

**HOUSE AND SENATE
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

February 26, 2024

Monday

No. 16

* * * * *

Address by

The Honorable Mary Sattler Peltola

United States Representative

Before a Joint Session

of the

Second Session of the

Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature

* * * * *

February 26, 2024

Juneau, Alaska

The following was submitted for publication:

Good morning, and thank you once again, President Stevens and Speaker Tilton, for the invitation to speak here today. It's great to be in Alaska!

I would like to recognize my two High Schoolers: Job, a Senior at Ya Kootz, and Nora, a sophomore at JDHS. Job & Nora, along with their 5 older siblings, have been an inspiration to me. Especially after the shocking loss of the head of our family, Gene Peltola, Jr./Buzzy. We miss him every day, and we strive to honor his memory.

I also want to recognize my staff in the gallery. We've achieved some big wins this year that wouldn't have happened without all of you. Anton, Inti, Burke, Logan, Tyson, and all of you who aren't here today or helped us with the transition last year—thank you for your commitment to Alaska.

Last year, I spoke about the Alaska Model and how many people around the country are paying attention to what's happening—in this building—and across our amazing state.

What you all have accomplished and continue to accomplish is incredible. After all—you've managed to keep the speaker of your House for two whole years! Believe me, it's harder than it looks.

I think the Alaska Model works so well because it is built on relationships—and friendships—between some incredible figures in our state's history.

Giants of our past, from Wally Hickel to Ted Stevens to Don Young, would never let partisanship or national media attention stand between them and the right decision for Alaska.

Many of us know giants of our own; in our family histories, the parents and grandparents who persevered through hardship, worked exciting and challenging jobs in booming industries. Whether they came from a long line of Alaskans or were one of the many who moved here, fell in love, and never left.

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 16

February 26, 2024

But many people seem to struggle to thrive in Alaska these days. For 11 straight years, more and more adults in the prime of their working years have left Alaska. From affordable housing to good—paying jobs to high energy prices—Alaskans are facing many hurdles.

I want to thank this body for tackling one of the biggest hurdles Alaskans face when deciding whether they can raise their families in Alaska. Last week, you showed Alaska that we are invested in our kids and their education.

As a mother of seven with two kids still attending school here in Juneau—thank you.

I hear from Alaskans every day who worry the good times are behind us. They fear their future will be smaller than the one their parents enjoyed. I'm here to tell all of them—we won't let that happen.

Alaska has never been an easy place to live. For 12,000 years, Alaska Natives have struggled with natural disasters, food scarcity, and safety issues. And even today, when 85% of our communities are off the road system—we find ways to live our lives, care for our families, and live far better lives than people—at least in my opinion—do in DC and elsewhere in the Lower 48.

Alaska has faced and overcome challenges before. We are a young state, and there is still so much we can accomplish if we are willing to work together—ignore Lower 48 partisanship—and cultivate a new generation of leadership. I know this because we all stood up to just that over the last year. And we've demonstrated this in the last year of working together.

There's no better example of this than the news I have to share with you today. Alaska convinced the FTC to sue to block the Kroger-Albertsons merger.

After listening to Alaskans who were concerned about paying higher food prices and losing union jobs in their communities, I took the lead by sending the FTC a letter urging them to block the merger. 24 of you also sent a letter to the FTC asking for the same. Our U.S.Senators

raised deep concerns in a letter of their own. Then, we all banded together to host unprecedented listening sessions so the FTC could hear the concerns of regular Alaskans. And—today—the FTC informed me that it was those sessions—hearing from regular people like they never have before that not only convinced them to move to stop this merger—but also created a new model for how the FTC will engage with constituents when making big decisions that affect their lives. The Alaska model!

Another great example of what we can accomplish when we all work together is the Willow Project. Last year, I spoke to you about how important this project was to our state and how we all needed to come together to make it happen. With a unanimous resolution, you all helped us show that Alaskans not only wanted this project—we needed this project. Luckily, I can stand before you all today and say we got this project.

As we speak, ice roads are being laid, and construction is getting underway. The first of thousands of Alaska jobs are being created, with new wages rippling out into the broader economy. I believe it was Senator Bishop who told me that he recently stopped into a hardware store in Fairbanks, and the shelves were nearly cleared—all the inventory had been bought up for use on the North Slope. That is the kind of success that Alaskans can see and feel in our communities.

You all, together with the Governor, labor groups, businesses, and Alaska Natives, formed one of the largest coalitions in Alaskan history to overcome the pressure of lower 48 groups—who have no connections to Alaska. When I joined our Senators to meet with President Biden, we emphasized our unity, and each of us spoke for a different part of that coalition.

Let me be clear: Willow is not a step back in terms of climate goals, it is an essential step forward in our energy transition. Alaska is not an empty snow globe—people live here, and we have needs. I am confident Alaska will have more unified wins, like Willow, in the near future.

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 16

February 26, 2024

However, Willow is underway, and outside groups have pushed the Department of Interior to restrict development in almost all of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, which, as its name reflects, was set aside explicitly for oil development. They ignored precedent. They ignored the Inupiat of the North Slope and made this decision without any actual tribal consultation. They rushed through this process to satiate lower 48 political pressure. I am encouraged to see Representative Baker's resolution opposing this rule, and I will continue working to make sure the voices of the North Slope communities are being heard in D.C. Whether or not you support more production on the North Slope, everyone in the room agrees that it should be Alaskans who make this choice. And because, last year, we agreed that this development is essential—I am glad to report that I just learned that Santos is hiring more than 2,400 employees on the North Slope this season. Between Pikka and Willow, we are bringing over 4,000 jobs to our state!

Preserving our ability to fund public services through petroleum revenues is essential. Still, last year, I also spoke to you about the importance of using these energy projects and other federal investments as a springboard to a cleaner, less expensive energy future.

We are witnessing the effects of a changing climate in real-time, with Alaskan houses already sinking into the permafrost. For the sake of our future—we have to do something. We need to be creating a cleaner future for the next generation, not by rejecting fossil fuels entirely, but by investing in new technology that can power our homes and businesses with fewer emissions and for a lower cost. Creating a cleaner electric grid doesn't just benefit the planet—it benefits everyone and every household in a very real way. Cheap power is the foundation of a real economy, and Alaska has long had some of the most expensive power in the country—despite our tremendous oil and gas resources. We are an energy-rich state with wind, solar, tidal, and geothermal energy. We must take advantage of all energy options to ensure Alaskans have reliable and inexpensive power. These energy sources often don't pencil out for many reasons. But that doesn't have to be true anymore. We can make the choice to invest now in a 21st-century energy grid—one that can fully unleash the energy potential of our state.

There is no better way to start than with Alaska's Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships program award, nearly \$206.5 million to complete major upgrades to the Railbelt electric grid, with another \$206.5 million in matching funds required. I spoke with Secretary Granholm and President Biden personally about how much it would mean to our state. I worked day in and day out with our Senators to help bring this project home, and we will continue to deliver for Alaska. And if we pull this off, 75% of Alaskans could be on 80% of renewable energy by 2040.

I'll be direct—we must meet the required funding match. There is simply too much at stake to miss this opportunity. If, heaven forbid, Cook Inlet gas can no longer heat homes on the Railbelt or the next energy grid crisis occurs, we will kick ourselves for not having built a stronger grid that can share power more effectively between regions and lower costs for everyone.

As I often share with my colleagues in D.C., Alaska is a hundred years behind the rest of the country when it comes to basic infrastructure. We truly can't afford to miss out on these once-in-a-generation funding opportunities. We must act today.

This is also true when it comes to broadband Internet. The modern age is an Internet age, and Alaskans deserve to be a part of it as much as anyone else. I'm incredibly proud to have helped bring over \$2 billion in new broadband investments to Alaska. These projects will open up whole new regions of the state to high-speed Internet access and all the personal, health, educational, and economic benefits that come with it.

It's no secret that these projects are expensive, particularly when the communities involved are small. But delivering Internet access is not a one-way relationship. Connecting Alaskans to each other and the rest of the world helps us tell our stories and be heard in a way that we never could before. Think of how many people around the world watched the videos of Patuk Glenn, showing the rich traditions of life on the North Slope. Even the smallest, most remote community has something to teach us, and they should be able to share their lives like the rest of America.

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 16

February 26, 2024

But if we want people to move here and stay here, we also need to invest in the basic services that people expect from a state government. I'm deeply concerned by the number of Alaskans waiting for months to receive SNAP benefits and other nutritional assistance due to backlogs in the state's process. I am working with the USDA to support exemptions and extensions, but these are only temporary measures.

These programs and departments need to be adequately funded because if we can't deliver basic services to Alaskans, then why should people want to move here or raise children here? Food security is something most of us in this room take for granted. But for many Alaskans, it's no longer a given. It's these Alaskans who we need to be listening to and finding effective ways to support. I'm grateful to hear of the progress being made in this area, like the new USDA pilot program, Alaska Meals to You, that will fund the delivery of shelf-stable lunch foods across rural Alaska.

Kids with empty stomachs can't learn, play, or grow. They fall behind in ways that can follow them for the rest of their lives. And that brings me to another vital pillar of Alaskan food security: the fish that our communities rely on. We all know that fishing isn't just a key part of our state's economy; it is a shared cultural heritage and a very real food source for many of us. In some ways, it seems like the bad news keeps coming. More low returns and subsistence restrictions. Seafood plant closures in communities across Alaska. These are the stories that tear at our hearts. I cannot imagine raising children in an Alaska where the rivers are empty.

The decline of Alaskan fisheries is a trend years in the making, and it will take years of hard work to fully reverse. But I believe we are already starting to see positive signs.

When I got to D.C., people would laugh about my being 'pro-fish'. I have made it clear that this is not a laughing matter, and people are finally starting to pay attention. Everyone in Alaska knows we don't joke about our fish, guns, and freedom—now, a lot of people in the lower 48 know we don't joke about it either.

I am happy to say that because I founded the bipartisan American Seafood Caucus, we are bringing representation from all four of America's coastlines together for the first time in our Nation's history!

There is more encouraging news on the horizon. NOAA is reviewing its National Standards—the 10 Commandments of fisheries management, as I call them—for the first time in nearly a decade. Bristol Bay, the world's greatest wild sockeye salmon fishery, has been protected for generations to come.

But the highlight of the last year has undoubtedly been one of the most pro-fish executive orders in our nation's history, cracking down on the foreign trawl fleets and fish processed inhumanely that are undermining our Alaskan fishermen and the health of our ocean species. The ocean is a shared ecosystem, and the damage that these foreign vessels do is felt in every coastal community around our state. After catching untold, unreported amounts of fish, Russian fleets utilize Uyghur slave laborers in China to process their catch, avoiding Western sanctions and bottoming out the price of seafood for every Alaskan vessel. This is a system that has been perfected over the past decade by Russians to take more and more of a shared resource, funding a two-year bloody war in Ukraine while pushing ever closer to our waters. This is what our Alaskan fishing families are up against—and we've all had enough. I am proud to have pushed this administration to finally take action against these lawless foreign fleets.

What all of these victories have in common is that they were team efforts, and each of us took the lead in different ways. While we may not have the same power that Alaska enjoyed in the heyday of Stevens and Young, I believe our Congressional delegation today is following in the footsteps of our Alaskan giants.

I know that I can rely on our Senators to back me up, and I know that there is far more we agree on than disagree. I will always admire my friend Lisa, who has been such a champion for Alaska, reliably bringing home funding for critical projects and being a vital dealmaker over and over in a divided Congress. And I will always appreciate Dan's tenacity and passion, putting country before party to help push

HOUSE AND SENATE JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 16

February 26, 2024

through vital military nominations and uphold America's commitments to our allies. Together, we passed a National Defense Authorization Act that included a 5.2% pay raise for our troops, the largest increase in decades, and made crucial investments in Alaska's military bases.

Alaska has gotten more out of the 118th Congress in per-capita funding than almost any state, and that isn't an accident. Having a politically balanced delegation means we can talk to anyone from any angle. We can get a meeting with a Republican or a Democratic president. We can work with the majority and the minority. In a Congress as polarized as this one, that is a powerful advantage for a small state with only three members of Congress. Too much is riding on federal support to put all our eggs in one political basket. That's true for everyone here as well. Many of the giants of the past have left us, and it's up to us to carry on. While we will always stand on their shoulders, the next rung of the ladder is still a reach. We need new blood and new ideas to get there. That's why I'm proud to announce that this year, I will be convening a summit of Alaskans from all walks of life to focus on the issue of outmigration.

We've been discussing this issue for years, but everyone has their ideas on what's causing it and how to fix it. We need a whole-of-society effort to identify the trends causing our children to leave and a shared understanding of what it will take for them to choose to stay.

This summit will bring together educators, union members, youth, elders, elected leaders, small businesses, and more to have this vital conversation as a state. We need to be talking about what Alaska looks like in five, 10, 20, and 100 years from now.

The thing about giants is that they don't grow overnight. They need to be taught, supported, and mentored. They need spaces to learn, play, and roam across our great state. They need to see a future here that is big enough for them to thrive. We have a choice ahead of us: We can continue to coast on the accomplishments of the past, slowly losing momentum as the world changes around us, or we can embrace the need for change, just as we have done before. I'm confident we will choose the latter.

In addressing the Alaska Legislature, Don Young once said: "Alaska and the Alaskan spirit are on the rise." That is still accurate today. It is time for all Alaskans to revive the "can-do" spirit—Alaskans: please, run for office, participate in the process, and vote.

This legislature, and especially the new generation of leaders coming in as freshmen, is an example of that. I commend all of you in this room—Public Service is an honorable institution and also a huge sacrifice for the public servant and, most especially for their families. I encourage you to be both patient and persistent. There are future giants in this room, I'm certain, and all across this amazing state. Our best years are yet to come.

Last year, I said the Alaska Model works so well because it is built on relationships and friendships. I hope you can look at one another in this room as a team the same way the giants before us looked at each other. Please picture it with me if you can: A future where there is no doubt that our children and grandchildren will get to see a salmon abundance like it was when we were their age. I see a future where Alaska families will be able to live prosperously in the state, we call home. I see a future where Alaskans can grow up in Alaska, raise their children in Alaska, and watch their grandchildren grow up in Alaska.

To hell with politics, this is about the future of Alaska. Let's secure our bright future together. Thank you!

Please report corrections to the Chief Clerk's office.