

**HOUSE AND SENATE
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

March 31, 2026

Tuesday

No. 18

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Address by

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski

United States Senator

Before a Joint Session

of the

Second Session of the

Thirty-Fourth Alaska State Legislature

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March 31, 2026

Juneau, Alaska

The following was submitted for publication:

Speaker Edgmon, President Stevens, and Members of the Legislature:

It's great to be back with you to continue our annual conversation about the future of Alaska.

I love being back in this building. My time in the Legislature helped shape me and taught me important lessons, which continue to guide me in my service in the U.S. Senate.

Perhaps because this feels like home, I usually start with a quick update on my family. I was with my parents this past weekend for my Dad's 93rd birthday, and they send their best. Verne and the boys are also doing well and continue to be my strongest supports.

Looking out at the new faces here, I'm reminded of how things change with time.

As you near the end of session, a couple of bittersweet retirements are also rapidly approaching.

President Stevens, this is the last time I'll have you behind me for this address. And Senator Hoffman, this will be the last time you grill me on rural energy costs—at least from that chair.

Gary, you've given 25 years to this place. Lyman, you've given nearly 40. All throughout, you have kept your passion for Alaska. You've led and delivered for Alaskans.

To both of you: thank you for everything, including your decades of counsel and friendship. And thank you also to Rita and Lillian, who have been with you every step of the way.

Over the years, Gary and Lyman have built strong partnerships with every member of the delegation and with all of you. And that's what I want to speak to, today—how we can follow that good example to work together as legislators and partners for Alaska.

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I'm the closer this year. You've already heard from Dan and Nick about the legislation we have advanced for Alaska, including the highlights of last year's budget reconciliation bill.

I won't repeat everything they shared. I would only observe that our accomplishments are not solitary, but the result of teamwork, where we all do our part to help pull the sled.

What they shared—that there is plenty of cause for optimism—is right.

We kept federal income taxes low, made the Child Tax Credit permanent, and provided tax relief for everyone from waitresses to whaling captains.

We made historic investments in aviation safety and the Coast Guard. We're homeporting the newest ship in our growing icebreaker fleet, the *Storis*, here in Juneau, and, in October, we will commission a new guided missile destroyer—the U.S.S. *Ted Stevens*.

We've also strengthened our national security through strategic investments across Alaska—at JBER, Eielson, Fort Wainwright, Greely, the Pacific Spaceport Complex, and more.

We secured over \$465 million for military construction in Alaska this year alone, including for new barracks at Fort Wainwright and the runway expansion at JBER.

We secured another \$40 million for Arctic Facilities Sustainment Renovation and Maintenance.

Now, another major project is on the way for JBER—a state-of-the-art Fighter Campus Recapitalization that will support multiple platforms.

Of course, national security relies on more than funding and technology. Above all, it requires courageous men and women to risk their lives on our behalf. So, I want to recognize the active duty and Guard members who carry the weight of that mission on our behalf.

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To all who serve in our state—from the 11th Airborne to those who respond to Russian incursions in the 18th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, the 168th Refueling Squadron, the 176th Air Defense Squadron, and the 210th, 211th, and 212th Rescue Squadrons—thank you for keeping us safe.

As we meet, nothing is going better for Alaska than resource development. Our state is no longer a special on the menu, but the heart of the plan. Willow is on track and Pikka is nearing first oil.

We have restored access, mandated lease sales, and will soon keep a greater share of the revenues from our petroleum reserve, the Coastal Plain, and Cook Inlet.

And how about that first NPR-A lease sale? The best-ever. Fully half the revenues—more than \$80 million—for Alaska, with rightful priority for the North Slope. And companies like Shell returning to our state.

In light of geopolitics and supply disruptions, this is also a great opportunity to finally bring our natural gas to both Alaskans and Asia.

We have also put billions of dollars on the table to help rebuild our mineral security through projects like Graphite One and the Ambler Road. And, the patient and persistent people of King Cove now own the land for their life-saving road.

Another highlight for Alaska has been the Congressionally Directed Spending process—our modern “earmarks,” which make up less than one percent of the discretionary budget and do not increase spending on a net basis.

It takes a lot to wade through hundreds of requests each year. I get why not every office chooses to participate—but to me, the work is entirely worth it.

Over the past five years, my team and I have secured just over \$2 billion for Alaska.

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That’s comparable to the State’s share of the capital budget over that same period—numbers that might even impress Lyman—and these projects make a difference in your districts.

Representative McCabe and Senator Rauscher, your constituents in Caswell, Sunshine, Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, and Willow will have some help on childcare through funding for the Sunshine Station Childcare Center.

Representative Moore and Senator Yundt, we directed funding to Wasilla’s Set Free Alaska to build recovery residence facilities, expanding their capacity to help Alaskans heal and recover from substance use.

And Speaker Edgmon and Senator Hoffman, with federal dollars, Chignik will gain a new water distribution system, because every Alaskan deserves clean drinking water.

I have hundreds of examples like that—for clean water, heavy equipment, workforce development, housing, and public safety. But my team and I don’t just dream up these worthy projects. We hear from mayors, city council members, community leaders—even the State of Alaska asks for help. We then work to lock the requests in and bring them home.

We have also made good progress on legacy legislation—bills we have written and worked out over multiple Congresses. As you all know, legislating often takes time—we’ve been working on icebreakers for 15 years—and you have to be ready when the stars align.

Many of the measures the delegation has passed over the last year reflect Alaska Native priorities: extending the Vietnam Veterans Allotments program, returning control of ANCSA lands, and ensuring that elders and individuals with disabilities are not inadvertently excluded from federal assistance programs.

We also enacted Bruce’s Law, in memory of Bruce Snodgrass—with a major assist from a force of a woman, Sandy Snodgrass, whose

determination to stop fentanyl from taking additional innocent lives carried that measure to the President's desk.

Now we're focusing on what's next—like my Working Waterfronts Act, to help our coastal communities. Measures to streamline permitting for hydropower projects and advance new technologies. And a big one to convert the recommendations of the Commission on Native Children into legislation that addresses child welfare, behavioral health, nutrition, education, housing, and more.

There's a lot to be positive about, right now, and it is all based on partnership, not personal triumph. But I'm not here to talk just about the good stuff. I'm not going to tell you everything is fine. You know that's not the case.

This is a moment for optimism, and we should take pride in all that's going well. But it's equally a moment that demands realism, where we acknowledge our challenges and what it takes to address them.

As we delve into that, part of my purpose this morning is to help translate what's happening outside our state and the implications for Alaska.

We can start with the crises around the world that are impacting Alaskans—from military service members who are deployed abroad, to rural residents who already feel the echoes of war through higher fuel prices, shipping surcharges, and more expensive groceries.

We pray for those who have been lost and for the safety of those in combat in Iran. There's no question the world would be better off without a fanatical, terror-spreading regime in charge there. But it's not clear that will be the case, and here at home, people are confronting volatility and economic hardship.

I'm worried about higher fuel prices, but I'm also worried about shortages. This is also why, for years, I have warned against LNG imports: how would we be feeling if Southcentral was competing against most Asian nations for cargoes?

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While much of our focus is now on the Middle East, we cannot lose focus on Ukraine. We stand with President Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people, who are now in their fourth year of war—and still holding their own—against their Russian aggressors.

There's no ambiguity here. Russia has chosen Iran over regional stability. According to public reporting, Russia is helping Iran to target our troops and military assets. Meanwhile, Ukraine is sending teams to the Middle East to help knock Iranian drones out of the sky.

Every day, I am reminded of the geostrategic position that Alaska holds for our national security—whether intercepting Russian Bear bombers at our ADIZ or knowing that American troops can deploy more quickly to the Middle East out of Alaska than anywhere else in the country.

Beyond its geostrategic importance, the opening of the Arctic presents incredible opportunities, from resource development to maritime shipping to tourism. But the region is also drawing unprecedented attention, not all of which is welcome or good.

Alaska is not better off, and the region is not more secure, when the U.S. threatens allies like Greenland—pushing them away instead of reinforcing the partnerships that protect our mutual interests.

In the midst of everything happening abroad, the Senate has been debating a measure called the “SAVE Act.”

I strongly agree with its premise—that only citizens should vote, and voters should show ID.

My problem is with implementation.

Requiring original documentation to be presented in person at one of six Division of Elections offices to register to vote will be hard and costly for many in Alaska. The bill also takes immediate effect, with no time or resources for the State or voters to adjust. It was not intended to disenfranchise Alaskans who can rightfully vote, but that would be its effect.

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As we speak to electoral reforms, I want to commend this Legislature for doing things the right way. Senator Wielechowski and Representative Vance, you and many others have worked for multiple sessions to build consensus for a legislative package, and what you have put together will fundamentally improve our elections.

At the same time, I hope you're all paying attention to the SAVE Act, which would impose costs and change how elections are conducted here. And I hope you're tracking a case in front of the Supreme Court, *Watson vs. RNC*, that could prohibit states from accepting ballots after Election Day.

A different sort of threat to Alaska is emerging as the administration and some members of Congress target the Small Business Administration's 8(a) contracting program. Those who don't understand 8(a) are trying to tear it down, even though it delivers value to the federal government and helps fulfill the promises of ANCSA.

I want to be unequivocal: we need to protect 8(a). The Alaska Native Corporations who utilize it employ tens of thousands of Alaskans and serve as an unheralded economic engine for our state. When they are under attack, Alaska's economy is under attack.

Another concern is federal spending, which arrives here as federal funding. The federal debt is projected to reach \$64 trillion in a decade. Not Alaska's fault, but not sustainable, either. We're going to have to address it, and Alaska will need a legitimate fiscal plan as the federal budget inevitably tightens.

The price of oil is higher right now, but that's no substitute. The windfall will only go so far and last so long and it's much better to get revenue from volume than price. Kudos to the House Majority for calling for fiscal restraint. We can't count on anyone or anything to bail us out of our fiscal woes; only a long-term plan will truly end the cycle of boom and bust.

The federal government is often beset by chaos, these days. The Department of Homeland Security has been shut down for 46 days,

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costing many workers their paychecks and leaving many Alaskans who are traveling stuck with long delays in airport security lines. Shutdowns are becoming routine, and too many policymakers are becoming numb to their impacts.

It's not great in Congress right now. But here in Alaska, there are areas where the State is simply not meeting expectations.

One of those areas is matching funds. When the delegation secures a federal allocation, we need you to come through with your share in a timely manner. Meet the match. And not just the big, obvious ones—like transportation—but smaller ones, too, like for the U.S. Geological Survey to bring ShakeAlert to Alaska to give advance warning of earthquakes.

Sometimes, it's not even a match—sometimes, hiring a couple employees can unlock federal dollars for Alaska. That's what is needed for the Micro-Grants for Food Security program, which in a few short years has seeded projects that are feeding thousands of Alaskans.

The Alaska Marine Highway System is a clear priority for our coastal communities and was one my top priorities in the bipartisan infrastructure law. Through that bill we have received about \$700 million over the past five years. There's more on the way. But federal funding for AMHS is a lifeline, not an entitlement. We'll try, but there's no guarantee we will be able to renew it at any level.

So, no: it is not a good strategy to rely on a temporary competitive federal grant program to cover 45 percent of our system's operating costs, all of which used to be paid for by the State, as is now the case.

Healthcare is another worry for me. I held out my vote from the reconciliation bill until we had the adjustments, flexibilities, delays, exemptions, and funding needed to minimize harm in Alaska. Even with all we gained, I worry for those Alaskans who may fall through the cracks as requirements change. That's why I also held firm as we negotiated the Rural Health Transformation Fund, pushing to double funding and demanding that Alaska be a priority within it.

As a result, Alaska will receive the second-most dollars of any state and the most per capita—about \$1.3 billion in all. But the State needs to do dramatically better on this five-year effort than we did on ferries. If we don't, Alaska's funds will be redirected elsewhere, and we will miss a generational opportunity to improve care.

Representative Jimmie, I want to recognize you. I read the statement you made when Congressman Begich was here, about the human toll that Typhoon Halong continues to take. You're right. Hundreds of Alaskans have lost everything. It only adds to the devastation that some have lost hope and taken their own lives.

My commitment to you is that we will never forget those devastated by this storm. I'm going to chair a field hearing of the Indian Affairs Committee on this in Bethel in May. I will keep pushing federal officials to provide relief. And I will demand that it be the Alaskans impacted by this storm who determine their futures.

Our fisheries also remain in crisis. When salmon runs collapse, it threatens the food security, culture, and ways of life of so many Alaskans.

The reality is that these declines cannot be attributed to one factor alone. There is no silver bullet to solve this complex problem. But when faced with causes beyond our immediate control, like climate change, it is understandable why the discourse focuses on what we can control: bycatch.

Don't get me wrong, there is more we can do to reduce bycatch, and we should do it. An example is Senator Sullivan's Bycatch Reduction and Research Act, which I am cosponsoring. But we should also be cautious about demonizing one sector of Alaska's fisheries at a time when we need to work together to find solutions.

Commercial fishing provides good jobs and is the economic backbone of dozens of coastal communities. And while it is easy and often appropriate to point fingers at Seattle, we have to remember that many Alaska towns and villages are suffering after losing their fleets and processing plants. Life isn't necessarily better without them.

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We need sound science because that is the foundation of sound management. We need constructive dialogue that respects the needs of communities upriver while recognizing the benefits of industry. And we need to focus on what unites us so we can conserve and responsibly harvest one of our most precious, irreplaceable resources.

That brings me to education. This Legislature's decision to increase the base student allocation was a great step, but it is appalling that so many Alaska schools remain in disrepair, with black mold or asbestos in the walls, bathrooms that don't function, and collapsing roofs.

That's one part of the problem. Another is hiring and retaining good teachers. That requires districts to be able to pay teachers enough to live here. It requires municipalities to build housing that is affordable on a teacher's salary. And it requires competitive retirement benefits that aren't falling behind the Lower 48.

Right now, Alaska doesn't produce enough of our own, so many teachers are hired from abroad. And you know what doesn't work, for that?

The President's \$100,000 fee on H-1B visas. That could work in New York City, but not in Kodiak or Kivalina. That will devastate our ability to recruit, so I've introduced a bill to exempt teachers. I'm also pressing our new Secretary of Homeland Security for an administrative fix.

Representative Galvin, thank you for raising awareness and advancing a resolution on this in the Legislature. Alaska needs great teachers to help train our workforce, which is yet another area that demands partnership.

Non-residents now make up almost a quarter of our non-government workers, and that's compounded by an unprecedented 13 straight years of net outmigration of working-age adults. We're not growing enough of our own. And when we do, we're not keeping them.

That's not a slight to the University, which is our best engine to reverse those trends. Kids who graduate from our University are far

more likely to stay here. We're going to miss Pat Pitney, who is leaving the University in great shape. There's good reason to be excited for its future, especially as UAF rebrands as "America's Arctic University" and enrollment continues to grow.

We need to support our University system. But that's not enough, either. Ultimately, this goes back to making Alaska the best place to work and raise families through improvements in public safety, housing, childcare, schools, community services—all of that and more.

At the same time, Alaska has always relied on newcomers to fill out our workforce, to move our biggest projects and industries forward.

It is undeniably good that President Trump closed the southern border, and credit to him for that. But when the extension of those policies results in a mother in Soldotna and her three children being taken into custody, with the mother deported and the oldest put in jail, it's time for serious reflection and reform of our immigration policies.

My point in raising these topics is that Alaska has big needs that demand strong leadership. We have a lot going for us, but we should be clear-eyed about our challenges. We need to tackle them head-on. And we need to remember—we're in this together as Alaskans.

In a state one-fifth the size of our nation, it is understandable that we think about our needs regionally. But our economies are interdependent, and we need to avoid the temptation to break down by region or by party, because neither of those best serves our state.

When Alaskans support one another, we rise together. There's no better year for unity than this one—our nation's 250th birthday—which is a good reminder that we are incredibly fortunate. To be Americans, and to be Alaskans.

We're blessed to live in this great land. Even more so to represent it in office. We get to wake up and work for Alaska. But that's also a responsibility, and people are counting on us.

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So, let's make the most of our time. Let's set aside politics and regionalism and focus on partnership for all of Alaska, to achieve as much as we can for every part of our state and every person in it.

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