

**SENATE AND HOUSE
JOINT JOURNAL SUPPLEMENT**

March 31, 2003

Monday

No. 7

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Address by

The Honorable Ted Stevens

United States Senator

Before a Joint Session

of the

First Session of the

Twenty-Third Alaska State Legislature

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March 31, 2003

Juneau, Alaska

The following was submitted for publication:

It's great to be home. Speaker Kott, Senate President Therriault, thanks for allowing me to join you this morning.

We meet today at a moment of great historical importance. A few weeks ago I, along with the Speaker of the House, received a letter from President Bush indicating that the time for dealing with Iraq had arrived. The War Powers Act requires that the President submit a letter to the Speaker of the House and the President pro tempore of the Senate when he seeks to increase the number of troops equipped for combat in a foreign nation.

The letter outlined the President's intent to begin a military campaign that would enforce the seventeen United Nations resolutions regarding Iraq. The next night, the congressional leadership, including the Speaker and I, were called to the White House.

The President outlined his concerns and his plans. Our leadership agreed the time for action was at hand. On March 19th Operation Iraqi Freedom began with a promise to disarm Iraq, remove Saddam Hussein from power, and liberate the Iraqi people.

I support the President's decision, and our troops as they carry out his commands.

For over ten years the Iraqi regime ignored the world's call that they fulfill their 1991 commitment to disarm. Iraq failed to comply with every United Nations resolution.

We seek peace, not war. Military action is and always must be our last course of action.

On September 11th our nation entered a new era. We know terrorists seek to destroy our way of life. September 11th showed they will stop at nothing to bring their hatred to our nation. These events demonstrate the importance to our national security of developing our own natural resources.

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I was disturbed when we did not secure the votes needed to take the first steps toward oil exploration and drilling on ANWR's coastal plain. A nation that imports oil from its enemies will never be safe. In 2000 we imported almost 56% of our oil including nearly 1.1 million barrels of Iraqi oil per day--oil which should come from ANWR, not Saddam Hussein.

ANWR is an important centerpiece of any comprehensive energy policy. I'm proud to say that we've worked very closely with the labor leaders, such as Jerry Hood, who have been some of our strongest allies on this issue.

Don Young, Lisa Murkowski and I also want construction on the Alaska gas pipeline to be authorized this year.

Domestic natural gas production fell 5% last year, and Canadian production also decreased. Natural gas demand is expected to increase 1.7 to 2.3% annually. Without new supplies, a tremendous gap between our natural gas supply and consumer demand will continue to grow over the next ten years. Alaska's gas pipeline project could close one third of that gap.

As you know, the gas line project will use 3,000 miles of pipe and 1,500 miles of coupling pipe. It will employ over 7,000 Alaskan workers, and it will generate over \$50 billion in revenues for our state.

There may ultimately be support for a spur line to tidewater and an L.N.G. plant to deliver Alaska gas to other markets. Right now we are focused exclusively on providing the right incentives to build a pipeline to take our gas to the central United States.

The President opened a new door in his proposed budget by including funds to develop hydrogen powered cars. Not many realize Alaska is a great storehouse of methane hydrates. Lisa, Don, and I are working to develop this resource, so Alaska may be the hydrogen supplier for the nation.

In the meantime, we support efforts to develop coal bed methane, hydro-electric, wind, and tidal based power alternatives here in Alaska.

The Denali Commission will receive another \$15 million to upgrade power facilities in high cost areas. This year, our delegation will seek to expand Alaska's weatherization program to help individuals and small businesses reduce power bills through conservation.

We want to accelerate land conveyances to meet state and native entitlements. Our goal is to have every acre conveyed by the time we celebrate the state of Alaska's 50th birthday in 2009.

Lisa and Don will try to expedite the conveyance process while I try to get the survey money.

Economic development and diversification is a key to our future.

More Alaskans are computer literate than any other state in the union. To take advantage of our trained work force, we need state of the art technology to attract investors. I continue to seek funds for a statewide grant program for high speed internet service in rural Alaska.

Our television stations are ahead of the nation in converting from analog broadcasting to digital, and our public television stations are building state of the art production facilities to serve public and commercial stations alike.

This year, Alaska's public radio stations also enter the digital world to link them together to share news and information.

Another focus is agriculture. This past year, Congress approved legislation to revitalize the dairy industry in Alaska and to expand and upgrade Matanuska Maid. We provided support to begin a new berry industry and develop new crops.

Work will begin soon on a processing plant in the Mat-Su to convert our crops and seafood into school lunches and frozen dinners. And we want to continue to work with you to develop new seafood products.

We're also considering how we can enhance the tourism industry. I continue to do all I can – providing help to our cruise ship industry, seeking funds for visitor centers from Seward to Fairbanks and from Cordova to Kotzebue – and working with Don and Lisa to make sure we have the transportation infrastructure necessary.

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Last year Congress agreed to provide about \$50 million to the Alaska Railroad; funding to complete my pledge to bring runway lights to every community in the state; funds for new ferries and roads; and funds for the railroad to secure the coal loading facilities at Seward as part of a program to restore the market of coal to Korea.

I am pleased to report that funds were also provided to begin design work on the new bridge linking Anchorage with the Mat-Su Valley across the Knik Arm. Lisa and Don serve on the committees that will actually authorize the bridge construction and it's really their exciting new project.

Lisa's bill to provide highway funding to the Denali Commission could supply what has been up to now a missing link to develop a statewide transportation network of harbors, docks, roads, ferries, and airports.

The Denali Commission will receive nearly \$100 million this year, and my amendments to expand its mission into solid waste disposal and job training for local construction projects were approved.

\$340 million was provided for military construction projects, and again I have insisted that local hire apply to the jobs that will be created. Water and sewer construction also nears \$100 million with the state match you provide.

I am also pleased to inform you that the Army will begin stationing its newest and most technologically advanced fighting force, the Stryker Brigade Combat Team, at Fort Richardson and Fort Wainwright. This Stryker Unit will transform our Army to a more advanced, lethal and responsive force. Fielding this new capability in Alaska demonstrates the Army's understanding that Alaska has a unique and critical future military role.

I am pleased that NOAA will proceed with the construction of a new fisheries lab at Lena Point. This is an important project for Juneau and Alaska's fisheries research capabilities.

The stellar sea lion is now probably the most studied creature on earth, and the research is beginning to pay off.

This year, we continued work on harbor seals, and expanded our seal research to include ringed and spotted seals. Congress continued to support our efforts to protect walrus, polar bears, and otters. We funded work to restore the eider duck population, and an initiative I began to protect diving ducks from fishermen's bait is now underway.

Efforts continue to protect the Kenai River and I expanded that effort this year to include Ship Creek, Campbell Creek, and Chester Creek. My dream is to restore the fish runs in Anchorage, build fishing platforms and picnic facilities for families, school kids, and the disabled who might otherwise not have an outdoor experience.

We can't have a strong economy without a well educated work force. I am pleased to report that Congress agreed to increase funds for education in Alaska including teacher training, training for child care and Head Start workers, distance learning, and a vocational training school in Bethel.

Congress also agreed to my request to support development of a statewide Alaska curriculum. Instead of funding the many requests I received for curriculum development, we pulled together a variety of groups across the state to begin work on an optional Alaska curriculum.

The plan will also include an Alaska science curriculum for grades K-12 which will include hands on study opportunities with federal and state biologists, geologists, oceanographers, and other scientists.

Later this year, Congress will re-authorize vocational training programs, the higher education act that funds colleges and universities, and special education. As we consider those bills, Lisa, Don, and I welcome your ideas and input.

The "no child left behind" act is now being implemented across Alaska. We did not anticipate some of the difficulties to implement that act in a state as diverse as ours. I will meet with Secretary of Education Paige this week with the following requests. First, I'll request a single, statewide system for measuring how Alaska's students are meeting standards.

Second, I'll stress the need for flexibility and resources to develop regional learning centers in rural Alaska.

Third, I'll note that we need teachers in very small rural Alaska schools to be given "highly qualified" status if they have a master's degree or a major in one of the core academic subjects that they cover, rather than each of the subjects they teach.

Fourth, our rural schools need extra time to meet the new rules that require teacher aides to have associate degrees or 60 hours in college.

Finally, we need to change the requirement for Alaska that students must be tested in English for math and reading skills beginning in the 3rd grade.

Alaska is unique because we have students who speak 109 languages. That's about the same number of languages spoken by California students but California gets about 100 times as much funding for helping those students.

With 65 percent of Alaska mothers in the workforce, when the school bell rings, kids need a safe and nurturing place to go. At my request, Congress funded a variety of after school programs from Boys and Girls Clubs to Big Brother-Big Sister to the YMCA.

Another is a statewide mentoring program that links kids with a caring adult. Not every family offers role models, and I want to make sure that every Alaskan kid hears the words "you can do it" as he or she is growing up.

Later this year, Congress will also consider legislation to extend nutrition programs from the women, infants, and children's program – WIC – to food stamps – to the school lunch program – to food pantries. Lisa, Don, and I are working with the Governor to modify the WIC program so it accounts for the high cost of food in rural communities. We want to modify the school lunch program so that kid friendly cuisine like Alaska salmon is included. Studies show that children with learning disabilities and behavior problems often have a diet low in omega 3 fatty acids found in salmon.

We are also exploring including fish jerky in meals ready to eat for our troops overseas.

On another front, Alaska has had some successes in improving health care this past year at a meeting with a group of doctors in Anchorage at Christmas, I learned first hand of the problems facing Alaska's seniors. Based on those discussions, I was able to block a planned further reduction in Medicare payments to doctors who treat senior citizens.

Working with Senator Grassley from Iowa, Chairman of our Finance Committee, we were also able to use my appropriations committee bill to increase Medicare funding to rural hospitals.

Tommy Thompson, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, visited Alaska again last summer. He allocated \$10 million for a new frontier health initiative and more than doubled funding for community health clinics in Alaska.

Congress agreed to my request to increase by 50 percent, funding for clinics which combine dental, mental health, and medical services. These are built by the Denali Commission. These additional funds will go to improve emergency medical services in hub communities not served by the Indian health service.

Secretary Tommy Thompson is a good friend and will return again this summer to meet with Alaska's medical and native communities.

Work is now well underway in developing an obesity program for our state. This is one of the greatest health risks we face.

Earlier this year, Congress approved my amendment to fund the Carol M. White Physical Education Program at \$70 million. Alaska schools are now receiving grants to provide physical education in our schools.

And the effort I told you about last year to support the Alaska Lung Association and the Alaska Asthma Association to stop smoking especially among our young people has also been funded.

When I stood at this lectern last year, I spoke about developing a statewide plan to combat child abuse and domestic violence. I am pleased to report that that effort too is underway, and we expanded it to provide help for parents with teenagers in trouble.

Working with Alaska's attorney general, we seek a zero tolerance plan for perpetrators of violence against women and their children.

Alcohol continues to be the root of many of our problems, and Congress funded a dozen or more treatment programs across the state.

We also want to work with you to reinvigorate our fishing industry and expand markets for our seafood products. Last year the Congress approved a provision in the farm bill that requires that the country of origin and wild-caught or farm-raised status appear on seafood packaging. Lisa and I have asked the USDA to reach out to Alaskan fisherman as they develop regulations to enforce this law. This step will keep consumers informed so that they will purchase our products, not foreign imports masquerading as Alaska made.

Congress also approved our request that the Defense Department only purchase seafood that is caught and processed in the United States. This new market should be a tremendous opportunity for our state.

In the meantime, Lisa, Don and I realize many Alaskan fishing families are suffering. That is why we included much needed assistance in the latest appropriations bill. That bill included \$35 million in disaster assistance for our state's fishing families and communities, and \$22 million for pacific coastal salmon recovery efforts.

We also created a new entity, the Alaska Fisheries Marketing Board, which will help us improve our marketing, development, and promotion of Alaskan seafood. The board begins its work with a \$10 million appropriation.

One of the most exciting new developments on this front is Burger King's effort to put salmon burgers onto their menu this spring – not just in Alaska but on the whole West Coast.

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In the next few months Congress will consider major infrastructure bills that have the potential to greatly benefit our state. Both the highway and aviation bills will provide jobs and contribute to our economic development. Senator Murkowski is well-positioned on the environment and public works committee to work with Chairman Young to protect Alaska's interests, particularly on the highway bill.

We need to define our long-term vision for Alaska. I ask that you continue to sharpen that vision, paying special attention to our rural communities whose way of life is threatened by modern economic forces largely beyond our control.

In particular, I hope you address the subsistence problem and allow the Alaskan people to vote to solve it.

Don, Lisa and I have positions on three critical committees. Together, with your guidance, we want to establish long-term funding streams to benefit Alaska for decades to come.

I applaud you for your service to our state and I look forward to working with you on issues of vital importance to our constituents.

With the permission of your leadership I will respond to your questions. God Bless America, god bless each and every person that stands in harms way as we battle terrorism and this war to free Iraq from tyranny. God bless Alaska and every Alaskan.

Thank you.

Please report corrections to the Senate Secretary's office.

