

**HOUSE AND SENATE  
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

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**February 17, 2016**

**Wednesday**

**No. 13**

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**Address by**

**The Honorable Lisa Murkowski**

**United States Senator**

**Before a Joint Session**

**of the**

**Second Session of the**

**Twenty-Ninth Alaska State Legislature**

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**February 17, 2016**

**Juneau, Alaska**



**The following was submitted for publication:**

Good morning. It's a little unsettling isn't it? To come into this chamber and to know that our friend isn't with us. Max Gruenberg was a really great guy and a good friend to so many of us. And a friend to Alaska. And his loss is felt. My heart is with Kayla and the family, and with you. Max was our family. Max was part of the Alaska family. Know that I am with you all as you are thinking of him.

It's good to be back in Juneau, and I thank you for being generous with your time. You've got a lot on your plate. You know that when I come back to address you all, I don't start off my comments with the formal—I talk about my family first.

Our son Nic is attending law school, following in his mother's footsteps, and intends to return to Alaska when he is done. Verne is spending a lot of time in Anchorage helping Matt take over our family's wholesale pasta business.

I'm proud that both of my sons intend to make their homes in Alaska. That's a joy, but it is also a responsibility. It is up to all of us to maintain an economy and a quality of life that keeps or brings our young people home.

It wasn't so long ago that we could be confident in Alaska's future and well-being. Yet, despite strong policy action by the Legislature and Alaskans to make us more competitive, our state's fiscal issues are serious. We all know that.

No one in this room needs my advice about how to solve the state's budget challenges. And, thankfully for all of you, I'm not here to offer it. What I will say is that this legislature is composed of good, thoughtful, and diligent people. This is a legislature of citizens, and you share the values of the people you represent. I have faith you will find a way. And I have faith that you will do the right thing.

While I may not have a direct role in the decisions you make here, my work back in Washington, D.C. complements yours. I view my job back in Washington, D.C. to do what I can to help bring about stability at the federal level. Certainty that the federal government will "do no harm" to our economy and our lifestyles, and certainty that it will add to, rather than detract from, our stability.

All of us need certainty that regulations will protect our environment without burying us in red tape. Resource producers need certainty that our federal

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areas will be accessible, and that their permit applications will be considered promptly and fairly. Small businesses need certainty that their investments won't be subject to an ever-increasing tax burden.

This past year we have returned back to regular order—making sure committees work, allowing amendments to proceed to the floor. As your delegation, we have rolled up our sleeves to find ways to provide greater certainty for our state. And in many areas, we are succeeding.

Under our highway bill reauthorization, the DRIVE Act, Alaska's annual transportation funding jumps to nearly \$507 million this year. And it increases every year through fiscal 2021 when Alaska's share will exceed \$585 million. What this means is certainty to ferries and the tribal transportation program, to streamlined permitting and land exchanges in Southeast, the DRIVE Act offers Alaska the confidence to maintain and grow our infrastructure.

This didn't happen by accident – it was a great team effort. Senator Sullivan and Congressman Young did exemplary work formulating the highway bill in their respective committees. And as a member of the conference committee, it was my mission to lock these gains in. This is what a unified team brings and it is great for Alaska.

How many years have we been complaining about NCLB? Alaskans also need certainty that we will control our children's education, not bureaucrats in Washington. The Every Student Succeeds Act brings an end to the intrusive "No Child Left Behind" standards. Things like 'adequate yearly progress' and 'highly qualified teacher' are no more, and the new law eviscerates the federal Common Core mandate.

Another area where we need certainty—our fisheries. Alaskans need certainty that our world-class fisheries will be protected. Fishing is a critical part of our economy and the value of our brand matters. Whether it is the commercial sector seeking a market or the sportfish industry attracting visitors, their health depends on Alaskan fish really being Alaskan fish. You might think that is pretty simple. But one thing we're fighting is Frankenfish. Pirate fishing. Russian pollock mislabeled as Alaskan pollock. These help to bring about certainty in an industry that needs that. We scored major victories on all of these threats last year.

Alaskans need certainty that our rights to hunt and fish will be respected. That's why, on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I have advanced a bipartisan Sportsmen's bill that will make it a national policy for our federal lands to be "open unless closed." To me, that's pretty straightforward. But right now it's exactly the opposite.

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This past year we also stopped the ATF from denying hunters access to green tip ammunition. Now we have our eyes on the administration's directives regarding sales of firearms at gun shows. The administration is trying to scare people who do not need to be licensed as dealers into believing they do. We will fight them. We will push back because Alaska is a land where the Second Amendment is fundamental to our way of life.

Alaskans also need certainty that the military, which has been a backbone of our economy and our military that we look to provide for the security of our nation, will remain an integral part of our community. A year ago we thought US Army Alaska would lose its aviation capability because the Kiowa warrior helicopters were being retired. I worked with the Army and made sure that Fort Wainwright was among the first bases to get its replacement – the Apache helicopter. That's now a reality.

And there is no victory sweeter than our successful effort to save Eielson Air Force Base. But we didn't stop there.

In December we passed a defense appropriations bill that injects \$37 million for new construction to support the F-35 bed-down at Eielson and another \$34 million to improve base utilities. And the Defense Department's 2017 budget would inject an additional \$296 million in military construction on Eielson alone. The recognition is the rest of the country needs Alaska as that base, as that strategic place. To provide for our nation's defense. And we can do it better because we have more than any place in the country.

When the Obama administration took office we faced a real threat that investment in the missile defense complex at Fort Greely would come to an end. We turned that around, too. We have rehabilitated the aging silos at Fort Greely and increased the number of interceptors in those silos. That is on track. The Missile Defense Agency intends to invest nearly \$52 million to sustain this effort in 2017.

Alaska is assuming that role of the watchman. Alaska is not only the best place to launch an interceptor. It's also the best place to maintain the watch for incoming threats. This past year the Missile Defense Agency announced a new Long Range Discrimination Radar is coming to Clear Air Force Station, to keep tabs on North Korea and other potential threats. This radar will inject another \$155 million into the construction economy in Fiscal Year 2017, with more to come in future years.

There's also a new fire station for Clear, a hangar at Fort Wainwright to support the new Gray Eagles and significant work at JBER to support the

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AWACS aircraft. When you add it all up, this would amount to \$561 million being poured into Alaska's construction economy. This is significant to us.

You can't talk about all the good we're seeing, without recognizing the elephant in the room. The troublesome proposal to dissolve the Army's 4th Airborne Brigade Combat Team at JBER – the only airborne brigade in the west. That proposal was not budget driven. It was driven by the Obama doctrine, which holds that we can live with a smaller Army. Well that's not something I, Senator Sullivan, Congressman Young agree with.

The brigade is worth saving and the arguments for it are extraordinarily compelling. I have had conversations with Eric Fanning, the Army Secretary Designate. Last week the Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, was on Fort Richardson observing the brigade with Senator Sullivan. And this week the brigade begins a rotation at Fort Polk, Louisiana to demonstrate their significant capabilities. No guarantees, but we are pleased that Army senior leadership is taking a second look at our Arctic warriors.

We are lucky so many of our warriors' service brings them back to Alaska. Our veterans deserve certainty that wherever they live in Alaska, their earned veterans' benefits will follow them.

We began working on this issue in 2005 and today we have robust partnerships with the Alaska Native health system to care for our veterans – not only in rural Alaska but also in Wasilla. Last year the VA threatened to end those partnerships and force everyone into the dysfunctional national Choice Card system. We put a stop to that immediately. Now the VA is talking about expanding its partnership with the Southcentral Foundation in Mat-Su. The goal here is to provide the level of care to the veteran wherever they live.

I can assure you that our fight with the VA is not over. Alaska veterans regard the Choice Card as "no choice." We owe it to those who have sacrificed so much to ensure that veterans' healthcare choices in Alaska are meaningful.

Alaskans need certainty that we will benefit from changes in the Arctic. McGuire and Heron have been leaders on this. The good news is that the administration is finally serious about putting a new icebreaker online, with production to begin in 2020. And just last week the President signed a Coast Guard bill into law which transfers land for a future deepwater port in the Bering Straits region. I'm proud to wear the title of Arctic Senator.

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Alaskans also deserve to know that federal land managers do not overstep their bounds and do not choke off access to state and federal lands. We see this and feel it on a daily basis. We are joined in the gallery by one of my heroes, John Sturgeon. He is my hero because not only is he a stand-up guy, but he stood up to the federal government when he knew they were wrong, and knew they were over-stepping, and got his case to the U.S. Supreme Court. I proudly joined with Dan and Don in filing a friend of the court brief on John's behalf. A case that is so important for the direction of Alaskans.

Many have asked me about the *Sturgeon* case in the wake of the loss of Justice Antonin Scalia. You can agree or disagree with his opinions, but he was a giant in American jurisprudence whose presence on the Supreme Court will be missed. As we mourn the loss of Justice Scalia, the short answer is that it is too soon to tell. But I do know that if the court doesn't come to the right decision, I am prepared to crack open ANILCA to reaffirm what it – and "no more" clause – were supposed to mean for Alaska. Because it's too important for our state.

The loss of Justice Scalia will have an impact on other areas, as well. He may best be remembered for the *Heller* decision, holding that the Second Amendment guarantees individual Americans the right to possess firearms. That decision is now one vote away from being lost – as are many others. I don't hold judicial nominees to litmus tests, but it is clearly in Alaska's interest to maintain balance on the highest court in the land.

Keep in mind—the high court is a last resort, not a dependable strategy for success. Alaska's interests depend on the type of good policymaking that comes from an open, regular order process. Whether it's what you are conducting here in our state legislature, or what we are doing back in Washington, DC.

As Chairman of the Interior-Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, last year I led the first markup of that bill in six years. We had not had a markup on an Interior Approps bill. And while we wound up with an omnibus bill at year's end, not the preferred route after the consideration of individual bills was repeatedly blocked, the work we did in committee was incorporated in it. After a crush of regulations in recent years, we kept funding for the EPA flat – and we have trimmed their number of employees to a level not seen since 1989, in the George H.W. Bush administration.

After one of the worst wildfire seasons on record, we not only met the full request for fire suppression funds, but made an additional \$600 million available in emergency funding in case regular funds are exhausted this year.

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When Alaska's Native communities agreed to take over the delivery of BIA and Indian Health Service programs they were promised adequate funds to administer those programs. True to form, the federal government welched on the promise.

For decades the tribes and the federal government have been battling over the payment of contract support costs. The Obama administration has tried to cap them. But we provided an "indefinite" appropriation so that agencies will have access to whatever funds are necessary to fully pay tribes.

Alaskans in our rural communities are still forced to haul honey buckets to the lagoon as part of their daily lives. It is long past time for clean, piped water systems to be installed in every village, and the villages that already have those systems need funding to maintain them, as well. The Alaska Federation of Natives passed a resolution last year calling for greater funding for drinking water and wastewater systems – and in short order, I doubled that appropriation.

And then there are our Village Built Clinics throughout rural Alaska. The federal government has failed to maintain them and the structures have become decrepit, but I increased funding so that upgrades can begin and care can improve.

New timber sales in the Tongass, sanitation facility construction and maintenance, PILT payments – the appropriations process is once again working for Alaskans.

We need to be on guard against new restrictions, new moratoria, and new withdrawals over the next ten months. Given the president's commitment to unilateral executive action, the last year of this administration could very well be the worst year for us. But even here we have scored a few notable victories, and I am recruiting allies that will help us make even more significant gains in the years ahead.

One way to do that is to highlight the beauty and challenges of Alaska to other policymakers. Just two days ago, I hosted five other members of the energy committee – and a Cabinet member, our Secretary of Energy – at a field hearing in Bethel. That's an impressive showing for any field hearing, especially one in rural Alaska, in February. But it speaks to volumes to the alliances and awareness that we are building in Washington, DC.

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All of the members who were in Bethel are strong partners on the bipartisan bill we are writing to update and modernize our nation's energy policies. Our bill also includes ideas that many of you have been developing in this Legislature – and I could not talk about it without recognizing the work of Lesil, Bill, Charisse, Bryce, and Lyman to drive energy policy at the state level. I thank you for that.

The Energy Policy Modernization Act – is designed to put power in the hands of Alaskans to solve our energy challenges, and to develop expertise that can be exported across the globe. From greater efficiency, to hydropower, to mineral development, microgrids and to certainty for LNG exports, that is exactly what our bill does.

The energy bill has strong support because we worked at the beginning to build something that was collaborative. As Chairman, I am committed to an open and inclusive process, which provides the best chance for collaboration and good policy. I'm following that same model with offshore revenue sharing – and with Virginia's Democratic Senators on board, we are gaining traction there as well. While we all should celebrate that we are finally getting production from the NPR-A, there is so much more to do. In the next few months I will be laying out new ideas to finally open up more of our lands and waters – something that I will need your continued support on.

I leave you with the recognition that as we are all working at different levels to provide for our state, the efforts that I'm trying to make back in Washington are designed to provide some level of certainty. 2015 was a good year for Alaska in the Senate, even in the midst of a difficult administration. But we're not finished yet. We have a lot of difficult work ahead of us, not a lot of time to get it done, and results matter most.

So here's my approach. No hyperbole. No theatrics. No drama. I'm showing up for work, my doors are open, my lights are on, and I am always working hard for our state. Even when it snows in Washington, DC.

**Please report corrections to the Chief Clerk's office.**