

**SENATE AND HOUSE
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

March 16, 2000

Thursday

No. 14

Address

by

The Honorable Ted Stevens

United States Senator

Before a Joint Session

of the

Second Session of the

Twenty-First Alaska State Legislature

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**Address to the Twenty-First Alaska Legislature
by Senator Ted Stevens**

President Pearce, Speaker Porter, Members of the Twenty-First Alaska Legislature, Honored Guests: Thank you.

By the way, I'm not sure what you are here for, I came to see Jerry Mackie to pick up my \$25,000 check!

This is a difficult year in Washington. Because of the election season, the Senate has only 60 days left for votes on the Senate floor. Whatever we accomplish for Alaska will be done on a consensus basis - without prolonged debate. There is no time for filibusters.

Luckily, all three of us are chairmen and can ward off legislation harmful to Alaska. We should be able to fulfill many of the requests we've received from Alaskans.

Each year in this chamber, I've talked about my goals. This time I want to congratulate my terrific partners: Don Young and Frank Murkowski. Just last week each proved what valuable assets they are for Alaska.

As a senior member on the House Transportation Committee and member of the Conference on the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Bill, Don just took part in arm wrestling of the first order. It was a tough bill that took over a year in conference. Don held our Alaska items. He changed the airport improvement program formula so that Alaska will receive twice as much for our airports compared to the last authorization, up from \$18.8 million to \$37.5 million. Because of Don's insistence, funding for cargo operations will increase by more than \$6 million for our airports, and vital assistance was made available to Alaskan bush airstrips.

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Frank has been instrumental in bringing the health dangers of huffing or sniffing into the forefront of public awareness. With his leadership, we were able to fund the first statewide treatment program to combat this scourge.

Frank is showing tremendous leadership on our nation's energy policy. As Chairman of the Energy Committee, he's leading the fight for increased domestic oil production and has renewed our offensive with his new bill to expedite exploration and development of ANWR.

When I left Washington, gasoline was \$1.73 a gallon. By Memorial Day even the Energy Department predicts prices will rise another twenty cents. Last year the price was 96 cents. For the Department of Defense, fuel costs this year alone will rise by about two billion dollars. And I was told by the airline industry to expect at least a \$70 increase in coast-to-coast round trip fares by September.

We all know the answer to America's current energy crisis: ANWR must be opened. Stripper wells must be restored to production and this nation must reduce its dependency on foreign oil. During the oil embargo of the 1970's, our dependence on foreign oil was thirty-six percent, now it's fifty-seven percent and Alaska's oil production is down to 1.1 million barrels per day from 2.1 million barrels per day during the Gulf Crisis.

Alaska's oil and gas industry is challenged in many ways. My goal has been to ensure incentives to oil production with a healthy competitive environment and a fair and timely resolution of the BP/ARCO Merger. That has been a frustrating process in Washington - but as we heard yesterday a resolution is near.

It is time to get the bureaucrats out of the energy business. It is time to get Alaska back to work!

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BP Alaska and Phillips, we all hope, will now pull together to unlock Alaska's vast oil and gas potential to create a platform for growth for the next 25 years.

As a result of three education conferences held in Anchorage, Fairbanks and the Mat-Su Valley, I intend to offer amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to deal specifically with rural education in areas such as Alaska. Attracting and retaining teachers is a major problem.

Last year over 80 teaching positions went unfilled in rural Alaska. Many vacancies that were filled went to people without teaching certificates.

My frontier education amendment will include incentives to attract and retain teachers and help Alaska's Universities train Alaskans.

Vocational education is also a difficult problem. Only forty-four percent of Alaska's high school students go on to college. That puts us 49th in the nation. Of the ones who do go to college, only twenty-six percent graduate. So really about eleven percent of our high-schoolers receive a college degree.

While I want to work to increase the percentage of students who go to college and earn a degree, I've asked commissioner Rick Cross to work with my staff to develop a statewide vocational education plan to address the eighty-nine percent who don't graduate.

I applaud University of Alaska President Hamilton for his initiatives to assure U of A scholarships for the top 10 percent of each Alaskan high school.

Eighty percent of Alaskan students who go to our University of Alaska stay in Alaska. Helping the University attract more of our high school graduates clearly will help stop the brain drain.

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A new program I initiated last year is taking shape. It will take Alaska's urban students out to bush areas to better understand the bush way of life. This new effort, called the Urban-Rural Alaska Partnership Program, will break down the doors of misunderstanding and increase Alaskan solidarity.

I'm concerned about early childhood development. Clearly, children begin to learn even before Head Start is available.

Forty-two states offer free or subsidized preschool programs.

Alaska is among the eight that do not.

I agree with a friend of mine who said: "We need an education system that teaches our children right from wrong: civility, decency, respect and honor. Values and traditions thrive with such education."

"We need clear thinking children who will seek a developmental environment - and want to be drug free."

Children who participate in early learning programs are less likely to require special education and more likely to graduate from high school and attend college. They are less likely to become pregnant before they are married. They are less likely to engage in violence, be arrested or use drugs. Providing early learning programs is not only good social policy, it is sound fiscal policy.

The General Accounting Office and the Rand Corporation estimate that every dollar invested in these programs saves 4 to 7 dollars later. So I urge you to seriously consider these programs as you prepare your budget.

Today I also ask for your help and partnership in addressing the often irreversible harm caused by alcohol abuse.

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Alaska leads the nation in alcohol abuse. Statistics show eighty percent of all crimes are committed by individuals under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The costs to the state run in the millions of dollars.

In December, I also heard from Alaska educators and health care providers about the cause and cost of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect.

Fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect are totally preventable. I'm told the cost to the state for treating these conditions is about 1.4 million dollars per person over a lifetime.

I've asked my staff to work with Karen Perdue and the Alaskan treatment community and federal agencies to develop a comprehensive strategy to combat this plague.

I urge you to help in this effort.

Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation Act is also a top priority. There were good field hearings on the bill in Anchorage and Seattle this January. More hearings will be held in New England. We will try to get this bill passed as early as possible.

As you know, this Act ensures management of our fishing stocks on the principle of sustained yield. Resolution of IFQs and other important issues this year depends on the time we get to debate the bill.

Don's Resources Committee recently held a Magnuson Act hearing. Frank, Don and I have worked together for a long time on these issues.

Last week, Senator Murkowski and I introduced legislation to provide our fishermen important forms of tax relief currently only available to farmers.

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Also, I am working to designate wild Alaska salmon as an "organic" food to help find new markets for our fishermen.

At my request, Congress directed the Department of Agriculture to study whether the fishing industry should qualify for the crop insurance programs available to farmers.

I am working with Senator Roberts of Kansas on an amendment to the crop insurance bill to include fishermen when the bill comes up later this year.

I've just returned from a classified briefing on the Pacific Ballistic Missile Range in Hawaii - tough duty in March - right?!

If I have my way, we'll accelerate the timeframe for both Theater and National Missile Defense.

A portion of National Missile Defense will be based in Alaska. I support this action because National Missile Defense is needed to protect all fifty states from the threat of rogue nation or terrorist missile attacks - Theater Missile Defense is essential to protect our forward deployed forces.

Our state is uniquely positioned to provide a shield for all of the United States. National Missile Defense will underscore the strategic importance of Alaska.

I'm certain you have heard the Secretary of Defense suggested another two rounds of base closures.

I continue to oppose action by Congress this year to close more bases.

Our remaining bases - including those here - are needed for the national defense. Given the level of commitment by our military around the world, it is not timely to reduce our bases at home - such action would only assure longer force deployments abroad.

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I have tried to steer federal telecommunications policy not only towards Alaska's needs, but also towards our strengths, such as our strategic geographic position. Our state is the world's air crossroads, militarily and in terms of air freight. We should become the communications crossroads as well.

Many of us remember the launch of the Aurora II Satellite by Alascom. Now, because of technological advances not even thought of then, Aurora II will soon be replaced. The new Aurora III could meet the growing demands for satellite services from the Pacific Rim and Russian Far East and it continues to be a lifeline for us. Fiber optic cable is linking our Railbelt towns to the global economy, but for now, the cost of extending that system to our rural areas will be very high. Our goal should be to gain high speed access to the Internet without per minute charges.

People often ask me: How do you stay interested in the same job for so long? Clearly, this job of mine is interesting and challenging because it changes constantly.

A few years ago, I traveled to Antarctica to try to understand why we spent so many taxpayers' dollars there. I returned convinced of the validity of the scientific research being done there - and a little more knowledgeable about new concepts - like neutrinos and the research to determine how cod stay alive and reproduce in supercold - less than 32 degree - water.

Now, I'm fascinated by nanotechnology: nanoscience and nanoengineering. As Dr. Neil Lane, the Assistant to the President for Science and Technology (who, incidently, as former Director of the National Science Foundation accompanied my committee to Antarctica) recently told Congress: "If I were asked for an area of science and engineering that will most likely produce the breakthroughs of tomorrow, I would point to nano-scale science and engineering." Dr. Lane wrote this to me last week: "Nanotechnology promises to revolutionize the 21st Century the same way the transistor and Internet led to the information age."

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As you know, the prefix nano means one billionth of something - a nano-second, for instance. We'll learn a lot about that as we become more familiar with NMD or Theater Missile Defense Systems. I've asked Dr. Lane to give me some copies of his report entitled National Nanotechnology Initiative so that I may send one to each of you. They will be here in a few days.

My recommendation is that you each explore this new technology. Alaska can be relevant to these new concepts if we understand them - and pursue their applications in our state. Our University should be a nanotechnology center for all arctic science and engineering. We can, we must, we will work together to help Alaskans deal with these and other issues. My staff and I are ready to assist you in any way.

Again, thanks for inviting me. I'm ready to answer your questions.