

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

May 6, 2025

1:45 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Kelly Merrick, Chair
Senator Forrest Dunbar, Vice Chair
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Senator Robert Yundt

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Donald Olson

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 140

"An Act relating to a matching grant program for fire station construction and renovation; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 50

"An Act relating to snow classics."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 79

"An Act naming the Vic Fischer Shoup Bay State Marine Park."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 140

SHORT TITLE: FIRE STATION GRANT PROGRAM

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEDMAN

03/24/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/24/25	(S)	CRA, FIN
04/22/25	(S)	CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/22/25	(S)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
05/06/25	(S)	CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: HB 50

SHORT TITLE: SNOW CLASSICS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) HANNAN

01/22/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25 (H) CRA, L&C
03/11/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/11/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/11/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/13/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/13/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/13/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/18/25 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
03/18/25 (H) Moved HB 50 Out of Committee
03/18/25 (H) MINUTE(CRA)
03/21/25 (H) CRA RPT 6DP
03/21/25 (H) DP: PRAX, HOLLAND, RUFFRIDGE, HALL,
HIMSCHOOT, MEARS
03/26/25 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
03/26/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/26/25 (H) MINUTE(L&C)
03/31/25 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
03/31/25 (H) Moved HB 50 Out of Committee
03/31/25 (H) MINUTE(L&C)
04/02/25 (H) L&C RPT 6DP
04/02/25 (H) DP: BURKE, COULOMBE, CARRICK, NELSON,
HALL, FIELDS
04/02/25 (H) L&C AT 3:15 PM BARNES 124
04/02/25 (H) <Bill Hearing Canceled>
04/11/25 (H) TRANSMITTED TO (S)
04/11/25 (H) VERSION: HB 50
04/14/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/25 (S) CRA, L&C
04/22/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/22/25 (S) -- MEETING CANCELED --
05/06/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: HB 79

SHORT TITLE: NAMING VIC FISCHER SHOUP BAY MARINE PARK

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) FIELDS

01/31/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/31/25 (H) RES
02/07/25 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124
02/07/25 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --
02/17/25 (H) RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

02/17/25	(H)	Heard & Held	
02/17/25	(H)	MINUTE (RES)	
03/14/25	(H)	RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124	
03/14/25	(H)	Moved HB 79 Out of Committee	
03/14/25	(H)	MINUTE (RES)	
03/17/25	(H)	RES RPT 8DP	
03/17/25	(H)	DP: FIELDS, COULOMBE, HALL, ELAM, RAUSCHER, MEARS, DIBERT, BURKE	
04/14/25	(H)	TRANSMITTED TO (S)	
04/14/25	(H)	VERSION: HB 79	
04/15/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS	
04/15/25	(S)	CRA, RES	
05/06/25	(S)	CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)	

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR BERT STEDMAN, District A
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 140.

FOREST KUIPER, President
 Alaska Fire Chiefs Association
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of SB 140.

CAROLE TRIEM, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager
 Alaska Municipal League
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 140.

REPRESENTATIVE SARA HANNAN, District 4
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of HB 50.

FRANKIE PILLIFANT, President
 Juneau Nordic Ski Club
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of HB 50.

TRISTAN KNUTSON-LOMBARDO, Executive Director
 Juneau Nordic Ski Club
 Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation in support of HB 50.

COURTNEY OWEN, Staff
Representative Zack Fields
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced HB 79 on behalf of the sponsor.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:45:23 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK called the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:45 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Yundt, Dunbar, Gray-Jackson, and Chair Merrick.

SB 140-FIRE STATION GRANT PROGRAM

[1:45:47 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 140 "An Act relating to a matching grant program for fire station construction and renovation; and providing for an effective date."

[1:46:18 PM](#)

SENATOR BERT STEDMAN, District A, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, stated that SB 140 would create a program to address the future construction of fire halls. He emphasized that the program would take effect at a future time, when the state is in a better financial position. He paraphrased the following written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- It is an absolute necessity that firefighters across Alaska have functional facilities to ensure they can respond to emergencies swiftly and safely. Regrettably, numerous fire stations in the state are in critical need of repairs and modernization. Investing in these fire stations means supporting the dedicated individuals who consistently stand by our communities during our times of greatest need.
- Many stations are nearing the end of their useful lives, and each one serves an essential role in protecting their communities.

- Each new year brings innovations in technology and updates to best station design practices, coupled with regular wear and tear from daily use, and it is inevitable that existing fire stations eventually become outdated.
- SB 140 establishes a matching grant program that provides funding for up to 50 percent of the total project cost for constructing or renovating fire stations.
- This program would follow the structure of other successful infrastructure investment programs already established in our state. One notable example is the Harbor Matching Grant Program, which has awarded approximately \$118 million dollars to 57 harbor projects over the past two decades.
- A decade ago, the Legislature appropriated substantial funding to construct or replace a dozen fire stations across Alaska. These were highly popular capital budget items.

SENATOR STEDMAN argued that it makes sense to replicate successful ventures such as the Harbor Matching Grant Program. He noted that there is a similar program for libraries. He said that this removes much of the politics and creates a fair process to help communities build necessary infrastructure.

[1:48:59 PM](#)

SENATOR STEDMAN moved to slide 2, Nikiski Fire Department Station no. 2, Kenai Peninsula Borough. He stated that a previous capital budget included construction funding for this fire hall and many others across the state.

[1:49:27 PM](#)

SENATOR STEDMAN moved to slide 3, Anchorage Fire Station No. 6:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Prior to the construction of the new building, Station No.6 operated out of a fire hall built in the 1970s. That structure was originally intended as a temporary replacement for the old volunteer

station after the formation of the Greater Anchorage Area Borough.

- The new Station No. 6 was necessary to meet the ever-expanding demands of the greater Muldoon Area.

1:50:01 PM

SENATOR STEDMAN returned to slide 2, Nikiski Fire Department Station no. 2, Kenai Peninsula Borough:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Nikiski Fire Department Station no. 2 has the largest fire service area on the Kenai Peninsula
- The original structure was intended as a community center for Nikiski and was not designed or constructed to adequately accommodate the equipment and personnel required for medical and fire services.

1:50:30 PM

SENATOR STEDMAN moved to slide 4, City of St. Paul Municipal Fire Station:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Established a centralized facility to support community operations and equipment storage, ensuring an effective response system. This was a joint effort with the Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association and includes storage for their Grove Crane and front-end loader.
- Construction was successfully completed in 2009.

SENATOR STEDMAN noted that the presentation includes a selection of fire stations across the state.

1:51:06 PM

SENATOR STEDMAN moved to slide 5, Chugiak Volunteer Fire and Rescue Station No. 35 (Lowe):

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Located near Fire Lake in Eagle River
- The previous station was forced to close in February 2012 after heavy snowfall caused irreparable damage to the roof.
- This newly constructed building was completed in the summer of 2014.

SENATOR STEDMAN explained that previously, the legislature used an informal process to evaluate the need for fire halls statewide.

[1:51:43 PM](#)

SENATOR STEDMAN said SB 140 would create a formalized process with a needs-based, ranked system. This would level the playing field for communities across the state. He said fire chiefs across the state have submitted a list of fire halls in need of construction and renovations. He briefly discussed why it can be difficult for communities to access capitol budget funding. He reiterated that SB 140 would create a fair system and explained that the legislature would collectively decide how much of the list to fund, similar to other types of major maintenance. He explained that community fire hall construction is not constitutionally mandated like K-12 education and K-12 major maintenance. He said that SB 140 would enable the State to construct fire halls in years where the funding is available. He said that there is adequate time to write regulations and indicated that incomplete regulations would not hinder the program's start. He noted that the library fund did not have regulations and the State was able to implement that program with the help of librarians across the state. He said the fire hall program would involve the help of the Fire Chiefs Association. He emphasized that the Fire Department is not a political organization and said SB 140 would help ensure that politics remain outside of fire halls.

[1:54:27 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK announced invited testimony on SB 140.

[1:54:42 PM](#)

FOREST KUIPER, President, Alaska Fire Chiefs Association, Juneau, Alaska, said SB 140 is a direct investment in the safety, resilience, and wellbeing of Alaskan communities. He stated that fire departments across the state are forced to work with aging infrastructure and limited space. Often, fire departments operate out of buildings that were not designed for

the demands of modern emergency response. SB 140 would create a dedicated grant program for building construction and upgrades. He said that in 2023, the Alaska Fire Chiefs Association identified over \$400 million in essential construction and renovation projects across the state. The projects are shovel-ready but lack the necessary funding. He emphasized that communities across the state want to be proactive and prepared. He shared that many small fire departments operate out of converted garages or decades old station and therefore cannot accommodate modern fire engines or equipment. Stations operating in these conditions cannot provide a safe, clean environment for firefighters. He emphasized that this is inefficient and dangerous. He pointed out that, in an emergency, seconds count. A well-located, properly equipped fire station reduces response times, saves lives, and protects property. He said SB 140 recognizes that infrastructure, personnel, and equipment are equally important.

[1:57:37 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK opened public testimony on SB 140.

[1:57:56 PM](#)

CAROLE TRIEM, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, Alaska Municipal League, Juneau, Alaska, testified in support of SB 140. She acknowledged budgetary constraints. She thanked the legislature for recognizing that local governments play an important role in ensuring public safety and for acknowledging the importance of fire station construction and maintenance. She emphasized that public safety and fire protection are among the core services citizens expect local governments provide. She noted the increasing fiscal pressure on local governments, which places an additional burden on local taxpayers. She stated that the fire station grant program would be a significant advancement toward meeting crucial public safety needs across the state.

[1:59:03 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK closed public testimony on SB 140.

[1:59:14 PM](#)

SENATOR STEDMAN offered a closing statement. He directed attention to a letter stating that the Department of Public Safety (DPS) should house this concept. He opined that this is implausible and instead suggested replicating what works. He stated that having a 50 percent match helps communities keep costs under control. He added that the Legislature could consider funding caps and other adjustments in the future. He

opined that SB 140 is a good start and added that it would benefit the entire state to have updated fire halls in all communities once the funding is available.

[2:00:05 PM](#)

[CHAIR MERRICK held SB 140 in committee.]

[2:00:09 PM](#)

At ease.

HB 50-SNOW CLASSICS

[2:01:01 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of HOUSE BILL NO. 50 "An Act relating to snow classics."

[2:01:30 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SARA HANNAN, District 4, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said that snow classics are limited to a specific location, date, and time. She explained that HB 50 changes the charitable gaming statute by removing the specific location, date, and time requirements. This would allow any qualified charitable entity to apply to host a snow classic. She emphasized that no other changes are made to the charitable gaming statute. Charitable organizations would still need to meet applicable permitting and other requirements.

[2:02:53 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked what a snow classic is.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN replied that "classics" are defined in charity gaming laws. A snow classic is when a charitable organization specifies a location, date, and time and sells tickets to participants, who guess the snow accumulation.

[2:03:41 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked if Mt. Alyeska currently holds a snow classic.

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN replied that there is a statutory authorization for a snow classic at Mt. Alyeska to benefit the Girdwood Community School. She noted that this snow classic does not take place every year.

[2:04:11 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN commented that there are fifteen classics in statute and listed them.

[2:04:55 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK announced invited testimony on HB 50.

[2:05:10 PM](#)

FRANKIE PILLIFANT, President, Juneau Nordic Ski Club, Juneau, Alaska, introduced herself and said that the Juneau Nordic Ski Club (JNSC) is a 501(c)(3).

[2:05:32 PM](#)

TRISTAN KNUTSON-LOMBARDO, Executive Director, Juneau Nordic Ski Club, Juneau, Alaska, explained that JNSC considered holding a snow classic fundraiser before discovering the statutory limitations. He said JNSC is a low-barrier, "pay-as-you-can" program for Juneau youth. Due to increasing costs, JNSC is seeking new and fun ways to raise revenue. He opined that HB 50 is manageable and stated that this legislation would have a meaningful impact on the youth in Juneau and across the state.

[2:06:15 PM](#)

MS. PILLIFANT added that snow classics would be an additional tool that would help communities raise funds to sustain volunteer programs. She expressed support for HB 50.

[2:06:44 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK opened public testimony on HB 50; finding none, she closed public testimony.

[2:07:12 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN gave closing comments on HB 50. She shared a brief anecdote to illustrate the benefits of an ice classic for organizations like JNSC.

[2:07:52 PM](#)

CHAIR MERRICK held HB 50 in committee.

[2:07:54 PM](#)

At ease.

[CHAIR MERRICK turned the gavel over to Vice Chair Dunbar during the at-ease at 2:10 p.m.]

HB 79-NAMING VIC FISCHER SHOUP BAY MARINE PARK

[2:10:03 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR DUNBAR reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of HOUSE BILL NO. 79 "An Act naming the Vic Fischer Shoup Bay State Marine Park."

[2:10:24 PM](#)

COURTNEY OWEN, Staff, Representative Zack Fields, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, delivered a presentation titled HB 79: Vic Fischer Shoup Bay State Marine Park.

[2:10:43 PM](#)

MS. OWEN moved to slide 1, Vic Fischer Shoup Bay State Marine Park:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Vic Fischer Shoup Bay State Marine Park

In 1983, Vic Fischer's SB 128 passed establishing the first 13 State Marine Parks, including Shoup Bay State Marine Park.

There are currently 49 State Marine Parks in Alaska that were established to maintain natural, cultural, and scenic values; maintain fish and wildlife resources and lawful existing uses of these resources; promote and support recreation and tourism in the state.

HB 79 would Shoup Bay State Marine Park to the "Vic Fischer Shoup Bay State Marine Park" in honor of Vic Fischer and his contributions to the State of Alaska.

[2:11:13 PM](#)

MS. OWEN moved to slide 2, Vic Fischer Shoup Bay State Marine Park:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Vic Fischer's Service

Vic Fischer had a long and accomplished career serving the people of Alaska.

- In 1955 he was elected to the Alaska Constitutional Convention and was an original signatory of the first State Constitution.

- In 1962, Vic was appointed director of the Office of Metropolitan Development in the Housing and Home Finance Agency.
- In 1966 he became the director of the University of Alaska Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER).
- In 1980, Vic Fischer was elected as a Senator in the Alaska Legislature where he served until 1986.

[2:11:34 PM](#)

MS. OWEN moved to slide 3, Vic Fischer's Involvement in Valdez:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Vic Fischer's Involvement in Valdez

Immediately following the 1964 earthquake, Vic Fischer was part of a delegation of Alaskans in Washington D.C. that secured a flight on Air Force One back to Alaska to survey the damage. He was instrumental in communicating the damage the earthquake has caused to Alaska and advocating for federal funding to rebuild, especially in Valdez where the earthquake-induced tsunami had been particularly destructive.

As a city planner and a director at the Housing and Home Finance Agency, Vic Fischer's advocacy was crucial in rebuilding the town of Valdez quickly and efficiently.

Photo: Valdez after the 1964 earthquake

[2:11:52 PM](#)

MS. OWEN moved to slide 4, Establishing the State Marine Parks:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Establishing the State Marine Parks

On February 16th, 1983, Vic Fischer introduced SB 128, a bill to create the State Marine Park System. This bill also added 13 new State Marine Parks to protect them for future generations.

"It was a marvelous idea," Fischer said. "Subsequently, I kayaked right into some of those places that we helped create and I said, 'wow, we have preserved this for recreation.' That is such a good thing. It's great to know that somebody can kayak through the inland waters, through Prince William Sound, and know that there are state parks; that there is a good, secure, safe place to camp out, to come ashore or even if you're with a boat, a safe place to anchor."

"It's good from a recreation standpoint and as an Alaskan to know there are these protected areas."

SB 128 was signed into law on July 15, 1983, by Governor Sheffield.

Above: Vic and Ruthie Fischer kayaking at Aialik Glacier in Kenai Fjords National Park 1985

[2:12:32 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR commented that, while he knew Mr. Fischer, he was not aware of Mr. Fischer's connection to Alaska's State Marine Parks. He said he is working with the Board of Regents and the director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) to rename ISER the Vic Fischer Institute. He stated that Mr. Fischer is a seminal figure in Alaska's history.

[2:13:51 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR DUNBAR opened public testimony on HB 79; finding none, he closed public testimony.

[2:14:10 PM](#)

MS. OWEN thanked the committee.

[2:14:18 PM](#)

VICE CHAIR DUNBAR held HB 79 in committee.

[2:14:30 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Vice Chair Dunbar adjourned the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting at 2:14 p.m.