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SOUTHEAST CHAMPS

Girls volleyball team wins first at regionals, will head to state

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

From the first-place seed going into regionals to a first-place finish, the Wrangell High School girls volleyball team saw their winning streak interrupted only once in Klawock.

The Lady Wolves faced the Craig Panthers twice in the second day of play last Friday after beating host team Klawock the day before in three sets. Craig bested Wrangell in the first match-up after four sets, dashing their hopes of a clean sweep on Friday, but Wrangell rallied and came howling back to win the second match and the title.

At the start of regionals last Thursday,

Wrangell went up against Klawock, making point after point against them. The Lady Wolves got their footing early and never lost it. Klawock was able to anticipate a few of Wrangell's returns, but clear and effective communication kept Wrangell running like a well-tuned machine. Wrangell won the first set, 25 to 10.

Klawock pulled it together for the next two sets, taking advantage of missteps on Wrangell's part. However, teamwork and good fortune favored the Lady Wolves, and they won the next two sets, 25 to 23 each time.

Competition for Wrangell versus Craig was moved to the Craig High School gym

on Friday when condensation dripping from the ceiling made the gym floor unsafe to play in Klawock.

The Lady Wolves had a significant lead in the first set against the Panthers, making important saves. Missteps led to Craig creeping up during the game, a tactic they would use throughout the rest of the sets whenever they fell behind. The first set ended with a score of 25 to 21, with Wrangell winning.

Wrangell wasn't able to anticipate a lot of Craig's returns in the second set, allowing Craig to take an early lead. Craig consistently kept a two-point lead over

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School districts hope for more state funding next year

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

School districts statewide, including Wrangell, will be looking to the Legislature next year for an increase in state funding, but any boost in the state's per-pupil formula likely will depend in large part on oil revenues and also Permanent Fund earnings.

And neither looks good this month, less than eight weeks before lawmakers are scheduled to convene in Juneau.

The state funding formula for K-12 education hadn't moved in about five years before this year's 0.5% mini-nudge upward. Meanwhile, districts statewide are facing budget deficits and program cutbacks, also blamed on the end of federal pandemic relief aid.

"I think it's likely to be a big issue," Ketchikan Rep. Dan Ortiz, who also represents Wrangell, said of school funding in the 2023 legislative session. He expects to see legislation proposed to increase the formula, just as in recent years when it failed to gain enough support for passage.

The state was rich with revenues this past spring from near-record oil prices, but supporters still were unable to win enough votes to raise the school funding formula. The next legislative session could be harder, Ortiz said. "The problem is that revenue looks like it will be down compared to last year."

Oil prices, which generate a large piece of state revenues, started this week at about \$90 a barrel, down from almost \$120 when the Legislature adjourned in May.

And the Permanent Fund, which provides the single largest deposit into the state general fund each year, is down in value almost \$12 billion between Dec. 31, 2021, and Sept. 30 of this year, reducing the projected draw on the account to help pay for public services — and education — next year. The Permanent Fund Corp.'s Sept. 30 projection of the annual draw from earnings shows \$75 million less next year and almost \$145 million less the following year than had been forecast in January.

One problem is that as the state budget gets tight, education and other public services have to compete for limited funds with the annual Permanent Fund dividend. "The PFD proponent ... he's going to bang that drum," Ortiz said of Gov. Mike Dunleavy, who successfully campaigned for re-election

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Borough will install additional restrooms downtown next spring

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Next year, Wrangell will be home to a hot new tourist attraction — public restrooms. Portable facilities will appear downtown in the late spring to meet tourist demand and to reduce the strain on area businesses.

"We're looking at doing some sort of mobile trailer type of restroom," said Tom Wetor, director of the Public Works Department. The trailers will sit at the intersection of Campbell Drive and Front Street, near 56th North and Angerman's.

Facilities will include four private stalls, complete with sinks. Two of the stalls will be wheelchair accessible. Petersburg uses a similar setup during their busier summer months, Wetor said.

The department explored augmenting the permanent public restrooms that already exist behind the Elks Lodge, but the mobile trailer option proved more cost-effective. Expansion of the existing restroom building would have cost roughly \$400,000 to \$500,000, whereas the mobile setup will cost roughly \$100,000 to \$120,000.

Ease of operation is another benefit of the mobile system. The bathrooms will be "tied into the city collection system so (public works staff) don't have to pump them out all the time," Wetor said. He anticipates moving the new restrooms into position in late spring and removing them in the early fall of each year.

The Public Works Department, Harbor Department and Samson Tug and Barge

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SHOWIN' THEIR STUFF



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Alumni Ryan Rooney, in blue, tries to wrestle senior Ethan Blatchley to the mat in an exhibition match last Saturday in the Wrangell High School gym. See Page 7 for more on the event.

Alaska at or near bottom in economic measures nationally

By ALEX DEMARBAN
Anchorage Daily News

For the past seven years, the Alaska economy has performed "at or near the bottom" nationally in four key measures of economic health, according to a report released Nov. 17 by the University of Alaska Center for Economic Development.

Taken together, the state's poor performance between 2015 and 2021 — in employment growth, unemployment, net migration and gross domestic product — place Alaska's economic health at the bottom of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, said Nolan Klouda, the center's executive director and lead author of the 10-page report.

"You could make a case that Alaska is the bottom-performing state going back to 2015," Klouda said in an interview. "I think it is."

The report concludes, "by all measures presented here ... Alaska's economy appears stuck in a rut relative to the rest of the U.S."

"This underperformance places Alaska at or near the bottom of all states and D.C. for the period from 2015 to 2021, as well as the pandemic-affected period from 2020 to the present," the

report said. "This marks seven years of weak or negative growth as measured by (gross domestic product, the total value of all goods and services produced) and employment, and the highest rate of net outmigration of any state or D.C."

The report is a short but troubling look at those economic indicators in Alaska and nationally. It does not explore policy solutions. It casts years of low oil prices as the primary culprit, though those prices have improved in recent months. Oil prices are key to Alaska state revenue and higher prices drive funding for projects.

Klouda, in the interview, provided some ideas to help turn the situation around, including continued diversification of the state's economy and allocation of revenues into areas that can attract people to Alaska, such as investments to improve the educational system.

He also pointed out that the "stark" picture of the state's economy in the report is based on the performance of the rest of the U.S. during a time of relatively strong economic health nationally.

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Borough to seek community input on 6-Mile mill site development

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

At the municipal election Oct. 4, Wrangell voters authorized the borough to sell or lease the 6-Mile mill site, a 39-acre parcel of land on Zimovia Highway. As they explore options for developing the land, borough officials will seek community feedback at an upcoming public forum.

The forum represents an effort to "look at what the community would like to see out there," said Economic Development Director Carol Rushmore. How does the community think the property can best be utilized for its benefit, she asked.

At the Oct. 19 meeting of the borough's Economic Development Committee, members decided that the forum would be most useful if attendees had the opportunity to learn more about the property before making suggestions for its use. "Every piece of information we have needs to be out to the public before taking public comment," said Joan Sargent. The first development step, she suggested, should be "educating the public about the property and its potential and its disadvantages."

In that vein, Rushmore plans to post information sheets about the property on the borough's website, wrangell.com, in the coming days, for forum attendees and community members to access.

The property is "one of the last existing deepwater industrial sites available for development options in Southeast Alaska," according to borough documents submitted by Rushmore. Other deepwater sites in the area are often home to cruise ship docks or industrial parks, like those in Craig and Sitka.

Currently, Channel Construction uses portions of the property for a scrap metal recycling business that operates throughout Southeast. The borough assembly deferred selling any of the land to owner William "Shorty" Tongard Jr. or providing him with a long-term lease until they could determine a comprehensive plan for the site. The upcoming forum will be a part of that effort.

At its Nov. 8 meeting, the borough assembly unanimously approved a resolution to allow Borough Manager Jeff Good to finalize a short-term lease with Channel Construction so that operations can continue while the borough develops its property plan.

Regardless of what community members and borough officials decide, development will pose some challenges. The property's surface conditions are varied and its waterfront bulkhead is failing, Rushmore wrote in a statement to the assembly. "Potential uses vary and may or may not be compatible with Channel Construction's proposed use."

The site is the former home of sawmills going back decades, most recently Silver Bay Logging, which shut down operations in 2008.

The forum will take place on Dec. 14 in the Nolan Center at 5:30 p.m. Chris Mertl, a landscape architect with Ju-neau-based Corvus Design, will facilitate the meeting. Mertl has worked on a variety of Wrangell projects, including the Mariners' Memorial, the Mt. Dewey trail extension and the waterfront master plan.

Rushmore will retire in April as economic development director

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Soon after Carol Rushmore stepped into her role as economic development director in 1993, Wrangell's economic landscape changed forever. The sawmill, which had been the borough's economic mainstay since the mid-1950s, shut down, setting off a chain reaction of job losses and business closures that affected the entire community.

"We lost 20% of our workforce overnight," Rushmore said. "It was extremely bad for a good 10 years."

But 29 years and countless grant applications, public forums and infrastructure projects later, Rushmore is planning to retire, leaving the community in a better economic situation than when she found it, she suggested.

"There is so much opportunity right now," Rushmore said. Major projects at the former 6-Mile mill property and Alder Top Village (Keishangita.ʼaan) Subdivision (former Wrangell Institute property) could be on their way in the coming years. During her final few months at the borough, she will collaborate with community members, area stakeholders and other borough officials to "figure out what the community wants to see and make happen" at potential development sites.

Over the years, Rushmore has been involved in bringing many of the services that borough residents enjoy to fruition, including the Marine Service Center, Nolan Center and Heritage Harbor.

The job is about collaboration, she explained. "The community, the organizations, everybody pulling together and asking, 'How can we make Wrangell survive?' — to me, that is the key." She strives to understand and implement the community's vision, translating their dreams for the future into grant proposals, zoning codes, development policies and tourism marketing strategies.

She also collaborates with organizations throughout the state through her involvement in the Southeast Conference and Southeast Alaska Tourism Council.

The borough relies on grant funds to finance major infrastructure projects, but this funding has become increasingly difficult to obtain in recent years as the state budget has become tighter, forcing municipalities into the competitive federal grant pool.

Through the efforts of the borough's primary grant-writers, Rushmore and Capital Facilities Director Amber Al-Haddad, the borough has received \$18.7 million in grant and loan funds for a \$24.7 million worth of capital improvement projects.

"They broke the mold when they made Carol," Assemblymember Bob Dalrymple said at the Nov. 8 assembly meeting. "We're not going to find another Carol."

During Rushmore's tenure, the economic development director job description has grown into a three-page document with 35 qualifications and 13 responsibilities, many of which include sub-responsibilities. The first bullet point in the director's list of duties

includes nine different action words.

"This position wears multiple hats," Rushmore said, which include tourism development, economic development and planning and zoning. "In a lot of communities, you would have individuals for all these roles." The assembly discussed distributing the list of responsibilities across two separate jobs at its Nov. 8 meeting, but decided against it.

In the coming weeks and months, the borough hopes to identify a candidate who can bring their own unique abilities and experience to the role. Applications are now open for a new economic development director. The borough will begin reviewing applications around early December in hopes of hiring someone well before Rushmore leaves in April. That way, she will be able to train the incoming director for a few months before they step into her shoes.

Rushmore moved to Wrangell from Oregon, where she had lived with her husband for about four years while working with the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce. Once she retires, she plans to start chipping away at her bucket list. The list, which is over three pages long, should keep her occupied for the foreseeable future.

Rushmore has one piece of advice for her successor — listen to the community. Being the economic development director means adapting to Wrangell's ever-changing economic environment and responding to the needs of residents and local businesses in real time. "It's never a dull moment," she said.

Silver Liningz Boutique to close next month after nearly six years in business

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

On Dec. 17, a downtown shop will turn off the open sign for good.

Silver Liningz Boutique is closing after nearly six years in business, leaving customers to find their sassy fashions somewhere else.

A myriad of reasons led to the decision, said owner Terie Loomis, who will be entering her second retirement.

"I've already retired once from corporate America back in 2012. Then we moved here and decided to open the boutique," Loomis said. "I've retired twice now and (my husband is) jealous."

Her husband, Mike Loomis, works in the oil industry and is eyeing retirement in a few years, and closing the shop is one of the steps they are taking toward full-blown retirement together. But it's not the only reason.

"There is a multitude of reasons behind closing. We have a lot of things going on, personally, a lot of irons in the fire," she said. "I have my two kids left at home graduating this year, so then we're going to be empty-nesters. My parents are aging and I would like to spend more time up in that area (Kenai). And, of course, we have grandkids up in that area."

Loomis has two adult children in the Kenai area as well.

The family usually closes the shop and heads north for Christmas in early December, but this year Loomis is keeping

Silver Liningz open as close to Christmas as possible to help people with their shopping needs. To that end, everything in the shop is 50% off. She carries women's fashions, tops, jeans, hats, accessories, mugs and many other items.

Getting those items hasn't always been easy in the years since COVID-19 hit, she said. She noticed wholesale prices increased to retail price levels, forcing her to be more selective in what she purchased for the shop. "I'm not going to choose something that I'll have to boost the prices for my customers because one, I wouldn't want to do that to them, and two, who can afford that?"

Delays in shipping made it harder to get products and some of her vendors closed up shop, Loomis said. Some items were on backorder and never received.

Despite the challenges of running a business on her own, Loomis said she will miss the customers more than anything.

"Everyone who walks in here tells me how sad they are to see me go," she said. "I'll be in the grocery store, and they'll say, 'Oh, I'm so sorry!' They say it like it's a sad thing for me, but for me, it's the closing of a chapter."

One of her longtime customers, Dorteia Rooney, who has shopped there since Loomis opened, said she'll miss the items, but she'll miss the experience and friendly atmosphere more than anything.

"I'm sad that we'll be losing



Silver Liningz Boutique owner Terie Loomis has decided it's time to retire, again, and will be closing down her shop next month.

PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/
WRANGELL SENTINEL

(the shop). Walking into her store is like walking into a chic boutique, it's like my dream walk-in closet," Rooney said. "I know they are so family oriented. I will miss her store but I'm happy for her that she's on a different adventure now."

Rooney said she didn't shop a lot at Silver Liningz, "but buying her products was a treat because I got to visit with her."

Loomis said she'll also miss the laughter of her customers.

"I love bringing fun, sassy things to Wrangell, and having people come in and laugh," Loomis said. "People will come in and read the little sayings (on hats and other items) and they'll laugh. I feed off of that. When they're laughing, I'm laughing at what they're laughing at because it just brings it to the surface again."

Closing the shop will also mean she has more freedom to do the things she wants like spending time with her husband when he's off work, going fishing when the weather is amenable or traveling.

"I like the beach and like to be able to enjoy the sunshine,"

Loomis said. "Eventually, we'd like to travel worldwide. We just went to Israel back in the spring, so I would like to venture out to Europe and see Spain, France, Italy. There's so much in the world to see and such little time to see it. And I want to do it while I'm young."

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Palin can't win, that's why she lost

By LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

Former governor, former vice presidential candidate and perpetual self-promoter Sarah Palin now believes the old ways are the best ways when it comes to elections. She was the first Alaskan to sign a petition last week to put a repeal of ranked-choice voting on the ballot.

After losing her bid to serve in the U.S. House, Palin is attacking the election process rather than just admitting she isn't that good of a candidate.

It's like a hockey player who can't skate, blaming the ice for being too slippery.

"Ranked choice voting is the weirdest, most convoluted and most complicated voter suppression tool that Alaskans could have come up with. And the point is, we didn't come up with this. We were sold a bill of goods," Palin told a group gathered at an Anchorage church last week. Even though voters in 2020 approved the switch to ranked-choice voting, Palin figures Alaskans were unduly influenced by an expensive campaign funded by Outside money. She is right, there is too much money in politics, but wrong to believe another expensive campaign to overturn voting reform is the solution.

The answer to good elections is better candidates who appeal to a wide range of voters, not marginal candidates who can only win in a crowded field where no one needs to get 50% support.

Despite all her campaigning over the past six months, despite all her claims and pep rallies and Trump's endorsement, her degrading comments about her Republican opponent, her attacks on President Joe Biden and anyone else she thought

would get her a headline, Palin just didn't get enough votes to win anything. Fact is, she received a lower percentage of votes (26%) in the Nov. 8 general election for U.S. House than she did in the August special election (31%) to fill the remaining five months of the late Don Young's term.

Palin didn't lose because of ranked-choice voting; she lost because three-quarters of Alaskans voted for someone else. She lost because her support declined between August and November.

She lost because her campaign was nothing more than a string of personal attacks and simplistic explanations of complex problems.

She lost because tens of thousands of Alaska voters have turned against her in the 16 years since she won election as governor with 48% of the vote — almost twice the percentage she received in the Nov. 8 U.S. House election.

Advocates who want to toss out ranked-choice voting would need to collect more than 40,000 signatures from registered voters to put the question on a statewide ballot. That would be about as many votes as Palin received in the June

special primary election for the U.S. House — the first of the three elections she lost this year.

Rather than lose a fourth time, it'd be smarter for Palin to drop her bid to overturn ranked-choice voting. Alaskans approved it in 2020; they used it this year and polling indicates most are happy with it; and other than a couple of sore losers, candidates seem to have accepted it as the way of future elections.

The best candidates who appeal to the most voters win under ranked-choice elections. That wasn't Palin, and that's her fault, not that of the election process.

"The answer to good elections is better candidates who appeal to a wide range of voters, not marginal candidates who can only win in a crowded field where no one needs to get 50% support."

THE EDITOR'S DESK

Getting active in community makes a difference

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

Back in March, I wrote a column about being a converted sports junkie. It detailed my appreciation for high school sports, and I believe it's what spurred me to get more involved in the community since people still remark on it nearly nine months later.

On Nov. 15, the last session was held for the I Toowú Klatseen group. Before the final meeting, a make-up run took place for the kids who had missed the previous week's 5-kilometer fun run. It was the culmination of around 10 weeks of meetings and practices — and I nearly missed all of it.

Sometime last year, Kay Larson got wind that I was an endurance runner because when you're a runner, you tell everyone — except those annoying vegans; they never stop talking about being vegan. She came by the office and asked if I was willing to be involved in the program, which teaches third through fifth graders about things like respect, strength, community and caring about others. They learn Tlingit words and phrases. They get active and run. It ends with the kids running the 3.1-mile distance.

I didn't quite grasp the concept at the time and didn't think I'd be the right fit to coach. Thankfully, Kay is persistent and

dedicated to making Wrangell a better place to live, and I soon relented. Scheduling conflicts arose, planning meetings were held, and eventually we agreed on a time and date to start.

We were off and running. Kind of.

Initially, there were more kids wanting to attend than we had space to accommodate. Some of the children started strong, then decided not to return. By the end, we had nine regular attendees.

Throughout the program, Kim Wickman brought the kids into a sharing circle and talked about different values. Virginia Oliver taught them Tlingit and shared cultural stories. I made them run and question their decisions, much like attending a monthly meeting of local vegans. Kay, Virginia, Kim and the other program volunteers Joan Sargent and Artha DeRuyter all kept moving and encouraged the kids by participating in warm-up exercises and walking alongside the kids for practices.

Side note: If you want to be shown up in yoga moves, invite Virginia to participate. I've never felt so inflexible or unbalanced compared to someone else.

The I Toowú Klatseen program is the most I've been involved in a community program in a long time. Journalists typically don't volunteer for such things in the same areas they cover. It helps to maintain a sense of fairness in

our reporting. For example, if I sit on the board of an organization which is suddenly embroiled in scandal, how could I fairly report on that situation?

But it's different in a small town like Wrangell. Not only are we charged with telling the stories of the community, we're part of that community. It's important that we get involved. It's important that everyone get involved where possible.

I'm often amazed at how many different boards or committees Joan Sargent is a part of, but that's what getting involved looks like. It's not that she doesn't have anything better to do, it's that she wants to make a difference.

As the running program was nearing its end, a public notice was posted about the Parks and Recreation Department advisory board in need of one more member. I pondered it and wondered if I should write a letter of intent to join. I hemmed and hawed at first, but the thought occurred to me, "If not me, who?" I believe we should all have that thought and get involved to make a difference where we can.

And if you don't think it makes a difference, just ask kids who recently completed a 5K run/walk for the first time and got a nifty wooden medal for their efforts.

I look forward to being on the advisory board and helping to get Wrangell active as much as possible.

EDITORIAL

Borough smart to cut asking price for hospital

When you're trying to sell an unlivable house that needs an awful lot of expensive work — a fixer-upper, as it's politely called — you keep dropping the price until someone comes along who wants the property and can afford to completely rebuild or maybe tear down and build a new home on the lot.

No matter what you think that worn-down house with all its problems and unusable floor plan is worth in memories, it's only really worth what someone else can make of it.

The unused former Wrangell hospital is that fixer-upper, which is costing the borough nearly \$100,000 a year to heat, keep dry and insured. There are better ways to spend money.

The borough has been trying for the better part of the year to sell the building and land for a minimum asking price of \$830,000, but it's had no takers. Not even inquiries when it was listed on a national surplus property website. Seeing the futility of going another year with the full-price sticker hanging on the front door, borough officials have recommended that the assembly cut the asking price to \$470,000, which is the appraised value of the land only.

It's an acknowledgment that the walls and roof and plumbing of the former hospital probably have no value, at least not to a developer. The value is in the land and what could be done with it. If a buyer can find a use for the walls and doors and anything else, good for them. But expecting they would pay almost \$400,000 to buy the constructed lumber, plasterboard, metal roofing, wiring and plumbing was not realistic. Dropping the asking price to the land value is a smart move.

Cutting the price and turning over the sales job to a real estate agent requires an ordinance. The assembly was scheduled to hear the ordinance in first reading on Tuesday, with a public hearing and assembly vote set for Dec. 20.

The ordinance wisely states: "The borough assembly has determined that lowering the listing price accords with the public's interest to sell the property quickly to avoid incurring further maintenance and utility costs." That pretty well sums up the issue in one sentence.

The ordinance includes another sentence that doubles down on wisdom: "The borough, in its discretion, may entertain offers less than the listing price, but such an offer shall be justified for the purposes of economic development."

It's smart to leave open the option to take less than the land value if the buyer, for example, is willing to commit to building housing that is sorely needed to attract and retain new employees for Wrangell businesses. The real value in the former hospital property is what it can do for the community long term, not a one-time deposit to the borough checkbook. The assembly should adopt the ordinance, let a real estate agent work at finding a buyer, and then consider any plausible offer that helps the community.

— Wrangell Sentinel

Restrooms

Continued from page 1

have all been involved in the planning effort, since the restrooms will be placed on land that Samson Tug and Barge leases from the harbor. Partly in response to company stipulations and partly to improve the amenities for visitors, the Public Works Department will place a fence between the restroom and barge areas. It may also install benches and trash cans nearby.

Caitlin Cardinell, executive director of the Stikine River Jet Boat Association, presented the issue at a borough assembly meeting last spring. "When a thousand people flood into town," Cardinell said, "one of the most common questions I get asked is, 'Where are the restrooms?'"

"If the city continues to move forward with its downtown waterfront plan," she added, "having more accessible and a higher number of public restrooms is paramount." The borough

developed its waterfront master plan with contractor Corvus Design in 2015. The plan involves short, middle and long-term development goals, including an elevated boardwalk along the waterfront and a park where the freight yard is currently located.

It was too late in the season for public works to implement their mobile restroom plan last summer, but the restrooms should be ready for the upcoming tourism season.

Airline and cruise ship tourist numbers increased steadily between 2012 and 2019. After a sharp drop in 2020, numbers have begun to rise toward pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, Wrangell saw 21,540 cruise ship passengers and 14,637 airline passengers.

"We get pretty busy and cruise ships are only going to increase and continue," Wetor said. The project will help the borough "get ahead of the curve."

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Legislature to hear two renewable energy proposals at upcoming session

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Renewable energy advocates will try again at next year's legislative session to win approval for extending the life of the state's Renewable Energy Fund and creating a "green bank" to help finance clean-energy projects.

The Renewable Energy Fund (REF) provides grants for renewable energy projects via a competitive process. The fund was established in 2008 with an initial investment of \$100 million, plus additional deposits over the years.

The program ends in 2023, unless extended by lawmakers. Legislators convene in Juneau on Jan. 17.

Over 100 REF-funded projects are currently in operation and 44 are in development, according to Alaska Energy Authority documents. Past projects include a wind system in Kwigillingok, a coastal community west of Bethel; hydro power in Chignik Lagoon, about 250 miles west of Kodiak; and a biomass boiler in Thorne Bay.

However, uncertainty about the fund's future have jeopardized its ability to continue underwriting such projects. In 2015, the state's yearly contribution dropped from \$25 million to \$10 million, and in the spring of 2016 the fund received nothing due to budget cuts. In 2012, the Legislature extended the Renewable Energy Fund to 2023.

"For a lot of reasons, from climate change to the rising cost of diesel, now

is a really bad time for the Renewable Energy Fund to expire," said Matt Jackson, climate program manager at the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC). His organization is advocating to "extend and expand" the Renewable Energy Fund, giving it a \$50 million annual budget for the next 10 years.

"The cost of diesel has been exorbitant the last year and it can be really crippling for the economies of (small communities)," said Jackson. "Investments in REF would help save the state money in the long-term."

The program's state funding has fluctuated over the years. In 2022, the state's contribution to the REF was \$4.75 million. This level of funding "does not go very far in rural Alaska," Jackson said. He estimated that \$1 million could implement "maybe a smallish wind turbine."

"There's a backlog of projects that need this funding," Jackson said. SEACC hopes to avoid even "a single year gap" in grant opportunities for renewable energy projects.

However, as the state budget tightens and grant programs become less feasible, lawmakers are exploring loan financing options to fund renewable energy projects, like a green bank, which could be up for legislative discussion next year. Green banks help secure capital for clean-energy projects to "maximize clean energy adoption," according to the Coalition for Green

Capital. A green bank in Alaska would "de-risk clean energy projects and get those private partners involved in energy financing," Donovan Russoniello, Renewable Energy Alaska Project outreach director, said at SEACC's Climate and Energy Community Forum Nov. 15.

He shared an anecdote that REAP Executive Director Chris Rose often uses to explain the functions of green banks. If Rose goes to the bank with great credit, Russoniello explained, he can only get an 8% interest loan for solar panels to be paid off over five years. With the help of a green bank, he could get a 5% interest loan to be paid off over 10 years, since the green bank would "(reduce) the risks and (get) banks involved."

As of 2021, the 21 green banks in the United States had collectively generated \$7 billion in investments since 2011, according to a Green Bank Industry Report.

In Alaska, the proposed institution could "scale out what we could do in terms of residential energy and rooftop solar," Russoniello said.

In 2021, Gov. Mike Dunleavy introduced legislation that would have established an Alaska green bank called the Alaska Energy Independence Fund. The proposal failed to win legislative approval, but the issue likely will come back next year.

Environmental advocacy groups, like the Fairbanks Climate Action Co-

alition, took issue with Dunleavy's plan to house the green bank within the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), which has been criticized for poor investment decisions and lack of transparency. AIDEA officials deny the claims.

AIDEA has been heavily involved in financing resource extraction projects, such as oil and mining. "We don't see them (AIDEA) being a driver of the real change we need ... toward renewable energy and regenerative economies," said Arleigh Hitchcock of the Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition.

The state finance agency has a history of frequent executive sessions on spending decisions. "There are laws that need to be followed," Alyssa Sappenfield, of the Fairbanks group, said of AIDEA's inadequate public process.

A green bank proposal for the upcoming legislative session has not been finalized, but SEACC has released a petition urging lawmakers to "do the green bank right." The petition suggests housing the institution within the Alaska Housing Finance Corp. instead of AIDEA, funding projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, subjecting the bank to legislative oversight, establishing an independent board that would include rural, Alaska Native, and green energy sector representatives, and allocating at least 35% of funds to rural communities.

School funding

Continued from page 1

on the position of paying out large dividends.

In addition, opponents of boosting state funding for schools seem to always bring up low student tests scores as a reason to deny more money until they see better results, said the representative, who taught for 32 years before retiring. "You're not going to solve that problem by cutting education," Ortiz answered.

"Flat funding really is education cuts, year after year after year after year," Jim Anderson, chief financial officer of the Anchorage School District, said in an interview with the Alaska Beacon news website last month.

It's not just school districts that will be asking lawmakers for more money next year, said Sitka Sen. Bert Stedman, who also represents Wrangell. High inflation is driving up budgets for a lot of public services, including schools.

Stedman, who served last session as co-chair of the Senate Finance Committee, said legislators can expect to see flat state revenue and strong upward pressure on spending when they convene in January.

Although a bill to increase the state funding formula for schools would be a relatively simple math exercise, Stedman worries that some lawmakers

would seize it as an opportunity to rewrite major pieces of the program, transferring education dollars from rural areas of the state to urban centers. The senator commented last year that urban legislators are gaining influence as they hold more seats in the House and Senate.

"That doesn't excite much of us in rural Alaska at all," he said of risking a rewrite of the funding formula rather than merely boosting the per-student dollar number.

And though school districts around the state are lamenting the end of federal pandemic relief aid that helped cover budget holes the past few years, Stedman said there will not be much sympathy among some legislators for that plea. Districts knew the pandemic money was ending, he said, and were warned not to assume the state would step in and replace the federal aid when it is exhausted.

Wrangell, which lost significant enrollment in the first year of the pandemic, has been helped by a state program to assist districts adjust to less funding. But the end of those state payments to help shield Wrangell from the revenue loss of declining enrollment will mean \$100,000 less in state funding for the 2023-2024 school year, Tammy Stromberg, school district business manager, said last week. The

final year of federal pandemic money will help for 2023-2024, she said, but after that the budget gap gets wider. "Then, things have got to change," she said.

The district is using about \$300,000 in federal aid to help balance the budget this year.

Anchorage is among the most financially stressed school districts in the state, with planning underway to close as many as six schools next year due to funding gaps and declining enrollment.

"We've been able to stave off what Anchorage has been going through," Stromberg said, but the Wrangell district still needs a long-term plan that balances the budget.

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Ongoing worker shortage drags down Alaska economy

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

Alaska's economy shows signs of prosperity. But it's also facing an emerging crisis.

A veteran economist described these contradictory forces in a presentation Nov. 16 at an industry conference in Anchorage.

"We have the strangest and weirdest economy that I've ever seen, and I've been following the economy for a long, long time," Neal Fried of the Alaska Department of Labor told the Resource Development Council for Alaska.

By many measures, Alaska's economy is in good shape, said Fried, whose economic presentations have become a staple at the annual RDC conferences.

Unemployment was down to 3.5% at the end of summer, compared to a high of 12.2% in May of 2020, he said. Alaskans' incomes have been rising steadily since 2010, he said. Oil prices, key to state revenues, have shot up.

But there is a stubborn problem that is dragging down the Alaska economy as a whole: The dearth of workers needed to keep companies and industries functioning normally.

Blame Alaska's demographic facts, Fried said. The state's working-age population, considered to be between the ages of 15 and 64, is shrinking.

"It's just kind of math, and why this problem isn't necessarily going to go away too soon," he said, displaying graphs created by state demographers. "You can see that population is just simply smaller in Alaska, and has gotten smaller, and probably will continue to get a little smaller into the future."

The problem is less about young people exiting Alaska - something that has been common in the highly mobile state - but more about the reduction in young people moving in, he said. Thanks to the resulting net out-migration that has occurred over the past nine years, Alaska has had the steepest decline in that population segment of all states except West Virginia and Wyoming, he pointed out.

For various reasons, the post-pandemic economic recovery in Alaska has also lagged progress in all but three other states, and that is part of why Alaska is not attracting young workers from the Lower 48, he said. "When you can find opportunity close to home, you are not necessarily going to move. And that's had a big impact on us. As long as that is what's going on, as long as the rest of the country's economy is performing better than us or doing relatively well, it's going to be really hard to attract that workforce to Alaska," he said.

The shortage of workers predates the COVID-19 pandemic, he said. It was evident in Alaska employment statistics from 2016 to 2018, a time of both recession and tight labor markets in the state, he said. "One characteristic of a recession, typically, is you have a lot of people that can't find jobs. That did not happen during that recession," he said.

Meanwhile, those working adults who are in Alaska are aging, Fried said.

"Let's face it: This was a Baby Boomer state," he said. The biggest population influx was in the oil boom years of the 1970s and 1980s, he said. "A lot of you in this room with gray hair or no hair had a lot of hair then, and that's when you came. And you stayed. But you aged," told the audience.

Fried ran through summaries of some key industries' performances and outlooks, and the picture was mixed. Oil and gas employment that peaked at 15,300 in 2015 was down to 7,500 this year, despite the high oil prices. Mining employment, in contrast, has been steadily rising, despite the pandemic. The tourism industry, hard-hit by COVID-19, is well on the way to recovery, he said. But the commercial fishing industry is expected to take a serious hit from the crash of crab stocks in the Bering Sea and the subsequent closures of most Bering Sea crab fishing.

An analysis of industry sectors and their 10-year job outlooks was published in the October issue of the department's monthly magazine, Alaska Labor Trends. A detailed forecast for 2023 is in the works, Fried said.

The challenge of attracting workers and filling key jobs was a theme repeated through the first day of the two-day conference.

The oil industry is among those affected both by the inability of contractors to find key workers like truck drivers and by staff shortages in regulatory agencies, said Kara Moriarty, executive director of the Alaska Oil and Gas Association. There are backlogs for air quality permits, for example, not because of any deliberate slow-rolling at the state Department of Environmental Conservation but because "there's just not the personnel to issue those permits," she said.

One session was devoted to discussion of possible workforce solutions.

Former Gov. Sean Parnell, who is now chancellor of the University of Alaska Anchorage, spoke in the session about accelerated education opportunities like

the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program, or ANSEP, which allows secondary students to start earning college credits and offers academic enrichment to students as young as elementary ages.

Others discussed opportunities for vocational and technical training, which for rural Alaskans includes necessary housing.

Joelle Hall, president of the AFL-CIO of Alaska, described outreach to military service members who are on the verge of discharge. "We're going to have more and more people exiting the military who are looking for a reason to stay," she said. "They seem like great catches."

Tim Dillon, executive director of the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District, called for broader support of young workers. "Transportation, housing and child care need to be part of the conversation," he said.

Dave Karp, an executive with a transportation company who is finishing up a term chairing the nonprofit Alaska Resource Education organization, said he feels fortunate that his four children returned to Alaska after graduating from college in the Lower 48. But getting more young people to come to Alaska or stay here will require investments in quality of life that go beyond financial incentives like low taxes and loan-forgiveness programs, said Karp, who moderated the session. "Look at that entire universe and look at it holistically," he said.

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Annual Audubon Christmas bird count scheduled for mid-December

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Though you might not find four calling birds, three french hens, two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree in the rainforest ecosystems of the Tongass, there can be no doubt that counting birds is a quintessential Christmas activity. On Dec. 17, Wrangell's avian enthusiasts will participate in Audubon's 123rd annual Christmas Bird Count.

Over 20 countries and thousands of volunteers contribute to this early-winter bird census, which runs from Dec. 14 to Jan. 5 yearly. Each community's bird count is conducted on a

single calendar day within a 15-mile diameter area, according to the Audubon website.

"We count the birds we see that day and turn it in to the national record," explained Bonnie Demerjian, who has organized Wrangell's count for more than 10 years. Volunteers add to "a long-term data record about the health of bird populations and their habitat."

The project is an example of "citizen science," in which members of the public collaborate with professional researchers to generate new knowledge about the natural world. "It's really important to count birds because they can ... give

you a sense of the state of the environment," said Demerjian. "It's a good feeling to be able to help a little bit in that way."

On the day of the count, participants pair up to walk predetermined routes along the shoreline and, if weather permits, go out in boats to count seabirds. Then, they tally the number and variety of birds they see.

"It requires people to know a little bit about birds," Demerjian said. However, all would-be volunteers are welcome to join the count, regardless of their birdwatching expertise. Demerjian will pair up newcomers with more experienced birders to bolster

community involvement.

About 15 volunteers participate each year, on average.

Joe Delabrué, district wildlife biologist for the U.S. Forest Service, compiles the data that volunteers gather and submits it to the national Audubon Society. "We average about 47 species per count, with a total bird average being around 3,800," he said. Common species include eagles, rock doves, crows, ravens, mallards and grebes. Others, like yellow-billed loons and ring-necked ducks, are more rare.

"I encourage people to come and join us," he said. "You don't have to be an expert birder to enjoy this stuff." He and his wife, Corree, are longtime participants in the count.

Similar Audubon bird counts, like the Great Backyard Bird Count, have been used to examine the effects of climate change on migratory patterns and track snowy owl population shifts across the northeastern United States. The Great Backyard Bird Count takes place in late February.

To participate, contact Demerjian at bonniede@aptalaska.net.

"Come out and count some birds," said Delabrué.

Economy

Continued from page 1

Bill Popp, head of the Anchorage Economic Development Corp., said the report paints a clear and accurate picture of the state and Anchorage's economic challenges. Net outmigration - more people leaving Alaska than coming - is a particularly troublesome issue that hinders economic recovery through a lack of available workers, he said.

"I think it's a call for action to the community, that we can no longer say this is a cycle and the economy will get better next year," Popp said. "We have a lot to be optimistic about, but we don't have the labor force to take advantage of those opportunities that we need to."

More people have left Alaska than moved here each year from 2012 to 2021, another sign of a contracting economy. "Alaska's average annual net migration rate between 2015 and 2021 is the lowest of any state," the report said.

During that period, Alaska lost about nine residents for every 1,000, while the U.S. gained about 2.2 residents for every 1,000.

Popp said the net outmigration of Alaskans has continued for an unusually long number of years. The key factor has been the lack of people moving to Alaska, a situation that can be addressed with proper investments to improve services, he said.

"One issue is that our wages are not as strong as they used to be," he said. "And a lot of (other) cities and states have reinvested in themselves, providing great schools, vibrant downtowns and community settings and walkable neighborhoods, things that younger generations are looking for. There's a lot of competition for the labor force nationally and it's come full circle that we haven't invested in ourselves."



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SENTINEL SPORTS

Wrestlers take on their teammates in exhibition matches

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

A tournament that originally pitted the Wrangell High School wrestling squad against Petersburg and Sitka ended with the Wolves grappling the Wolves.

Two rounds of wrestling, with a pause for senior appreciation and other accolades, was held last Saturday in the high school gym when competitors from the other schools decided against the trip due to scheduling, illness and other issues.

"This is really just so people can see them wrestle," head coach Jack Carney said before

the matches.

Lucas Schneider took on Devlyn Campbell in the first bout, followed by Ethan Blatchley versus Steven Bales and Della Churchill against Boomchain Loucks. Campbell and Schneider battled it out for a few rounds before Campbell won. Blatchley bested Bales in their bout, and Loucks won over Churchill.

Kyan Stead and Ben Houser went head to head, with Houser winning. Vanessa Johnson and Katelynn Gillen battled several rounds with Gillen emerging triumphant over her teammate.

Blatchley returned to the mat to take on Cody Barnes and proved again why he consistently takes first in his weight class at competitions, though Barnes gave him a solid run. Schneider then took on Ian Nelson, with Nelson besting his opponent to end the first round of competition.

The senior team members were then recognized. Carney pointed out that there are no junior wrestlers this year, so next year's squad will be comprised of freshmen through juniors. Along with the seniors, former head coach Jef Rooney was honored with a plaque for his years of coaching and leadership.

After the brief ceremony, the wrestlers returned to the mat, with Blatchley taking on former classmate Ryan Rooney in an alumni matchup. Rooney is a two-time state champion, having graduated in May.

In the second round, Houser beat Schneider, Churchill beat



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Wrangell High School head wrestling coach Jack Carney, left, presents the senior wrestlers with their stats during senior appreciation last Saturday at an exhibition match.

Stead, Campbell beat Loucks, Johnson beat Gillen in their rematch, Elias Decker beat Nelson and Barnes beat Bales.

Rooney then suited up to take on Blatchley. The two showed why they're tough to beat on the mat. Though Blatchley is still fresh from training and compet-

ing, Rooney still had a solid background to rely on. The two were methodical in their approach but Blatchley eventually got the best of Rooney, emerging victorious a third time that day.

The squad will be off this weekend and is scheduled to compete in Petersburg on Dec. 2-3.

Volleyball

Continued from page 1



The Wrangell High School girls volleyball team is this year's Division 2A regional champion.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALYSSA ALLEN

Wrangell. Whenever the Lady Wolves would catch up, the Panthers would power ahead. The second set was in favor of Craig, 25 to 18.

Senior Kiara Harrison would use her height to defend the net and senior Brodie Gardner was quick to dive when the ball cleared Harrison's reach, but it wasn't enough in the third set. Craig consistently got low and scrambled for the ball. That hustle was just enough to stay on top of Wrangell. The third set was won by Craig, 25 to 23.

Wrangell had one more set to tie it up and send the match to five games. At first, the squad seemed to have more confidence than the previous two games, throwing just as much hustle back at Craig as the Panthers had thrown at them. Wrangell led by three points for most of the game, but it ultimately wasn't enough and Craig beat them 25 to 23, moving on to the championship game.

Wrangell went on to play Metlakatla, which beat Klawock just before battling it out with Wrangell. It only took three sets for Wrangell to beat them, 25 to 11, 25 to 16 and 25 to 13. Metlakatla was showing signs of fatigue in the match, having just gone five sets in the Klawock game.

From there, Wrangell went on to fight for first place against Craig in the last game of the night. Wrangell made quick work of Craig, coming into the match with confidence and a lot of energy. They beat the Panthers in the first three sets, scoring 25 to 21, 25 to 18 and 25 to 18. Only one tie-breaking game to 30 points stood between the Lady Wolves and the regional championship title.

Fast-paced play ensued, with Craig showing fatigue and Wrangell surging forward confidently. Wrangell was two points away from the win when they started to make mistakes.

Craig took advantage to close the point deficit, coming within six points of Wrangell. The Lady Wolves rallied and scored the final two points to win.

"Craig is pretty senior heavy and very experienced and I think we really learned from (that earlier loss)," head coach Alyssa Allen told the Ketchikan Daily News. "We came out a lot stronger (in the championship). I think we were just more focused and had better energy. We had better communication and hustle."

Wrangell and Craig are scheduled to travel to Palmer to compete in the state Division 2A competition Dec. 1-3.

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Dunleavy, Murkowski, Peltola headed to victory today

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

All three incumbents likely clinched victory in Alaska's statewide elections when the Alaska Division of Elections updated vote count results on Friday with thousands of additional absentee, questioned and early ballots from this fall's general election.

Final unofficial results will not be available until 4 p.m. Wednesday, when the division implements the state's new ranked-choice sorting system, but voting trends have made the results clear in most races.

With 264,994 votes counted, incumbent Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy had 50.3% of the vote for governor, well above his leading challenger, Democratic candidate Les Gara, who had 24.2%. Independent candidate Bill Walker had 20.7% and Republican challenger Charlie Pierce had 4.5%.

Friday was the deadline for absentee ballots sent from within the United States to arrive and be counted. Ballots are counted by the elections division's five regional offices, and by the end of the day Friday most offices had finished counting all ballots that had arrived through last Wednesday.

A few hundred ballots sent from international destinations could be added to the count if they arrive by this Wednesday, but it appears all but certain that the remaining ballots are too few to alter the governor's race, where Dunleavy has a margin large enough that ranked-choice sorting will not take place.

In races where no candidate earns at least 50% of the vote, the lowest finisher is eliminated, and voters who supported that person have their votes redistributed to their second choices. That process continues until only two candidates are left, and the person with the most votes wins.

In the U.S. Senate and U.S. House races, no candidate is expected to finish with more than 50% of the vote.

For U.S. House, Democratic incumbent Mary Peltola had 48.7% of the vote, ahead of Republican challengers Sarah Palin (25.8%) and Nick Begich (23.4%) and Libertarian challenger Chris Bye (1.7%).

While the combined totals of Palin and Begich would surpass Peltola's tally, a special election in August showed the number of Begich voters willing to support Palin with second-choice votes was too small for her to overtake Peltola. Pre-election opinion polling showed little change in opinions since August, and analysts expect Peltola will far exceed 50%

when the ranked-choice tally is calculated.

In the race for U.S. Senate, incumbent Republican Lisa Murkowski led all challengers with 43.3%. Her main challenger, Republican Kelly Tshibaka, led on Election Day, but Murkowski erased that deficit by the end of the day Friday with late-counted absentee and early votes. By the end of the day Friday, Tshibaka had 42.7%, trailing by 1,658 votes out of 259,747 cast in the race.

When ranked-choice voting kicks in, Murkowski is expected to receive the majority of the second-choice votes cast by supporters of the third-place finisher, Democratic candidate Patricia Chesbro (10.4%). Many supporters of the fourth-place finisher, Republican Buzz Kelley (2.9%), are expected to back Tshibaka, but even all of those votes would not give Tshibaka enough to win.

Of the 59 races on the ballot for the state House and Senate, nine were unresolved Friday night, including two in the state Senate and seven in the state House.

In House District 1, which covers Wrangell and Ketchikan, incumbent Rep. Dan Ortiz was comfortably ahead of challenger Jeremy Bynum, 3,508 to 3,166 as of last Friday.

Among the most politically contested legislative races in the state, former Re-

publican Senate President Cathy Giessel narrowly leads a three-way race for a South Anchorage Senate seat that features incumbent Republican Sen. Roger Holland and Democratic candidate Rose-lynn Cacy.

Giessel had 33.6% of the vote, Holland 33.1% and Cacy 32.9% as of Friday night. Elections officials said they had counted all early votes, questioned ballots and absentee ballots received through Wednesday, Nov. 16. A relative handful of ballots remain uncounted in the race, which will be decided when elections officials calculate ranked-choice sorting on Nov. 23.

Democrats and moderate Republicans seeking to create a coalition majority in the Senate have said they are waiting on the results of Giessel's race.

"Because of that, there's really not been a lot of definitive movement on (Senate organization)," said Sen. Donny Olson, D-Golovin, and the only legislator not on this year's ballot.

In the state House, two Anchorage races and one in the Mat-Su had no likely winner and will wait until this week for the final count.

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Palin first to sign petition to repeal ranked-choice voting

By IRIS SAMUELS
Anchorage Daily News

A new group has announced it will attempt to do away with ranked-choice voting in Alaska by ballot initiative, and former Gov. Sarah Palin was the first to sign the petition — before the outcome of her failed congressional bid was final.

Alaskans for Honest Government, a political action committee that formed last month, hosted an event Nov. 17 where group organizers launched their effort to collect signatures to put the question of reinstating the state's former voting system to voters on the 2024 ballot. Ranked-choice voting was adopted in Alaska by ballot initiative in 2020, and first used this year.

Six days before final results in Alaska's U.S. House race would be known, Palin spoke to a crowd of several dozen people at a South Anchorage church, calling ranked-choice voting "whack" and promising to "fight for what's right and to lead the rest of the nation in getting back to fair, free, transparent, clear elections."

Ranked-choice voting has been found to be constitutional both by the Alaska Supreme Court and in federal court. It is used in congressional elections in Maine and Alaska, and in local elections in several cities across the country. A ranked-choice voting ballot initiative passed in Nevada this month, putting it on track to become the third state to use it in state-

wide elections.

Palin said she hadn't given up on her hope for winning Alaska's lone U.S. House seat, though she was far behind Rep. Mary Peltola — with the final count due Nov. 23.

The former vice presidential candidate was one of 48 candidates who ran in a special U.S. House election to replace former Rep. Don Young, who died in March. Palin received the largest share of votes in the 48-way primary in June, but lost the August general election to Peltola after the field was narrowed to just three choices.

On Nov. 8, Palin again faced Peltola, along with Republican Nick Begich and Libertarian Chris Bye.

Palin has made railing against ranked choice voting a hallmark of her campaign.

Ranked-choice voting and the new open primary system are credited by political observers for allowing Peltola to beat her Republican rivals in a state won by Trump by double digits in 2020. But they also point to Republican infighting and Palin's high negative ratings as key factors in the U.S. House race that Peltola won.

Alaskans for Honest Gov-

ernment registered with the Federal Elections Commission in mid-October. In the week leading up to the election, the group spent \$20,000 opposing Sen. Lisa Murkowski in the U.S. Senate race and Peltola in the U.S. House race. Additional information about the group's donors and cash-on-hand was not immediately available, and group organizers declined to say who their current financial backers are.

The group also registered as an entity with the Alaska Political Offices Commission on Nov. 1, with Phillip Izon as the entity's officer. The three-member initiative committee includes Izon, Jaime Donley and Art Mathias. At an event hosted at the Well-spring Ministries on Thursday evening — where Mathias is founder and president — the group's leaders said they planned to submit the initiative petition to Lt. Gov. Kevin Meyer by Nov. 30 — the first step to get the question put to voters on the 2024 ballot.

To do so, the group must first gather 100 signatures from qualified registered voters. Many of the dozens of audience members at the An-

chorage event signed the petition. The group is planning several additional events in the coming days in the Mat-Su region and Fairbanks.

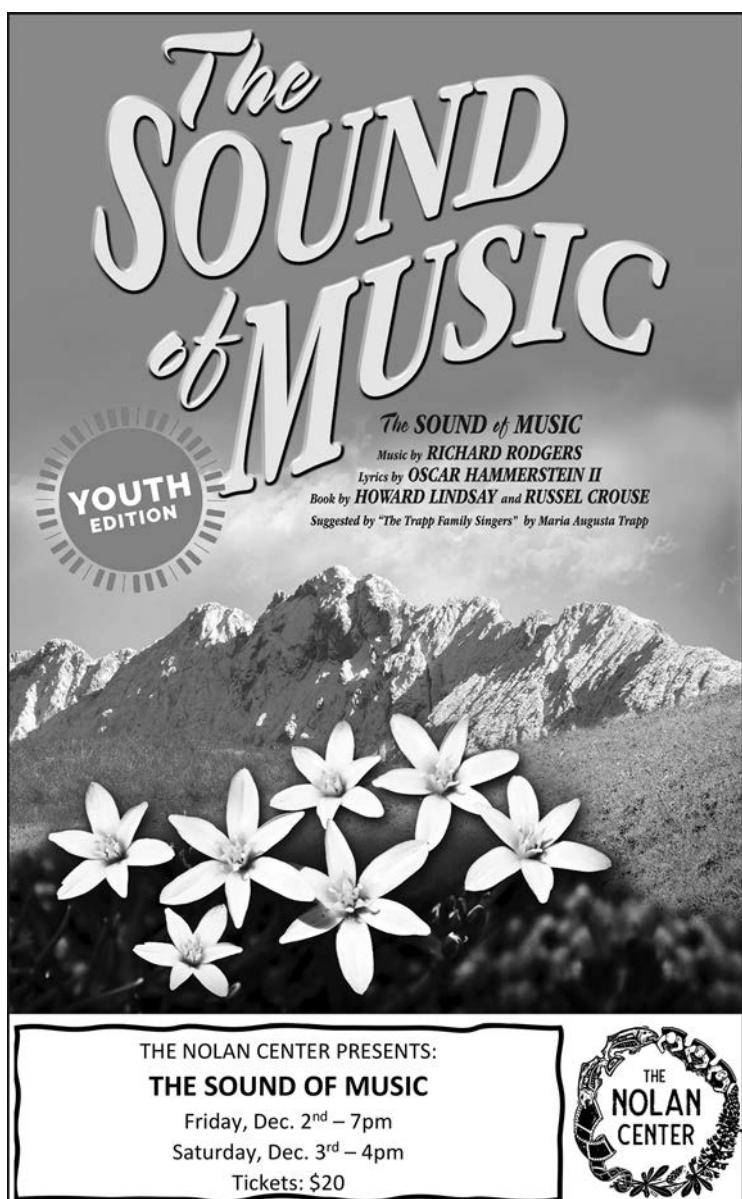
If certified by the lieutenant governor, the initiative group has a year to collect signatures from qualified registered voters. They must collect a number equal to at least 10% of those who voted in the preceding general election from places representing the majority of the state. Group leaders said they intended to gather more than 40,000 signatures and expected their effort would cost millions of dollars.

In 2020, the ballot initiative that put ranked choice voting in Alaska law was backed to the tune of millions by Outside groups, including Unite America and FairVote Action Fund, which advocate for voting reform nationwide and are funded by deep-pocketed individuals from out-of-state. Alaskans for Better Elections collected more than 40,000 signatures to put their initiative on the ballot. The measure passed narrowly by a margin of less than 4,000 votes, in a result that was confirmed by an election audit.


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BIA accepts Juneau parcel to hold in trust for Tlingit and Haida

By MARK SABBATINI
Juneau Empire

A tiny parking lot on a little-traveled downtown side street is now a landmark achievement for Alaska Natives in Juneau, with the federal government approving a "land-into-trust" application last Thursday that paves the way for a range of self-determination, economic and other benefits for the tribal owners.

The application by the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska is only the second approved in the state, following one in Craig five years ago. In addition to making Tlingit and Haida eligible for more federal services and programs, the approval also addresses the "landless tribe" issue that has been problematic since the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971, Tlingit and Haida President Richard Chalvey Eesh Peterson said Friday.

"Tlingit and Haida will no longer be a landless tribe, but be eligible for a much greater range of land-based programs," he said.

Such title transfers move the property into a land trust held by the federal gov-

ernment for the benefit of an individual or tribe. The U.S. Department of Interior, which authorizes the transfers, states among the advantages for tribes are being granted certain rights-of-way and the ability to enter into leases for use of the property's natural resources.

In addition, lands held in trust are afforded permanent protection from actions that could be detrimental to the tribe.

Unlike the Alaska regional and village for-profit corporations created in 1971, regional nonprofit tribal councils were not granted land by the federal government.

The property in the approved application, first submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2009, is a parking lot on Capitol Avenue in the historical and cultural area known as the "Juneau Indian Village," according to a Tlingit & Haida news release. Peterson said it will remain a parking lot, but the approval "brings us one step closer to ensuring our tribe will have a center for our tribal government in perpetuity."

"The work is not done yet," he added. "We still have fee-to-trust applications

pending that we are hopeful the U.S. Department of the Interior will approve. Many of these parcels were once held subject to a restriction that prevented their alienation or taxation. When Tlingit and Haida purchased these parcels from its tribal citizens, the Bureau of Indian Affairs terminated the federal restrictions that protected them, and it is the tribe's priority to restore these protections."

Peterson expressed optimism about the fate of the still-pending applications. "I think we believe this decision speaks for itself in that regard," he said.

The Interior Department, in an announcement of the application's approval, stated "federal policies dating back more than a century have eroded the land base of Indian Tribes across the United States ... tribes have faced delays and increasing costs in efforts to develop housing projects, manage law enforcement agencies and develop local economies as a result of unnecessary hurdles in the land-into-trust process."

The first such transfer in Alaska was approved in 2017 after the Craig Tribal Association applied in 2015 for a 1.08-acre parcel where offices and a town hall

are located. It was the first approval after the Department of Interior issued a revised rule in 2014 that reserved a policy dating back to the enactment of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1971 that barred the Bureau of Indian Affairs from processing land-into-trust applications in Alaska.

Peterson said a multitude of factors are involved in the 13-year wait for the approval of Tlingit and Haida's application, but the Biden administration in favor of the policy. The Trump administration had not supported such title transfers.

"I've been smiling all day today as a result of this," Wáahlaal Gíidaak Barbara Blake, a Juneau Assembly member and director of Alaska Native Policy Center with First Alaskans Institute, told Native News Online.

"For a long time, we have been attempting to gain many of the same rights that our tribal brothers and sisters have down there in the Lower 48. We're just starting to see this come to fruition after so many years of really working hard to ensure that the federal government is holding their responsibility to our tribes here."

Washington state orders closure of last Puget Sound fish-farming pens

SEATTLE (AP) — The Washington state Department of Natural Resources said Nov. 14 it will not renew a fish-farming company's last remaining leases on net pens in Puget Sound.

Department officials said Cooke Aquaculture has until Dec. 14 to finish steelhead farming and start deconstructing its equipment, The Seattle Times reported. Cooke's pens are located in Rich Passage near Bainbridge Island and Hope Island in Skagit Bay.

Letters sent from the Department of Natural Resources to the Canada-based company on Nov. 14 indicate Cooke had a history of failing to comply with the provisions outlined in its state contracts. Cooke didn't comment on the decision, but a representative told the newspaper the company may do so later.

The decision not to renew the leases stems from a 2017 spill of tens of thousands of non-native Atlantic salmon after a pen break at Cypress Island, near

the San Juan Islands.

The New Brunswick, Canada-based company vastly underreported the number of escaped fish, a state investigation found. Investigators found as many as 263,000 of the farm's fish escaped, not the 160,000 Cooke told the public. Months after the spill, more than 200,000 were still reportedly unaccounted for.

An inspection revealed Cooke's Port Angeles Atlantic salmon farm wasn't adequately maintained and was outside its leasehold boundaries. Cooke challenged the decision in court, but a Thurston County Superior Court judge ruled in favor of state regulators. Cook lost its lease to operate the salmon farm.

The state Legislature in 2018 passed a law effectively phasing out net pen farming of exotic species in Washington waters.

Cooke pivoted to raise steelhead but Department of Natural Resources officials deter-

mined that Cooke's operations could pose risks to the state's environment, according to the letters.

Feeding fish in concentrated areas releases nutrients and organic matter that can contribute to algae production, state officials wrote. And fish feces can degrade the ocean floor environment.

"Today, we are returning our waters to wild fish and natural habitat," Hilary Franz, the state public lands commissioner, said in a statement. "Today, we are freeing Puget Sound of enclosed cages."

Franz had ordered the inspections of Cooke's facilities after the 2017 escape incident, which sparked calls to end non-native fish farming in Washington — with 20 Western Washington treaty tribes at the forefront of the push.

Swinomish leaders told the Department of Natural Resources that the Hope Island net pens were adversely impacting fish and fish habitat in

Skagit Bay, and that the pens were located near Lone Tree Point, a sacred cultural area for the tribe.

"Swinomish are the People of the Salmon, and fishing has been our way of life since time immemorial," Swinomish tribal

community chairperson Steve Edwards wrote in an email. "Cooke's net pens have interfered with the exercise of our treaty rights for far too long. We look forward to the day when the Hope Island net pen facility will be a distant memory."

Happy 80th Dad! Love, your grandkids.



State euthanizes black bear cub infected with avian flu

By The Associated Press

JUNEAU — A black bear cub in Southeast Alaska was euthanized after it became ill with avian influenza, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game said.

It is believed that the cub, which was located in Bartlett Cove in Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve west of Juneau, is the second bear diagnosed with the highly pathogenic bird flu, the Juneau Empire reported.

Bird flu "passes really easily to poultry, but mammals aren't really susceptible to it," said Dr. Kimberlee Beckmen, a wildlife veterinarian for the department. "It's difficult to get, but we suspect the cub probably ate a bird that died from avian influenza."

The bear likely became ill because it was a small, young animal with a weak immune system, she said.

Since the virus was first detected in an adult female black bear in Canada in June, Alaska state officials have tested scavenging animals for it. So far, it's

only been found in two other animals, both red foxes in Dutch Harbor and the western Alaska community of Unalakleet.

Finding bird flu in the bear and foxes is not an indication it's likely to spread to other animals or to people, Beckmen said.

"This particular strain, people are pretty much immune to it," she said.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said this strain of bird flu poses a "very low" risk to humans, and only one person in the U.S. has been diagnosed in this outbreak.

However, the flu has hampered the state's wild bird population.

People in Glacier Bay last month noticed that the cub, one of three accompanying a sow, had difficulty walking, according to state wildlife officials.

The sow abandoned the cub and a biologist picked it up. However, it began suffering seizures, as did the Canadian bear previously diagnosed with the illness. The Alaska bear was euthanized by a state biologist. Lat-

er testing confirmed the presence of the virus that causes highly pathogenic avian influenza.

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Indian Health Service wants to 'reenergize' vaccination efforts

PHOENIX (AP) — The Indian Health Service announced last Thursday that all tribal members covered by the federal agency will be offered a vaccine at every appointment when appropriate, under a new vaccine strategy.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, American Indians and Alaska Natives have had some of the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates across the country.

But Indigenous people are especially vulnerable to vaccine-preventable illness, and IHS officials recently noticed fewer patients have been getting vac-

cines for COVID-19. Monkeypox is now an additional health concern.

Patients in the system are also beginning to fall behind in more routine inoculations, such as jabs for childhood diseases like measles, mumps and rubella, as well as shingles shots for older adults.

"With time passing, we are seeing some COVID fatigue, and we feel we aren't where we need to be," Dr. Loretta Christensen, IHS chief medical officer, said in a brief interview before the announcement was posted online. "With our vulnerable population, it is critical to

reenergize our staff to get everyone the vaccinations they need."

Christensen said in a posted announcement that she had directed all care sites in the system "to respond to this important call to action to increase vaccine coverage and protect against vaccine preventable illnesses in tribal communities."

"Every patient at every encounter will be offered every recommended vaccine when appropriate," she wrote. "IHS will exempt encounters in which a vaccine would not be appropriate such as when someone has a moderate or severe acute

illness."

Christensen told the agency's staff in an additional message that she was encouraging everyone to get an updated COVID-19 and flu shots as winter approaches.

"We can work together to protect our friends, relatives, elders and our communities as we gather across the country for the holiday season," she said.

The Indian Health Service is the health care system for federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Natives in the United States.

Supreme Court hears case against American Indian, Native adoption law

By MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court appears likely to leave in place most of a federal law that gives preference to Native American families in foster care and adoption proceedings of Native children.

The justices heard more than three hours of arguments on Nov. 9 in a broad challenge to the Indian Child Welfare Act, enacted in 1978 to address concerns that American Indian and Alaska Native children were being separated from their families and, too frequently, placed in non-Native homes.

The law has long been cham-

pioned by tribal leaders as a means of preserving their families, traditions and cultures. But white families seeking to adopt Native children are among the challengers who say the law is impermissibly based on race, and also prevents states from considering those children's best interests.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh called the case difficult because the court is being called on to draw a line between tribal sovereignty and "the fundamental principle that we don't treat people differently because of race, ethnicity or ancestry."

He was among conservative justices who expressed concern

about at least one aspect of the law that gives preference to Native parents, even if they are of a different tribe than the child they are seeking to adopt or foster. Chief Justice John Roberts, Justice Samuel Alito and Justice Amy Coney Barrett also raised questions about whether that provision looked more like a racial classification that the court might frown upon.

"To get to the heart of my concern about this, Congress couldn't give a preference for white families to adopt white children, Black families to adopt Black children, Latino families to adopt Latino children, Asian children," Kavanaugh said.

But none of the non-Native families involved in the case has been affected by the preference the conservative justices objected to, Justice Department lawyer Edwin Kneedler told the court.

Even if there is a court majority to strike down that provision, the rest of the law could be kept in place, Ian Gershengorn, a lawyer for the Cherokee Nation, the Navajo Nation and other tribes said.

He urged the court to uphold the law "that has made such a meaningful difference to so many children."

Representing the non-Native families, lawyer Matthew McGill called on the court to strike down the law because it "flouts the promise of equal justice under law."

Justice Neil Gorsuch, a conservative who is a strong supporter of Native Americans' rights, and the court's three liberal justices seemed strongly inclined to uphold the law in its entirety.

"Congress understood these children's placement decisions as integral to the continued thriving of Indian communities," said liberal Justice Elena Kagan.

Gorsuch said a broad ruling in favor of the challengers also would take "a huge bite out of" other federal programs that benefit Native Americans, including health care.

The law's fate is in the hands of a court that has made race a focus of its current term, in cases involving the redrawing of congressional districts and affirmative action in college admissions.

The full 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals struck down parts of the adoption law last year, including preferences for placing Native children with Native adoptive families and in Native foster homes. It also said Congress overstepped its authority by imposing its will on state of-

icials in adoption matters.

But the 5th Circuit also ruled that the law generally is based on the political relationship between the tribes and the U.S. government, not race.

The tribes and the Biden administration appealed some parts of the lower court ruling, while the white families and Texas, allied with those families, appealed others.

More than three-quarters of the 574 federally recognized tribes in the country have asked the high court to uphold the law in full, along with tribal organizations. They fear widespread impacts if the court attempts to dismantle the tribes' status as political sovereigns.

Nearly two dozen state attorneys general across the political spectrum filed a brief in support of the law. Some of those states have codified the federal law into their own state laws.

A ruling in favor of the families and Texas could undercut the 1978 law and, the tribes fear, have broader effects on their ability to govern themselves.

When child protection authorities remove Native children from their homes, the law requires states to notify tribes and seek placement with the child's extended family, members of the child's tribe or other Native American families.

All of the children who have been involved in the current case at one point are enrolled or could be enrolled as Navajo, Cherokee, White Earth Band of Ojibwe and Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. Some of the adoptions have been finalized while some are still being challenged.

Before the Indian Child Welfare Act was enacted, between 25% and 35% of Native American children were being taken from their homes and placed with adoptive families, in foster care or in institutions. Most were placed with white families or in boarding schools in attempts to assimilate them.

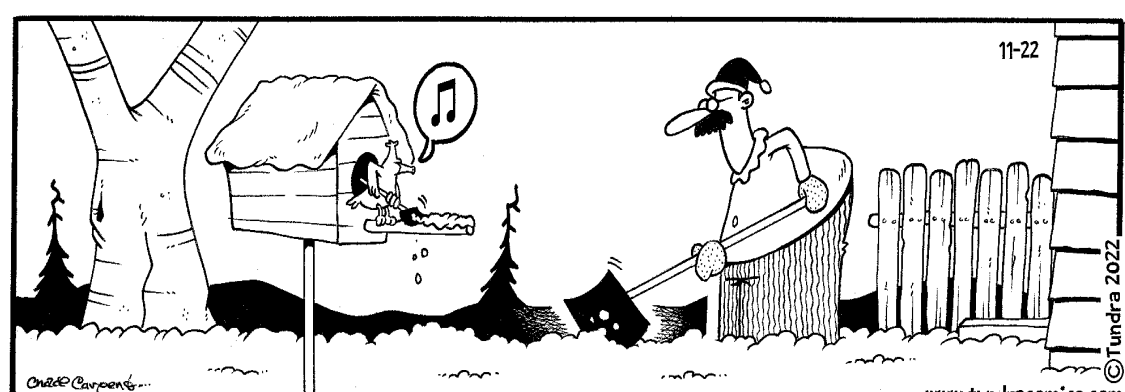
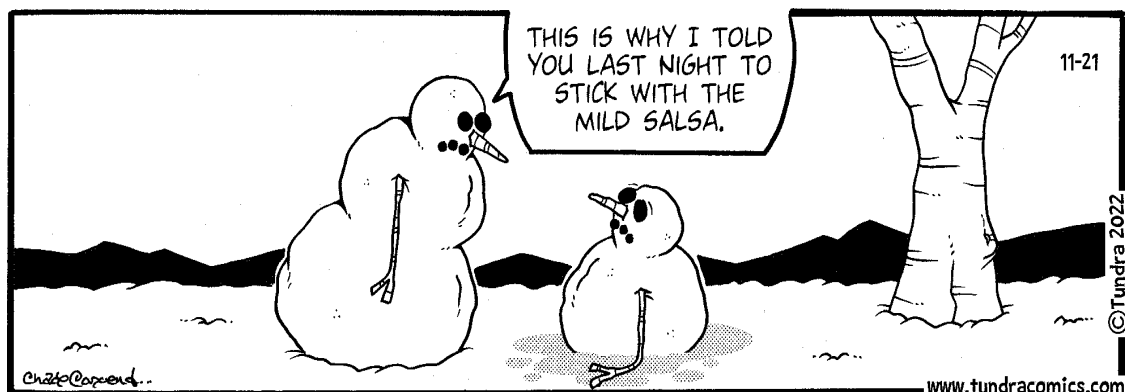
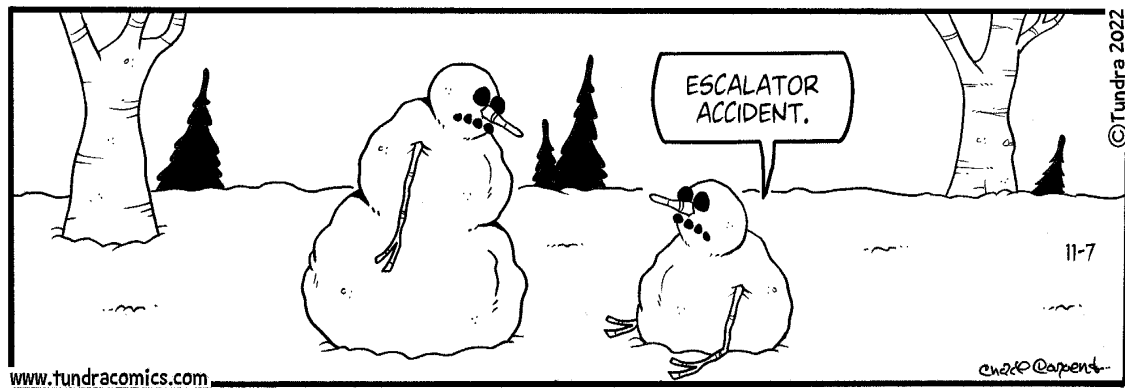
Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



Police report

- Monday, Nov. 14**
Parental matter.
Welfare check.
Traffic stop.
Traffic stop.
 - Tuesday, Nov. 15**
Dog at large.
 - Wednesday, Nov. 16**
Theft.
Parking complaint.
Welfare check.
 - Thursday, Nov. 17**
Citizen assist: Vehicle unlock.
Violating conditions of release:
Unfounded.
 - Friday, Nov. 18**
Agency assist: Petersburg Police Department.
Agency assist: Petersburg Police Department.
Letter served for removing a person from a licensed establishment.
Driving complaint.
Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.
Parking complaint.
Noise complaint.
 - Saturday, Nov. 19**
Disturbance.
Harassment.
Concerned citizen.
Noise disturbance.
 - Sunday, Nov. 20**
Traffic stop.
Illegal parking.
Disturbance.
Citizen assist.
Vacation checks.
- During this reporting period there were six agency assists for an ambulance.

Longstanding problems led to banishment of village school principal

By ZACHARIAH HUGHES
Anchorage Daily News

Leaders in the Western Alaska community of Kipnuk say the principal of nearly a decade bullied Native school staff members, put residents in jeopardy by ignoring COVID-19 restrictions and oversaw a decline in education quality. That's why in October, according to documents obtained through a public records request, they voted to banish her from the community.

School officials and tribal leaders involved in the banishment order and subsequent search by tribal police officers at the Chief Paul Memorial School at the end of last month have largely declined to comment on what happened beyond brief written statements. But in documents submitted to the Alaska Department of Public Safety and obtained by the Anchorage Daily News, new details emerged about longstanding tensions between community members and principal LaDorothy Lightfoot, who began work in Kipnuk in 2013.

Lightfoot did not respond to multiple emails and phone messages seeking comment.

"We are kindly encouraging you to leave your position as Kipnuk Site-Administrator at Chief Paul Memorial School. We, the Native Village of Kipnuk, have received many calls from the local Kipnuk Tribal members about you," said the banishment order, signed in early October. "You have neglected important parts of being a leader in Kipnuk. The relationship with (a) variety of people was not positive."

According to the document, tribal leaders voted 6-0 on Oct. 4 to permanently expel Lightfoot from the community of about 700 mostly Yup'ik residents near

the mouth of the Kuskokwim River on the Bering Sea coast.

After the vote, the problems escalated, with a formal resolution to keep kids out of school. It came to a head the weekend before Halloween, when tribal officials signed a document authorizing a search of school buildings and homes. A few days later, state troopers were on the ground in Kipnuk, and the principal, along with more school employees, were flown to Bethel on planes chartered by the Lower Kuskokwim School District.

Instruction for the school's roughly 200 students is happening online for the foreseeable future, with teachers staying temporarily in Bethel while conducting lessons online for students almost 100 miles away back in Kipnuk.

Banishment has long been a way for Alaska Native communities to protect collective well-being in places where state and federal law enforcement barely exist, sending away tribal members and outsiders whom local leaders deem to pose significant threat.

Tribal Administrator Nick Slim said the Kipnuk Traditional Council declined to comment on the situation.

Along with its banishment order, the traditional council included a list of problems during

Lightfoot's tenure. Many of the complaints relate to how the school was run, including claims that she neglected traditional language instruction and values, communicated poorly with local leaders, violated COVID-19 health measures, showed disrespect toward indigenous school staff, and mishandled extracurricular programming.

"More of the Kipnuk language is being lost since she arrived here," the council wrote.

According to the complaint, more local students were opting to leave the community for better educational opportunities elsewhere.

"The school and leadership is not promoting and supporting student performance and school effectiveness," according to the Kipnuk Traditional Council.

"Communication between KTC and LaDorothy is nil. For close to 10 years, LaDorothy (has) refused to meet with Kipnuk Traditional Council," the council wrote. "School administration does not truly listen. Kipnuk Traditional Council in the past shaped the school vision and mission together."

Tribal leaders also faulted Lightfoot for a decline in educational outcomes and fewer options for extracurricular programs like Native Youth Olympics, academic competitions, shop and music classes.

Another major flashpoint related to COVID. The Kipnuk Elders Committee sent a letter to legislators, state education officials and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp. in September 2021, angry that students were brought back to school in-person to take standardized tests at a time when lockdown measures and firm prohibitions on gathering were in place to prevent illness.

"The duty of safety and health of all students was ignored," the elders wrote, noting that the local lockdown order barred gatherings at school, church or stores.

The letter notes that Kipnuk, like many communities across Alaska that fall, was seeing a surge in COVID cases driven by the Delta variant.

"In total we lost seven local members since January 2021," the elders wrote of the coronavirus. "The school authorities should know that COVID-19 spreads easily, and guidelines shouldn't be ignored, especially for a village that doesn't have running water and disinfectants available in their homes. The welfare of Kipnuk is more important than taking a test."

A week after the banishment order was signed, the traditional council held a public meeting on Oct. 12 with parents of students that culminated in a resolution ordering pupils "not to attend school until further notice," with the exception of participating in athletic programs. According to a copy of the resolution, 32 parents supported the measure, none opposed.

"Despite this resolution, approximately 80% of students continued to attend school," the Lower Kuskokwim School District said in a press release. "Unfortunately, on October 28, 2022, a large group of people purportedly representing KTC entered and occupied the school building and refused to leave, greatly disrupting the educational environment in the school. Thereafter, tribal police attempted to enter LKSD teacher housing units."

The next day, state law enforcement officers arrived in Kipnuk to find the boardwalk from the airport into town blocked.

"Alaska State Troopers were

Continued on page 12

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE INVITING BIDS Recreation Center HVAC Upgrades

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, will receive sealed bids for the construction of the Recreation Center HVAC Upgrades.

Work consists of all activities necessary to remove and replace as upgrades HVAC air handler fans and ductwork that support the Natatorium and the Natatorium support spaces. The project calls for the replacement of fans, an air handler, as well as the refurbishment of three air handlers. In addition, this work calls for the replacement of multiply control and balance dampers. An Additive Alternate addresses the replacement of insulation in one Mechanical Room.

The Contract Documents are available in electronic format only and can be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell website (www.wrangell.com) under the Bids and RFP's section. Sealed bids will be received by the City and Borough of Wrangell, Post Office Box 531, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, or at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, until 2 p.m. prevailing time on December 8, 2022.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Nov. 23 and 30, 2022

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE OF JOB OPENING Power Generation Mechanic - Operator Wrangell Municipal Light and Power

The Wrangell Municipal Light and Power Department will accept all applications for the position of Power Generation Mechanic - Operator and the position will be open until filled. This is a permanent position with all City and Borough benefits and is part of the collective bargaining agreement.

The Power Generation Mechanic - Operator is a versatile position within the Wrangell Municipal Light and Power Department. This position is responsible for maintaining and operating the standby electrical generation facility, performing scheduled or routine maintenance on diesel engines, generators, electrical switchboards, compressors, control systems, pumps and other related equipment. This person will operate the generators during scheduled and emergency outages. This position will also inspect diesel preheat systems, cooling systems, air systems and lubricating systems and install new power plant electrical and mechanical systems and equipment as needed.

The position requires extensive knowledge of diesel mechanics and operations, generator operation, voltage regulators and AC generation control and protection systems, safety standards and the expertise needed to conform to them.

This is a full-time, hourly position with full benefits, paid at Grade 20 with a starting wage at \$26.47 per hour.

Applications and job descriptions may be obtained and returned to Robbie Marshall at City Hall, 205 Brueger Street (P.O. Box 531), Wrangell, AK 99929 or via email at rmarshall@wrangell.com.

The City and Borough of Wrangell is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Nov. 16 and 23, 2022

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE INVITING BIDS High School and Middle School Fire Alarm Replacement

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, will receive sealed bids for the construction of the High School and Middle School Fire Alarm Replacement.

Work consists of all activities necessary to completely replace the existing fire alarm systems at the Wrangell High School and Middle School. This includes demolition and replacement of all field devices, initiation devices, flow and tamper switches, and all auxiliary components including fire alarm relays and circuit interface modules. Work includes demolition and replacement of the fire alarm panel, remote annunciator panels, fire alarm extender panels, and all fire alarm wiring. The engineer's estimate for the project is \$525,000 to \$575,000.

The contract documents are available in electronic format only and can be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell website (www.wrangell.com) under the Bids and RFP's section. Sealed bids will be received by the City and Borough of Wrangell, P.O. Box 531, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, or at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, until 2 p.m. prevailing time on December 6, 2022.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Nov. 23 and 30, 2022

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE OF JOB OPENING Economic Development Director

The City and Borough of Wrangell is seeking candidates for the position of Economic Development Director. The Economic Development Director position will remain open until filled. The position will be posted for no less than 14 days. Applications will be reviewed as soon as Nov. 28. This is a permanent position with all City and Borough benefits.

The Economic Development Director is a department head position responsible for an array of Borough functions. The Community and Economic Development Planner is responsible for managing, performing and integrating current and advanced planning programs and services that enhance community image and environment. This position requires the ability to accomplish all short- and long-range community development objectives in the scope of planning and zoning, tourism, economic development and grant writing.

Complete job description, qualifications/requirements, and job application can be obtained on the borough website at <https://www.wrangell.com/jobs>. Applicants are required to submit their cover letter, resume and application to City Hall, 205 Brueger Street (P.O. Box 531), Wrangell, AK 99929 or via email at rmarshall@wrangell.com. The City and Borough of Wrangell is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Nov. 16 and 23, 2022

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ConocoPhillips wants to start work this winter on \$8 billion Alaska project

ALEX DEMARBAN
Anchorage Daily News

A top official with ConocoPhillips said the company expects to start working early next year on the \$8 billion Willow oil prospect in Alaska, an effort that could lead to more than 2,000 construction jobs in the coming years.

The project is located in the 23-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska on the North Slope. The reserve is home to migratory birds, polar bears and calving grounds for the Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd.

Willow could potentially produce 600 million barrels of oil over a 30-year life, according to estimates. Peak production could reach 180,000 barrels a day, according to the company. Total Alaska North Slope oil production is less than 500,000 barrels a day, down 75% from its peak in the late 1980s.

Nick Olds, executive vice president of global operations for ConocoPhillips, said on a Nov. 10 earnings call that the company expects federal approval for the project by year's end. The Bureau of Land Management is in the final stages of preparing a supplemental environmental impact statement for the project, following a court order that found the original EIS was deficient.

Following a decision by the federal gov-

ernment allowing the project to proceed, the company early next year expects to make a final investment decision before major construction begins on the project, Olds said.

However, Conoco expects some early work at Willow this winter, such as opening up a gravel mine site and laying some gravel roads, he said.

Olds said ConocoPhillips supports the development plan presented in the BLM's draft supplemental environmental review earlier this year. That new plan would reduce the company's originally proposed footprint to three large gravel pads on the tundra to support drill rigs, down from five in an earlier proposal.

The new EIS and development plan follows a ruling by federal Anchorage District Court Judge Sharon Gleason that tossed the agency's earlier approval for development, after conservation groups sued to halt the project, arguing that the agency had underestimated the plan's harm to wildlife, including polar bears, among other errors.

The downsized project remains a good value against other projects, even with inflation high, Olds said. "Despite all the cost pressures, the project remains very competitive in our cost-supply framework," he said.

Federal agencies will resume study of restoring grizzlies to North Cascades

BY NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Environmental groups have hailed a decision by the Biden administration to resume studying whether grizzly bears should be restored to the remote North Cascades mountains in Washington state.

The National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said they would jointly prepare an environmental impact statement on restoring the endangered bears to the North Cascades ecosystem.

Humans killed the bears off from the ecosystem long ago and restoration there will contribute to the general recovery of the endangered animals in the Northwest, the agencies said.

"This overturns the Trump administration's rash termination of these plans," Andrea Zaccardi, of the Center for Biological Diversity, said Nov. 10. "Without a helping hand, grizzly bears are likely to disappear from the Pacific Northwest."

But Republican U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse, who represents central Washington, criticized the plan.

"The introduction of grizzly bears into the North Cascades would directly, and negatively impact the people and communities I represent," Newhouse tweeted. "It is disappointing our voices are once again being ignored, even after the last process was discontinued due to overwhelming local opposition."

Newhouse said introducing an apex predator to the area would threaten families, wildlife and livestock.

The agencies began a study of restoring grizzly bears to the North Cascades through a trapping and relocation process in 2015. But the Trump administration terminated the process in 2020 without explanation. The Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit challenging the termination in federal court.

The North Cascades is one of the largest wild areas in the

Lower 48 states, encompassing more than 9,500 square miles centered on North Cascades National Park. It also includes large areas of surrounding national forest.

Other conservation groups also praised the decision.

"For far too long the North Cascades have been missing an integral part of their unique ecosystem," said Kathleen Callaghy, of Defenders of Wildlife. "Returning the grizzlies will finally make this incredible wilderness whole again."

The environmental impact statement process will include an opportunity for public comment at four virtual public hearings. The last one is Dec. 2.

"We're cautiously optimistic that this process will lead to a decision on how to successfully restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades through sound science and robust public involvement," said Gordon Congdon, a retired fruit grower in nearby Wenatchee, Washington.

The North Cascades Ecosystem is one of only two grizzly recovery areas without an established population of bears, and due to its relative distance and isolation from other zones it would not likely be repopulated from natural bear migration, environmental groups have said.

"We know how to move bears successfully into new places and we know how to live with them safely," said Chris Servheen, who retired in 2016 after 35 years as Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and continues to advocate for grizzly recovery.

Under the proposal, the two agencies would capture grizzly bears in British Columbia or from the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem in the Rocky Mountains. Approximately three to seven grizzly bears would be released into the North Cascades each year over roughly five to 10 years.

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Continued from page 11

able to deescalate the situation and travel to the school," the Department of Public Safety wrote in a dispatch on Halloween. "Troopers met with the principal and school staff to determine what was happening. Troopers were able to determine that no crimes had been committed and worked with the school district to facilitate assisting those that wanted to leave the village in doing so. The principal along with other school staff chose to leave and were flown out of the village on two aircraft chartered by the school district."

The Lower Kuskokwim School District did not respond to detailed questions regarding the incident, allegations against Lightfoot, or when educators might go back to Kipnuk. Superintendent Kimberly Hankins would not comment on whether Lightfoot would be returning to her position in Kipnuk, as the district is "not able to provide additional information about confidential personnel matters."

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