

**HOUSE AND SENATE  
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

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**February 18, 2020**

**Tuesday**

**No. 15**

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**Address by**

**The Honorable Lisa Murkowski**

**United States Senator**

**Before a Joint Session**

**of the**

**Second Session of the**

**Thirty-First Alaska State Legislature**

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**February 18, 2020**

**Juneau, Alaska**



**The following was submitted for publication:**

Thank you for your warm welcome. It is always good to be home and here with you.

The Alaska Legislature is a family and whenever we are together, we talk about our families. I'm blessed that both of my boys continue to thrive. Matt is a typical Alaskan entrepreneur – trying to grow his small business in a challenging economy, dealing with customers and regulations. He's also a proud new homeowner with a mortgage to prove it. Nic has finished law school, passed the bar, and has found work as an energy regulatory attorney. It has been a big year for him.

It is our families that give us the strength to serve, and I couldn't do it without the support from Verne. Please help me welcome Verne.

I also want to welcome the members of my team who are joining us today:

- Amber Ebarb. Amber is from Anchorage and handles Indian Affairs and Rural Development.
- Angela Ramponi. Angela is from Soldotna and she handles healthcare issues.
- Ann Robertson. Ann is from Juneau and she handles oceans, fisheries and science issues.
- Grace Jang. Many of you know Grace, who is now my communications director on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.
- Dana Herndon. Dana is my support on the ground here in Juneau.

I'm grateful to my family and my team because they have sustained me, as I stand before you not in a February funk brought on by winter weather, but worn down after the darkest, most deeply partisan experience of my career. Senator John McCain used to say that "it's always darkest just before it goes pitch black" – usually as a joke – but I can't think of a better description for the past few months.

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In my floor statement at the conclusion of President Trump's impeachment trial, I referenced Alexander Hamilton, who in Federalist 65 warned that: "the demon of faction will, at certain seasons, extend his scepter over all numerous bodies of men."

We are in the season the founders warned of. The division in Washington is an embarrassing betrayal of what we have become. What started in the House as a wholly partisan exercise stayed that way. The vitriol escalated and the sides dug in. I worked to find a path forward and honestly thought there would be one. But when it became clear that my vote would accomplish nothing other than dragging the judicial branch down, tarnishing that branch too, with the "demon of faction," I said enough.

It's an ugly time in Washington, DC. I have very deep concerns about the overreach in power of the executive branch, most particularly at the expense of Congress. That's not just a criticism of this administration, but several consecutive administrations and Presidents of both parties. I was joined by many of you in calling out the Obama Administration for federal overreach. It's been a recurring pattern, and it's not good for our country.

But it's not just overreach. The legislative branch must not cede our power either as we have done on congressionally directed spending. Congress must reassert itself as a coequal branch of government, and that was one of the reasons why I voted to restrain the president's war powers just last week – to help re-establish the lines and responsibilities of the executive and legislative branches of government.

But throughout that debate, and every day, I keep in mind the men and women who serve us on the front lines. Those who put their lives on the line every day.

Roughly one third of the troops deployed to Iraq right now are stationed here in Alaska. I think that's important for us to remember that. I spoke with some of them after Iran's missiles hit their base in Iraq in early January, and I cannot say enough about their selflessness and bravery. And it was a reminder, they are not fighting as

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Democrats or Republicans. They are fighting as Americans for the United States. We should remember that – and we need to try our best to do the same.

We are seeing good examples of how to do that back here—pushing past politics to enhance public safety. A few roundtables in Anchorage and a trip to Napaskiak by the Attorney General has blossomed into a movement within the executive branch which is now working with Congress. When I first teamed up with former Senator Heidi Heitkamp several years ago to work on the very concerning issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, most – especially in the Department of Justice – really had no idea the extent of the crisis we were facing. Today, we have legislation with Savanna's Act and the Not Invisible; a Presidential executive order; and a task force led by Assistant Secretary Tara Sweeney. I was able to direct \$6.5 million of funding – the first ever – specifically targeted and directed to understanding greater the extent of the problem, how we're able to provide for greater forensic investigation, cold cases. But what we're seeing at the federal level is quite significant.

This is extraordinary collaboration and it is being reflected at the state and local level. AVCP President Vivian Korthius, Chief Victor Joseph with TCC, and many others are at the table with their ideas. The Governor is building key partnership like standing up the new prosecutors office in Utgiagvik. But each of you is engaged – either through the budget or on this floor – with a special shout out to Senator Olson. Thank you all for your efforts that you are making to improve public safety throughout all Alaska.

As with any initiative, we are all working through challenges—like whether or not the federal funds come as grants or are reimbursable. But think about that—we are not debating the problem but working on implementing. These are the details that come with implementing policy when legislative initiatives hit the real world.

Working through the details creates the space for collaboration and creativity. It generates innovation, like Don Young's proposal to create a tribal justice pilot in the Violence Against Women Act reauthorization. His idea has sparked conversations, new ideas, and

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together we're continuing to refine and build on it with my version of the pilot program for special domestic violence jurisdiction.

Governor Dunleavy deserves credit for challenging us to think of new ways to bring Tribes to the table when it comes to education. And we should recognize the important steps this House took to establish a special committee on Tribal Affairs to consider these issues.

Tribes and Tribal Consortiums work hard every day to serve Alaskans all over the state. The Alaska Native Health system is the envy of Tribal systems everywhere across the country. Housing authorities work with critical partners like the Cold Climate Housing Research Center to tackle needs and develop ways to foster local workforces and economies.

Co-management and cooperative management efforts like those on the Yukon or Kuskokwim Rivers or in the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas protecting resources while ensuring that traditional knowledge and customs thrive.

From Medicaid and telehealth, education and public safety, infrastructure and workforce development, Tribes and Tribal Consortiums are critical to Alaska's social and economic systems. Thank you for considering the relationship Tribes and Tribal Consortiums have with the state.

Every day, I hear from Alaskans about the various challenges we face, but also offer creative solutions.

Like lowering health care costs. Thankfully, Congress has moved past the debate over coverage, and we are now focused where we should be which is on reducing costs. I'm working with a group and colleagues to do specific initiatives to end surprise medical billing, create more transparency, and increase prescription drug competition. I'm also working on drug pricing reform, which will make prescription medicine more affordable.

When we think about Alaska and our reality, one of our best solutions to control costs is telemedicine services, which require affordable and

reliable internet access. Alaska's size, terrain, climate, and lack of infrastructure make it harder to deploy internet services, especially for rural villages. But we aren't debating whether broadband connectivity is important for telemedicine, distance learning, and entrepreneurship – we are building out the infrastructure.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is deploying the rural broadband funding that we made available through the ReConnect program, connecting Yakutat to Cordova, and the Universal Service Administrative Company's Alaska Plan is supporting investments to expand broadband. We're also seeing investment in low earth orbit and traditional satellites by companies like Microcom, OneWeb, and SpaceX that will hopefully bring new technology to the table.

As we think about infrastructure, we probably won't pass a trillion-dollar package this year, but I do remain hopeful and optimistic for a new highway bill and a new Water Resources Development Act. We know that our infrastructure needs work and these are two prime opportunities for progress not just for us here in Alaska but clearly across the country. Right now, the new highway bill provides \$287 billion over five years. It provides for ferry boat and terminal construction. And more importantly, it provides the ability for long-term planning.

I want to acknowledge the work of many of you. Thank you, Senator Stedman and others, for taking the long view, for sharing your ideas with me to improve federal highway programs, and for never forgetting that in Alaska, highways include a marine highway. It's just as simple as that.

If you thought I was going to stand up here and tell you what the system should look like, I know that you are working aggressively in working on this very important connector. And as you work through how to reform and make the ferry system sustainable, vessel traffic continues to increase throughout the arctic. We are no longer debating whether we are an Arctic Nation. We are defining what it means to be an Arctic Nation. Last week came good news that the Port of Nome is closer to being a reality and the land transfer for Port Clarence is in its final stages.

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There is also a critical erosion project advancing at Utqiagvik. We have a President who emphasizes the importance of mapping and charting the Arctic. Last year we applauded the first icebreaker and we are already funding the long lead time items for a second icebreaker now.

At my direction, the Department of Energy will reopen its Arctic Energy Office in Alaska later this year.

I have also introduced a bill along with Dan and Don to establish a Center for Arctic Security Studies. This will be a strategic education and research venue to develop and conduct national security initiatives in the circumpolar Arctic. It will support scholarships and advance international and academic partnerships. In honor of my mentor and of our close friend who advocated for enhancing our knowledge and operational capacity in the Arctic, we will name it the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security.

I was pleased to see that just this month, the Alaska Senate passed a resolution supporting our legislation. I think we recognize that Alaska is America's Arctic and we cannot go forward without strong support here at home. So, I thank you for that.

When it comes to our national defense there is little debate as to the key strategic role Alaska plays. Instead of "if" we host new assets for instance at Eielson and the Interior, we are now working on how many F-35s are coming, what additional assets we can bring to Alaska, and how and where to house the people needed to support the mission. Again, we've moved beyond the debate to the implementation.

We aren't debating the importance of our oceans, either. We acknowledge their priority by investing in efforts to advance our understanding of fisheries, ocean acidification, and the changing of our coasts. Ocean science is critical for our nation, and especially for Alaska. We need science to properly manage our fisheries, improve coastal resilience, and support healthy ecosystems and the communities that rely on them.

Right now, I am working on the BLUE GLOBE Act, which I introduced to foster innovation and collaboration to improve ocean exploration, data collection, and monitoring. Of course Senator Sullivan has also done great work in this area, with his Save Our Seas Act, and leading the most comprehensive marine debris legislation ever adopted by the Senate. So we're doing good things in that capacity.

Through my role on the Appropriations Committee, I recently secured a \$4.8 million increase for NOAA's fishery surveys, data, and stock assessments. That will help NOAA capture the dramatic changes happening in our fisheries, from the Northern Bering Sea to the Gulf of Alaska.

And when it comes to changing climate, we need to recognize the debate is not about what is happening, but what we intend to do about it. That conversation must be based on science and data, and not partisan interests or political fantasies.

When I return to Washington, DC, I will introduce a bipartisan bill to advance a range of clean energy technologies. From renewables to energy storage, we are seeking to modernize our energy laws. This is something that we haven't done in 12 years. This is probably the single-best step we can take in this Congress to keep energy affordable, strengthen our long-term energy security, and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

One of the key technologies – especially for Alaska – is nuclear energy. I know when I mentioned it I got a few raised eyebrows. I want to speak again about my interest in it. I'm not talking about large reactors that can power a major city, but innovative technologies that can be scaled to fit our needs. I want to thank Senator Hoffman for working more than a decade to explore low-cost nuclear energy options for rural communities.

Senator Bishop has introduced a bill that will help ensure Alaska can attract investment for this new technology. With it, think about the range of possibility, we could power villages, military bases, and resource development projects safely and affordably, with no

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emissions and no need to refuel for years at a time. Senator Bishop, thank you for your leadership and for working together to bring these opportunities to a place like Alaska.

Just as Alaska will continue to be the place to deploy emerging energy systems, to pioneer microgrids, and to revolutionize cold climate housing and building technologies, we will continue to lead the world in responsible resource development.

I have to say it bothers me when I read and hear from some who suggest that in order to combat climate change, Alaska must immediately turn away from developing our resources. The reality is the world will need conventional resources for a long time to come. Under the International Energy Agency's sustainable development scenario, which reflect emissions reductions under the Paris Agreement, the world will still consume about 67 million barrels of oil per day in 2040.

As far as I'm concerned, the very last drop of oil the world uses should come from Alaska's North Slope. Alaskans set the standard for responsible production. We have strong oversight and stringent environmental regulations. We don't flare our gas; we reinject it. We build roads and pads out of ice. Our footprint of development has become ever smaller over time, making our overall carbon footprint smaller and increasing efficiency.

With exciting prospects on state land, in the NPR-A, and the coming lease sale in the 1002 Area, we have reason to be optimistic about our future production. But we can't take it for granted. More than ever, we must keep our state competitive in the race for global investment.

Here in Southeast, we are working with the administration to exempt the Tongass from the Roadless Rule to ensure that communities can grow. That isn't solely or even mostly about timber harvesting. It is about reasonable access for every local stakeholder in these islanded communities—from transportation and tourism, to energy and mining.

In the absence of reasonable access and resource production, we rely on programs such as Secure Rural Schools to help smaller communities. I'm proud to report that Dan, Don, and I worked together late last year to secure a two-year extension of the program. I also ensured full funding for the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program, which is critical for Alaska given the large amount of federal lands within our borders. These are important programs.

A great reminder of Congress working together is an accomplishment I'm especially proud of. Because what you see and read is that it's a place of great dysfunction and that we cannot collaborate. But we're coming up on the one-year anniversary of the passage of a package of more than 120 lands bills that I built with several of my colleagues. With a vote of 92 to 8, the lands package received overwhelmingly bipartisan, bicameral support.

That bill restarted a program to ensure that Alaska Natives who served our country in the Vietnam War could receive the land allotments guaranteed to them decades ago. It's not a perfect solution but it gives them some opportunity to receive the promised benefits. It will help keep our lands open for sportsmen and women who hunt, fish, and participate in recreational shooting. It provided routing flexibility for the gasline, conveyed sand and gravel resources on the North Slope, and permanently reauthorized the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which funds many of our state parks, while making important reforms to limit federal land acquisition.

Maintaining access to public lands means funding critical maintenance like the Denali Park road – thank you Representatives Talerico and Josephson for working on a resolution to support our work on the Denali Park Road. It is a project of statewide significance and your support in this matters.

In addition to maintaining existing infrastructure, we must invest in new recreational access statewide, like expanded trail systems, to help meet the needs of our growing visitor industry and to serve Alaskans.

There's just so much that needs to be done, so much to share with you but I'll end here.

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I have no pretension that 2020 will be an easy year. It has already proven it will not be. We have endured an impeachment, we are already in the midst of a presidential election, and partisanship is running high.

When our political landscape goes pitch black, I remember the men and women on the front lines, and the honor I have to serve our state. I double down and work harder than ever. And I don't start a day without reflecting on my dear friend Senator Ted Steven's words, "To hell with politics; just do what is right for Alaska."

**Please report corrections to the Chief Clerk's office.**