

**SENATE AND HOUSE  
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

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**February 24, 2017**

**Friday**

**No. 6**

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**Address by**

**The Honorable Dan Sullivan**

**United States Senator**

**Before a Joint Session**

**of the**

**First Session of the**

**Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature**

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**February 24, 2017**

**Juneau, Alaska**



**The following was submitted for publication:**

President Kelly. Speaker Edgmon. Members of the House and Senate from the Great State of Alaska, thank you for inviting me to speak to you. Thanks also to each member of the Legislature and to all of the staff for your service to our state. Welcome also to the new members of this body.

It's always great to be back. Every time I come home—which is most weekends—I'm reminded as soon as I get off the plane that the heartbeat of Alaska, the one that has kept us strong through good times and bad, is still steady and vibrant.

When I think of the men and women who serve the people of our state, I'm reminded of Theodore Roosevelt's great speech about the men and the women who are in the arena. The person, who, in his words, "knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

This room, in the Capitol building, is one of those arenas. And Alaskans are full of people in the arena. And if you hadn't quite thought of it in that way before, you all know it now, particularly as you're dealing with our state's fiscal and economic challenges.

I'm reminded of that every time I take a tough vote. There doesn't seem to be a cold nor timid soul to be found in our state. Opinions, worthy causes, great devotion—expressed strongly—abound. So do great public servants, like you all and those who work for us. So thank you for that. I know it's not easy.

Let me introduce a few people in the audience who are also very much in the arena.

Joe Balash, my chief of staff, cut his teeth in politics and policy in this building. My communications director, Mike Anderson, is here, keeping us all in line. Amanda Coyne is here. Many are probably happy that she's still with me and not reporting on you. Everyone knows Connie McKenzie, who does a great job representing me in Juneau. And my wife Julie. The love of my life. The best thing that's ever happened to me. No doubt.

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We all know that our state is facing challenging economic times. But our history has been full of challenges, solved by creative and tough people, with vision, all working together to realize the great dream of a place that we call home.

This year marks that 150th anniversary of the purchase of Alaska. As a result, I've been thinking a lot about the history involved in the creation of our state, as well as the challenges.

The first challenge confronting the first territorial legislature in 1913—46 years after the purchase—was about transportation. Specifically how to get some of the far-reaching members to Juneau to begin to hash out creating the rules of a new territory. Of course, there were no commercial airlines in those days—no snow machines. So, four members from Nome—lawyers, miners and a businessman—hitched up their dog teams, headed to Valdez, and took a steamship to Juneau. It took them nearly two months to get here. And when they did arrive, the first order of business was this: To give women the right to vote, seven years before Congress ratified the 19th Amendment.

That's the heritage of every one of you sitting in this room. And that's the same spirit, of traveling far against the odds, to do what's right that still animates our great state.

This history of overcoming the odds is the foundation that gives me optimism today. But so do the very real things that are happening right now, both in the state—with so much potential for new resource development—and in D.C. These are things that I want to spend some time talking about to you today.

When speaking to you last year, I quoted what Senator Ted Stevens told the Legislature in his address in 1988, during a time of low oil prices. He said that while the federal government had no control of world oil prices, it does have the ability to help the state in many other ways: to make sure that Alaska is getting full value for its fisheries, to invest in infrastructure, to ensure our strong military here, and to allow us to responsibly develop our world-class resources.

Working hand in glove with Lisa Murkowski, and Don Young, I have been busy in the last year focusing on these very issues. We are in prime positions through committee memberships to gain real progress on these fronts. Let me give you a brief update.

I'm happy to report that I have been named to serve as Chairman of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard, where I'll have a larger platform to work with all of you on

increasing opportunities for the approximately 80,000 Alaskans, and dozens of communities that make up our fishing industry. These Alaskans are the ultimate small businessmen and women—they produce a great product, work long hours and take risks, often alongside other family members.

The seafood and economic activity from our waters is valued at roughly \$6 billion. In fact, close to 60 percent of all seafood harvested in the United States comes from Alaska waters. Alaska is the super power of seafood. I will be working closely with our incoming Secretary of Commerce and his NOAA team to make sure that our scientists have the tools they need to study and clean up ocean debris that harms our environment and keep our fisheries the most sustainably managed in the world.

As you all know, we are a resource rich, but infrastructure poor state. Everywhere I travel in our state, I hear about and see first-hand the desperate need for greater investment in roads, bridges and ports. Last year, your congressional delegation was able to secure nearly \$3 billion in infrastructure for Alaska as part of the long-term transportation bill—close to \$600 million of which has already made its way to our state. Just recently, we've made additional progress.

I made a commitment to many of you, including my friend Senator Lyman Hoffman, that I would do as much as possible to bring more resources to rural Alaska to address our lack of water and sewer infrastructure. And when you make a commitment to Lyman, you never forget it—and neither does he.

When the topic of aging infrastructure dominated our Senate debates last year due to problems in Flint, Michigan, I was able to make the argument: What about my constituents—what about Americans with no infrastructure for clean water and sewer?

Working closely with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, I was able to create a new federal program for communities that are without basic drinking water or wastewater services. That program authorizes \$300 million over 5 years to fund waste water systems in small communities across our state.

We were also able to include provisions for increased funding for harbors and emerging ports across the state, and language—in both the water bill and in the National Defense Authorization Act—which encourages the development of more Arctic infrastructure, including a strategic Arctic port.

Let me also tell you what my team and I are working on from my position on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

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Because of our strategic location, world-class training facilities, and our Arctic-tough military men and women, Alaska constitutes three pillars of American military might. We are the cornerstone of our nation's missile defense, the hub of air combat power and training for the Asia-Pacific, and a vital expeditionary platform for some of America's best-trained troops. We are maintaining and building on these pillars.

Last year I told you that if the Obama Administration moved forward with its initial plan to get rid of the 5,000-soldier Airborne Brigade Combat Team at JBER, known as the 4/25, it would be over my dead body. I'm happy to report that I'm still alive, and the 4/25 is still intact, and it will remain that way.

More broadly over the past year, we secured more than \$560 million of military construction funds for this year for Alaska, focused on the incoming F-35 squadrons at Eielson Air Force Base, and enhancing our missile defense capabilities. In a recent meeting with the head of the Corps of Engineers, he assured me that the vast majority of this funding for these military projects will be going to Alaska businesses, contractors, construction workers and union members.

But we can't rest on these achievements, which enhance America's national security and Alaska's economy. In the coming year, we'll be working to build upon each of these pillars. With increasing intercontinental ballistic missile threats to the homeland from North Korea and Iran, and the Trump administration's plan to rebuild our military, there should be many more opportunities to do so.

Let me spend a few minutes talking about America's heroes who live in our state. As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I brag all the time that Alaska is home to more vets per capita than any other state. We need to keep our veterans here and make sure they are taken care of. We're holding the Veterans Administration's feet to the fire about getting our vets the healthcare they deserve and have earned.

We recently confirmed Dr. David Shulkin as the Trump administration's Secretary of the Veterans Administration. As President Obama's VA undersecretary, Dr. Shulkin traveled to Alaska at my invitation in 2015 to hold VA roundtables and hearings throughout our state. He knows the state, and understands our unique challenges.

Prior to his confirmation hearing, my office reached out to veterans across Alaska to get their input and questions for him. Let me tell you about one of our distinguished Alaska veterans who responded. His name is Bob Thoms, also known as Cajun Bob. He lives in the Valley. He fought in Vietnam, in the

famous battle of Hue City, where he and his fellow Marines were heavily outnumbered. It was a brutal, house-to-house battle. The Marines prevailed, and Bob left the service with Six Purple Hearts and a Silver Star for combat valor.

A photographer caught him in the heat of the battle. His face is determined. His shirt and pants are shredded. His rifle is in one hand, the other hand is pointing to the place to which he was leading his men, urging them on in a fierce counter-attack. This iconic image graced the cover of Life Magazine in 1968. Cajun Bob is a true hero—one of so many that we call our neighbors, our friends, who have fought to protect our nation and our freedoms.

He told us what veterans in Alaska are looking for. They are looking for a secretary of the VA who will “kick ass and take names.” I repeated that wish, verbatim, during the recent Senate confirmation hearing of Dr. Shulkin. Secretary Shulkin committed to me—and to Cajun Bob and all of Alaska’s veterans—that he’d be that guy.

You all know that I focus a lot on our veterans. But there are other heroes in Alaska who deserve our attention: our police officers and first responders—the men and women whose jobs are to keep us safe. Last year was a particularly difficult time for police officers in Alaska and all across the country. We lost 134 brave men and women in blue uniform. That’s up more than 20 percent from the previous year. Some were targeted, even ambushed.

In Alaska, Police Officer Salao bravely fought back against an ambusher, and was shot multiple times. Thankfully, he survived. The incident resulted in the arrest of a man who is accused of killing five others in Anchorage. Unfortunately, another Alaska police officer wasn’t so fortunate. Sergeant Allen Brandt succumbed to gunshot wounds he sustained in a shoot-out in Fairbanks on October 16.

We need to put a stop to this nation-wide trend of violence against first responders. That’s why I introduced the Protect Our Heroes Act, which would make it a federal offense to assault or kill a public safety officer, with an enhanced penalty for offenders who lure an officer to a location for the purpose of harming them. We need to let our first responders and their families know that we have their backs. That’s what this legislation is intended to do.

Let me also talk about a Summit that I hosted last summer in the Mat-Su Valley. It was called the Alaska Wellness Summit: Conquering the Opioid Crisis. The summit was inspired by a group of courageous Alaska women I

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met with who were recovering from addiction. After listening to their stories and digging deeper about the scourge of heroin and opioid addiction that's ravaging many communities in our state and country, I knew it was time to do more to address this crisis. It was also time to acknowledge that those who struggle with addiction are not moral failures, but our fellow brothers and sisters who need our help and need our respect.

So on August 4, more than 400 Alaskans made their way to the Mat-Su College to look at how we can work together to combat the opioid addiction crisis. It was an inspiring event full of spirit and fight and dignity. The federal officials who attended—including the Surgeon General of the United States—got a good picture of Alaska's challenges, and our strengths.

In Congress, we've taken action. We passed two bills last year, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), and the 21st Century Cures Act, both of which will bring needed funds and attention to this issue. The message that everyone walked away with at the Summit is that there's hope and community in Alaska. Lots of it. And I want to thank Governor Walker for declaring a public health crisis on this issue. There are areas in the Lower 48 that have been completely wiped out by this epidemic. We simply cannot allow that to happen here. Just like we can't continue to lead the nation in having the highest rates of sexual assault and domestic violence. My focus on working with all of you to combat these scourges remains unwavering.

So that was an update from a year gone by. What's more important, of course, is the year ahead. Going forward, I will be 100 percent focused on the economy—on helping bring good-paying jobs to our state, and working with all of you, Democrats and Republicans, to achieve the critical goal of re-energizing Alaska's private sector, and expanding job opportunities.

Jobs create dignity and self-worth. They create strong families and strong communities. And I'm more convinced than ever that whether it be the opioid epidemic, homelessness, or the violence that is plaguing cities like Anchorage—the antidote to so many of our challenges is a strong economy and a sense of opportunity and community.

We need to focus on each other and encourage policies that provide good jobs for all Alaskans. The best social program always has been, and always will be, a meaningful job.

There is good news on this front. The Trump administration has prioritized energy production, responsible resource development, and streamlining job-killing regulations as some of its top goals. The new cabinet—including the

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new EPA Administrator and the incoming Secretary of Interior—has committed to work with Alaska as a partner in opportunity, rather than acting as a roadblock to our success.

This is a welcome change from the past administration. As your Attorney General, Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, and now as your U.S. Senator, I've witnessed first-hand how the Obama administration tried to stop, stymie, and slow-roll every economic development project in our great state.

Unfortunately, this occurred until the final hours of the administration. When President Obama locked up almost all of Alaska's resource development opportunities in the Chuckchi and Beaufort Seas over the Christmas holidays, he told Alaskans that we need to "move decisively away from fossil fuels." Giving voice to a dangerous ideological movement—one that wants to leave our vital resources in the ground—President Obama said that the way "to build a strong Arctic economy" was by moving "beyond" energy production, relying instead on things like charity — "philanthropy" in his words — to build our future.

Let me be clear: Relying on charity for our future is not something the great state of Alaska should aspire to. It's beneath us. In our 150 year history, that has never been the hope of Alaska—and it should not be today. We still have tremendous resources yet to be developed—and a bright future to look forward to. Working together, as one people, we can seize that future, which is our heritage.

Now more than ever, Alaskans need to speak with a unified voice on these critical economic issues. There is no doubt we can and must diversify our economy. But the responsible development of our world-class resources—fisheries, timber, oil, gas, renewable energy, minerals—is the cornerstone of Alaska's economy and our future. And there is progress.

Strategic resource development projects, like the Donlin Gold Mine in Western Alaska, are going through state and federal permitting. Other mines across the state show significant promise. After billions of dollars of investment and millions of hours of hard work by Alaskans, the Point Thomson field is finally up and running and producing.

Policy matters.

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This body passed Senate Bill 21 and then the people ratified it in a statewide referendum. It incentivized exploration, and brought in more state revenues than the old tax system would have when oil prices plummeted.

We've recently seen new discoveries on the North Slope, both by the major oil companies, and independents, estimated to produce billions of barrels of oil. Let me repeat: billions of barrels of oil. And DNR's most recent North Slope lease sale was one of our state's best.

I am hopeful that this is just the beginning of a new renaissance of economic growth and job creation in Alaska, buoyed by federal agencies that want to help us seize opportunities, not undermine them. But if such agencies end up blocking our progress, then we all must be prepared to battle against them, just as we've done in the past.

Let me conclude by briefly going back to the historical record and the vision some had for our state 150 years ago, when the Alaska purchase and the treaty with Russia were being debated in the U.S. Senate.

It was not a slam dunk. Our country was reeling from the Civil War. Resources were spare. Many in Congress thought that the country, instead of expanding, needed to deal with the massive post-war problems and focus on the existing states and territories.

But thankfully for us, there were others who saw what we, as Alaska, could become. Secretary of State William Seward was one of them. So were a handful of very forceful Congressman and Senators, who saw expansion as part of our country's destiny, and who saw huge possibility in the contributions Alaska could make—both in terms of our natural resources, our national security, and our national pride.

One of those men was Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner. Senator Sumner was a man of purpose, principle, and many, many words and opinions. In fact, he was nearly caned to death, in his office, by one of his colleagues from the South for expressing his opinions on the horrors of slavery. (And we think politics is tough today). He was skeptical of the Alaska Purchase, until he immersed himself into the accounts of the promise of this new territory, which turned him into an ardent supporter. On April, 8, 1867, Senator Sumner, using only notecards, gave a three hour speech on the Senate floor about our state.

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He spoke of Alaska's abundant resources. He saw the Pacific as the ocean of the future, and argued that Alaska is the key to that future. He spoke of the treasures—the gold in our land, the veins of coal, our huge mineral deposits, and the treasures below the Arctic Ocean. He talked about the “multitudes of fish,” the thousands of acres of timber, and the opening of new trade routes.

He, and others, saw in Alaska the Eden of the North—a future which would entail up to 1 million self-sufficient Americans supported by the resources of the land. Owning Alaska would give us greater control of the next “great theater of action” in the Arctic and Asia-Pacific, for both national security and economic reason. In the new territory of Alaska, “Commerce will find new arms; the country new defenders, the national flag new hands to bear it aloft,” Senator Sumner argued. A “boundless and glorious future,” awaits, he and other supporters argued.

Senator Sumner ended his epic 1867 speech by arguing that the whole territory, not just the peninsula, should be given the name by the people who lived here. “It should be indigenous, original, coming from the soil,” he said. “Alaska,” he concluded, “the great land.”

He and others were accused of “living in the clouds.” Alaska was “barren” and “worthless,” they said. However, Senator Sumner and others persisted. The day after Sumner's Senate speech, the once-skeptical United States Senate approved the purchase by a vote of 37 to 2. One hundred and fifty years later, Alaska has made good on that early promise, and we still have the vision of Seward and Sumner driving us to a brighter future.

Alaska. Our great land. Let's work together to ensure that it continues to live up to its name, for us, our children, and for generations to come.

God Bless Alaska and the United States of America.

**Please report corrections to the Senate Secretary's office.**