



BERTA'S BRIEFINGS

REPRESENTATIVE BERTA GARDNER

Serving Geneva Woods, College Village, Green Acres, Tudor, Taku & Campbell Park

SEPTEMBER 2, 2011

What you told me at the BBQ

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I want to thank all of you who attended our first BBQ/Constituent Meet & Greet this past Wednesday. It was a great success with well over 100 people attending from the surrounding neighborhoods – despite the continuing rain.

What I love about such events is the opportunity to meet with you in-person and directly hear your concerns. Because we had such great fun and learned so much, I plan to make this an annual summer event.

Meanwhile, in case you could not join us, I want to tell you the top issues on people's minds.

Holding Legislators Accountable

Many of you were rightfully upset about recent news reports of some legislators traveling to far off places and staying in posh hotel rooms on the public dime. My view is that it is vital that any legislative travel directly relate to state business and be done in the cheapest possible manner. After all, it's the public's money and it's a legislator's duty to be careful with using state resources.



We had a GREAT time at our first annual BBQ and Constituent Meet and Greet

The State of Alaska belongs to two national groups, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the Council on State Governments (CSG). These organizations provide research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues.

NCSL also develops policy positions which are voted on and sent to the US Congress. The State of Alaska pays for each legislator to attend the annual meeting of either CSG or NCSL. Additionally, the House Democratic Caucus, of which I am a member, has a travel budget which allows one other legislative trip per year. Legislators also have office accounts which they sometimes use for legislative travel, including coming back home from Juneau to meet with constituents.

All legislative travel, whether paid by the state, by “scholarships” or through individual office accounts is reportable. Though many of us rely on the press to check the reports, any citizen can track legislators’ office spending, travel, economic associations, state contracts, conferences paid by groups or any gifts. Here is how to find the information:

1. **Financial Disclosures.** The state Ethics Act requires legislators and legislative employees to disclose certain transactions. This includes travel paid for by others, contracts and gifts. To find these disclosures go to the following link for the year-by-year listings:
http://ethics.legis.state.ak.us/ethics_disclosures.php
2. **Legislator’s Office Allowance Accounts.** The Legislative Affairs Agency (LAA) maintains records of each legislator’s office accounts. You may request a copy of these detailed records by a written email request sent to AccountingGroup@akleg.org You may also call the LAA Accounting Office at (907) 465-3852 if you have any questions.
3. **Other Legislative Office Expenditures.** Every year, on January 1, LAA produces a *Legislative Salary and Business Expense Report* which tallies each legislator’s spending for the previous year. This includes spending not covered in the Allowance Accounts.

The only way to hold our legislators accountable is for members of the public to pay attention to spending and financial disclosures. Things change only when citizens act as watchdogs and demand change for the public interest.

What’s Happening with Waldron Park

The second big issue at the BBQ was Waldron Park. As you know, despite overwhelming public support, Governor Parnell vetoed funding to acquire this wonderfully valuable parkland, which is for sale and may otherwise be developed for high density housing. We have since learned that the governor never read the many letters of support that were sent to his office, nor the backup documentation provided. Also, he apparently did not know the Boys and Girls Club had agreed to maintain the property at their expense.

Senator Johnny Ellis and I have met with representatives of the Boys and Girls Club. We know are sympathetic to making sure the park remains an open space – but they also need revenue from the land to support their programs and services for children all across this state. We have also met with several organizations and concerned citizens to look for a way to find a solution to protect this park. **In a nutshell, Waldron Park is not dead.** We continue to work for a “win-win” for everyone and I will keep you posted on the latest news concerning Waldron Park. In the meantime, if you are interested in getting directly involved, you will want to check out “Save Waldron Lake” on Facebook.

I hope you and your family have a great Labor Day weekend and enjoy the last days of summer. I'm

Berta and I'm still listening,

Berta
