

Last week . . .

- The **First Alaskans Foundation** met with the **Bush Caucus** to share data gathered for them by the University of Alaska Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) for a project called "Our Choices - Our Future." Information on population growth, health issues, the economy of rural remote Alaska, and education indicators will be shared through various forums around the state and is intended to help support discussions that will drive positive policy changes. www.firstalaskans.org <<http://www.firstalaskans.org>>
- Members of the **Alaska Municipal League** held another "fly-in." Faced with dramatic losses in funding, including last year's decision to eliminate municipal assistance and safe communities funding and the capital matching grants, AML supports a Percent of Market Value Approach (**POMV**) as the anchor for a state fiscal plan with earnings allocated to inflation proofing, PFD's and state/local public service needs. They also support a **revenue sharing "lifeline"** for small communities - \$9 million statewide. Bethel Mayor **Hugh Short**, council members **David Trantham**, and **Andrei Jacobs** were in Juneau for these important meetings. www.akml.org <<http://www.akml.org>>
- **Bev Hoffman** also stopped by the office as part of the University of Alaska **Cooperative Extension Service** lobby effort related to funding for the coming year. The University has asked for an additional funding, and there has been a high level of support this year-although the amounts differ-among both Democrats and Republicans for increases in education from K-12 and the University.
- The **Conference Committee on SB 283** held an initial meeting. This bill by Senator Hoffman to address budget holes from last year was amended in the House to include **increased funding for education**, capital funding for **Yuut Elitnaurviat** and a few other important projects left out last year. The Conference Committee appointees are charged with the responsibility of proposing a compromise. www.legis.state.ak.us/basis <<http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis>>
- Members of the **Alaska Native Health Board** were here to lobby for the \$1 per pack increase in **tobacco tax**. The Governor's bill, **HB 538**, is scheduled in the House Labor and Commerce Committee on April 21. www.anhb.org <<http://www.anhb.org>>
- The **House Special Committee on Education** heard and moved **HB 84**, the bill I introduced to require Alaska students pass a course in **Alaska History**. The Alaska Humanities Forum gave an impressive update of work on curriculum development funded by Senator Ted Stevens. Rep. Seaton (R-Homer) garnered 4 votes to amend (weaken) the bill by making it permissive. With 30 of my colleagues-both Democrat and Republicans-signed on as co-sponsors of the original bill, I am working to bring the bill back to its original intent.
- The **Legislative Ethics Committee** held another meeting on the subject of "**open meetings**." This is important work because decisions made by the legislature are the public's business and much of the frustration expressed in recent years has related to decisions made by the Republican Majority "behind closed doors." I consider my job as a member an important one because it speaks to **the core of good government**-government decisions that affect all of us.

- The **House Finance Committee** moved several pieces of a possible fiscal plan forward to the Rules Committee: HJR 46 and HJR 47, each constitutional amendment proposals related to the permanent fund; HB 533 related to permanent fund appropriations; and HB 333, creating a Public School Endowment.
- The **House Ways and Means Committee** moved HB 493 related to a long term fiscal plan on to House Finance and heard HB 441 by Rep. Gara (D-Anchorage) that adjusts severance taxes on the oil industry.
- The teacher's union, **NEA Alaska**, came forward with a proposal to create a constitutional amendment that would establish a **K-12 Education Fund**. www.neaalaska.org [<http://www.neaalaska.org>](http://www.neaalaska.org)
- The **Governor** pressed for action on the **POMV**. With oil prices in the high 30's and speculation that they will continue to climb, Legislature's resolve to work on a long range plan has weakened. With the news, rumors of a possible special session began to emerge.
- The **Democratic Caucus** continued to urge passage of a **long range fiscal plan** because even if POMV passes, it is only one piece-not a plan.

This week . . .

I look forward to our first group of High School **Close-Up Students from Tuluksak**. The **Alaska Association of School Boards** is coming for its second fly-in and to help us focus on education issues. www.aasb.org [<http://www.aasb.org>](http://www.aasb.org). The State Operating Budget (HB 375) will be in Senate Finance for amendments. Work on the Capital Budget (SB 257) should begin to pick up. And with less than a month left in the session, many bills introduced by individual members that have stalled are likely to begin to move as well.

<http://kapsner.akdemocrats.org>