

Senator Hollis French

Senate Democratic Leader

State of the State Response, January 22, 2014

It's a honor to be given the opportunity to address you

Rep. Tuck has done a good job articulating the Democratic vision for the state.

I'd like to focus for a few minutes on what I believe will create the greatest likelihood of success for the greatest number of Alaskans and that's public education. We have to educate the next generation of Alaskans to solve the problems they will inevitably confront.

Remember, education is a constitutional obligation and it can't be done with half measures and it certainly can't be done with flat funding.

Innovations long embraced by other states, like statewide voluntary pre-kindergarten, do not get the attention they deserve from the administration. Keep doing what you've been doing and you'll keep getting what you've been getting.

And for many school districts, the governor's approach now means cuts to the classroom.

Cuts here in Juneau. 30 teachers.

Cuts to the schools in Anchorage – 159 teachers –
and cuts in Fairbanks – 60 teachers

indeed, the school superintendent in Anchorage said that the cuts to ASD are and I quote “unlike anything I’ve seen in my 23 years with the Anchorage School District.”

We want to build a stronger Alaska from the ground up.
We intend to push for more education funding this session.
The state needs an increase in the base student allocation.
Schools need money they can count on.

The governor claims he has a positive vision for the state, but a vision that does not include a powerful education agenda is not a vision, it’s a mirage.

Reality demands action and you will see us putting forward measurable, tested, and achievable education reforms.

(On the issue of vouchers: I listened carefully to what the Governor had to say and I'm disappointed he's going in this direction.

Diverting public money to private schools simply continues to deprive our public schools of the resources they need to do their job.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the governor has decided that the waiting lists at certain schools means those schools programs should be expanded.

Here's what he said in a recent interview: When we have a public school called a charter school that has a wait list of with hundreds, they're doing something right. We ought to be replicating that.

I would say the same thing about Head Start

Let me turn now to the issue of energy.

Energy development can enrich a society. We have seen it work here and seen it work even better in countries like Norway. We believe energy development works best when a sovereign acts like a sovereign.

The innovative model we adhere to is known as the owner state. An owner state.

Visionaries working for statehood confronted skeptics who doubted our ability to stand on our own two feet economically. The answer was to give Alaska control of its vast resources. Keeping in mind that we hold those resources in trust for future Alaskans, we will not apologize for working diligently to maximize the benefit of those resources for all.

Doing anything less means we are failing in our duty.

We will be talking a lot about the gas line this session and our approach to the gasline is simple:

Gasline Yes

Giveaway No

A pipeline that does not return economic benefit to the people of this state may as well not be built.

How do we build a gasline that is not a giveaway? The key is to recognize that a gas pipeline deal must be structured for the next fifty years. And the key term will be access. Access to the gas for consumers at a reasonable price.

And access to the pipeline for new oil and gas companies who will come to alaska.

We have seen how smaller companies in Cook Inlet have revitalized those fields. The same will happen in time on the North Slope if we do it right.

But as we consider the governor's gasoline approach, we and many Alaskans have every right to view it with some skepticism.

This is the same administration that pushed last year's oil tax giveaway. The public saw through that and 50,000 of them, Alaskans all, rose up and signed a petition to reverse that bill. They did not need to see the new budget information now coming out that shows that the energy policies of the governor will drain our savings. They just knew it.

The surpluses we enjoyed just two years ago have been turned into billion dollar, actually \$2 billion dollar, deficits. The governor did not mention the fiscal cliff he is driving us towards in his speech. His own revenue forecasts do not show new oil coming to the rescue. It's red ink as far as the eye can see.

And the new investment the governor is now touting was already in the works a year ago, under ACES. We have consistently drawn attention to the steady upward trend in investment and in jobs on the North Slope since 2007, the year we passed ACES. .

Indeed, A year ago, the Slope was booming. A year ago, the camps were overflowing. A year ago, investment was reaching all time highs.

A year ago we were getting our fair share

What we didn't have a year ago was a governor leading a parade every time a new investment was announced.

We have offered a positive approach to oil tax reform. There's a smart way to adjust oil taxes that is win win win.

In conclusion, We must be good stewards of our resource wealth.

Energy propels Alaska now and education will continue to propel it in the future.

I am optimistic about the state and I thank you for taking the time to let me share my optimism with you.

Thank you and good night. God bless Alaska and god bless the United states.