

off the record

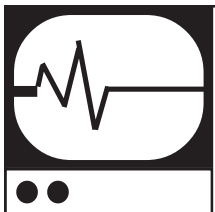
a weekly legislative
update from
Senator Kim Elton

Room 504, State Capitol, Juneau, AK 99801 ♦ 465-4947 ♦ 465-2108 FAX ♦ Feb. 19, 1999

Southeast loses university regent

Despite behind-the-scenes efforts of several Southeast mayors and other leaders, Governor Knowles filled a traditional Southeast seat on the university board of regents with a Fairbanks appointment. Knowles passed over several qualified SE candidates and filled the four vacant seats with two applicants from Anchorage and two from Fairbanks. This summer, after student-regent Annette Nelson-Wright of Juneau leaves the board, Southeast will have just one representative on the board, Juneau resident Elsa Demeksa.

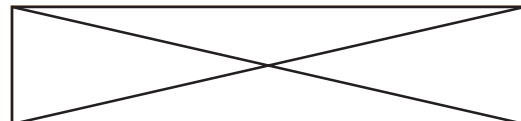
The loss of a SE advocate is especially disappointing because the competition between campuses for scarce state dollars grows hotter every year. Outlying campuses are especially vulnerable in the funding wars. Former Southeast Alaska regent tag teams (Gordon Evans/Don Abel, Eric Forrer/Lew Williams, and more recently Lew Williams/Elsa Demeksa) helped UAS grow and prosper. The governor has made Elsa's job much more difficult and, unfortunately, UAS more vulnerable.



**capital
move
pulse:**

no new action this week.

Capitol Undercurrents



Against the tide

One opinion not heard at the February 9 Economic Forum on the state of Alaska's economy was from Roger Herrera. The Anchorage-based oil consultant and former BP Alaska poohbah predicts the price of oil will go up within six months and return to the \$15-\$20 range within a year. His counterintuitive prediction was outlined in *Business News*, an Alaska business news tabloid.

Native corps missed at forum

Other opinions not heard at the Economic Forum were from the Native Corporations. AFN President Julie Kitka told a Juneau audience this week she found it strange that a forum of business leaders couldn't include Native corporate leaders—especially since Arctic Slope Regional Corporation is the state's largest business entity and Sealaska is the fifth largest.

UA gets a champion

New University of Alaska President Mark Hamilton began dipping his toes into legislative politics at a Wednesday breakfast meeting with about a dozen legislators and a Friday appearance before the House and Senate Finance committees. The retired Army major general is prepared to capture the hearts and minds of policy makers. I'm beginning my fifth year of legislative service and this is the first time I've heard a vision for higher education clearly and forcefully articulated. Especially memorable was his comment that "the most important Alaska jobs are the ones we've not yet created."

English Only?

Don't read too much into which way the Alaska Supreme Court is leaning on the suit challenging the legality of the successful English Only ballot initiative—even though former chief Justice Jay Rabinowitz administered the oath of office to new Justice Bud Carpeneti in Italian at a ceremony February 12. Before the swearing in, the revered former justice noted we are more vibrant because of our diversity of cultures. He celebrated that diversity by asking the new justice to take the oath in Italian, to honor Carpeneti's heritage. The oath was then repeated in English.

on the move

bills seeing action this week

SB 12, Forest Practices Act

(Mackie, R-Craig), changes the Forest Resources and Practices Act requirements on private land along anadromous waters, passed the Senate unanimously. This was a consensus bill supported by all the stakeholders.

HB 5, Education Vouchers

(Kohring, R-Wasilla) had its first hearing in House HESS. The bill would give parents about \$4000 in vouchers for the cost educating their child. Vouchers could go to private schools or kept for home schooling. There are constitutional problems, however, and the bill has an uphill battle. Held over in House HESS Committee.

HB 89/90/91, Gov. Knowles' Budget Gap Bills

(Governor's bills) the governor's proposal for transferring assets from the Permanent Fund to the Budget Reserve Fund, and the income tax proposal, had its first hearing in House State Affairs on 2/18/99. Hearings continued over the weekend.

S.E. transportation plans: an update

South of Juneau

The Southeast Transportation Plan is still making its way through the planning grinder.

The major sticking point is a proposed road segment across the Cleveland Peninsula north of Ketchikan. Conservation groups, Fish & Wildlife, and the Forest Service are balking to varying degrees over potential environmental impacts. DOTPF came up with two alternative plans and presented them to the House Transportation Committee Wednesday, and to SE mayors last week. A possible Prince of Wales alignment would take travellers over improved POW roads, where they could catch a ferry south from Thorne Bay or Hollis to Ketchikan, or north from Coffman Cove to Wrangell. A Wrangell Island alignment would add a fast ferry three times a day between Ketchikan and Wrangell.

Both alternatives come on-line faster than the Cleveland option, and both may negate the need for a lengthy EIS process. Initial projections show that both may have lower capital and M&O costs. Word from the ground is that Ketchikan sees the POW option as time-consuming and inconvenient, while Wrangell prefers the fast ferry or Cleveland route. For Southeast mayors, it's all for one and one for all—unless everyone agrees to abandon the Cleveland route, they'll stick together.

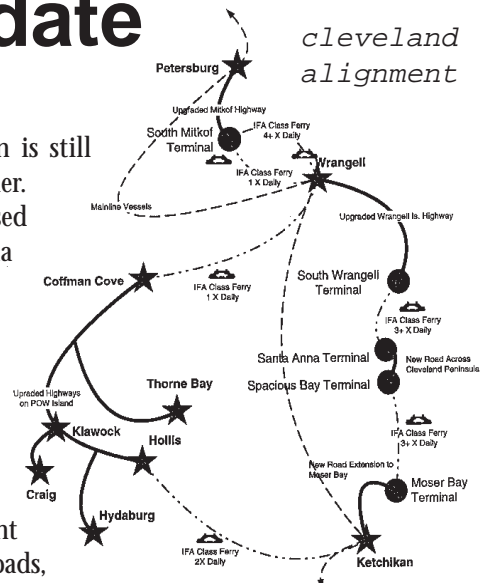
Planners are taking the options on a roadshow around Southeast, and hope to have a final plan in 4-6 weeks. Then it's straight to the legislature for dollars, starting with \$2.2 million for the EIS and preliminary engineering.

North of Juneau

Meanwhile Juneau Access is taking another spin around the block. DOTPF is reviewing the public comments and running various marine options through their paces. Rumors of a combination plan, with road extensions north from Juneau and south from Skagway (and new ferry terminals in Berners Bay and Katzechin) are still circulating.

DOTPF hopes to offer a "preferred alternative" soon, probably after the SE Transportation Plan is approved but before the end of session. Because a combo road/ferry plan wasn't included in the original EIS, this choice would need more scrutiny—either with a supplemental EIS or a brand new revised draft EIS. Haines is sure to hate any plan that bypasses their town, and so far Skagway is cool to the combo idea. Goldbelt, Inc. could certainly benefit from a stream of ferry traffic through their land at Berners Bay, and critics haven't failed to comment on a possible conflict of interest for DOTPF Southeast Regional Director and Goldbelt board member Bob Martin.

Juneau Access funding is still a big question mark. DOTPF doesn't expect to ask the state for any funds until they've picked out a preferred alternative. When they do ask, budget cutters will be waiting: staffers at DOTPF report that Sen. Randy Phillips has already contacted the department, asking how to identify Juneau Access money in the budget request—so he can cut it.



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