

**SENATE AND HOUSE
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

March 18, 2025

Tuesday

No. 6

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Address by

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski

United States Senator

Before a Joint Session

of the

First Session of the

Thirty-Fourth Alaska State Legislature

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March 18, 2025

Juneau, Alaska

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The following was submitted for publication:

Speaker Edgmon and President Stevens, Majority Leaders Giessel and Kopp, Minority Leaders Shower and Costello, members of the Legislature: thank you for the opportunity to address you again this morning.

As I look around, I see new faces. I understand the House has 10 new members, and that, for the first time, there are more women than men among your ranks. Within that is another record, three Alaska Native women.

I also see many familiar faces, including a few I served here with, who are more like friends and extended family. Lyman, Gary, you've become the giants of this place. I think of you as the Ted Stevens and Don Young of the Legislature - though I'll let you decide who's who.

Whether you are new to public service or continuing it, thank you for stepping up at a time when Alaska needs you.

I've spent a lot of time in Washington, DC, as we begin a new Congress and a new administration. This is our first recess of the year, so you won't find anyone, anywhere in Alaska, who is happier to be back home.

I wasn't sure this would happen, either. We managed to avoid a government shutdown, just with an end result that was less than enviable. The Continuing Resolution was a Morton's Fork - the lesser of two bad options.

Fortunately, we're not in a shutdown, and as we get started, I want to recognize some of the good work you're doing.

Representatives Dibert and Carrick and Senator Kawasaki, thank you for saying it loud and proud - it's Denali. Your joint resolution is great support for my bipartisan legislation, and I thank all 50 of you who voted for it.

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Senators Wielechowski, Tobin, Cronk, and Hughes, Speaker Edgmon and Representatives Himschoot, Johnson, and Ruffridge, thank you for tackling K-12 funding with the Governor - because nothing is more important than a good education for our children.

To those of you who were part of the Joint Legislative Task Force on Alaska's Seafood Industry, thank you for your great recommendations to help our fish, fishermen, fish processors, and coastal communities.

Senator Hughes, I appreciate what you're doing on food security, and I'm proud to support your work through the microgrants program I created for Alaska.

Representative Stutes, Representative Tomaszewski, and all who supported HB 65 - great work on your legislation for a new passenger dock in Seward and the economic development that will facilitate.

And Senator Gray-Jackson, thank you for pushing to establish March as Women's History Month in our state.

On a personal level, Senator Olson and Representative Dibert, we're glad you're better and back to work. And Representative Schrage, we congratulate you and your wife on the birth of your second beautiful daughter.

There are also some people in the gallery I want to introduce. My state director, Karina Waller. My communications director, Joe Plesha, who previously worked in this Legislature. My advisor for energy and natural resources, Hali Gruber, who joined us after working for Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers. And, my regional director here in Juneau, Kara Hollatz.

I'm proud of my team. And I'm proud of what we accomplish in partnership with the delegation, with you, and people across our state.

Even in an election year, last year, we made progress for Alaska.

That includes the purchase of a commercially available icebreaker, and the Coast Guard's commitment to homeport it here in Juneau.

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We secured cold weather pay for Alaska's Air and Space Forces, and saved the Alaska Air National Guard from cuts that would have cost 80 positions.

We secured \$300 million for fishery disasters and passed legislation to reform the declaration process to work better for Alaska.

We enacted the Social Security Fairness Act to provide the benefits earned by thousands of Alaskans, which they are now receiving.

We broke ground on the Kenai Bluff Stabilization Project, one of many major infrastructure projects now underway around our state.

We worked with our military leaders to help Kake, Angoon, and Wrangell secure long overdue apologies for the bombings that devastated their Native villages in the late 1800s.

We increased funding to address natural hazards, including the landslides that continue to claim lives across Southeast.

We pushed for better, more reliable weather observing systems, which communities like Yakutat must have, and which we will deliver through the Don Young Alaska Aviation Safety Initiative - especially as we recover from the terrible Bering Air crash outside Nome.

Through the Congressionally Directed Spending process, my team and I advanced dozens of community priorities, from housing for Sitka to the expansion of the University's program for nurses and the allied healthcare workforce.

We secured nearly all funding needed for an Alaska Veterans Cemetery. We're putting a new roof on the Palmer Pioneer Home after years of delay. And we finally repainted the Wrangell Post Office.

We also have good news this week. I've been working with Secretary Lutnick and Secretary Rubio, and I'm happy to confirm that our fishermen will be able to get out on the water on Thursday for the black cod and halibut opener.

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We've accomplished a lot, but it took hard work from the delegation, from you, from our teams, and from Alaskans across our state. Our people made the difference. And that's what I want to focus on today - our people.

Not just the great Alaskans who make us proud at the Olympics, like Kristen Faulkner from Homer, or who receive top honors from the National Endowment for the Arts, like Chief Reverend Dr. Gilbert Trimble from Arctic Village.

Not just the Alaskans who run James Beard award-winning restaurants, like Carolina and Heidi and Patricia at Lucky Wishbone in Anchorage. Or those who have built institutions, like Jack Hébert did with the Cold Climate Housing Research Center in Fairbanks. Or our military men and women, who we are proud to have serving here. We celebrate them all. But today, I want to talk about another set of people who make a difference, Alaska's federal employees. There are about 15,000 of them across our state. I want to give them the credit they are due - and express how disturbed I am by their recent treatment.

As I stand here, federal employees across Alaska are losing, or have lost, their jobs.

I can't tell you how many because no one who has that information will share it.

What I do know is that these abrupt terminations have affected NOAA, the National Weather Service, the National Park Service, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, USDA Rural Development, the VA, and more.

These terminations are indiscriminate and many, we are learning, are unlawful. They are being made regardless of performance and with little understanding of the function and value of each position. At a human level, they are traumatizing people and leaving holes in our communities.

As one couple said, they're not just losing their jobs, they're losing their lives.

No one should feel good about that.

I agree the federal government is too big. The debt is now above \$36 trillion and we spend more on interest than national defense. So, I support the mission behind DOGE, to find efficiencies in government. And reductions in the federal workforce make absolute sense if they're done the right way.

But not like this.

The Trump administration's approach lacks the type of planning you need to avoid unintended consequences, and it lacks the fundamental decency you need when dealing with real people. Public servants are not our enemies. They're our friends and neighbors, and they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Let's not forget: Alaska's federal employees are integral to our economy and our ability to function as a state. Their work might be underappreciated, but that doesn't make it less important.

Mount Spurr is rumbling - do we want to go back to the days of KLM Flight 867, which lost its engines and 14,000 feet of altitude after flying through a cloud of ash?

In a few weeks, thousands of tourists will arrive here on the first cruise ship of the season - do we really think one person can handle them all at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitors Center?

Do we no longer recognize that our weather forecasters save lives in Alaska?

Is it a good idea to fire the scientists who are tracking avian flu, given our status as a global flyway for migrating birds?

As we head into what looks like a bad fire year - with fire season starting yesterday - do we really want to gut the support staff for the firefighters who will be on the front lines?

Do we think the fish are going to save our fisheries, as opposed to the marine biologists and stream ecologists who work tirelessly to bring them back?

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I'm just as frustrated by the federal funding freeze - another area where Alaska faces disproportionate impact.

We have more than \$1 billion in limbo, even though Congress approved the funding, a president signed it into law, and Alaskans secured it through competitive national processes.

What's being targeted will not put a dent in the deficit or balance the budget. But we're going to see project costs go up. Construction seasons lost. Employees and contractors laid off. And we may lose some projects, entirely.

We worked for more than 20 years to get funding for Angoon's Thayer Creek hydro project, and let me assure you, we are not about to let that go.

But again, this is happening indiscriminately, with little understanding of what projects mean for Alaska - how they'll reduce the cost of energy or protect the victims of domestic violence who have nowhere else to go.

President Stevens and Speaker Edgmon, I got your letter. Senator Kiehl and Representatives Story and Hannan, I got yours, too. I accept the challenge. And I want you to know that I'm doing everything in my power to make the best of this.

My team and I are engaging everyone we can to get things back on track, including Cabinet Secretaries and folks at the White House. We are making some progress. But a reminder: I'm one of three in the delegation. For as much power as a Senator can have, there are times when I need your help, and the help of all Alaskans. This is one of them.

I also stood here in 2017 and said that as long as this Legislature wants to keep the Medicaid expansion, you should have that option.

My commitment remains. I did not support Medicaid cuts then, and I will not support them now. There may be some reasonable reforms we can make, but I'm not on board with anything that hurts our people or puts you in a budget hole.

While we're speaking candidly, I need to bring up a difficult subject: the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan. The STIP. The reality is Alaska is on pace to wind up hundreds of millions of dollars short of where we could and should be. I'm not here to point fingers, but I can't solve this one. And the longer it takes to sort out, the more our contractors and communities will lose.

The same goes for the Alaska Marine Highway System. We're about to enter the final year of our bipartisan infrastructure law. We've delivered \$700 million and counting for AMHS, but the system isn't modernized. It's not on track for the long-term. There's a plan for that, but it's a draft on paper. Unless the State steps up on capital and operating expenses, we'll have wasted a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do right by all who depend on our ferries.

Senator Bjorkman, I know you get it, and I commend your work on the Transportation Committee on federal funding, AMHS, the STIP, and more.

When federal dollars are on the table, we need to go after them, especially as spending is constrained. And when the delegation manages to throw a lifeline, we need the State to grab it and use it to reach stable ground.

We have enough problems, without creating more for ourselves. But that seems to be what we are doing.

Take tariffs: they're already harming for our timber industry, and we have Canada threatening tolls on goods trucked to our state. Or foreign policy, where I am stunned by a turn of events that threatens to abandon Ukraine and collapse long-standing alliances from NATO to NORAD.

We have two close neighbors. How we came to a place where we are fighting with Canada and placating Russia is beyond me. As long as we have to send up fighter jets to chase off Russian Bear Bombers from our ADIZ, I won't trust Putin, and I will continue to speak out.

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When the Trump administration does things I oppose, when they side with the wrong people, you will hear me say it. But there are also plenty of areas where I agree with the President.

We do need to secure our borders. We do need to stop the flow of fentanyl. Our trade relationships aren't always fair. The war in Ukraine does need to end. Our partners and allies do need to step up for themselves and the defense of democracy.

I don't have to tell you that things are going to be different, for the next two to four years or beyond. They already are.

Some of it will be difficult - Alaskans out of jobs, projects stuck or canceled, volatility in the markets, the potential for trade wars or the collapse of international partnerships, to name a few.

Some of it has been difficult for a while - like in our fisheries, which need every bit of help we can give amid Russia's trade manipulations, lawsuits from extreme environmental groups, and climate change.

But some of it is also going to be better. There are good people we can work with to do good things for Alaska.

As we push to bring back our fish and crab, we also need to reinvest. We need to recapitalize an aging fleet. The President's push for more domestic shipbuilding can be great for us, and I want it to reach Ketchikan, Seward, and more.

We also have a chance to grow our private sector and reduce our dependence on the federal government. We need to embrace that, because it will benefit and could define our economy, our budget, and our quality of life for a generation or more.

We can put Alaska back on the global map for energy and resource production. Turn the NPR-A back into a petroleum reserve. Tap into the rich resources beneath a small fraction of the non-wilderness Coastal Plain. Reverse the political decision to reopen and reject the Ambler Road.

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We can get Graphite One through permitting. Produce antimony, copper, nickel, tungsten, tin, and other critical minerals. Restore our federal timber harvests to more than a single - but beautiful - Christmas tree in front of the U.S. Capitol. Lift public land orders, complete conveyances, and ensure our Alaska Native veterans receive their rightful allotments. We can not only approve but build the life-saving road for King Cove.

All of that is now right in front of us - and we are working hard through every process available to us, including budget reconciliation - but there's more.

After years of skepticism and doubt, we have a real chance to move forward on an Alaska natural gas pipeline. The President mentioned it in his recent address to Congress, and he's given the project an incredible lift.

Here in Alaska, Senator Sullivan and Governor Dunleavy have helped bring Japan, Korea, and Taiwan to the table. They're the reason Glenfarne is opening offices in Anchorage. I thank them for keeping the faith.

You know I hate LNG imports with the white-hot fury of a thousand suns, but I will acknowledge, just this once, that maybe we can take those lemons and use them as part of a bigger plan to export our North Slope reserves.

Again, though, I would remind you - every one of our opportunities depends on our people. People make it all happen. People allow us to be resilient.

Resource development. Road construction. Fishing and tourism. Everything.

Our opportunities, our industries, require people. They depend on the essential workers who build our houses, keep us healthy, and teach and watch the kids while we work. To bring it full circle, our opportunities also depend on functional government - the men and women who do the trawls and the surveys, who issue permits, maintain visitor facilities, forecast the weather, and a whole lot more.

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We have incredible potential, but it will take all sorts of people, doing all sorts of things, to realize it.

A big part of my job is to make sure we have people in place at the federal level who will help us. And at the state level, that's a big part of yours.

We need to grow our own, for every facet of life in Alaska, so we can grow as a state. We need to take care of our own, so that people can stay and build and enjoy their lives here. And that means we need to work together to knock down every barrier we find in housing, schooling, childcare, healthcare, infrastructure, the cost of living, the cost of energy, and everything else.

Through it all, we also need to treat people like people - because we are all Alaskans, we are all invested in the future of this great place, and we all contribute to it in our own way.

I wish you all success in this session. And I believe you will find it, if you keep the Alaskan people front and center in everything you do.

Please report corrections to the Senate Secretary's office.