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Keeping in Touch! End of Session Newsletter

Legislature Forward Funds Education \$1 billion put into Public Education Fund

This year was an historic year for education funding. The budget that passed will allow schools across the state to hire more teachers, reduce class sizes and enhance educational achievement. Also, the Legislature appropriated \$1 billion into the Public Education Fund so that the state can soon begin to fund education a year in advance. With some more work, this effort will lead to advance funding for schools.

As the session drew to a close, we were disappointed education funding was subject to backroom deals and too-little public process. Thankfully, we were able to pass a one-year fix that included assistance to school districts with retirement costs and school improvement grants that increased education funding to Anchorage schools. But many of us were disappointed that a long-term revision to our statutes, and solution to a fairness problem that has pitted rural and urban schools against each other, didn't get incorporated into this year's fix.

We voted to create a task force to finish the job, and revise our statutes so rural school districts, many of which receive inadequate resources, will be treated fairly into the future, and not just this year.



Reading with a young constituent



Senator Ellis meets with a trooper at the State Trooper Academy in Sitka

Legislature Passes Crime Bill Honoring Bonnie Craig Public Safety a Priority in 2007

This year, the Legislature placed a priority on enacting a public safety package to address the growing concerns that our communities are no longer as secure as they once were. We're happy to report that we were successful in achieving our goal.

The Legislature passed an omnibus crime bill that included several amendments in honor of Bonnie Craig, who was murdered in 1994. HB 90 includes provisions eliminating the statute of limitations for kidnapping, and require DNA testing in all felony arrests. The bill also incorporated Rep. Harry Crawford's HB 14, which limits the sale of alcohol to convicted DUI offenders. We also passed bills requiring ignition interlock for convicted DUI offenders, and Rep. Bob Buch's HB 220, requiring gang members convicted of serious crimes to wear electronic monitoring devices.



Senator Johnny Ellis and Representative Les Gara



Report to the People

District 23 End of Session Newsletter

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The legislative session has just ended, and we'd like to give you an update on what's happened recently. We hope you find the information we've provided on education, ethics reform and other issues to be helpful.

Also, as you know, we've pushed for a more fair oil tax, and House Democrats called on Governor Palin in early May for a Special Session to reform Alaska's oil tax law. She has agreed, and it looks like we will meet this fall in Anchorage to address that issue. The current FBI investigation has shown that the oil tax law that passed last year, which we expressed grave concern about and voted against, was likely tainted by the pending VECO vote-buying scheme. Currently 4 legislators are under indictment for their misdeeds, and we believe that loopholes in the flawed oil tax law that passed last year are costing Alaskans over \$1 billion/year in lost revenue.

With limited space, we can't address everything that happened this session. If you need more information, please don't hesitate to contact us. We hope you're enjoying your summer, and we both look forward to getting back home to Anchorage.

It our honor and privilege to serve you,

Senator Johnny Ellis

Representative Les Gara

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Anchorage Capital Projects

Here is a partial list of appropriations of interest to many of our neighbors:

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Highway to Highway Connector | \$10 mil. |
| 2. Anchorage Neighborhood Health Center | \$10 mil. |
| 3. Loussac Public Library | \$4.2 mil. |
| 4. Fire Department Training Center | \$9.0 mil. |
| 5. Anchorage Senior Center | \$800,000 |
| 6. Northern Lights Sound Barrier | \$297,000 |
| 7. 13 th /Gambell Safety Improvements | \$55,000 |
| 8. Neighborhood School Book and Supply Grants | \$42,500 |
| 9. Fairview Recreation Center Repairs/Upgrades | \$100,000 |

****All projects are subject to a veto by Governor Palin****



Representative Gara and Senator Ellis work on state and local issues in Juneau.

Senator Johnny Ellis

ASPIRE Program Will Help Foster Children Succeed Ellis Bill Connects Communities with Foster Children in Need

“Foster children are a part of our state’s future. This bill gives Alaskans a chance to get involved in foster kid’s lives and provide them with opportunities.”



For children in long-term foster care, one of life’s most significant hurdles occurs when the child “ages out” of the state’s care. Often times, foster children are ill prepared for life as an adult, whether they choose to pursue education beyond high school, or seen the necessary training to join the work force.

For these reasons, Senator Ellis sponsored Senate Bill 76, which established the ASPIRE program, an acronym that stands for Alaska’s youth Succeed when People Invest Resources in Education. The purpose of the bill is to allow churches, community organizations, non-profits, businesses and individuals to donate money to establish education savings accounts in the name of foster children through Alaska’s award winning UA College Savings Plan.

In many instances, foster children who have aged out of the state’s foster care system have essentially been left by the wayside. SB 287 would allow these children to explore opportunities in education and vocational training that they normally would not have.

We are happy to report that ASPIRE passed both the House and Senate unanimously, and is on its way to Governor Palin for her signature.

Ellis Leads Effort to Address Doctor Shortage Sponsors Bill to Double WWAMI participation

Alaska is in the midst of what many experts have called an immediate health care crisis. Across the state there are too few physicians to provide the necessary medical treatment to Alaskans. With Alaska’s population aging, the crisis is sure to get worse before it gets better.

It’s this crisis that spurred Sen. Ellis to introduce Senate Bill 73 to double the participants in our state’s medical school program, WWAMI. WWAMI stands for Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana



and Idaho, the states who cooperate to provide its best and brightest students an opportunity to attend medical school at the University of Washington. The Bill was designed to double the participants from 10 to 20 students per year, as an important first step to address the crisis Alaskans face.

Sen. Ellis worked with Representative Kevin Meyer to ensure this important step was passed this year before any more time was wasted.



Senator Ellis and governor Palin at the WWAMI bill signing.

Alaska Legislature Updates Substance Abuse Treatment Ellis Bill puts Pregnant Women at the Top of the List, Requires Evidence-Based Programs

Addiction takes a heavy toll on Alaskans. In addition to tragic social costs, the estimated financial burden is over \$730 million. Over the years, many constituents have come to me to discuss their personal struggle with addiction and the need for expanded treatment.

With that in mind, this year Sen. Ellis introduced Senate Bill 100, to address this state-wide epidemic. The bill makes incremental but important changes to the statutes regarding substance abuse. It includes provisions to put pregnant women at the top of waiting lists at treatment programs, to reduce the incidence of FASD in Alaska.

SB 100 also requires the state to fund evidence-based programs, and also focus on identifying and treating Alaskans with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders. Finally, we should make a wide spectrum of treatment available to people who seek help. The bill included a non-discrimination clause for effective faith-based treatment programs; no one program works for everyone.

The bill passed the House and Senate unanimously, and Sen Ellis is proud to be the sponsor of a bill that brought together people from across the political spectrum on such an important issue.



Meeting with Anchorage “Parking Fairy” Susan Pacillo. It was my honor to sponsor a bill naming the new state parking garage in Anchorage after her late sister, community activist Linny Pacillo. The bill passed in the final days of session.

Representative Les Gara

Ethics Reform: Finally! Ethics Bill Includes Reform Priorities Rep. Gara's Pushed Since 2004 Bill combines good ideas from the public, many legislators, and the Governor

After a long fight for ethics reform, started in 2004 by Rep. Gara and Sen. Ellis, and other legislators including Sen. Hollis French (D-Anch), and Rep.s Berta Gardner (D-Anch.) and Harry Crawford (D-Anch), the legislature finally passed a comprehensive ethics reform package this year. It helped that one of the main opponents of reform, former Sen. Ben Stevens, was no longer around to stand in the way of fixes needed to promote open government, and prevent some legislators from using their public office for personal benefit.

Three of the provisions came from legislation pushed by Rep. Gara. In 2004, Gara and Sen. French joined forces to demand ethics reform within the executive branch. This was in the wake of a coal deal our former Attorney General worked on that would have benefited a company in which he owned over \$100,000 in stock. Now executive officials will be barred from working on matters in which they have material conflicts. Additionally, Gara and Gardner have been pushing legislation to prevent legislators from earning money from private companies in exchange for passing or stopping legislation. Legislators should work on legislation for the public, not private interests, and so-called "consulting fees" from performing this type of work is now

banned under Alaska law.

Finally, Rep. Gara's provision closing a loophole in Alaska's bribery law has been passed. The current FBI investigations charge legislators with promising votes in exchange for campaign contributions and other money. Gara, after learning that trading a vote in exchange for campaign money was not a crime under Alaska law, filed legislation to close that loophole. That legislation passed as part of this year's ethics bill too, so such crimes can be prosecuted by local and state law enforcement in the future. Under state law, bribing someone with a campaign contribution is not a crime. For more information about the ethics package that passed, just give Rep. Gara or Sen. Ellis a call.



Proposal to Curb Drunk Driving Passes House

Alaska's drunk driving rate is still one of the worst in the nation, and we've been working on a way to reduce the needless death and injury inflicted by this crime. Studies have confirmed the effectiveness of an underused tool in the fight to curb drunk driving by repeat offenders: ignition interlock devices. These devices are placed on cars of repeat drunk drivers and prevent a car from starting if the driver has been drinking.

This year we pushed a proposal, successfully used in Canada and New Mexico, to install these devices on the cars of repeat offenders after they get their license back. The proposal we promoted requires that judges impose the interlock requirement for the duration of a repeat offender's probation period after their license suspension period ends. The provision was inserted into another piece of legislation (HB 19) with the cooperation of bill sponsor Kevin Meyer (R-Anch), and Reps. Lindsey Holmes and Max Gruenberg (D's Anch). The bill passed the House, and is waiting for action in the Senate, where Sen. Hollis French (D-Anch.) is supporting a similar provision.

In recent years, we've focused on sending defendants to jail for longer periods of time. But studies show that repeat DWI offenders continue to drive drunk after getting out of jail and getting their licenses back. This provision aims to repeat the successes in reducing drunk driving that have worked in other places where similar laws have passed.



Representative Gara spends time with constituent Peggy Burgin in Anchorage