

From: [Cindi Lagoudakis](#)
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: HB 72 - General Operating Budget
Date: Monday, March 30, 2015 1:57:29 PM

I wish to offer some comments to actions under consideration by the Legislature this session. I would especially like to once again express my enthusiasm and support for the Governor's bill to establish reforms in Alaska's Medicaid program, and to accept federal funding that would expand Medicaid coverage to low income Alaskans. Insuring the health of all our citizens makes fiscal sense for the State, and it is the humane thing to do.

Transportation

Transportation priorities should be those that maintain essential travel, including the Alaska Marine Highway System along the ONLY highway that connects the majority of communities in Southeast Alaska (the Southcoast, in DOT parlance). AMHS fundamentally affects access to medical services, tourism, the arts, construction, employment, shipment of goods and education. It needs BETTER management, not a gutting of service to communities, as this will affect smaller, less resilient communities disproportionately. As director of our local Chamber of Commerce, I am continually receiving questions and comments about the difficulty of trying to travel to and between communities in Southeast Alaska.

However, there is another transportation project of more immediate concern to me personally - namely, the Kake - Petersburg Road. Recently, representatives of the Federal Highways Administration and the Alaska State Department of Transportation traveled to Petersburg and Kake to hold public meetings on this project despite the lack of community support for this controversial and questionable project.

Several years ago Andy Hughes of DOT appeared here at a borough assembly meeting to provide an overview of the project. At that time, I noted that the State draft transportation plan acknowledged that State and Federal road maintenance dollars would be declining in the future. I asked Mr. Hughes why he thought a low volume use road in an isolated location would successfully compete for limited maintenance dollars over other roads in the state. He did not have a good answer.

The clarity for this project was not achieved at this more recent meeting. The only part of the presentation that made sense was the admission by DOT that analysis had determined what area residents had tried to tell transportation planners two years ago: namely, that there was no compelling need for the road. Analysis concluded that Kake residents don't consider Petersburg as a primary destination for services, and building the road wouldn't make an appreciable change in travel patterns between the communities. And yet, DOT continues to press forward with this project, even adding an alternative that calls for pushing a road into the Petersburg Creek-Duncan Salt Chuck Wilderness. The project, by DOT's own admission, does not serve its purpose and need. There is no compelling reason to spend another dime on this project, especially given the state of the State's budget.

Public Broadcasting

When a situation is an emergency, including an economic one, the correct reaction is not to eliminate the best and in many cases the only method of getting information to those who will be affected. The OMB Director has stressed the need to keep communities involved in

discussions about budget priorities and impacts as we navigate this difficult time. Cutting funds for Public Broadcasting is a double hit, as elimination of state funds also jeopardizes the federal contribution. It causes the unraveling of an interconnected and cooperative system of sharing resources across the state to bring programming and information to as many citizens as possible. This is not a partisan discussion, as some might like to characterize it. It is a practical one, however.

In our community, our radio station is an NPR station. It provides weather information for aviators, fisherman, businesses, schools, and residents. It keeps us apprised of the situation and recommended action in situations such as tsunami threats, power outages and severe storms. It brings us together as a community to support and assist one another in crises. It shares information on aspects of the fishing industry that are so important to our local and state economy. It provides an educational opportunity for the students who run their own regular programming. It leverages TENS of THOUSANDS of dollars every year by using volunteer hosts for local programming throughout the broadcast day. It keeps us abreast of local, regional and state issues of importance to all residents, and even has an international following as evidenced by funding pledges. Talk about marketing Alaska! It also employs 7 people, some of whom have families in town.

We are fortunate in Petersburg to have a local weekly paper with limited content, but not all communities have access to anything but public broadcasting.

Education

We cannot make continued cuts to education and expect Alaska to be able to attract quality educators, maintain our investment in facilities, and educate our citizens, let alone attract new ones. Providing for education is a basic function of our state government--one we can ill afford to undermine.

In our school we have managed to cobble together a food program with limited resources and inadequate equipment and "cafeteria" space. We even have a school garden that is used to raise food for student consumption. For some children, these meals are the only decent ones they receive daily. Funding cuts threaten such programs, which are already working to be as efficient as possible.

Programs like OWL provide resources for students returning to school, including working students, affect early childhood education, and allow information to be shared in locales where internet access is not as readily available as other areas.

Revenue Sharing

Any budget legislation considered should not put whole communities at risk for their very survival. Revenue sharing needs a rework at the very least, but in no case should small rural communities be threatened with bankruptcy and worse because of budget shortfalls. When the legislature has to meet in community halls and borrowed spaces, shiver under the threat of no heat and light, and wonder if access to information and other communities is coming under the budget knife, then and only then can you consider "solutions" that have such drastic consequences across the smaller communities all across the state.

Medicaid Expansion

In a word, YES. If the legislature can't lead, then it needs to get out of the way. The Governor has this one right.

Exemptions and taxes

Alaska needs to take a long hard look at the age limit for senior exemptions, consideration of a state income tax that would capture revenue from those working but not permanently living in the state, and review property tax limitations if we are going to work our way out of this budget crisis. These are hard subjects to broach, but these are hard times. Before we gut programs and functions in ways that will have rippling and unintended consequences FOR YEARS TO COME, we need to consider unpopular but effective measures of increasing revenue to sustain essentials such as education, public broadcasting, mental health services, corrections, and transportation.

Thank you for your time and efforts during this very difficult economic situation. Thank you, too for your consideration in these matters.

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