



Berta's Briefings

End of Session Newsletter

26th Legislature

May 2010



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 26th Legislature ended with significant progress being made on a range of issues. Primarily we saw some visionary thinking in regard to energy with the passage of a state Energy Policy, outlining tangible goals of increased production, including renewable energy projects, and reduction of use – the cheapest way to reduce energy costs. Additionally, for the first time in our state's short but rich history, Education had its own committee instead of being tied with Health and Social Services, which handles very different policy issues. It was my honor to serve as a member of the first standing committee for Education, working for policies to improve educational outcomes for Alaska students.

One of the most important legislative responsibilities is construction of the state capital and operating budgets. Capital expenses are usually one time funds for improving Alaska's infrastructure, while operating expenses fund the day to day functions of state government.

I am pleased to say that for perhaps the first time since I have been elected I actually voted for the operating budget. I was a yes vote because not only did we work to hold the line on spending, we also paid back the money owed to the state's primary savings account. I voted against the capital budget and fully expect the Governor to veto some items. Although the budget includes a great many important and valuable projects around the state, we simply cannot afford to fund everything at once.

Serving in the Legislature provides a never-ending opportunity to learn about our great state. Each day, in committee and on the House Floor, I study the issues, ask many questions and work to make responsible, informed decisions. Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter!

Berta



Representative Gardner argues against overturning a citizens initiative and reducing the cruise ship head tax. Industry representatives testified that a reduced cruise ship head tax would not bring ships back to Alaska.

I am Honored to Serve *You!*

As many of you know, I am passionate about keeping in touch with my community. Please let me know about important news or events. I will be delighted to attend your events or help you with an issue.

Honoring Our Veterans

On March 22, through a bipartisan effort, House Bill 274 was signed into law by the Governor. This law designates August 7 as Purple Heart Day in perpetuity.

Many thanks and congratulations to constituent and Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Ron Seibels for all his efforts on getting this bill passed.

Alaska has a long and strong military tradition with

more than 70,000 veterans calling our great state their home. I am particularly proud to have sponsored this bill and to continue the efforts to honor our military men and women.

We hope that when August 7 rolls around, you will join all of us in honoring our Purple Hearts recipients – men and women who have been killed or injured by enemy action while serving our country.



Representative Gardner with Representative Nancy Dahlstrom and Senator Bill Wielechowski join Governor Sean Parnell while he signs Purple Heart Day into law.



It's About You!!!

Every day in the Legislature, I make a strong effort to work with all my colleagues to create good legislation and support good policy. We strive to make decisions on what is best for Alaska. Many bills need bipartisan support in order to work their way through the legislative process. I fully support the dynamic of the debate and appreciate differing points of view from my colleagues, stakeholders and members of the public. Treating each other with respect, listening carefully and working together, we can better craft solutions to the challenges facing Alaska.

Community Councils

One of the best ways you can have an impact on your community and see change you want is to participate in your local community council. Our neighborhoods includes all or part of seven different councils, meeting once a month at a designated time. Here is a list of the community councils I represent. If you do not know which is your specific community council, please feel free to contact me and I will help you find out.

Abbot Loop - Meets the last Thursday of every month at Abbot Loop Community Church at 7pm.

Campbell Park - Meets the third Thursday of every month at Tudor Elementary School at 7:30pm.

Midtown - Meets the second Wednesday of every month at Mt. Vernon Common House at 7pm.

Rogers Park - Meets the second Monday of every month at Rogers Park Elementary at 7pm.

Taku / Campbell - Meets the second Thursday of each month at the Dimond Center Hotel at 7pm.

Tudor Area - Meets the first Thursday of each month at the First Church of God, 4317 MacInnes at 7 pm.

University Area - Meets the first Wednesday of every month at College Gate Elementary at 7pm.

There are always events going on in Anchorage that effect our district. Many of these events I let you know through my electronic newsletter. I also provide legislative updates. If you would like to be on the electronic news list, please contact me at any time.



After Senator Lisa Murkowski's address to the Legislature, we discussed energy issues facing Alaska, specifically Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) development, loan guarantees for the gas pipeline and the denial of the ConocoPhillips CD-5 bridge in the NPR-A. We used this information to lobby the federal government to assist in moving the projects forward for the benefit all Alaskans.

Alaska Legislature TV

Along with the online ability to track bills on BASIS and listen to live committee meetings through the Legislative website, the Legislative IT department is offering another way for constituents to follow state government and the process of making new laws.

The new website, www.AlaskaLegislature.tv, is being provided by the Alaska Legislature. Currently, the Capitol is equipped to live stream audio and visual committee meetings in two of the most used rooms. This program is in its infancy and we hope to expand this offering to more rooms in the future. It is a great way to watch live committee meetings and follow the activities.

Capital Budget Items

Anchorage Highlights

- Anchorage Crime Lab (pared down about 20% from the original proposal)
- Port of Anchorage expansion (important for gas pipeline construction!)
- Anchorage Neighborhood Health Clinic expansion and relocation
- Z.J. Loussac Library Renovation

Midtown District Projects

Anchorage School District

Infrastructure, Technology, Book and Educational Supply Grants for Rogers Park Elementary, Taku Elementary, Tudor Elementary, Lake Otis Elementary, Polaris K-12, SAVE High School, King Career Center, and McLaughlin School.

Road Projects

- LaTouche / Annapolis Pedestrian Safety Improvement
- Little Tree Drive Road & Drainage Rehabilitation
- Sylvan Drive Reconstruction
- Egavik Drive and Denali Street Reconstruction
- Bancroft Subdivision Road & Drainage Rehabilitation
- Northern Lights Boulevard Sound Barrier, Phase III, Seward Hwy to Lake Otis Pkwy

*All requests are subject to Governor veto.

Campaign Finance Disclosure

Alaskans have long worked for and supported strong, transparent campaign finance laws, agreeing that the names of those who fund campaigns should be known to the public. After the US Supreme Court decision to allow unlimited corporate and union spending in elections, the Legislature moved to strengthen our disclosure laws. Prior to this ruling, corporations and labor unions had been banned from participating in Alaska's elections so our existing disclosure and disclaimer laws did not apply to those groups.

Senate Bill 284, which I supported, may be the single most important legislation passed this year. It amended state election laws to clarify that corporations and labor unions are covered by all applicable reporting requirements. It expands communication disclaimer requirements to ensure accurate reporting of top contributors so voters can be fully aware of who is sponsoring that communication and make informed decisions.

We may not be able to limit the donations but we certainly can demand full disclosure.



Representative Berta Gardner

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Successes of the 26th Legislature

All-Alaska Gasline

House Bill 365 created a development team in the Governor's office charged with selecting a route from the North Slope to tidewater, and developing a construction plan to be delivered to the Legislature by July 1, 2011. The team will evaluate all aspects of an in-state project to determine the best actions for the state to take. This legislation will not conflict with a successful open season for a gas pipeline project.

Constitutional Budget Reserve (CBR)

Through a combination of high oil prices and spending restraints, we were able to pay back loans taken from the CBR over the years and make it completely whole again. It took cooperation of all of us (and high oil prices) to make it happen but we managed to restore the fund to its full \$9 billion dollars.

Choose Respect Campaign

A very good first step toward raising awareness about Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (DV/SA) was introduced by the Governor this year. Also, HB 307, by Representative Holmes, (I co-sponsored), now allows magistrates and district court judges to grant protective orders in cases of DV/SA; issues which are especially important in rural communities. Missing from this campaign, however, is adequate funding for alcohol treatment, which I believe is crucial to any effort to address the issues.

Cook Inlet Gas Storage

Storage capacity for Cook Inlet gas reserves is highly seasonal. Producers have a hard time keeping up with the demand during our cold winter months. House Bill 280, the Cook Inlet Recovery Act, provides tax incentives and regulatory authority to attract the private investment necessary to develop storage facilities and help reduce the cost of gas to consumers.

Forward Funding of Education

The timing of the budget process has always made it difficult for school districts to anticipate their appropriation for an upcoming year. By doing this, we give the ability to the school districts to forward plan their budget to maximize student education.

Energy Policy

We took steps forward for long range planning on energy development and use. The passage of HB 306 was an energy policy vision developed by stakeholders across the state. The policy is the first step in developing an energy plan for Alaska, which will guide investments in people and projects. In addition, SB 220 passed to implement and promote alternative energies and energy reduction programs throughout the state.

Deferred Maintenance

Maintenance is one of those things that is often overlooked, especially during tight budget times. This year we finally bit the bullet and appropriated the much-needed funding to repair our roads, bridges and schools around the state.