



Senator Johnny Ellis and Representative Berta Gardner



# Report to the People

End-of-Session Newsletter for Midtown Anchorage

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

We have finally come to the end of a very frustrating but ultimately productive special session. As you probably know, the Governor adjourned the 2011 legislative session on April 17th and called the legislature into special session on April 18th. After considerable disagreement, the legislature eventually came together and accomplished a lot, and we want to give you an update.

Our goals for this session were based on our back to basics agenda that puts people before politics. To that end, we focused our efforts on **Education, Energy, and Economic Development**. In pursuit of those goals, we advanced these key initiatives:

- Funding pre-K, K-12, and University programs
- Promoting Renewable Energy Projects
- Scholarships based on both Merit and Need
- Funding Weatherization & Heating Assistance
- Extending Alaska's Film Incentives

These initiatives dovetail with our work on the State's budget—a budget that puts **Savings before Spending** and still makes key investments in Alaska's future.

We're very happy to finally be back in Anchorage. We are eager to hear from you and hope to see you involved in making Anchorage a great place to live. Please contact our offices if you have any questions on these or any other issues.

Senator Johnny Ellis

Rep Berta Gardner



Sen-

ator Ellis and Representative Gardner listening to constituents at the 2011 midtown pizza party.

P.S. We hope you have a great Alaska summer.

# Senator Johnny Ellis



*Senator Ellis chaired the Senate Finance Committee during Anchorage testimony on the capital budget*

## EDUCATION

The Senate expanded education funding in several ways, but most measures faced resistance with the House majority. The Senate approved funding for school meals, base student allocation, vocational education, and help with rising energy costs.

- **Senate Bill 3** provides matching funding for free and reduced school breakfasts and lunches. This bill is pending in House Finance.
- **Senate Bill 84** passed providing \$12 million in education funding for Voc Ed. The much-needed BSA increase was removed by House Finance.
- **Senate Bill 97** provides funding to school districts based on the price of oil to help pay for rising energy costs. This bill is pending in House Finance.

I sponsored **Senate Bill 107** which funds new engineering facilities at UAA and UAF. Alaska needs engineers who understand our challenging environment. We also funded \$6 million for merit and \$3 million for need-based grants.



*Senator Ellis with Chancellor Fran Ulmer and Senator Linda Menard (R-Wasilla)*

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Senate Bill 23** is legislation I sponsored to continue the rapid growth of the film and television production industry in Alaska. I worked hard to establish the production incentives in 2008, and it has been gratifying to see new productions bring millions of dollars into our economy, create jobs and provide opportunities for businesses large and small. The continuation of this economic boom is supported by the Governor, the ACVB, the Assembly, and the Mayor. I'm confident we'll finish our work on the bill next session.

The Senate is reviewing **House Bill 110**, the Governor's proposal to reduce oil taxes by about \$2 billion per year. However, we must ensure that any changes result in more oil into the pipeline and more jobs for Alaskans on the North Slope.

## ENERGY

We passed **Senate Bill 42** that allows Alaska Energy Authority to move forward with permitting for the Watana hydro-electric project, and we committed \$67 million to this process in the capital budget. Once complete, Watana will provide renewable energy to the Railbelt for many years. The capital budget also includes \$18 million for the Mt. Spur Geothermal project. Geothermal power is cheap and reliable, and Mt. Spur could be up and running in the next five years.

The popular weatherization and rebate program, which cuts monthly heating costs by over 30%, received \$126 million to give more Alaskans an opportunity to reduce their energy costs.

## SAVINGS BEFORE SPENDING

I helped the Senate Finance Committee commit more than \$1.0 billion into Alaska's savings accounts this year. I coined the phrase "Savings Spree", and I'm proud to say we did it! The house majority decreased that savings from the more than \$2.0 billion that I supported.

We also made big investments in key areas. The Senate funded \$1.6 million in pre-K programs that had been removed by the House majority. The Senate also invested more than \$1.0 million in several

According to a recent McDowell Group report prepared for the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation on the economic impact of *Everybody Loves Whales*

- 1,300 Alaskans earned income directly related to the filming
- There was spending at least 80 different businesses – totaling \$7.7 million dollars, much of it right here in Anchorage
- The total direct and indirect economic impact was estimated at \$16.5 dollars

*"A Back to Basics Agenda that Puts People before Politics"*



*Senator Ellis received the 2011 Seymour Award for his work on economic development in Anchorage*

programs at the University of Alaska Anchorage, including two nursing programs and the Honors College. We also supported additional funds for the Human Services Matching Grant program, programs that serve developmentally disabled children and adults, and Alaska public television.

I tried to cut spending in the Dept of Administration, but it was restored by a conference committee. I still believe major belt tightening is necessary.

# Representative Berta Gardner

## IT'S STILL ALL ABOUT JOBS!

A major focus of this legislative session has been to create a strong economy with jobs for Alaskans. Many approaches are moving through the system and those that don't reach completion this year will likely move forward next year. Some of my favorites include:

- House Joint Resolution 27 encourages CDQ fishing fleet, Coastal Villages, to **move their homeport from Seattle to Seward**. Such a move would mean millions into the Alaska economy, hundreds of new jobs and new development. It might also be the first step to moving the other 5 CDQ fleets home.
- House Bill 222 sets up a Task Force to promote Alaska by setting up a competitive system of **grant matching for industries** such as tourism, seafood and mining.
- House Bill 118 creates a tax credit for research and development expenditures to **help attract new industries**, particularly technology firms, to the state. Senator Ellis' similar approach for the film industry has been dramatically successful.
- House Bill 220 seeks to encourage **new and smaller explorers and developers to produce oil** in Alaska by providing them with a method of overcoming one of the biggest hurdles to new explorers and developers — access to existing facilities. These facilities range from feeder lines, process facilities and even roads. Most new explorers do not have the capital to build new facilities, or the size of their fields doesn't justify new facilities.



*Representative Gardner and Representative Paul Seaton (R-Homer) discuss his vitamin D bill on the floor*

## TED STEVENS DAY

With the Governor's signature, the 4th Saturday in July will become Ted Stevens Day, a time to gather with friends and family to celebrate the life and contributions of the man who served for 40 years as Alaska's Senator, leaving an indelible and memorable stamp on Alaska.



*Representative Gardner talks with Senate President Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak)*

## LEGISLATURE EXTENDS SENIOR BENEFITS

The Senior Benefits Payment program helps approximately 10,000 eligible Alaskans pay their bills and living expenses. The extension is keeping a promise.

## NEW COMMITTEE TO DEVELOP FISCAL POLICY

Too often political decision making is short-sighted, looking for the next big issue, the next news story, the next election, but a policy change with every campaign cycle is harmful to our economy. The new House Special Committee on Fiscal Policy will work on creating a fiscal plan for continuity, diversification, and the infrastructure for long term growth.

With a budget that grows 6 or 7% year, it is crucial that we take this time of high income to develop a coherent plan to convert our non-renewable resource to a renewable source of fiscal strength. The committee is charged with examining the state's current and future balance sheet and making recommendations to ensure a sound fiscal future for Alaska.



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**Senator  
 Johnny Ellis**

**Representative  
 Berta Gardner**

***Keeping in Touch!  
 End of Session Newsletter***



*After prioritizing savings before spending  
 Senator Ellis and Representative Gardner secured  
 funding for some neighborhood priorities*

- Storm drain reconstruction of Egavik Drive/Denali Street
- Radio and safety equipment for neighborhood community patrols
- Grants for science and computer equipment at area schools
- Safety Equipment for Anchorage Fire and Police Departments
- Renovations to the Loussac Library, Anchorage Museum, Sullivan Arena, and Ben Boeke
- Repairs to Wickersham Park and other neighborhood park upgrades
- Purchase Tract A-1 Waldron Subdivision
- The ARC of Anchorage renovations
- Safety upgrades at Abused Women's Aid in Crisis (AWAIC)



*Senator Ellis and Representative Gardner  
 breaking ground on the UA Health  
 Sciences Building*

These projects are still subject to veto by the Governor