sources for this page and the preceding three pages include Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; Bloomberg; U.S. Census Bureau; Yahoo Finance: COMEX; Alaska Department of Revenue; and U.S. Courts, 9th Circuit

EMPLOYER RESOURCES

Changes to foreign work visa programs and processes

Each year, many Alaska employers rely on Alaska's [Temporary H-2A and H-2B Foreign Labor Certification programs](#) to meet their seasonal or peak-load workforce needs. These programs allow employers to hire foreign workers when U.S. workers are unavailable to fill temporary agricultural (H-2A) and nonagricultural (H-2B) jobs.

Both visa programs require Alaska employers to recruit for U.S. workers via their state workforce agency in [AlaskaJobs](#) as part of the Temporary FLC application process.

While Alaska's FLC processes have remained consistent in the last year, federal updates are reshaping the landscape ahead of the 2026 season.

In 2025, a federal court vacated the [2023 H-2A Adverse Effect Wage Rate Final Rule](#), returning wage calculations to the methodology established in [the 2010 rule](#) while the U.S. Department of Labor prepares further guidance.

Also during the year, the U.S. DOL's Office of Foreign Labor Certification announced its [planned transition to an electronic fee collection system](#) for

H-2A certifications, [the archiving of its searchable FAQ database](#), and a [60-day public-comment period](#) proposing updates to H-2A application forms and instructions.

Before Alaska's 2026 FLC peak season begins in January, employers should [confirm the standing of their AlaskaJobs accounts](#) and review our [Temporary FLC Requests page](#) to help avoid processing delays.

Business Connection and [Seafood Office](#) staff at our [Alaska Job Centers](#) remain available to assist with H-2A/H-2B job order staging needs.

Employers with questions on these programs can contact Alaska's Foreign Labor Certification Desk at dol.flc@alaska.gov. Visit the U.S. DOL's OFLC for information about the [Temporary FLC programs](#) or contact the Temporary Programs National Processing Center Help Desk at oflc.tlc@dol.gov.

Employer Resources is written by the Employment and Training Services Division of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Second of 3 new Coast Guard cutters commissioned in Kodiak

KMXT | By **Davis Hovey**

Published August 19, 2025 at 9:50 AM AKDT



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The Earl Cunningham (right) flying flags next to the John Witherspoon (left), a nearly identical ship which was commissioned in Kodiak in April.

Brian Venua / KMXT



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I did! ✕

The Earl Cunningham is the second of three new cutters to be homeported in Kodiak. It joins the John Witherspoon which was **commissioned in Kodiak in April**. By the end of this year the third vessel, the Frederick Mann, is scheduled to arrive in Kodiak and be commissioned into service as well.

Acting Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Kevin Lunday said these 154-foot cutters have the capability to move beyond the Gulf of Alaska, into places like the Aleutian Islands and the Bering Sea.

"They're amazingly capable, much more so than the older 110-foot patrol boats that they replaced," Lunday said. "And so that enables us to move them forward and base them temporarily, position them out of forward operating locations. We haven't decided how to do that specifically in Alaska and the Arctic, yet."

Lunday added that the plan is to have future fast response cutters homeported in Seward, Sitka and Ketchikan. But infrastructure still needs to be developed in Sitka and Seward before those vessels can dock there.



Brian Venua / KMXT

Coast Guard Acting Commandant Adm. Kevin Lunday has been nominated to the post, pending confirmation by the U.S. Senate.

The new Kodiak cutters are the latest in a build-up of Coast Guard personnel and infrastructure in Kodiak.

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expansion of 200 service members and their families on Base Kodiak, with more **local housing at Nemetz Park to accommodate them**. The new housing complex was announced in 2022, at a cost of \$85 million. In that same time frame, the population of Coast Guard Base Kodiak has roughly doubled to over 2,000 members.

Although these Sentinel-class cutters were authorized to be built years ago, they are being included as part of plans the Trump administration said it has to renew the Coast Guard's capability. Kristi Noem, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security which oversees the Coast Guard, calls it **a blueprint to transform the force** after "decades of underinvestment, neglect and strategic drift."

The Coast Guard renovation plan has been deemed Force Design 2028.

"Force Design 2028 kind of had two components of strategy and funding," said Deputy DHS Secretary Troy Edgar. "So the strategy that had been laid out with the Secretary and worked very closely with the commandant, really took the Force Design 2028 that would take quite a bit of time, at least three to five years, to come to full fruition."

During the Aug. 11 commissioning ceremony in Kodiak, Edgar noted that the Earl Cunningham is an investment in the Coast Guard's growing presence in this part of the country.

"And with the Arctic region and the natural resources that are up here right now, you can see that the President and the Department of Homeland Security we're very focused on making sure that we don't leave the Arctic uncovered," he said. "And as we can see that right now, **our adversaries are absolutely focused on this area**."

Roughly 24 hours earlier in Juneau on Aug. 10, **the service commissioned its first additional icebreaker in 25 years** – the Storis, which was formerly the private vessel Aiviq.

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The final F-35 fighter jets arrive at Eielson Air Force Base

Alaska Public Media | By **Associated Press**

Published April 18, 2022 at 6:50 PM AKDT



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The four F-35A Lightning IIs now at Eielson - like this one based at Hill Air Force, Utah - will participate in this round of Red Flag training exercises. They're the first of 54 F-35s that will be based at Eielson by the end of next year. (Department of Defense DVIDS)

The final two F-35A Joint Strike Fighter jets have arrived at Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks, completing the full complement of 54 aircraft.

Col. David "Ajax" Berkland of the 354 Fighter Wing at Eielson called it "a really significant day for us in terms of the buildup of Eielson Air Force Base."

The base was selected in 2016 to host F-35s, spawning a base expansion that cost more than a half billion dollars and includes 36 new buildings and 54 housing units for the F-35s, **Fairbanks television station KTVF** reported Saturday, a day after the two final jets arrived.

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I did! ✕

Combined with two squadrons of F-22s at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska will have more operational fifth generation assets than anywhere else in the world, Eleventh Air Force Commander Lt. Gen. David A. Krumm, told [Air Force Magazine](#). Krumm is the senior military official in Alaska.

“Gen. Billy Mitchell talked about it in the 1930's, that whoever holds Alaska, holds the world. So the strategic importance of competing and securing our nation's interests, which were there then, remains as much now as ever,” Berkland told KTVF.

The expansion also includes personnel, with about 3,500 new active duty airmen and their dependents stationed at Eielson.

The strategic importance of these aircraft in the Arctic illustrates the Air Force's capability for readiness, and when it comes to training, you need an area as big as Alaska, Berkland said.

“We are actually sitting inside the greatest air space in the world to train for fifth generation tactics against advanced threats, both on the air and on the ground,” he said.

With the capability to fly more than 12 hours at a time, the F-35s can reach almost anywhere in the Northern Hemisphere in one mission.

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Sullivan: Alaska experiencing largest military buildup since WWII amid rising Arctic threats



Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, said Saturday that Alaska is undergoing its largest military buildup since World War II

By [Augusta McDonnell](#)

Published: Mar. 2, 2026 at 8:02 PM AKST





The Alaska Republican — who chairs the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation’s Subcommittee on Coast Guard, Maritime and Fisheries — convened a field hearing at the University of Alaska Anchorage focused on Arctic security infrastructure, with five expert witnesses, including a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the nation’s first Arctic ambassador.

“We are now undergoing the largest military buildup and expansion, billions of dollars in investment in Alaska, since World War II,” Sullivan said in his opening statement. “My belief is we’re doing a lot, but we need to do more.”

The hearing comes as joint Russian-Chinese military operations near Alaska’s coastline have occurred with “increasing frequency and sophistication,” according to Sullivan. He noted a Russian incursion occurred 10 days before Saturday’s hearing.

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Sullivan presented charts showing joint Russian-Chinese strategic bomber flights and naval task force operations near Alaska — activity he said is “not happening anywhere else in America, only in Alaska.”

In an interview following the hearing, Sullivan explained his decision to bring a Senate hearing to Alaska.

“That panel of five Arctic experts, that would be an all-star panel in D.C. Those were all Alaskans,” Sullivan said. “The people of Alaska came out in ways that had a huge impact, stopping bases from being shuttered, stopping big military units from being cut or completely disbanded.”

Major Investments Detailed

The senator outlined defense spending flowing to Alaska, including a \$25 billion Coast Guard expansion — the largest in the service’s history. The investment includes 16 new icebreakers, 22 new cutters and 40 new helicopters.

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The icebreaker was commissioned to expand the United States' presence in the region.

Alaska now has more than 100 fifth-generation fighters between F-35 squadrons at Eielson Air Force Base and F-22 squadrons at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

The 425th Infantry Brigade Combat Team at JBER has been expanded into the Army's 11th Airborne Division, now centered in Alaska.

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Strategic Infrastructure Projects

Sullivan highlighted three main infrastructure projects.

The Port of Nome received \$400 million to begin construction of the nation's first Arctic deep-water port, with work scheduled to start this summer. The port will serve as a forward staging hub for the Coast Guard and Navy while supporting more than 50 surrounding communities, many of them Alaska Native villages.

Nome's Port Director Joy Baker emphasized the project's urgency in her testimony.

"The Arctic deep draft port project in Nome is designed to serve as the critical refueling and resupply facility in the U.S. Arctic for U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels," Baker said. "Without this vital maritime infrastructure, U.S. National Security operations in the Arctic will be constrained, the U.S. will fall further behind Russia and China, who are operating in the region with increasing persistence."

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Gen. Gregory Guillot, the current NORTHCOM commander, has called the Port of Nome "a game changer for operations in the Arctic," Sullivan said in the hearing.





The project involves all military services as well as the Aleut Corporation and the state of Alaska, which contributed \$30 million to repave runways, Sullivan said.

Retired Gen. Joe Ralston, former Joint Chiefs of Staff vice chairman, stressed Adak's strategic importance.

"Adak is 1,100 nautical miles closer to the Taiwan Strait than any of our bases in Hawaii," Ralston testified. "Arctic security cannot be effectively managed from outside of the region. A permanent presence is required to ensure we have military capability where we need it, when we need it."

JBER is receiving a \$1 billion investment for a new runway, part of a broader missile defense expansion including a billion-dollar long-range discrimination radar system.

Sullivan said the new runway at JBER represents nearly half a billion dollars going to local contractors and construction unions.

Threat Assessment

Sullivan said Russia continues to expand its Arctic footprint with 54 icebreakers, many nuclear-powered and weaponized, along with deep-water ports, airfields and forward operating bases.

China, despite having no Arctic territory, calls itself a "near-Arctic state" and is rapidly expanding its polar capabilities, he said. Chinese research vessels operated off Alaska's coast throughout last summer, likely for military purposes, according to Sullivan.

He cited a Dec. 29 [Wall Street Journal article](#) warning Chinese mastery of Arctic travel could position nuclear-armed submarines closer to U.S. targets.

"These activities are deliberate," Sullivan said. "They test our readiness, our response time and our resolve."





"This is not signaling. This is the new normal," Kee testified. "This pattern is a normalization of sustained great power competition in the Arctic between Beijing, Moscow against the United States and the West."

In the post-hearing interview, Sullivan emphasized the significance of joint Russian-Chinese operations.

"The really concerning element are those joint Russian-Chinese incursions into our airspace and into our waters," Sullivan said. "There's no way that you would be doing joint operations, joint strategic bomber raids and task forces into our airspace, joint naval operations, without Putin and Xi Jinping of China signing off on that."

Ralston testified such coordinated military operations require approval from the highest levels of both governments, based on his experience organizing joint exercises with Russia in the 1990s.

Expert Witnesses

The hearing featured testimony from Mike Sfraga, University of Alaska Fairbanks interim chancellor and former U.S. ambassador at large for Arctic affairs; Ralston, Kee, Baker and Steve White, Marine Exchange of Alaska executive director.

Sfraga told the committee "Arctic infrastructure and Alaska infrastructure are national security imperatives," noting the state sits at the nexus of domestic and foreign policy.

"Security in the Arctic begins with presence, presence requires access, access requires infrastructure," Sfraga said.

He recommended thinking of Nome not just as a port but as an integrated "port complex" that could co-locate federal, state and local agencies for monitoring vessels, supporting research and enabling economic development.

White emphasized the need for forward operating capability in the Arctic





of public-private partnerships and collaboration with Alaska communities.

Infrastructure Gap

Sullivan displayed maps showing billions of dollars in Navy infrastructure investment along a “central avenue of approach” through the Pacific, compared to minimal infrastructure along a “northern avenue of approach” through the Arctic — despite the northern route being “much quicker” and “where all the activity is.”

Ralston noted an operational challenge under the current infrastructure.

“It takes several hours to get to the places that we need to be to intercept those airplanes” entering Alaska’s Air Defense Identification Zone, Ralston said, describing the process of launching AWACS, tankers and fighters from existing bases.

Icebreaker Gap

Sullivan highlighted an “icebreaker gap” between the U.S. and Russia, which operates 54 icebreakers compared to America’s limited fleet.

Ralston recalled a 1988 incident when three whales became trapped in ice north of Barrow during the Cold War.

“The United States of America had to go to the Soviet Union and beg for an icebreaker to come in and rescue the whales,” Ralston testified. “That’s why I support Nome, but wherever else we can get them to the north.”

The Port of Nome expansion project reached a milestone in January 2024 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced a Project Partnership Agreement with the state of Alaska.

The bipartisan infrastructure law allocated \$250 million for the port’s construction. Alaska’s congressional delegation, including Senators Sullivan and Lisa Murkowski and former Rep. Mary Peltola, applauded the partnership agreement at the time.

