

**HOUSE AND SENATE  
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

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**February 23, 2012**

**Thursday**

**No. 12**

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**Address by**

**The Honorable Lisa Murkowski**

**United States Senator**

**Before a Joint Session**

**of the**

**Second Session of the**

**Twenty-Seventh Alaska State Legislature**

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**February 23, 2012**

**Juneau, Alaska**



**The following was submitted for publication:**

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, my colleagues of the Alaska Legislature, good morning. And to our fellow Alaskans watching and listening throughout our state, thank you for inviting me into your homes.

People say our nation is deeply divided, but in Alaska things are different. All of us – whether we live in town or in the Bush, whether we are pioneers or recent arrivals – are joined together by our choice to live in this great and challenging land. We recognize that our state is what we make of it. We work together, and that allows us to overcome even the greatest of obstacles – what some would call "big miracles."

Our response to the fuel shortage in Nome is a perfect example. Getting so many federal, state, and local agencies to work seamlessly to make things happen in the timeframe required – that was a miracle. Transferring fuel through a mile-long hose in harsh conditions without losing a drop – that's just Alaskans rising to the occasion.

Alaska's can-do spirit is visible in the Guardsmen who will provide security to three Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan. We see it in warriors like Thomas McRae and Brandon Stone of Juneau. Both suffered devastating injuries while on duty in Afghanistan; both came home to face incredibly challenging recoveries. Like all of our military men and women, Tom and Brandon are true heroes ... and some of the bravest Alaskans of our time.

When things seem most frustrating in Washington DC, it is stories like these that keep me going. Remembering where I come from and who I represent keeps me on task. It helps me filter out the negativity, the partisanship, and the personal attacks that now characterize our national politics.

Like it or not, the federal government is a constant presence in our lives. It was before statehood, it is today, it will be tomorrow. The current issue of *Alaska Economic Trends* explains where the funding that Washington sends to Alaska is spent. Yet that same federal

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government is more than \$15 trillion in debt. Cutting spending is a national imperative. And Alaska will take its share of that hit.

Since statehood Alaska has pleaded with the federal government to get out of the way and let us grow our economy. And 53 years after statehood the answer is still no. At least, not without a fight.

Right now, much of Washington's focus is on the Keystone XL pipeline. We're doing everything possible to make sure it proceeds, despite the continuing resistance from the administration. But as I tell my colleagues, that's not the only pipeline that's in trouble because of politics. Our Trans-Alaska Pipeline is already built – and I don't need to remind you how underutilized it is. Alaskans appreciate the need to bring new production online. It's not just an urgent need. It is the urgent need. I've said this to you before, but cannot emphasize it enough. Alaska can't wait. That pipeline is our lifeline.

Many of you are wondering why the Senate can't seem to pass ANWR, as the House did just last week. For the 12th time now, Don Young has carried this over the goal line. And yet, even with high unemployment, hundred dollar oil, and an empty Treasury, we still don't seem to have 60 votes to break the filibuster in the Senate, and the Majority Leader would bend over backwards to keep this off the floor if we did. I believe I have the votes for ANWR in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, but it won't become law until we have a firm majority and a supportive administration – or until a major international calamity shows why we should have opened it long ago.

ANWR will happen, and I will not give up until it succeeds. It is too important to Alaska, and our nation. But, I've got other irons in the fire – and am making real progress on them. Twelve months ago the EPA and the Corps of Engineers were blocking production in CD-5, in our National Petroleum Reserve. They were refusing to permit a simple bridge across a remote river to access the drill site. It took months of negotiations, but that bridge can now be built. We made our case, we never let up, and we won.

I'm sure you all know that the Interior Department approved Shell's Chukchi plan last week, as well. The EPA had been frustrating the

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plans to explore these leases. A major chokepoint was a delay in air permits that was costing Shell drilling season after drilling season.

EPA won't be doing that again. The 2012 Interior Appropriations Act included a provision which I authored that transfers the responsibility for air quality from the EPA to the Department of the Interior. Interior has a legal mandate to bring about orderly development of offshore resources, and as we saw this past week, that is now starting to happen for the Arctic.

I want you to know that Senator Dan Inouye of Hawaii played a major role in making this happen. He reminded me that we needed to stand strong whenever the federal government treats our states like territories. His partnership with Senator Ted Stevens lives on, and he remains one of Alaska's best friends in Washington.

Our work on the Interior Appropriations bill will yield big dividends. It will help Alaska's foresters, and included an 18 percent increase for Alaska Native contract support. We added local hire provisions so more of our residents can work for the federal land management agencies. When more Alaskans work for those agencies, those agencies will work better for Alaska.

If you believe the conventional wisdom, progress like this shouldn't be possible in today's Washington. But Alaskans have a long history of ignoring conventional wisdom.

Conventional wisdom also holds that in an election year very little can be accomplished. But that will not stop me from pursuing Alaska's interests in areas like veterans' benefits, education, fisheries, transportation, public safety and tax policy.

Energy is at the top of my agenda. The White House, the federal departments, and my colleagues in Congress know that I'm not about to stop fighting for resource development – funding for programs like LIHEAP, so that our residents can heat their homes during the extreme winter cold.

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Another priority for me is ensuring that our nation's leaders fully understand Alaska's contribution to our national security. The Administration's new strategy is properly focused on catching up with new threats in Asia and the Pacific. In Alaska, we offer the most committed troops, the strategic location, and the best joint training range in the world to prepare for that mission.

It is out of sync with that strategy for the Air Force to propose to reduce operations at Eielson Air Force Base by transferring its F-16 Aggressor Squadron to Elmendorf. The Air Force has offered one, and only one, justification for this proposal: cost cutting.

I'm skeptical to say the least. Their 2012 proposal is in all respects the very same proposal that was rejected by the 2005 BRAC Commission. The Air Force argued that warm basing Eielson would save money. The BRAC Commission found that it wouldn't. You can't maintain a warm base in a cold place.

We won the battle in 2005, but the war over Eielson continues. This proposal was wrong in 2005, and it remains wrong today. I'm working closely with the Governor and his AMFAST team, with you and Interior communities to educate the military on why. I urge you to help the Governor wage that fight.

We can win if we speak as Alaskans – with one voice – in support of our network of military installations. We should not pit Eielson versus Elmendorf, or JBER versus JPARC. We need to focus our strategy on the long-term vision of Alaska's role in the global force structure.

As we look to the future I also continue to push the United States to lead in the Arctic. This means funding for new icebreakers. Our success in Nome proved their worth. I'm also happy the Secretary of the Navy responded to my request to commission the USS *Anchorage*, an amphibious landing ship, in Anchorage. Let's show them the kind of hospitality that will bring the Navy back to Alaska on a year round basis.

There's an important role for the members of the Legislature in our Washington efforts. The solidarity you show here – in support of resource development, support for the military, opposition to federal

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overreach – is incredibly helpful to our cause. So I thank you for everything you've done in the past, and ask you to keep it up. Where you have concerns, please express them. Let me, and everyone else in Washington, know exactly how you feel.

We will be at our best when we coordinate our efforts. So in that vein, I am most interested in hearing what you have to say about Alaska's future – what you're working on, what you're concerned about, and what I can do to help. So I'll stop here. It's my honor to serve Alaska, to work with you, and to hear your thoughts today.

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