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Address by

The Honorable Nick Begich III

United States Representative

Before a Joint Session

of the

First Session of the

Thirty-Fourth Alaska State Legislature

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Juneau, Alaska

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Governor, Mr. Speaker, President Stevens, Minority Leaders Shower and Costello, members of the Legislature - thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

It's great to be back in Juneau. This room is full of people who have dedicated themselves to making Alaska stronger, and I appreciate the work you do. I know how much time and effort it takes to serve in this building, and I want you to know - I respect it. You're on the front lines, balancing competing priorities, fighting for your districts, and making tough decisions. I know that feeling well because I live it every day in Washington.

I also want to acknowledge my colleagues in the congressional delegation. Senator Murkowski and Senator Sullivan have been strong advocates for Alaska, and I appreciate our partnership in Washington. None of us do this alone, and I wouldn't be standing here without the support of my family, my team, and the Alaskans who make public service possible.

To my fellow members of the freshman class of 2025, I'm proud to be one of you, and extremely gratified to have a few good friends among your membership. I know exactly how you feel, because I feel the same way. You've got big ideas, a long to-do list, and a deep sense of responsibility to the people who sent you here. It's a lot of work, but it's worth it - there's nothing more rewarding than knowing you're making a real difference for the people of this great state.

A Heavy Loss for Alaska

Before I go any further, I want to acknowledge the heartbreaking loss in Nome with the Bering Air flight tragedy. My heart goes out to the families, friends, and the entire community mourning this loss. Alaska is no stranger to hardship, but time and again, we see the incredible resilience of our people. In the face of tragedy, Alaskans come together. We lift each other up. And in those moments, we're reminded of what makes this state so special: the people.

But we also have some happier news closer to home: I want to take a moment to recognize Rep. Calvin Schrage and his wife, Chelsea, who just welcomed a beautiful baby girl, Emmaline Louise, into the world last week. Eight pounds, five ounces-and from the photos I saw, absolutely adorable. (Must take after her mom.) Congratulations to you both. I hope you're getting at least some sleep!

Here to Listen

I know I'm the one standing here behind the lectern, but I want to impress one thing upon you: I came here to listen to you.

You are the boots on the ground - the ones closest to the challenges and opportunities in your communities. No one understands Alaska's needs better than you. That's why I'm here - not just to talk, but to listen. Your insights, your concerns, and your ideas shape the work I do in Washington. If there's something standing in the way of progress, I want to hear about it so we can tackle it together.

Alaska's Moment

We all know the challenges we're up against rising costs, federal overreach, an economy that isn't firing on all cylinders. But we also know the opportunities in front of us.

Alaska is a state built on bold ideas and hard work. We have the resources, the talent, and the drive to lead - not just in energy, but in innovation, infrastructure, and economic growth. The question isn't whether we can do it. The question is: Are we willing to fight for it?

For many of you, that's why you ran: to fight for our state. And that's also why I ran for Congress - to make sure Alaska's voice is heard in Washington, loud and clear.

A White House That Understands Alaska

One of the biggest developments for our state this year was President Trump's executive order focused on unleashing Alaska's resource potential.

It's refreshing to have an administration that not only values Alaska but understands our role in America's energy future. This order lays out a bold vision - opening up development, streamlining permitting, and prioritizing Alaska's energy production.

But we all know - the devil is in the details. A lot depends on who gets put in charge of these policies. And that's where we come in.

No one understands Alaska better than Alaskans. We are the experts on how to get things done here. I'll be working closely with all of you, as well as industry leaders and stakeholders, to make sure our voices are heard. We will watch the process closely and make sure that practical, pro-development Americans - not Washington bureaucrats - are leading the way.

Energy Dominance Starts in Alaska

Alaska should be the powerhouse of American energy. We have the resources, the expertise, and the workforce to meet our energy needs and strengthen America's energy security.

And right now, we're seeing some very encouraging news about the Alaska LNG pipeline project - momentum that we haven't seen in a long time.

First, we have a new, solid partner on board. AGDC has teamed up with Glenfame LLC to lead the project, and that's a huge step forward. Glenfame is a serious player in the LNG industry, with the experience and resources to help bring this across the finish line.

Second, President Trump has singled out Alaska LNG as a key piece of America's national energy strategy. That's a strong signal about where this administration is headed - toward real, sustained energy development with Alaska at the forefront.

And even more exciting, Japan has been announced as a key potential purchaser of Alaska LNG exports. That's a critical piece of the puzzle - because for this project to move forward, we need both an LNG pipeline and the ability to export LNG.

These are huge, positive steps, but as always, the devil is in the details. That's why I'm working closely with our state, federal, and industry partners to identify and eliminate potential obstacles before they slow us down.

One major piece of the equation is securing the necessary loan guarantees - because a project of this scale needs financing that reflects its importance to both Alaska and the nation. That's something I'm pushing for in Washington, and I'll keep working to ensure that every necessary component is in place.

Delivering for Alaska in Congress

Since taking office, I've been focused on cutting through the noise and making sure Alaska gets results. That means ensuring Washington keeps its promises - especially to our Alaska Native communities.

That's why I introduced House Resolution 42, the Alaska Native Settlement Trust Eligibility Act, which fixes an unfair flaw in federal law that was forcing blind, disabled, and elderly Alaska Natives to choose between receiving their settlement trust benefits or staying eligible for federal

assistance programs like Supplemental Security Income, SNAP, and housing aid. These trusts were set up to support Alaska Native shareholders, but an oversight in the law counted payments as income - hurting the very people they were meant to help. H.R. 42 ensures they don't lose critical assistance just for accepting what's rightfully theirs. I also introduced House Resolution 43, the Alaska Native Village Municipal Lands Restoration Act, which returns more than 11,500 acres of land to Alaska Native Village Corporations - land that's been locked in bureaucratic limbo for decades. ANCSA required villages to set aside land for potential municipalities, but after 50 years, only 8 out of 101 villages have incorporated. That land should be used for housing, development, and community expansion - not tied up in red tape.

Both bills passed the House with bipartisan support, and I was honored to be the first freshman in this Congress to pass legislation out of the House. These bills were bipartisan, and I'd like to thank Representative Peltola for her work on them in the 118th Congress.

Fisheries

Now, I want to turn to a topic that is unarguably one of the most important for our state - both economically and culturally - *our Alaskan fisheries*.

To say that fishing is a "way of life" would be an understatement - our fisheries are what so many Alaskans live and breathe every single day.

Alaska's fisheries are an inseparable component of our economy and a resounding symbol of identity for our coastal communities.

As the industry that employs more Alaskans than any other, our fisheries are Alaska's primary source of food security while also serving as a critical economic driver, generating billions in revenue and providing a stable source of employment for Alaskans from Southeast to the Bering Sea.

Unfortunately, the fishing industry has faced many unforeseen challenges in recent years and hard-working Alaskan families have carried the weight of those challenges with a diminished sense of hope for the future.

From unprecedented closures in the Bering Sea for our snow crab fisheries, to a shocking decline among certain salmon species, our Alaskan fishermen need a lifeline.

We also need to preserve and strengthen the Alaska Marine Highway System, which is a lifeline for so many coastal communities. I'm working to ensure federal transportation policies recognize and support this critical service.

And, of course, affordable, reliable energy is the backbone of everything. I'm focused on expanding power generation to lower energy costs and making sure our power transmission infrastructure is resilient enough to handle our extreme conditions. Whether it's securing investments for microgrids in rural Alaska or pushing for better interconnection between regions, this is a priority that affects every Alaskan - families and businesses alike.

Infrastructure isn't only about moving goods - it's about keeping our economy strong, our communities connected, and our cost of living manageable. I'll keep fighting to make sure hard infrastructure investments are prioritized.

We're Here to Work With You

Before I wrap up, I want to introduce a couple of key members of my team who are here with me today.

Many of you already know Josh Walton, my Natural Resources Legislative Assistant. He's spent years working right here in Juneau, and he knows these issues inside and out. And I'm proud to have Rick Whitbeck leading my state team as State Director.

Rounding out my state team are a couple of other names you may know: our Anchorage Regional Director Portia Babcock Samuels, our Fairbanks Regional Director Leslie Hajdukovich, Constituent Liaison Denali Tshibaka, and our Green and Gold Fellow Ryan Chatterton who is working specifically on Veterans issues. They couldn't join us in Juneau today, but they are top-notch and will be very valuable resources.

My office is here to help. If there's something I can do to move Alaska forward, I want to hear from you. Reach out - let's work together.

Closing Thoughts

Alaska is a land of opportunity - but only if we fight for it.

Our Alaskan fisheries face increasing challenges from regulatory overreach, foreign competition, bycatch, and certain practices that may be contributing to the systemic collapse of early-stage ecosystems upon which downstream species rely. We must address the issues within the fishing industry with science-based, factual research.

As a resource rich state, we cannot afford to exercise selective oversight of our endowed perpetual resources. This is true across all industries, but particularly within our fisheries.

Congress must continue its work to ensure a streamlined and efficient approach to distributing disaster relief funds. I will continue pushing for a more responsive federal relief process for affected communities. We must make sure that communities receive the support they need without unnecessary delays.

Protecting Alaska's fisheries means protecting our economic future, our recreational fishing heritage, and our subsistence way of life. I am committed to defending this resource so that we may secure Alaska's fisheries for generations to come.

Building the Infrastructure Alaska Needs

Alaska's economy - and our future - depend on strong, reliable infrastructure. Whether it's ports, rail, roads, or energy, we need modern, resilient systems that support growth and keep costs down. Right now, I'm focused on delivering real infrastructure investments that make a difference in Alaskans' daily lives.

One priority is developing Port MacKenzie to provide critical redundancy for the Don Young Port of Alaska. Rep. Kevin McCabe has been a champion of this effort, and I'm working to help move it forward. Having a fully functional alternative port in Cook Inlet strengthens our supply chain and ensures we're not overly reliant on a single point of failure.

At the same time, I'm pushing to secure the funding needed to fully repair and modernize the Port of Alaska - because we can't afford to let our state's most vital shipping hub deteriorate any further.

Beyond our ports, Alaska needs better connections to the Lower 48, and that means finally establishing a rail-to-rail connection through Canada. This project has enormous potential to lower shipping costs, improve supply chain reliability, and create new trade opportunities. I'm committed to working with stakeholders at the state and federal levels to move this vision forward.

I'm honored to serve as your representative, and I look forward to working with all of you to build a stronger, more prosperous Alaska.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you here, It's a great honor. And thank you for all you do on behalf of our state. God bless you, and may God bless Alaska and the United States of America.

Please report corrections to the Senate Secretary's office.