

**HOUSE AND SENATE
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

February 22, 2023

Wednesday

No. 7

* * * * *

Address by

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski

United States Senator

Before a Joint Session

of the

First Session of the

Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature

* * * * *

February 22, 2023

Juneau, Alaska

The following was submitted for publication:

President Stevens, Speaker Tilton, Members of the Alaska State Legislature:

Thank you for your warm welcome, and for taking this hour to discuss our state's future.

I always start my remarks with a family update. I share the latest on my husband, Verne, and my boys, Nic and Matt. But, this morning, I'm looking at a different Legislature. There are many of you I don't know yet. And you don't know that my sons, who are now in their 30s, wore their first ties here as guest pages when they were just eight years old.

Time flies. It's been 24 years since I first entered this chamber as a State Representative. I served alongside a few of you still here—Gary, Donny, and Lyman. Representative Foster, your Dad was serving and doing birthday tributes to each of us, and Representative Saddler, I believe you were singing in the skits.

To those of you who are continuing your service, I'm glad that your commitment to Alaska still runs strong.

To those of you who are beginning your first term, I want to congratulate you. It's great to see so many new faces—as well as your diversity and your passion for our state.

I particularly want to commend the House freshmen who have created an informal bipartisan caucus. Representatives Ruffridge, Gray, and all who have joined—what a good idea. In these divided times, we need to know each other, to work with each other, to achieve for Alaska.

You never know who you'll meet here, either, or how your lives might be connected over time. Among the freshmen in my class in 1999 was a young woman I became fast friends with. Her name was Mary, and today, we again work in the same building, still friends, carrying on the legacy of the Alaska legends who came before us—including the

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 7

February 22, 2023

Congressman for all Alaska, Don Young, who we miss every single day.

You've heard from Dan and Mary in the past couple of weeks, so I'm here to wrap it up. As you can tell, we remain a "small but mighty" delegation. Our gruffness rating is down a touch, but our effectiveness is still high. We're a good team for Alaska, and we work hard to bring home results.

Of course, we couldn't do it without our own teams. And on that front, I want to introduce the members of my staff who are in the gallery.

Amber Ebarb, my new staff director on the Indian Affairs Committee, is Tlingit, raised in Anchorage with family from Hoonah.

Aaron Thiele is my advisor on energy and natural resources.

Kevin Swanson, who joined us from Congressman Young's office, is my advisor for transportation, broadband, and more.

And Matt Robinson, my new "fish guy," is from the Golden Heart City of Fairbanks.

You'll see a few others wandering the building over the next couple of days, including Kaleb Froehlich, my chief of staff, and Kate Williams-Sterne, my deputy chief, both from here in Juneau. You'll see my Legislative Director, Angela Ramponi, and my Communications Director, Karina Borger, both from Soldotna. We're here to make connections with you and your teams, brainstorm, and work on problems together.

I'm proud of my team, which works tirelessly for Alaskans. And I'm proud of the work we did over the past year, together and with the delegation and with many of you, to help people and improve our state.

We responded to more than 8,000 individuals who wrote to my office. We opened and successfully closed hundreds of cases for Alaskans who needed assistance with everything from passport renewals to

missing Social Security payments. Every one of those was important—as were our legislative accomplishments.

When I spoke to you last year, our bipartisan infrastructure bill had just become law. I explained how it would allow us to build and modernize our core infrastructure—everything from our roads, bridges, ports, and airports to our energy, water, broadband, and ferry systems.

A year in, that's playing out better than any of us expected. Nearly \$3.2 billion from the infrastructure law has now been announced for our state.

Senators Stedman and Kiehl, Representatives Ortiz and Stutes, you know how much I love our ferry system. It was great to call and give you a heads-up that \$285 million is headed our way.

Senator Olson and Representative Foster, with \$250 million from the infrastructure law, and the matching funds you convinced the Legislature to approve, we're finally going to build Nome's Arctic Deep Draft Port.

President Stevens and Representative Stutes, the Coast Guard now has \$210 million for projects in Kodiak to support the Offshore Patrol Cutters that will be homeported there.

Senator Hoffman, Representative Edgmon, and Representative Patkotak, your regions, among others, have received major grants for broadband deployment. Bryce and Lyman, your legislation to establish a state broadband office, and its coordination with delegation staff, has made a big difference in our ability to bring those dollars to Alaska.

Senator Hoffman, you always ask what I'm doing on rural energy. I want you to know, the Department of Energy is standing up the \$1 billion program we created for energy improvements in rural and remote areas. So, happy belated birthday!

Beyond infrastructure, I partnered with many of you to leverage my position as a senior appropriator.

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 7

February 22, 2023

My annual Interior-Environment bill was chock full of Alaska priorities, from transboundary water quality monitoring to a new program to clean up contaminated lands.

Since I last spoke here, we also engaged the Congressionally Directed Spending process to secure nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars in earmarks for Alaska to address nearly 200 local priorities.

Every community has the right to clean water and sanitation, which has led to investments from Petersburg to Palmer to St. George.

We're expanding health services, providing housing for the victims of abuse and the homeless, expanding the shipping channel to Dutch Harbor, demolishing the Polaris Building to help revitalize downtown Fairbanks, supporting engineering and design work on the gasline, and backing law enforcement needs across the state—to name a few.

I know there are criticisms of earmarks, but these allocations are across the political spectrum, fully transparent, within budget caps, did not increase spending levels, and would've gone elsewhere had we not fought to bring them to Alaska.

On that note: the appropriations request portal on my website is now open through March 17. I want this process to help Alaskans in all communities—including the folks who can't just hop online to apply or travel to DC to make their pitch. That isn't necessary. What is necessary, is for us to try to reach everyone.

We also had some big policy wins last year.

We passed my University of Alaska Fiscal Foundation Act, which will add up to 360,000 acres to the University's land grant.

President Stevens, Senator Kawasaki, I know this is something you championed, with many others here in the Legislature, in partnership with the Governor and the University.

The reality is that we have a great land grant University, here in the largest state in the union, with a smaller land grant than the one in Rhode Island.

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

February 22, 2023

No. 7

We're fixing that. And over time, the lands the University receives from the State will generate additional revenues to support its students, faculty, and campus infrastructure.

We reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act; secured \$300 million for commercial, recreational, and subsistence harvesters affected by fisheries disasters; and convinced FEMA to lift its cost-sharing requirements to ensure a quick, effective response after the remnants of Typhoon Merbok slammed western Alaska.

We made historic investments in our military and brought home \$335 million for military construction, including runways at JBER. We gave the men and women who serve a well-deserved pay raise, and passed major portions of my Arctic Warrior Act to provide additional benefits for those stationed here. We also honored our promises to veterans through the PACT Act, which will provide better care for those who had toxic exposures during their service.

I could go on about our legislative accomplishments, but suffice to say, last year was a good one for Alaska. We didn't get every last thing we wanted – we're still pushing for that commercial icebreaker – but we'll feel the benefits of the measures that passed for generations to come.

However...as beautiful of a day as it is here in Juneau, there's also a not-so-sunny part of my remarks.

Alaska is facing big challenges. Just look at the analyses that Nolan Klouda and his team are producing. We've had ten straight years of net outmigration. Our employment growth was next to last of any state from 2015 to 2021. Our GDP declined and was next to last over that same period. Alaska's economy is recovering from the pandemic, but at a slower pace than almost any other state.

The price of food and fuel is still too high. It's hard to find eggs, let alone childcare or affordable housing.

No one, from private firms to state agencies, from schools to hospitals, can find enough workers.

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 7

February 22, 2023

We're a resource state that isn't being allowed to produce resources in our vast federal areas—even, potentially, in our petroleum reserve.

Some of our fisheries, from crab to salmon, are collapsing, leaving families and communities without sustenance.

The impacts of climate change are growing worse.

Too many people are struggling, and fentanyl is claiming more and more innocent lives, including those of young Alaskans like Bruce Snodgrass.

Friends, Alaska can't settle for being 49th in anything but statehood.

We can't be a place where people spend part of their lives, only to pack up and leave because they don't see a future. Or watch as the kids we raised here leave and never come back.

Alaska needs to be a place where people want to move and want to stay, because they have good jobs that support their families, a good place to live, good schools where their kids can excel, and a quality of life they can't match anywhere else.

Where we take care of our fellow Alaskans when they hit rough patches.

That's going to take vision from all of us. A different sort of effort from all of us. And a recognition that while a lot of supplemental federal support has come our way, between the COVID packages and the infrastructure bill, we can't count on that forever. That's not open-ended.

The delegation, the administration, and the legislature are all equal partners in Alaska's success. We need to be pulling together to take full advantage of these opportunities while they're in front of us.

As I start a new term, I'm looking at every facet of how we can make Alaska the best place to live, work, play, and stay. That comes with an extensive agenda, touching just about every area of public policy.

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

February 22, 2023

No. 7

At the top of my list is economic development. And, of course, at the top of that list is the Willow Project. I'm proud that so many Alaskans, and so many friends from the Lower 48, have come together to push for its re-approval. I welcome and appreciate the resolution the House passed, 36 to 0, which sends a strong message about Alaskans' unity on this project. But here on February 22, a little less than two weeks from a final decision, I'm still not certain which way it will go.

I'm totally committed to this fight. Dan has been an absolute warrior. Mary has shown true courage, pushing the administration and standing up to Democratic members in the House. The Governor has been clear on his position, and here in the Legislature, you've been steadfast in your resolve.

I also want to express my thanks to the large majority of Alaskans, especially the Alaska Natives who live on the North Slope, who are pushing for Willow—this has truly been a unified effort.

But, we know this is a difficult administration to deal with. From Ambler and ANWR to the Tongass, we've had decision after decision go against us. Even this one—a socially just project located within a petroleum reserve—is perilously close. So we need to finish strong. Every one of us needs to do everything we can, with every remaining day, to make the case for why an economically viable project should be approved.

We also need to recognize that if the final decision on Willow goes against the recommendation of the career civil servants at the Department of the Interior, it's nothing but pure politics and has nothing to do with the merits of the project.

Willow is our priority, but it is not alone. The Pikka Project is another. So is the gasline. I'm more bullish on mining's future in Alaska than I ever have been, so long as EPA follows its commitment to avoid further vetoes in our state.

We have incredible potential for renewable energy, from hydropower at Angoon to geothermal at Makushin, and there is more federal support available than ever. We're going to deploy the first advanced

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 7

February 22, 2023

reactors in a few years. We can be a global hub for both carbon sequestration and hydrogen. And I commend the Governor for putting new ideas on the table for carbon storage and even monetization.

There is one item out there for Alaskan energy that doesn't sit well with me—at all. And that's the possibility of our state importing LNG to meet energy needs in the Railbelt. We have tremendous resources on the North Slope and more in Cook Inlet. We have renewables and the promise of advanced nuclear. And we're going to settle for imports from British Columbia?

Really?

Don't let that happen, even as a temporary solution. We shouldn't be taking the easy way out, which is to ask someone else to help instead of using our resources to help our people. It's the definition of aiming low, and a long way from the "owner state" mentality that Wally Hickel preached.

Alaskans deserve better.

Beyond resources, another priority is workforce development. From the North Slope, to the projects being facilitated by the infrastructure bill, to everything else happening across our state, we need more workers in just about every field. And that means we need Alaskans trained and ready for those opportunities.

I've been able to direct funding to several workforce initiatives through the CDS process. I'm going to support the University of Alaska—and Ilisagvik, Yuut, Northern Industrial Training, and all who prepare Alaskans for the workforce—every chance I get. I encourage you to do the same, because we also need state-specific solutions to educate and train Alaskans and attract new talent from the Lower 48.

Next is childcare. Every region of our state lacks sufficient access to childcare, and that's taking people, usually Moms, out of the workforce. Lack of childcare may even impact our national security footing in Alaska. I spoke with Lt. Gen. Nahom about this, and it's not an exaggeration to say it is starting to impact readiness within the

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

February 22, 2023

No. 7

Alaska Command. For example, without childcare options, the Coast Guard will not homeport new vessels in Alaska.

At the federal level, I'm working with others on the HELP Committee to improve the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program, to help make childcare more affordable, help providers stay open, and enable them to better recruit and retain staff.

I'll continue to advocate for Head Start, which also faces barriers to staff recruitment and retention.

For the military, I am looking at ways to give leadership more authority and funding to staff childcare centers and give their employees a competitive wage.

Representative Fields has a bill on childcare, as do others. And I will again urge you to do what you can from here, by putting this issue firmly on the agenda for the 33rd Legislature.

When it comes to housing, we know we need more and better all across the state, from St. Lawrence Island to here in Southeast.

This is an area where the federal government has a limited role, so I'm looking for creative solutions, including housing for teachers, public safety, and more.

One avenue is the CDS process, which can provide some assistance with site preparation and water and sewer connections that are needed before housing can be built. Another is the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act, which we will be pushing hard to reauthorize in this new Congress.

Here, again, you have opportunities. There are requests in the Governor's budget for housing. I hope you'll give these a thorough review and add your own ideas.

The area I want to challenge you the most is transportation. We have an unprecedented opportunity to refloat our struggling ferry system. This is our shot. This is a lifeline. Grab it.

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 7

February 22, 2023

I almost never call on the Legislature to do anything specific, but I'm asking you to approve the matching funds for our ferry system. It is the Alaska Marine Highway System, not the Federal Marine Highway System. This is maybe just a little personal to me, having grown up down here in Southeast, but the ferry system matters. And as we worked through the infrastructure bill, I made sure that marine highways were included. I've done what I can, and now it's up to you to bring it home.

There are so many opportunities under the infrastructure bill and other federal measures. I know the fiscal budget is tough, but the opportunities we have created for Alaskans to invest in our future won't be fulfilled unless this Legislature steps up with the state share.

When it comes to transportation, I have to ask—what's our long-term vision and plan?

When I was in this chamber, Representative Jeannette James had big ideas about a rail connection to Canada as a way to move our mineral resources. Frank Murkowski is still talking about those big ideas. Yet here we are, all these years later, with good projects at risk of not getting off the ground because we still can't move our stuff.

We should be thinking big about how we move our people, resources, freight, and trash, but it sure feels like we've lowered our sights.

Frank is right—to maximize development opportunities across our great state, we need to be able to move things by rail. So let's get the conversation moving again about projects like the northern rail extension and the Mat-Su rail connection.

We also need to get it right at the Port of Alaska—the heart of our transportation system, handling well over half of the cargo our state receives. It's imperative that we upgrade the Port to modern standards, but for that to happen, everyone has to agree on its design.

The delegation has stepped up to provide funding, and the State has stepped up with matching funds—thank you, Senator Merrick. But when I read in the Anchorage Daily News about new proposed design

modifications that may cost another \$200 million, with no agreement on how to pay for it besides applying for additional federal grants...really?

The Port is too important to Alaskans. This project is too big to fail.

Many of you here share my passion for the Arctic, which is now on the front lines of the great power competition. What we have done so far—funding for broadband, water, and other core infrastructure, icebreakers, the re-establishment of the 11th Airborne, Arctic-focused strategies from every branch of the military, the creation of the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, the recent announcement of our first Arctic Ambassador—are all good steps. But they're first steps, not final pushes.

So where do we go from here on the Arctic? We need to make our international territorial claims. We need to prepare for greater maritime traffic from shipping, tourism, and resource development, here and abroad. We need to invest more in infrastructure, to meet the needs of those who live there; in diplomacy, to try to keep the Arctic a zone of peace; in scientific research, to better understand the region and its environment; in adaptation, to address climate change; and, of course, in security, to protect our sovereignty.

So many of us have worked to educate Washington about the strategic importance of Alaska to our nation's security. And people outside the state are seeing in real time what we have been saying all these years.

In a very short span, Americans have seen firsthand how China is a threat, how Russia is on our doorstep, and how North Korea is lurking. It started with a Chinese spy balloon transiting over Alaska. A few days later, our military shot down an unidentified object off the North Slope. A few days after that, Russian Bear bombers were approaching our airspace. And then North Korea fired off ballistic missiles, labeling the Pacific Ocean its "firing range."

Alaska is increasingly America's first line of defense. I'm more thankful than ever for all who serve and keep us safe. And what the men and women of the 11th Air Force and the Alaska Air National

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 7

February 22, 2023

Guard have so powerfully demonstrated in recent days is that when you threaten Alaska's sovereignty, you threaten the nation's sovereignty and we will respond.

As we discuss threats to national sovereignty, we acknowledge that we are near the one-year mark of Russia's catastrophic war against Ukraine. It has never been more important to stand with Ukraine to help preserve their democracy, and I am proud to do so.

The people of Ukraine deserve our support. Their need is immense, and we applaud their courage and continued sacrifice in defense of democracy.

That brings me to the final priority I want to speak to today, which is caring for the vulnerable right here at home—because we have an obligation to do both.

As much as we invest in infrastructure, transportation connectors, and everything physical, we also need to invest in our people. Not all is well in our state. Too many Alaskans are vulnerable and need help.

We need to take care of the elderly, the young, people with disabilities, the hungry, and those who face violence and abuse, addiction, mental and behavioral issues, and homelessness. We know there are good ways to make a difference in those lives. We need to reach for them, and that's why I was pleased to see the Governor's proposal to extend Medicaid's post-partum coverage to 12 months.

We can also bolster our healthcare workforce, especially in rural areas so Alaskans can access care closer to home.

We can do more to educate Alaskans about the extreme dangers of fentanyl poisoning, as we're doing with Bruce's Law, and to stop its illegal trafficking into our state.

We can provide resources to community-based organizations that support Alaskans as they undergo treatment and recover from addiction.

We can reduce barriers to trauma-informed care after sexual assault.

I plan to make care for our most vulnerable a priority every day that I have the privilege to serve. And I ask all of you to join me.

Our state needs Willow, Pikka, Donlin, Graphite One, Ambler Road, and the Port of Nome, to name a few. But those big projects won't matter as much if we don't have healthy families and communities.

We have come so far as a state, but still have a long way to go to reach our potential. And what matters, for each of us, is that we're here, in the arena. We have been chosen by the people of Alaska to represent them, to serve them, and to help them.

They're counting on us to have a vision. To push that vision, whether for resources, housing, childcare, workforce development, transportation, or another big idea that can shape our state for the next generation. A generation that stays, instead of leaving.

The delegation has done a lot for Alaska in the past several years. Now we need our partners in the state to step forward. That's my challenge to all of you who have the privilege of serving in the 33rd Legislature.

I hope I didn't step on anybody's toes with some of my direct comments, but know that I'm comfortable raising this here because I love this place. It's where I started, it is my home, and we are family.

I want the best for Alaska, and I know all of you do, too. We should not be 49th in anything but statehood. So, I promise you—I will be with you every day, as your partner and fellow Alaskan, to take on the big things together, to resolve our challenges together, and to help our people together.

Please report corrections to the Chief Clerk's office.