



The Olympic Torch passed by the State Capitol en route to the Winter Games

News From MARY

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The Education Business

At an oil and gas luncheon last month one of the presenters asked the audience to remember, "Every Alaskan is in the oil business." In my office we are restating the sentiment as, "**Every Alaskan is in the education business!**" Education is a mandate of our Constitution, most of us are products of a public education and we have a vested interest in the quality of the education we provide for our students. In addition, the school is the virtual center of the community in cities and villages across the state.

How we fund the operating costs and school construction and major maintenance is an annual tug-of-war in the legislature, one that can be challenging to follow. I've attached a list of current education bills, and I encourage you to weigh in with your opinion. If you have web access you can monitor the bills at www.legis.state.ak.us/legis. Any time you have questions or want additional information, you are always welcome to call my office. Education continues to be one my top priorities, and I always appreciate hearing your views.

Mary

School Construction Bills

The backlog of school construction and major maintenance needs exceeds \$640 million. The legislature's failure to address rural school needs in an equitable way led the judge to rule in the **Kasayulie** lawsuit that the state had violated the State Constitution in its funding practices.

This year the Governor has proposed a school construction general obligation bond be put before the voters in the amount of \$212 m. (**HB 363/SB 259**). Sen. Hoffman and Rep. Joule have sponsored a larger bond package (**SB284/HB291**) in the amount of \$352 m. Many of our districts' needs would be funded if the bill passes the legislature and is approved by the voters in November. I am a co-sponsor of HB 291 and strongly support the package.

I have also sponsored a bill that puts another solution on the table (**HB 495**). The bill proposes to eliminate the municipal bond reimbursement program (whereby the state reimburses municipal governments 70% of their costs) and to require every school project to go through the department's priority list for state funding. School construction and major maintenance needs would be funded through an Education Facilities Financing Authority.

HB 495 is a work in progress, introduced to meet the personal bill deadline on February 19.



Bob Herron and Janelle Vanesse visited the office this past week as they made the rounds of legislative offices to advocate for the \$900,000 in the Governor's capital budget for Yuut Elitnaurviat: The People's Learning Center. (**HB 337**).



Rep. Con Bunde joined Rep. Kapsner in a pro and con debate on HB 171 for close up students studying the bill.

Alaska History Bill Passes the House

Last year I introduced **HB 171** to require Alaska history as a graduation requirement. The bill passed the House on February 19 by a 36-0 vote. It has been referred to the Senate Health Education and Social Services and Finance Committees.

The House Finance Committee removed the requirement that the Department develop a history curriculum, which had the effect of creating a zero fiscal note. In other words, the state will not pay for curriculum.

I'm not as worried about this change as I would have been last year because I've seen a tremendous commitment among supporters to make sure the curriculum is funded in other ways. Sometimes we have to think outside the box. As I look back on my own education, that's precisely what many of my best teachers encouraged us to do.