

*Bradners'*  
**Alaska Legislative Digest**  
*- Commentary on Alaska issues and policy*

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**Trump is back!**

## **Drill, baby, drill?**

Donald Trump defeated Kamala Harris on Nov. 5, and will become the next U.S. president in January. The implications are enormous. For the world, Trump's opposition to climate change measures guarantees a world that will continue warming, bringing superstorms. For world peace, Trump's coziness with Russia's Vladimir Putin spells big trouble for Ukraine, Europe and the U.S. (Putin makes no secret that his ambitions won't stop with Ukraine.) Putin's alliance with North Korea and closeness with China also spells trouble. This involves Alaska, since military based here will be first responders to war in Asia.

For Alaska, however, Trump's victory will end the policies of President Joe Biden that would likely have been continued by Harris, blocking oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, expansions of protected areas in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and opposition to an industrial access road to the Ambler Mining District in northwest Alaska, where companies are exploring copper deposits. In the words of Sarah Palin, it's "drill, baby, drill." But not right away. A new lease sale is set for ANWR in late December but it will be under terms set by the Biden administration, which may discourage bids. On NPR-A, unwinding restrictive new regulations will take time. It will also take time for a new round of permit applications and a new Environmental Impact Statement for the Ambler road. All of this, plus environmental lawsuits, may take more than the four years of a new Trump administration.

### **Alaska results: Has Mary Peltola lost? Coalitions seen in state Senate, likely in state House**

In the Alaska elections a surprise is that Democrat Mary Peltola, holding Alaska's one seat in the U.S. Congress, may be defeated by Nick Begich, her Republican challenger. Peltola had a heavy cash advantage over Begich but the "coal-tails" of the Trump victory may have overcome that. However, centrist and progressive candidates in state House and Senate races did well. The state Senate will be a Democrat-moderate Republican coalition again. Votes are still being tallied, but it looks like a Majority coalition of 15, with three Republicans not joining the coalition and two apparent new Republican senators, Robert Yundt (Mat-Su) and Mike Cronk (Interior), whose positions are unknown. — *Continued on page 2*

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## **. . . Elections: Coalitions likely in Senate, House . . .**

### **Yundt and Cronk will be new faces in Senate**

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Yundt has likely defeated incumbent David Wilson and Cronk will take the seat being vacated by Click Bishop. Wilson and Bishop are currently members of the Senate Majority coalition. Both are pragmatists and are part of the coalition so their districts has a seat at the table in the Senate leadership. However, two of Mat-Su's three senators, Shelley Hughes and Mike Shower, are outside the Senate Majority because of policy differences. Both Yundt and Cronk are strong conservatives who also may not buy into the centrist positions of the current Senate Majority but both will also be under pressure from constituent groups to join a coalition to have a voice in Senate Majority decisions. With 15 senators likely in the coalition whether Yundt or Cronk join is almost immaterial except to their constituents.

### **The state House looks within range of a coalition**

The state House looks within range of a coalition, too, with 15 Democrats apparently elected, five independents and 20 Republicans. Some of the Republicans are likely to join a coalition, for example Rep. Louise Stutes, R-Kodiak, and Chuck Kopp, who has defeated Craig Johnson in south Anchorage. However, final outcomes are still uncertain. Johnson's defeat, by a heavy margin, is significant because as Rules chairman in the current House he was a powerful force holding the Republican Majority together. His opposition to pension reform legislation for public employees and Kopp's heavy advocacy for it will increase the odds that something on this will pass in the 2025 session.

There are other outcomes that will influence pending legislation. The reelection of Sen. Jesse Bjorkman, R-Kenai, and Rep. Justin Ruffridge, R-Soldotna, are important for bills on health care and medical insurance reform. The apparent election of Ky Holland and Carolyn Hall, new House members in Anchorage, bode well for increased state funding for schools. Walt Featherly's loss to incumbent Julie Coulombe, a conservative Republican, in south Anchorage was disappointing to education groups, however. Coulombe was a key vote in sustaining Gov. Mike Dunleavy's veto of education funding last spring.

The vote to support Dunleavy's veto also played into the defeat in northwest Alaska of Rep. Thomas Baker of Kotzebue, a Republican-turned-independent, by Robyn Burke, a Democrat. Baker's vote to sustain Dunleavy's veto added to financial difficulties in rural schools, particularly the Northwest Arctic School District, which is in Baker's district. Baker was appointed to the District 40 northwest House seat by Gov. Mike Dunleavy. It is thought that Dunleavy made the appointment on the condition that Baker would vote to support the veto of school funds.

*More analysis coming in our next interim Legislative Digest.*