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Federal declaration will provide WCA with funds to clean landslide tidelands

By BECCA CLARK
Sentinel reporter

Presidential approval of a disaster declaration for the Wrangell Cooperative Association will make more than half-a-million dollars available for the tribe to remove hazardous material from the beach covered in debris by the 11-Mile landslide on Nov. 20.

WCA is the first tribe in Alaska to receive a federal disaster declaration, and the fourth in the nation to provide individual assistance under the program, said Esther Aaltsén Reese, WCA tribal administrator.

President Joe Biden signed the declaration on March 15.

The funding will cover the cleanup of hazardous material on the beach below the landslide, a project estimated to cost \$570,000, said Reese. There will also be federal funding available to individuals to help with temporary housing and home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property.

However, the federal aid requires at least a 10% cost share for WCA on the hazardous material cleanup, and a 25% match on a portion of the individual assistance. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, "the cost share ensures local interest and involvement through financial participation."

Reese said that WCA is writing a letter to Biden requesting a 0% cost share on the cleanup. If the request is not approved, she said WCA will likely ask the state to cover it.

The borough is prepared to cover the match required for the individual aid up to a total of \$50,000, said Borough Manager Mason Villarma.

Because WCA is a federally recognized tribe, they were able to go directly to FEMA for the assistance, rather than having to go through the state of Alaska, as the borough must do.

The borough also submitted a federal disaster aid request to cover the costs incurred by landslide clean up. They have yet to hear back, said Villarma.

The state declared a disaster the day after the slide, making
Continued on page 5

Lack of crew continues to limit operations at state ferry system

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

The Alaska Marine Highway System's ongoing crew shortage has eased up for entry-level steward positions but remains a significant problem in the wheelhouse and for engineers, likely keeping the Kennicott out of service again this summer.

As of March 8, the state ferry system was short almost 50 crew of what it would need to put its full operational fleet to sea this summer, which means keeping the Kennicott tied to the dock, Craig Tornga, the system's marine director, reported to a state Senate budget subcommittee on March 19.

That is about half the crew shortage of a year ago.

The Kennicott, the second-largest operational vessel in the fleet, has been used to fill in for the Columbia when that ship is out of service for winter overhaul, but the Kennicott was held at the dock last summer and is

not on the schedule again this summer as the state tries to manage with a crew shortage now in its third year.

Resignations and retirements have outpaced new hires since 2019.

In addition to attending job fairs, visiting schools and conducting a national advertising campaign to recruit new hires, the state in February 2022 contracted with an Anchorage-based company to help find applicants for jobs aboard the ferries. That effort, however, has produced negligible results.

The contractor, PeopleAK (formerly Alaska Executive Search), referred about 250 applicants to the state in 2022, but only a dozen were hired in the first year of the contract. Last year, the company forwarded almost 280 applicants to the ferry system, which hired three of them.

The company was "missing
Continued on page 3



PHOTO BY BECCA CLARK / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Tired of the problem

Allen Frank, of Channel Construction, stands March 19 next to a small portion of the mountain of tires that the company is trucking from the community's waste transfer station to the former mill site at 6-Mile, which the borough purchased in 2022 for future industrial development. The hauling is expected to finish before the end of the month. The construction company already operates a scrap metal operation at the site, and hauling the tires off the island for disposal will be part of a new lease agreement under negotiation with the borough that will likely last five years.

Assembly hires Villarma, who talks of growth and prosperity for borough

By BECCA CLARK
Sentinel reporter

Mason Villarma, the interim borough manager since November, is no longer interim: The assembly has agreed to offer him the job.

In an executive session March 19, the assembly interviewed three applicants — two from out of state — and ultimately decided to proceed with contract negotiations with Villarma.



The assembly has hired Mason Villarma as borough manager.

Mayor Patty Gilbert and Vice Mayor David Powell will negotiate a contract, which will likely come before the assembly for approval at the April 9 meeting.

Villarma went to work as finance director in September 2021 and has been serving as both finance director and interim borough manager since November 2023 when Jeff Good stepped down.

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New fundraising group collects \$10,000 toward student travel to state competition

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

The 6-month-old Wrangell Athletic Club has raised more than \$10,000 toward its mission of paying for student travel to state competition, with plans to raise a lot more.

Meanwhile, the school district has advanced more than \$40,000 for student travel to state competition in the 2023-2024 school year. The school board last year appropriated \$46,000 to cover a deficit in the travel account for the 2022-2023 school year, with the cautionary advice that it did not plan to repeat the spending this year — and would look to the new fundraising group to take on the responsibility.

The nonprofit club's efforts were delayed by the community's focus on the Nov. 20 landslide and changes in its board leadership as a result, but the new president said it is back on track and plans to raise much more by June.

"Our main spearhead of money coming in, we haven't even approached that," said board president Chris Johnson. "That's going to be through the corporate donations. ... We've barely started."

Board members met on March 20 to review their finances and plans, including using pull-tab

games to generate more revenue in the future. The board also discussed its approach to soliciting corporate donors and welcomed new board member Brian Herman.

Vice president Jack Carney and treasurer Jamie Roberts said they will send to the school district by June whatever funds the nonprofit has raised, after reviewing the district's accounting of expenses minus the annual \$400 state travel fee paid by each student.

Carney said the nonprofit's contribution would go toward student travel expenses only. "We're not paying for admin (accompanying adults such as coaching staff) going up."

Johnson took over as president of the group after the first president, Mason Villarma, resigned due to a conflict with his new job as interim borough manager.

Johnson and Carney met with Schools Superintendent Bill Burr and school board president Dave Wilson in January to discuss the club's progress and make clear that its fundraising efforts are strictly voluntary, with no obligation, and while they will assist with whatever funds they are able to raise, it will take time. "What we tried to communicate to Bill and Dave was, we're in our infancy here."

Senior Center Menu

Open for in-person dining. Must be fully vaccinated.

Thursday, March 28
Tuna casserole, broccoli blend, tomato aspic, fruit

Friday, March 29
Chicken stir fry, green beans, tossed salad, rice

Monday, April 1
Shelf-stable meal
delivered on Friday, March 29

Tuesday, April 2
Cinnamon chicken with green peppers, sweet potato, garden salad, rice and vegetable pilaf, fruit

Wednesday, April 3
Fiesta pork chops, peas, herb biscuit, carrot raisin salad, fruit

Call the senior center at 907-874-2066 24 hours in advance to reserve a seat at lunch or to request delivery. The senior van is available to take seniors to medical appointments, errands such as collecting mail, getting prescriptions or other essential items.



ALASKA AIRLINES CLUB 49 COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

PAJAMA STORY TIME 6 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 27, at the Irene Ingle Public Library. Children invited to come read bedtime stories in their PJ's.

BRAVE is hosting the I Toowú Klatseen (Strengthen Your Spirit) program from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays through May 9, at the community center. The empowering, confidence-building program for grades 3-5 incorporates Southeast Alaska values, running and a sense of community to help kids learn what it means to strengthen their spirit. Free, for kids of all cultures, physical abilities and backgrounds. Participants will be provided with healthy snacks, running shoes, an ITK T-shirt and a water bottle. Register online at tinyurl.com/wtk2024.

BAKE SALE 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, March 29, at City Market, to support the annual community cleanup. Donations welcome. Call Paula Rak at 907-305-0309.

TRIBAL CANOE JOURNEY MOVIE NIGHT 6 p.m. Friday, March 29, at the Nolan Center. Dinner, documentaries and discussion regarding the Native canoe movement. Potluck dinner is free and open to all. The event is a fundraiser, too.

NOLAN CENTER THEATER "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," rated PG-13, 6 p.m. Saturday, March 30. The action adventure drama film runs 2 hours and 37 minutes; free of charge. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

COMMUNITY EASTER EGG HUNT promptly at 1 p.m. Sunday, March 31, at Muskeg Meadows Golf Course. For toddlers through 12 years old. Sponsored by the Elks. Donations of wrapped small pieces of candy, or funds to purchase more coins can be dropped off at the Elks Club or at Angerman's. Volunteers are needed to help fill plastic eggs and help hide the 1,000-plus eggs the morning of the hunt.

CHILI COOK-OFF 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 13, at the Nolan Center. Individual entries or businesses are welcome. Sign up by April 10 by calling The Salvation Army, 907-874-3753, or stop in at the Nolan Center or KSTK.

LITTLE LEAGUE VOLUNTEERS needed for coaching, umpiring, scorekeeping, concessions, running the pitching machines, field upkeep and more. Little League is scheduled to start April 1 and end June 15. Registration is open through Saturday, March 30; sign-up forms at City Market and IGA. To volunteer, call or text Brianna Schilling at 907-305-0282.

FREE TAX RETURN PREPARATION every Saturday through April 13 at the Nolan Center classroom. Open to everyone, regardless of age. IRS-certified volunteers will prepare and e-file your return for you at no charge. By appointment only. Call Paula at 907-874-3824 or 907-305-0309.

STORY TIME AT THE LIBRARY, 10 to 11 a.m. Fridays through April 26. Come enjoy the stories, crafts and snacks at the Irene Ingle Public Library. Call 907-874-3535.

VIRTUES MATTER activities for children, 2:35 to 4 p.m. Wednesdays at the elementary school music room. An interfaith effort hosted by the Baha'is of Wrangell and open to all. For more information and to register, call Kay Larson, 907-209-9117, or email wrangell@akbnc.org.

WRANGELL PARKS and RECREATION is offering multiple activities to get your body moving. For more information on any of the activities and more visit www.wrangellrec.com or call 907-874-2444.

- **SKATE NIGHT** 5 to 7 p.m. Saturdays at the community center gym. Limited quantity and sizes of skates available to borrow. Family focused, kids 12 years and under must be supervised by a parent or adult. Open-gym style activity. Drop-in fee; pay before you skate.
- **OUTDOOR CHALLENGE** through April 28 is built to encourage consistent movement, with a goal of completing at least 30 minutes of exercise 5 to 7 days per week. This challenge is for people of all fitness levels. The participant who completes the most workouts will win a six-month pass to the Parks and Recreation facility; prizes donated by local businesses will be raffled off at the end of the challenge. For ages 14 and up. Registration required for this free activity.
- **PRIVATE SWIM LESSONS** 12:30 to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday with Darren Shilts. For ages 4 years and up. Parent or guardian of kids ages 4-6 will need to be on site for the lesson. Fee: \$40 per lesson. Registration required.

Ferry Schedule

<u>Northbound</u>	<u>Southbound</u>
Wednesday, April 10 Hubbard, 12:45 p.m.	Monday, April 15 Kennicott, 6 a.m.
Friday, April 12 Kennicott, 4:30 p.m.	Monday, April 22 Kennicott, 6:15 a.m.
Friday, April 19 Kennicott, 7 p.m.	Monday, April 29 Kennicott, 7:15 a.m.
Friday, April 26 Kennicott, 3:45 p.m.	Wednesday, May 15 Columbia, 6:15 a.m.

Listings are scheduled departure times. Call the terminal at 907-874-2021 for information or 907-874-3711 for recorded information.

Tides

	High Tides				Low Tides			
	AM Time	PM Time	Ft	Ft	AM Time	PM Time	Ft	Ft
March 27	02:44	03:10	16.5	15.1	08:48	08:51	-0.2	1.8
March 28	03:07	03:41	16.3	14.3	09:18	09:17	-0.2	2.6
March 29	03:31	04:14	15.9	13.4	09:51	09:47	0.1	3.5
March 30	03:59	04:54	15.5	12.4	10:31	10:24	0.6	4.5
March 31	04:33	05:49	14.9	11.4	11:20	11:11	1.2	5.5
April 1	05:21	07:16	14.1	10.7	...	12:23	...	1.9
April 2	06:39	08:57	13.3	11.2	00:19	01:43	6.4	2.1

The Way We Were In the Sentinel 100, 75, 50 and 25 years ago.

March 27, 1924
Nicholas Fliness, who has the contract for building the Wrangell breakwater for the government, arrived here on the Northwestern Monday night. Mr. Fliness brought 14 men with him who will comprise his crew at the start. A camp is being established near the head of the bay. The cottage which the city recently bought from James Shaffner has been rented by Mr. Fliness and will be used as a mess hall. The Virginia IV arrived from Seattle Thursday afternoon bringing powder and other material and equipment which will be used on the job. Mr. Fliness states that he is busy with preliminary work, and that he

expects to be ready to begin the actual construction work within a week.

March 25, 1949
Alaska's 19th Legislature adjourned shortly before 2 a.m. today. The end to 77 days of lawmaking came within a few minutes after Gov. Gruening rescinded his special session call after what he described as completion of legislative responsibility. Adjournment came after the House concurred in the Senate's general appropriations bill increase to a record \$13,041,000. Critics label it as a tax-happy legislature, while the administration's supporters contended it enacted a long-

needed basic tax program. Actual tax revenue estimates go beyond the general fund figures. The tobacco tax is estimated to raise a million dollars every two years, earmarked for school building construction in addition to \$2.25 million more appropriated for school buildings. More than a million is expected in motor fuel taxes, which is earmarked for highways and airports.


March 27, 1974
The Senior Citizens Center will mark two years of operations next June and, following a disappointingly slow start, has become a fixture in the lives of many of Wrangell's


elderly. Mrs. Barker, center director, said the organization has 68 members, but actually a group of about 30 who regularly participate in center activities or depend on the services. The center operates in the Civic Center, sharing the building with the Women's Civic Club and other organizations. Mrs. Barker said establishment of the senior center "in a building they can call their own" will be an important advancement for the operation. "If we could get our own place, it would mean a great deal to the members."


March 25, 1999
The city council had a full plate on their agenda Tuesday

evening, including a large helping of items concerned with city property and its disposal. Also on the agenda was a proposed ordinance providing for the sale of city-owned Wrangell Fisheries to Wrangell Seafoods. The proposed ordinance was approved on second reading and will now go to a special election for approval by the voters. Though the city bought the company for \$1.5 million and will sell it for \$1 million, Wrangell Seafoods was the only bidder. Council members pointed out that buying the plant had saved Wrangell jobs and that selling it now will put it back on the tax rolls.


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WEEKLY
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FREIGHT
FOR LESS

Property tax assessment values similar to last year

By BECCA CLARK
Sentinel reporter

After last year's comprehensive review of every piece of property in Wrangell pushed up the borough's total taxable assessed valuation by more than 50%, this year's assessment notices are tame.

Property tax assessments were sent out March 20, and initial numbers are down slightly from last year, though the numbers are not final until approved by the borough assembly.

This year the total assessed value of taxable property comes to \$229 million, with non-taxable property at \$158 million, which includes state, federal, borough, SEARHC and church property and residential property owned by senior citizens exempt from taxation.

Last year's number for total taxable property was \$235 million, with non-taxable properties at \$150 million.

The change in numbers is likely due

to some properties becoming non-taxable, additional senior-owned residences qualifying for an exemption and reduced values for property affected by last November's deadly landslide at 11.2 Mile, said Martins Onskulis of the Anchorage-based Appraisal Company of Alaska. Assessments are based on property values as of Jan. 1 each year.

Actual property tax bills will go out this summer after the borough assembly adopts a budget, which involves setting the tax rate — a percentage applied to the assessed value.

The borough reassessed the value of all 2,300 properties in town last year in an effort to correct inequities — some properties hadn't been assessed in 10 to 20 years, and in some cases similar homes in the same neighborhoods were assessed at significantly different values.

The reassessment covered homes, businesses and vacant lots. The higher

values prompted almost 180 owners to appeal their property assessments last year, more than three times the number of the year before. Most were resolved informally between the property owner and borough assessor, though seven went to a full appeal before the borough Board of Equalization.

Appeals of this year's assessments are due by April 19, if property owners believe the value is set too high for their lot or building. Forms are available at City Hall, or from the borough website: Click on the NEWS button and then click on the property tax appeal form.

In a continuing trend, Wrangell is adding more senior-owned residences to the tax-exempt rolls. As of last year, 319 residences qualified for the senior or disabled veteran exemption, taking more than \$41 million off the taxable roll.

Since 1972, state law has required municipalities to exempt \$150,000 in as-

essed value on a senior-owned home from property taxes. Seniors are defined by state law as anyone age 65 or older or a surviving widow or widower age 60 and older.

According to the Department of Commerce 2023 Alaska Taxable report, Wrangell had the largest percentage of senior-owned properties exempt from taxes in the state at 13.9% of all residential property in the borough.

The next highest was 11.4% in Nenana, about 50 road miles south of Fairbanks.

Last year's rates for senior exemptions in Southeast were 9.6% in Petersburg, 8.6% in Ketchikan, 7.1% in Sitka and 5.5% in Juneau.

Wrangell's population is older than most communities in Alaska. The town's average age, as of state estimates for 2023, was 48.4 years old — one of the highest in Alaska. The statewide average was 36.5 years old.

Ferry ridership still not back to pre-pandemic numbers

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

The state ferry system carried 181,000 passengers in 2023, still short of the pre-COVID numbers in 2019 and down substantially from almost 340,000 in 2012 and more than 420,000 in 1992.

Overall vehicle traffic also is down, from more than 115,000 in 2012 to 63,000 last year.

Much of the decline corresponds to a reduction in the number of vessels in operation, according to statistics presented to a state Senate budget subcommittee on March 19.

The fleet provided almost 400 "operating weeks" in 2012, with each week a ship is at sea counting as an operating week. By 2023, that number was down to 245.

The numbers include Southeast and Southwest ferry service, including the shuttle runs between Ketchikan and Metlakatla.

With fewer ships in service — such as the Kennicott, which was tied up much of last year due to a crew shortage — the Alaska Marine Highway System underspent last year's budget, Craig Tornga, the marine director, explained to the Senate Finance Subcommittee in its re-

view of the ferry system's budget request for fiscal year 2024-2025.

In calendar year 2023, the system spent almost \$14 million less, about 10%, than the \$144 million budgeted for operations. Fewer operating weeks and smaller ships that consume less fuel led to the savings.

While running fewer ships — whether due to crew shortages or maintenance issues with the aging vessels — saves money, it also reduces service to coastal communities. For example, it would require more vessels at sea to restore year-round service to Cordova and Kodiak, Tornga explained.

Revenue systemwide declined in calendar 2023 by about 5% from the prior year. Passenger and vehicle fares covered just under 30% of the system's operating expenses last year, with state and federal money providing the majority of its revenues.

The Legislature and governor have relied heavily on federal money the past couple of years since the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The state, however, last year received a much smaller federal grant — about \$38 million — than expected for the ferry system, Tornga told senators.

The smaller federal grant came up almost \$28 million short from what was expected. The Marine Highway System plans to cover about half of the gap with money left over from underspending in calendar 2023 but will need a supplemental appropriation from the Legislature to cover the other half.

The ferry system's budget request now before the Legislature for the fiscal year that starts July 1 assumes a federal grant about double what the state received last year. The state has applied for \$76 million in federal infrastructure funding, Dom Pannone, program management and administration director for the ferries, told the Senate subcommittee.

Sitka Sen. Bert Stedman, co-chair of Senate Finance, asked Pannone what would happen if the federal grant comes up short again, like it did last year. Pannone answered that the ferry system would come back to the Legislature to seek more state money to cover the shortfall, while also seeking other federal aid.

Stedman said it's important for legislators to know what the ferries need as they write the state budget. "We need to try to get this year's budget right, if we can."

Ferry hiring

Continued from page 1

the mark at first" in recruiting qualified applicants for maritime jobs, Tornga said in an interview after his testimony at the Senate Finance subcommittee on the Marine Highway System budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

PeopleAK now better understands what is required of qualified applicants, he said.

Though the state has not hired 95% of the applicants referred by the contractor, it's not out much money: The state pays PeopleAK only for the applicants hired, at the rate of \$5,000 per

new hire.

Without the Kennicott on the schedule, Wrangell this summer will see the same service as recent years — one northbound and one southbound ferry each week.

And without the Kennicott, the state is unable to resume the popular service between Southeast Alaska and Prince Rupert, British Columbia, which offered travelers a much less costly highway-connection alternative to ferrying their vehicles all the way to Bellingham in Washington state's Puget Sound.

Part of the problem in recruit-

ing new hires, particularly licensed crew such as mates and engineers, is money, Tornga said.

The ferry system pays non-residents less than Alaska residents — and has for decades — which makes the Alaska jobs less attractive as the state tries to recruit licensed mariners from the Lower 48.

"We're not competitive with our out-of-state rate," Tornga said.

In addition, non-residents hired for the job have to pay their own travel expenses to and from Alaska to board their assigned vessels, he said.

Another impediment is that junior engineers and oilers who want to advance to third, second or first engineer or chief engineer jobs need to go to school for five months, at their own expense, at a cost of about \$30,000, Tornga said.

Even when new hires come aboard, housing is a problem, he explained. The state houses new crew for three months aboard the Matanuska, which is tied up out of service in Ketchikan, awaiting a decision on whether the state wants to spend millions of dollars to replace rusted steel and make other upgrades.

After three months, the workers need to move off the ship into their own housing.

"When they do find it, they can't afford it," Tornga said.

Besides for advertising and working with its recruitment contractor, he told senators the Marine Highway System has hired its own recruiting staffer, attended career days at maritime

academies nationwide and at high schools in coastal Alaska communities, and is working with a union to see if retirees would like to come back to work.

Spring thaw uncovers recurring problem of uncollected dog waste

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

Problems with dog waste in town, in parks and ballfields are ongoing. While there has been some improvement in recent years, people not picking up after their dogs continues to be a recurring issue, especially with the coming of spring.

"With everything thawing, it's one of the more gross times of the year," said recreation director Devyn Johnson of Parks and Recreation. "And it's a bit of a roller coaster. Sometimes people do better than other times."

Parks and Recreation Director Lucy Robinson and her staff have been working hard to clear parks, fields and playgrounds of dog waste. They also try to forestall the problem through education and reminders on their website and social media pages to the public.

They are in the process of arranging a "poop scoop" event, inviting residents to volunteer their time to help clean up the messes, hoping to schedule it in April.

Joan Sargent, who serves on the Parks and Recreation advisory board, remembers how bad it was in 2021 at Volunteer Park. "At that point, the park was such a mess," she said, adding that as she was walking her dog and picking up excess dog waste, she saw a teacher escorting a group of students into the park, screaming at the kids not to step in it.

Sargent estimated she collected more than 100 pounds of dog waste at Volunteer Park during that spring, saying at the time that "you couldn't walk across the entry area without tiptoeing."

Continued on page 4

FREE

Estate Planning presentation with Attorney Liz Smith
49th Estate Planning
Friday, April 5
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Tax credits no substitute for state responsibility

BY LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

Tax credits have long been popular, growing more so every year. Supporters push them to provide government backing for new initiatives or ongoing programs, steering money to worthy causes — some unworthy ones, too — bypassing actual appropriations by federal, state or municipal lawmakers.

With a tax credit, businesses or individuals can make donations to a program or invest in a project, such as housing, and reduce their taxes to the federal, state or municipal treasury.

Tax credits divert private money that otherwise would become public money when taxes are paid. Essentially, they are a subsidy.

They are an acknowledgement that supporters do not have the political votes to win support for direct federal, state or municipal funding for a particular housing or child care or education program, so let businesses and individuals contribute to the program and reduce their taxes.

It's a win-win-lose. Taxpayers get a break, the nonprofits or schools or housing advocates get money, and the public treasury loses revenue.

"The rise in the use of credits is probably best seen as the outcome of an ill-fated political compromise. Republicans like credits because they look like tax cuts. Democrats like them because they advance social policies without raising government spending. Both sides are getting a bad deal," says a commentary published a quarter-century ago by the non-partisan Brookings Institution.

The century-old public-policy research house notes that the proliferation of targeted credits adds complexity to the tax code. "In addition, tax subsidies tend to breed demand for more subsidies," the 1999 commentary says.

Amen to that — and I'm not a religious person. That's why it's so discouraging to see Alaska's governor introduce legislation that would expand the list of corporate donations eligible for tax credits, and also increase the amount of money that taxpayers could save by writing checks to something other than the state treasury.

The state has long granted credits for corporate

donations to universities and colleges, K-12 schools (public or private), value-added seafood processing investments and a few more. Those credits cost the state maybe a few million dollars a year in lost revenues.

Gov. Mike Dunleavy's bill would widely expand the list of donations eligible for tax breaks to include child care services, anything that reduces residential heating or electricity utility rates, reduces residential mortgage rates, reduces the costs of building energy-efficient housing in the state, or "improves food security and affordability."

Dunleavy's own Revenue Department reported it has no way of knowing how many businesses would take advantage of the expanded tax breaks, but it calculated that if every eligible entity in Alaska donated to the max, the state could lose about a quarter-million dollars a year in revenue.

The governor's bill lacks the research needed for lawmakers to consider opening the state treasury door that wide. Besides, the tax credit is available only to corporate taxpayers, which, in Alaska, means only publicly traded corporations that do business in the state, such as Walmart, Target, Safeway, Fred Meyer, Wells Fargo, FedEx, Alaska Airlines, Delta Airlines and not many more — plus the biggies ConocoPhillips and ExxonMobil.

Even if you believe in tax credits as a sound public policy, Dunleavy's bill likely would do little to help most communities that lack any presence of large corporations.

Thankfully, neither the House nor the Senate have held a hearing on this tax turkey. It's unaffordable, unhelpful and uncaring answer to real needs for more affordable housing, better schools and improved access to child care.

"A better approach (than tax credits) would be to decide on the goals of public policy and find a straightforward and open way to pay for them," says the Brookings Institution commentary.

Amen. Alaskans need to pay for the public services they want, rather than hide behind the curtain of tax credits.

EDITORIAL

It's time to wake up downtown garden beds

Wrangell has a lot to offer people who live here and those who visit. Certainly the river, Native history and culture, Petroglyph Beach, the museum and fishing are on the list. So, too, is an attractive downtown.

It's spring, which means it's time for volunteers to pitch in with a rake, a shovel, pruning shears or weeding gloves to keep downtown looking good through the summer months — when everything looks better and greener than the recently departed winter.

The Parks and Recreation Department is running an adopt-a-garden program again this year to entice and encourage volunteers to help beautify downtown. The department is planning a work party for April 6. Look for more details to come, but make a note to help out with opening the garden beds that day, whether adding fertilizer, mulch, weeding and trimming bushes and shrubs.

The department staff already takes care of 56 acres of parks and trails and could use some help on the 10 garden beds planted in the bump-outs on street corners downtown. There are no annual flowers or plants that need constant maintenance and watering. The work is pretty basic and much appreciated by locals and visitors alike.

And time to clean up after dogs

Just as the snow and ice have melted away from the bushes and shrubs in downtown garden beds, so too have they disappeared from the parks, trails and ballfields in town — exposing the winter deposits left by dogs. Or, more accurately, left by dog owners who don't think enough of the mess that their pets leave behind for others to step in.

Devyn Johnson of Parks and Recreation describes it as "one of the more gross times of the year." That pretty much sums up how everyone else sees it.

Department staff try to dig in and keep the recreation areas clean but could use some help, such as help from volunteers at a "Poop Scoop" event tentatively planned for sometime in April. Yes, it's exactly as it sounds.

And help from dog owners to be courteous and respectful of others.

This is not just a parks and trails problem — some boat owners are just as guilty of letting their dogs roam the harbors, leaving behind their droppings. "It's an issue with every harbor," said Harbormaster Steve Miller, who encourages everyone to use the plastic bags available from dispensers at every harbor.

Whether by land or by sea, grab a bag, pick it up, and everyone can enjoy a cleaner community.

Wrangell Sentinel

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Wrangell continues to show up for each other and for the community

The community of Wrangell never stops showing up for each other. It is the quality that I most appreciate about living here. It keeps me humble and hopeful for the future, because I see examples of people caring for each other every day in Wrangell. Sometimes in little ways. Sometimes in big ways.

On Saturday, March 16, I got off a plane from Washington, D.C., and attended the public memorial service for Ottie Florschutz. People brought food, memories, photos, laughter and tears to share with family and friends, as the community grieved together for a good man

and family who experienced a local tragedy that rocked the entire community. Sharing grief with others can help those who feel it most acutely carry the burden. Unfortunately, I know from experience.

Next, I attended the St. Patty's Day "fun run/walk" organized by Lucy Robinson, another one of the many gifts of her time to others in this community.

The event was used to get people active while also raising funds for the annual Sig and Helen Decker Memorial Scholarship. Each year, one high school graduate from each of the Wrangell and Petersburg high schools is awarded a scholarship for either trade school or college. Approximately 70 people showed up for the event and raised \$2,350 in either cash or

online donations. Online donations can be made year-round through the Alaska Community Foundation, the organization that manages the scholarship fund.

This was the fourth time the event was held, each time being a tiny bit easier for me to attend as I see all the faces and feel all the love of those who knew Sig and Helen.

I want to say thank you to everyone who helped make these events happen. It was just one day out of 366 days this year (leap year!) where the community of Wrangell will continue to show up for each other.

Thank you, Wrangell, for being an example to the world of what it really means to be a community.

Julie Decker

Dog waste

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It finally galvanized residents into action. "It took a month to clean it up," she said. "But it really got people's attention."

Since then, Sargent said there's been a turnaround. "People who go there on a daily basis, they take three buckets. They don't take one. And they pick up after other people."

Johnson also spoke of several community members who regularly volunteer to pick up after dogs.

Now, Sargent believes the problem areas are at the harbors where dogs live with their owners on boats and tend to use the green spaces there to poop.

"It's an issue with every harbor," said Harbormaster Steve Miller, who added that there are

dog poop bag dispensers available at all harbors and he encourages everyone to use them, as he and his staff keep an eye out for people not picking up after their dogs. "We try to chase them down when we see them."

The proximity of dog waste near water correlates to a 2022 study that was done by high school students as part of a Rural Alaska Students in One-Health Research program, to research problems with dog waste getting into ground water along the Volunteer Park trail, amid concerns of the many different health issues can arise from water that has been polluted with animal fecal matter, including cholera, gastroenteritis and E. coli.

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Electric school bus for district hits another roadblock

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

The district's electric school bus, originally scheduled to arrive in late spring through the federal Clean School Bus program, has been delayed until March 2025 due to a backlog of orders at the bus manufacturer, which could be too late for the terms of the grant's fall deadline.

Schools Superintendent Bill Burr explained the reasons for the delay at a school board meeting on March 18.

The delay could pose a problem, as the grant deadline requires the bus to be on the job by October. Burr doesn't know yet whether the grant can be salvaged. "We're working on that," he said after the meeting. "It's a question for the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency)."

Wrangell was the only school dis-

trict in Alaska to be awarded a \$395,000 grant in October 2022 to purchase an electric school bus through the EPA program.

One factor in the delay was the unexpected influx of orders for electric buses from schools across the country also trying to take advantage of the federal grant, and how production time estimates changed significantly from when the Wrangell district first looked at it.

"When we had talked to them before December, and we were talking with a company that was hesitant, they were thinking two to three months to build, and two or three months to get it," Burr said. "We were looking at a six-month window, which was plenty of time."

But now the manufacturer has said the build and transport time will take much longer, leading to the arrival time

being moved to March of next year. Each bus is built to order at IC Bus, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the vehicle would then have to be transported to Alaska.

"Our problem is it took a long time (to submit the order) because they (the buses) are not common in Alaska," Burr said. "The specifications are all different. What plug-in would you like? What kind of (recharging) stand are you going to have? Do you want it in the front of the bus or the back of the bus? What kind of building are you going to put it in?"

"They just wanted to make sure that it was going to work with our temperatures, and how far we're going, and the route," he added. "Nobody in Alaska has done it."

The unexpected delay and looming grant deadline are the latest in several

obstacles the district has dealt with in trying to bring an electric school bus to Wrangell through the EPA clean-air program.

In April of last year, Taylor Transportation, the district's bus service contractor, decided to pull the plug on using the grant to buy a bus, citing "unknowns" about electric vehicle operation and maintenance. The school district picked up the task to buy and own and be responsible for the bus, so as to preserve the grant.

The program also requires destruction of a diesel-powered bus to receive the funds for an electric bus. First Student, a nationwide company based out of Cincinnati, Ohio, which holds school bus service contracts around Alaska, donated a diesel bus last summer to the school district to be taken out of service without ever coming to Wrangell.

WCA

Continued from page 1

funds available for road repairs, search and rescue operations and individual assistance for people directly affected by the slide. The landslide took out two homes, killing six people.

The federal disaster declaration for WCA means the new money will stay entirely in the community, whereas disaster aid requested by the state would go into a statewide pot covering multiple slides that same day in Southeast Alaska.

The federal funding

awarded to WCA also offers individuals more aid than was available through state funding, Reese said. Through state funding, individuals could get up to \$42,500 for direct expenses and housing repairs, but with the funding available to WCA individuals can get up to twice that amount — \$42,500 for housing and \$42,500 for other needs which includes things like medical care.

FEMA staff will visit Wrangell to help individuals apply for assistance, and the financial aid will be available to all members of the community, Native and non-Native, Reese said.

The state cleaned up the land and beach covered by the slide to the high-tide zone. The delay in removing hazardous material from below the tideline and in Zimovia Strait has jeopardized an area that is particularly important to WCA, Reese said. That beach area has

provided rich and plentiful clams, crabs, shrimp, fish and other traditional subsistence foods.

In 2018, WCA Earth Branch mapped the beach for paralytic shellfish poison to ensure clams and cockles are safe to eat. Additionally, there are several historic Tlingit sites nearby that prove that ancestors used the beach and the surrounding areas. Cleaning up the area is important to WCA, as the tribe wants to continue stewardship and care for the land as their ancestors did for thousands of years and protect it for generations to come, Reese said.

According to a state report, the landslide started at almost 1,500 feet in elevation and flowed about 3,750 feet to tide-water and then extended an additional 500 feet into Zimovia Strait.

The WCA sent a letter to Biden on March 21 requesting that the federal aid also cover

any loss of traditional subsistence foods, which currently is not covered. This coverage may not apply much to Wrangell because the borough quickly provided portable generators to provide electricity to homes after power lines went down in the slide, allowing people to keep their freezers and refrigerators running.

Reese, however, noted that she wants to get subsistence foods covered in order to set a precedent for other tribes that need federal aid in the future. She highlighted the importance of traditional subsistence foods to rural communities, adding that the loss of a freezer full of subsistence foods is equivalent to the loss of a grocery store.

The process to request a presidential disaster declaration was challenging and full of barriers, Reese said, and she had little hope in achieving the

declaration but wanted to push forward with the process to bring some of the barriers to light for other small tribes in the future.

Barriers included cost shares, a required \$250,000 threshold of damages, a required 25% match in individual assistance and the lack of coverage for subsistence foods.

Reese noted that another barrier included the inability for a regional tribe to apply for assistance on behalf of a smaller tribe. There are smaller tribes in the state that likely don't have the resources to apply for federal aid, she said.

Reese said she wants to turn the recovery from the deadly landslide into another historic moment of pride for the Wrangell community. She also hopes this process will model how tribal and federal governments can work together effectively.

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Borough manager

Continued from page 1

Villaroma moved to Wrangell full time in 2021 after spending summers here to visit family and work aboard fishing boats.

He worked almost two years for a large accounting firm in Washington state before moving to Wrangell and holds a bachelor's degree in business administration.

In an interview, Villaroma said his goals for Wrangell are growth and prosperity. The borough has acquired more than \$8.6 million in state and federal grants in the past year and has applied for more than \$45 million in project grants for next year, he said.

His priorities as borough manager include maintenance projects the borough has needed for a while including the water treatment plant and water reservoir dams, repairs to the Public Safety Building, and road and underground infrastructure improvements. Much of the water and sewer lines and drainage systems under the roads have not been touched in two decades, Villaroma said.

Wrangell has been heavily reliant on state and federal funding, and part of the challenge is being creative with the limited funds, the new manager said. Ultimately, one of his goals is for Wrangell to become as financially independent as possible.

He speaks of Wrangell's future with excitement. Villaroma described himself as bold and a risk taker in terms of his plans for the borough. "Complacency is not an option," he said, adding that if Wrangell is complacent, it may as well move backward.

At 27, he is likely the youngest borough manager Wrangell has ever seen. Villaroma said he wants to be judged on his competency rather than his age, adding that there are a lot of benefits to having a young manager like new perspectives, ideas and energy.

One aspect of the job he is excited about is to negotiate deals to bring jobs to the community and bring in big capital projects.

Almost half of Wrangell school students counted as Alaska Native

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

Almost half of the students enrolled at the school district are counted as Alaska Native.

Schools Superintendent Bill Burr confirmed that out of a total of 270 students enrolled in the district, 122 are registered as Alaska Native, while 13 are American Indian. "We're 50% or really close," he said. "Some of those might be mixed, depending on which parent filled

it out."

Burr added that while Kim Powell, the district's administrative assistant, had told him that the ratio has always been around that percentage, statistics from the state and federal government have the number listed as lower, about 35%, possibly because of a variety of factors, including improperly completed paperwork, discrepancies in census data and confusion between ethnicity

categories such as "American Indian and Alaska Native" and "mixed race."

Also, the federal government records ethnicity differently than how the state records it, according to Burr. "It usually looks lower than it actually is," he said. "It depends on a lot of different factors, depending on how paperwork is filled out."

The U.S. Census estimates that Wrangell's Alaska Native

and American Indian population last year was 17%.

"How do you incorporate identity in a box?" asked Mike Hoyt, who began as the new Indian Education Act director at Wrangell schools on March 11.

A day before her resignation on Feb. 29, then-IEA director DaNika Smalley reported on the changing demographic at an Indian Education Act committee meeting at the high school. She later explained on March 13 how IEA formula-driven grant funding can affect the number of Native students. "We already qualify for the grant," she said. "But the more Native students we have, the more funding we'll see for the school year."

She added that such funding is used for cultural-based events and classes like the Tlingit language class run by Virginia Oliver, as well as the shadowbox plays which are regularly staged at the elementary and high schools.

Smalley said parents registering their children as Native

must file a form and provide proof of tribal membership, either through the child, parent or grandparent.

Burr said funding can also provide tutoring for eligible Native students for subjects across the board that they're having trouble learning. In addition to tutoring, Hoyt also wants to instruct teachers on how to incorporate Native culture into their curriculum.

Hoyt suggested that there might be potential ways to seek alternate funding outside of federal avenues, including nontraditional sources like Sealaska Heritage Institute. He also said confirmation of having such a large Native portion of the student body can have an impact on curriculum and provide opportunities to introduce more culturally aware material.

"Lately, there's been more of a push within Native communities to make their cultural identity known," he said. "That can be seen in the increase of different cultural events both in the community and in the classroom."



PHOTO BY MARC LESTER / ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS

Mt. Edgecumbe boys basketball coach Archie Young works the sideline during a game at Ketchikan High School on Feb. 22.

After 25 years as coach, Wrangell grad Archie Young will leave Mt. Edgecumbe

By CHRIS BIERI
Anchorage Daily News

Archie Young likes to joke that August is like Christmas for the coaches at Mt. Edgecumbe, full of surprises for the season ahead.

The state-run public boarding school in Sitka has new students coming in and departing each year, and it isn't until classes start and the dust settles that the coaches know who might be representing the school on various athletic fields and courts.

In 25 years as a teacher and coach, Young has thrived as a stabilizing force in those unpredictable circumstances. But earlier this season, Young announced that this will be his final one at Mt. Edgecumbe.

"It's been one of the joys of working at Mt. Edgecumbe," said Young, the school's boys basketball coach. "You don't know who is coming back, you don't know who is coming in. You're never set in stone what you want to do as a program. There are a few foundational things you want to do as far as work ethic and teamwork and family."

Young will be moving to Anchorage in June, allowing him to be closer to more family members.

"Now was a good time and 25 years gave me the flexibility to do that," he said.

Young was a high school star himself, playing for Wrangell, class of 1991. He was named to the Alaska High School Hall of Fame in 2014.

He ended up at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where he chose to major in education as a junior. His father was a contractor in Southeast and after graduating, Young joined his dad on a nine-month remodeling job in Sitka for the Coast Guard. Young never left.

"The principal approached me and talked to me about if I was interested in coaching,

and we had a conversation, and a month later, I had a job teaching and coaching at Mt. Edgecumbe," Young said. "Here we are (25 years later)."

Due to the nature of the school, each year is a fresh start for Young with little continuity from season to season. But he said the teams come together quickly.

"These kids are living together 24/7," he said. "A lot of coaches ask, 'What do you do for team bonding?' We don't do bonding. They live together. They eat together. We don't have to do that because it's such a unique environment."

Young has also had a big impact on young athletes through coaching with Native Youth Olympics. He said hard work is the core value he preaches the most to the student-athletes he works with. He said that was an ideal his father instilled in him.

"We talk a lot about hard work doesn't guarantee anything, but it provides an opportunity for success," Young said.

His final team at Mt. Edgecumbe may be as good as any he's had over the years. The Braves lost a 63-61 thriller in the Division 3A state championship game against Nome on March 23 to finish runner-up in the tournament in Anchorage.

Following the game, the Mt. Edgecumbe fans showed their gratitude, chanting, "Thank you Archie, thank you Archie," from the stands.

He hasn't ruled out continuing to coach after he relocates and said it's not something that's easy to give up.

"Coaching is something I really enjoy," he said. "The challenge of trying to help people improve and watching that process and molding that process — there's just a lot of joy in that."

Program for children ties together running, exercise, and self-respect

By BECCA CLARK
Sentinel reporter

Wrangell's BRAVE has started its running and empowerment program, I Toowú Klatseen (ITK), for kids in third through fifth grades.

The program provides free running and exercise activities, lessons in self-respect, community building and healthy decision-making.

I Toowú Klatseen means "strengthen your spirit" in Tlingit, or being strong on the inside and the outside — philosophies the program seeks to share with Wrangell's youth.

The program started Tuesday, March 26, and will run to May 9 on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the community center.

It's still open for registration for students who want to join.

ITK was created in Juneau and Sitka in 2014 as a running and empowerment program for boys, said Maleah Nore, BRAVE (Building Respect and Valuing Everyone) volunteer and ITK coordinator. The program is a collaboration between tribal and domestic violence prevention programs as a way to teach young boys healthy masculinity, inner strength and community.

After the program saw success, it was expanded to be more gender inclusive and now operates in Juneau, Sitka, Kake, Angoon, Gustavus, Hoonah and Wrangell. The curriculum is also being expanded to be offered in Interior Alaska.

Though many of the lessons are based on Southeast Alaska Native stories and strengths, every student is encouraged to bring culture and traditions from their own backgrounds into the program, Nore said.

The lessons are centered around place-based values, Tlingit values and plants and animals in the region.

BRAVE received a grant from Alaska Children's Trust to fund the program this year, the first time they have received such funding, Nore said. The first time the nonprofit ran the ITK program was in 2022, and they scraped together donations, she said.

The program will provide fresh and healthy snacks at every practice. Each student will also get a free pair of running shoes, a T-shirt and a water bottle. The program will culminate with a five-kilometer fun run where students will be awarded medals for completing the program.

"Any kid in grades three to five will have fun," Nore said, emphasizing that ITK is open to all kids in the community, at any level of physical ability. There are enough coaches and volunteers to cater to every student in the program.

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Green thumbs can help beautify Wrangell again this year

By BECCA CLARK
Sentinel reporter

This is the second year that Wrangell's Parks and Recreation Department will host an adopt-a-garden volunteer program to help beautify downtown.

Though volunteers have maintained the garden beds in years past, last year was the first year that Parks and Rec organized the volunteer program and provided resources.

The seasonal garden beds will be opened for work on

April 6, when Parks and Rec will host a work party. That will include a meeting to discuss guidelines, available resources and a garden bed care schedule. Opening the garden beds entails adding fertilizer, mulch, weeding and trimming bushes and shrubs.

Lucy Robinson, director of Parks and Rec, said she was looking for a better solution to maintain the downtown garden beds last year. The department already maintains 56 acres of parks, trails and mowing,

Robinson said, noting that adding the downtown garden beds to the list was just too much for the staff and budget.

Robinson modeled the volunteer program last summer after similar programs in communities throughout Alaska and the Lower 48. Before last summer, there wasn't necessarily an established protocol for maintaining the garden beds. Robinson said she found last year's volunteer program to be a relatively simple fix.

She said "easy manage-

ment" is the program's motto. All the bump-outs at street corners have a similar theme with similar plants. None of the bump-outs have annual flowers or plants, to reduce maintenance and watering. Basic garden maintenance like trimming shrubs, weeding and deadheading are the only tasks required of volunteers.

Part of the benefit of having an organized volunteer program is hosting the closing party, Robinson said. That brings everyone together to put the bump-outs to bed for the winter and to share ideas and feedback.

The organized program also allows Parks and Rec to provide resources, tools and supplies to gardeners.

Last year, Robinson was successful in getting four to five people to volunteer to maintain the garden beds. When they noticed other beds weren't getting taken care of, Robinson said the volunteers began taking care of additional beds as well. This year, all 10 downtown bump-outs are claimed by volunteers, including one that is mostly rock now, but will be transformed to hold dirt and shrubs similar to the other garden beds.

Robinson said maintaining the garden beds is a great way to get outside and to be active in the community. "It's neat to have these grassroots programs that allow people to connect. You never know what will come of it," she said.



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Tight defense under the basket

Wrangell's Jenna Eastaugh (25) struggled for a shot, hemmed in by Petersburg's Charlotte Nilsen (left) and Julianna Allison (right), in a game at the AAU Stikine Hoops Invitational on Saturday, March 23, at the high school gym. Petersburg won the game, 47-22. Ketchikan teams also participated in the weekend double-elimination tournament for middle-school age girls, which was won by Ketchikan's Island Hoopers.

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EASTER SERVICES

Thursday, March 28

Island of Faith Lutheran
Maundy Service Worship, 7 p.m.

St. Rose of Lima Catholic
Holy Thursday, 7 p.m.

Friday, March 29

Community Ecumenical
Good Friday Service, noon
Soup and bread to follow
at the First Presbyterian Church

St. Rose of Lima Catholic
Good Friday Mass, 7 p.m.

Island of Faith Lutheran
Good Friday Service, 7 p.m.

Saturday, March 30

Seventh-day Adventist
Worship, 11:30 a.m.

St. Rose of Lima Catholic
Vigil Mass, 7 p.m.

St. Philip's Episcopal
Easter Vigil Worship, 7 p.m.

Sunday, March 31

Community Ecumenical
SonRise Service, 8 a.m.
(Next to Evergreen Elementary School)

Harbor Light Church
Breakfast, 9 a.m.

Bible Baptist
Breakfast, 9:30 a.m.
Easter eggs for elementary kids, noon

Easter programs
Bible Baptist, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian, 11 a.m.
Harbor Light, 10:35 a.m.
Island of Faith Lutheran, 9:30 a.m.
St. Philip's Episcopal, 10 a.m.
St. Rose of Lima Catholic, 11 a.m.
The Salvation Army, 11 a.m.

Everyone is welcome
to the Easter services.



Research says Alaska teacher salaries below Lower 48 average

By ANNIE BERMAN
Anchorage Daily News

Teacher salaries in Alaska are not competitive when compared to much of the Lower 48, according to new research from the University of Alaska Anchorage's Institute of Social and Economic Research.

Alaska teachers are paid below the national average once their salaries are adjusted for the high cost of living in Alaska, said Matthew Berman, a professor of Economics at UAA and one of two authors of the study published last month.

The topic of public school funding and teacher pay has been a main focus in the Alaska Legislature this session and of local school boards statewide.

Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy vetoed an education package that overwhelmingly passed the Legislature and would have provided the largest schools funding increase in Alaska's history. The governor said he vetoed the bill because it did not include two of his priorities, including teacher bonuses and provisions for charter schools.

A vote to override the veto failed 39-20, just one vote short of the 40-legislator threshold.

The study was published at a moment when Alaska school districts are profoundly struggling to find and keep qualified teachers.

Many education advocates, superintendents and school board members say flat state education funding and a lack of a defined-benefit retirement system have made it difficult to offer higher wages and better benefits that could keep teachers.

Berman and Dayna DeFeo, director of the university's Center for Alaska Education Policy Research, noted in the study that this is a not a new problem: When cost of living differences are taken into account, Alaska teacher salaries have been, on average, below the national average for decades.

What's new is that in recent years, teacher salaries nationwide have not kept pace with inflation, contributing to a national shortage of teachers, Berman said. That is making it even more difficult for Alaska schools to stay competitive and fill open positions.

While Dunleavy and lawmakers indicated this month there was still a chance that Alaska school districts could see a financial boost to public education before the end of the fiscal year, it wasn't clear how, when or how much money districts could expect.

Without the promise of additional state funding this year, some districts face further financial uncertainty.

Funding and hiring challenges appear to be especially acute in rural communities off the road system, where districts also face higher operating costs, fewer housing options and a harsher climate, the study found.

Higher operating in those districts and the higher cost of living means salaries need to be even higher to attract qualified teachers, the study said.

"If Alaska wishes to attract and retain educators who are well qualified for teaching, it needs to make investments in teacher pay," Berman and DeFeo wrote.

The study is, in part, a response to a 2023 report by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development that examined teacher wages in the state since the 1980s, Berman said.

That report showed a shrinking gap between how much Alaska teachers made compared to the Lower 48, but still placed Alaska 10th in the nation for highest teacher pay — at about 11% higher than the national average.

However, when Berman and DeFeo adjusted those numbers to account for Alaska's high cost of living, they found that Alaska teachers actually make an average of 25% less than their Lower 48 peers.

In urban areas, that differential is smaller, Berman said — Anchorage teachers would need raises between 5% and 6% for the district to be nationally competitive. Rural teachers would need closer to 25%.

"A gallon of milk costs more in Anchorage than it does in Albuquerque. And it costs more in Nome than it does in Anchorage," the authors wrote in the study, explaining the importance of paying attention to cost of living when looking at differences in salaries between places.

Berman and DeFeo also noted that while Alaska's teachers have historically earned more than Lower 48 teachers, that gap has narrowed over the past two decades at a time when much of the country is grappling with a teacher shortage.

Nationwide, fewer people are choosing careers in teaching; the profession is experiencing

higher turnover rates, which means Alaska will need to offer even higher salaries to recruit and retain teachers, the authors wrote.

In a 2021 survey conducted by the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, fair compensation was the No. 1 factor Alaska teachers considered in deciding whether to leave or accept a job.

The ISER study findings track with what Corey Aist, president of Anchorage's teacher union, has seen and heard from local educators.

"I think what's important to note is how much more Alaska educators can make outside of the state," he said. "Pay increase and pension: It's those two things in union that are really compelling our teachers to leave," Aist said.

Legislation would allow use of cell data to find lost people

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

Under legislation passed March 21 by the Alaska House of Representatives, police searching for a lost hiker could obtain cell phone and satellite phone location data without a warrant.

The House approved House Bill 316 by a 38-1 margin after moving it forward with unusual speed. The Senate has referred the bill to committee for discussion. The Legislature faces a mid-May adjournment deadline.

The measure is modeled after similar laws in other states and is known as the "Kelsey Smith Act."

Smith was an 18-year-old who was abducted and murdered in Kansas in 2007, and her family has since advocated legislation that would allow law enforcement to more quickly locate a missing person in an emergency.

Under HB 316, a communications company must provide the location of a phone to a law enforcement agency or dispatch center upon written request if the agency believes the phone is with a person experiencing an "ongoing emergency that involves the risk of death or serious physical harm."

"This is a piece of legislation that I hope is never used," said Anchorage Rep. Craig Johnson, who sponsored it.

Rep. David Eastman, R-Wasilla, and some other lawmakers said the bill raises concerns about civil liberties. There might be some people who don't want the government to be able to track them, he said.

After some lawmakers raised the possibility that the request system could be abused, the House amended the bill to make misuse a misdemeanor.

In an emotional speech, House Majority Leader Dan Saddler, of Eagle River, said the bill is personal to him. He has a son with autism, and he worries about what might happen if his son wanders away. "This is a bill about real people. It's not theoretical. It's not about how many civil liberties can dance on the head of a pin," he said.

"It's not theoretical, it's about ways to save lives," Saddler said.

The Alaska Beacon is an independent, donor-funded news organization. Alaskabeacon.com.

Wrangell teens bowl over the competition at state

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Five Wrangell teens know their books, chapters and verses better than any other team in Alaska, and for the second year in a row Wrangell won the state title at The Salvation Army's Bible Bowl competition.

The team was so dominant and won by such a wide margin at the competition March 16 in Juneau that "Anchorage actually forfeited," said Capt. Chase Green of The Salvation Army's Wrangell church.

Haines took second and Juneau won third in the four-team contest, he said.

With the state title in hand, Wrangell will move on to the nationals, scheduled for June 15 in Pasadena, California, Green said.

Last year's first-place Wrangell team placed third at the competition in Los Angeles.

The state competition pitted four teams against each other in one matchup, with contestants answering questions and scoring points with correct answers. With so many more contestants, the 13-team nationals will be a round-robin tournament, Green said.

"Kudos to our kids in Wrangell, they really wanted it bad," he said of the state title. They studied and practiced two hours a day every day for the three weeks leading up to the competition.

All the work paid off. "It was brutal," he said

of the team's victory margin.

The team consists of Clara and Everett Edens, Kaiya and Amura Brevick, and Arabella Nore, coached by Damon Roher, who coached last year's winning team, too. Roher himself was a Bible Bowl competitor more than a decade ago, Green said.

The five team members range in age from 13 to 16 years old.

The nationwide Bible Bowl has been around for decades, with Wrangell making several appearances at regional competitions in the 2000s, Green said.

Some of the hardest questions at this year's state meet asked the teens to cite book, chapter and verse of Bible passages, he said. Some of the questions were: "Finish this quote."

Even with so much study and practice, "they can very easily blur together after awhile," he said.

The Salvation Army's website describes the event: "Bible Bowl is an academic game where teens match knowledge about a designated portion of scripture in a competitive arena. It will take many hours of study and memorization, as well as a good attitude and the ability to work as a team."

The Wrangell teens will get a break in study sessions, but just a short one. "We took this week off, for sure," Green said March 21.

Policy for Letters to the Editor

- Letters should be typed or clearly written and no longer than 400 words.
- All letters must be signed by the writer and include a phone number and any affiliation with a group which pertains to the letter.

The Sentinel reserves the right to edit any submissions.

The deadline for submissions is Friday at noon for Wednesday publication.

Letters are run on a space-available basis.

WRANGELL SENTINEL

P.O. Box 798, 205 Front St., Wrangell, AK 99929
Ph: 907-874-2301 • wrgsent@gmail.com

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NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of Timothy Douglas Heller, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that the undersigned has been appointed personal representative of the above-named estate. All persons having claims against the said deceased are required to present their claims within four months after the date of first publication of this notice or said claims will forever be barred. Claims must be filed with the court (Case No. 1WR-24-00005PR) or be presented to:
 Alisa Bowman, Personal Representative
 c/o McQuillan & Hohman Law, LLC
 821 N Street, Suite 101
 Anchorage, AK 99501

Publish March 27, April 3 and 10, 2024

**CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL
 ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE POSITIONS
 OF TEMPORARY WORKERS
 HARBOR DEPARTMENT**

The City and Borough of Wrangell will accept applications from which to hire Temporary Laborers for the Harbor Department. Employees will be selected from applications in the pool at the time employees are needed throughout the year. There are multiple immediate openings. You must have a valid Alaska Driver's License, or a valid out-of-state Driver's License with the ability to obtain an Alaska License within six months.

This position will require someone with experience in carpentry and the ability to work independently in a marine environment. Work may include but will not be limited to replacement of bull rails, fascia boards, decking, plumbing, pile hoops and concrete patching. Duties will also include painting, pressure washing, cutting brush and grass, and working in the boat yard and office. Boatyard duties will include carrying blocking, boat stands and various types of cleanup. Must be able to lift and carry 50 pounds. Successful applicants must be able to work in all weather conditions and weekends.

Applications and job descriptions may be obtained and returned to Wrangell City Hall, 205 Brueger St. (P.O. Box 531), Wrangell, AK 99929, or via email to rmarshall@wrangell.com. Pay for this position starts at \$18 per hour DOE.

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

Mason Villarma
 Interim Borough Manager

Publish March 20 and 27, 2024

**CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL
 NOTICE INVITING BIDS
 CITY PARK PAVILION REPLACEMENT,
 DESIGN-BUILD**

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, will receive sealed bids for the **CITY PARK PAVILION REPLACEMENT, DESIGN-BUILD** project. Work consists of all activities necessary to design and construct the City Park Pavilion Replacement Project reflected in the contract documents. The work generally includes mobilization, concrete foundation, timber-frame construction, roofing, fireplace and other improvements. The Owner's Estimate for all work is approximately \$115,000 to \$125,000.

Sealed bids will be received by the City and Borough of Wrangell, Post Office Box 531, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, or located at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, until 2 p.m. prevailing time on April 12, 2024, and publicly opened and read at that time.

The Contract Documents are available in electronic format and can be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell website (www.wrangell.com) under the Bids and RFP's section. Downloading Contract Documents from the City and Borough of Wrangell's website requires registration with the Borough Clerk to be placed on the Plan Holders List and to ensure receipt of subsequent Addenda. Failure to register may adversely affect your proposal. It is the Offeror's responsibility to ensure that they have received all Addenda affecting this Solicitation. To be registered, contact the Borough Clerk at 907-874-2381 or at clerk@wrangell.com

The owner reserves the right to reject any or all Bids, to waive any informality in a Bid, or to make award as it best serves the interests of the owner.
 Mason Villarma, Interim Borough Manager
 City and Borough of Wrangell

Publish March 27, April 3 and 10, 2024

New federal opinion could put more Native land under tribal jurisdiction

BY JAMES BROOKS
 Alaska Beacon

A new legal opinion by the top attorney at the U.S. Department of the Interior has extended the land jurisdiction of Alaska tribes, upending decades of precedent and offering new opportunities for the state's 228 federally recognized tribal governments.

The opinion, issued Feb. 1 by Interior Department Solicitor Robert Anderson, says tribal authority applies on land allotments given to individual Alaska Natives, unless those parcels of land are owned by a non-tribal member or are "geographically removed from the tribal community."

"That is a very big change," said Joel Jackson, president of the Native Village of Kake. "We're always looking for land back," he said. "That's important to us. We're going to do that."

The legal opinion — which reverses decades of prior interpretation — doesn't change who owns the land, but it does change the laws that apply to the land. Tribal law, not just state, local or federal law, will now apply.

Since the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Alaska's tribal governments have had authority over minimal territory because that law assigned most Native land to regional and village corporations — which are legally distinct and not governments.

Almost 17,500 land allotments since 1906 have been awarded or

are in the process of being awarded to individual Alaska Natives, according to figures published by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Each parcel can be as big as 160 acres.

That means the opinion has the potential to change the legal framework around thousands of acres in Alaska.

"All in all, it will be a positive step forward for the state of Alaska," said Rhonda Pitka, first chief of the Native Village of Beaver, on the Yukon River in Interior Alaska. "Having Native lands in Native jurisdiction makes a lot of sense for everybody, I think."

Attorneys for the state of Alaska disagree.

In a court filing last month, they expressed alarm, calling the new opinion a "sea change" for the state.

In response to emailed questions, the Alaska Department of Law provided a written statement: "In two strokes of its solicitor's pen, Interior has changed how Alaska has operated for more than 50 years. The state has gone from minimal amounts of tribal territorial jurisdiction to millions of acres."

The change has implications for things as varied as game management, local zoning and police coverage.

In the past 10 years, the Native Village of Eklutna and the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska each sought to open federally regu-

lated gaming halls on Native allotments in their traditional territory.

A federal judge and the National Indian Gaming Commission, respectively, rejected the plans, concluding that the allotments were not under tribal jurisdiction.

"The tribe is reviewing the solicitor's opinion with interest and considering what it might mean for us," said Brenda Hewitt, tribal administrator for the Native Village of Eklutna, north of Anchorage.

Legal experts expressed mixed opinions about the state's analysis.

"My short answer is that I don't think it will ... affect folks much day to day," said Erin Dougherty Lynch, senior staff attorney for the Native American Rights Fund, by email. "And if the state is worried about confusion, it could proactively work with tribes to address any issues, as other states have done for years," she said.

Dougherty Lynch said that it's too early to tell how much new tribal jurisdiction will be created by the new legal opinion, which requires the allotment to be owned by a tribal member and be geographically close to the relevant tribe.

"So given those requirements there are some allotments (who knows how many) that would not meet that criteria," she said by email.

In Southeast Alaska, Jackson and the Kake Tribe have a long-running culture camp on one Native allotment, and the tribe has been seeking to acquire the land around the camp in order to protect it. The order could offer additional protection for the land, he said.

The Alaska Beacon is an independent, donor-funded news organization. Alaskabeacon.com.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of Alice Gloria Bakke, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that Helen Keller has been appointed personal representative of the above-named estate. Pursuant to Alaska Statute Title 13.16.450, all creditors are hereby notified to present their claims within four months after the date of first publication of this notice or said claims will forever be barred. Claims must be filed with the court (Case No. 1WR-23-00014PR) or be presented to:

Helen Keller
 PO Box 133
 Wrangell, AK 99929

Publish March 13, 20 and 27, 2024

**CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL
 PUBLIC NOTICE
 to Purchase Borough-Owned Property**

Notice is hereby given that an application has been received to purchase Borough-owned property.

The Wrangell Planning and Zoning Commission has reviewed this request and voted to approve the request to move forward with the sale of the six lots.

Any person wishing to protest this request to purchase the proposed Borough-owned property described as:

Lots 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9 of Subdivision Plat Block 54, according to Plat No. 68-81 (behind old Wrangell Medical Center), Zoned Open Space and requested by Wayne Johnson.

... must file a written protest with the Borough Clerk, no later than April 4, 2024, at 4 p.m.

Written protests may be emailed to clerk@wrangell.com or delivered to 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, AK 99929. Any such protest shall state the reason(s) for the protest in detail.

A Public Hearing will be held on April 9, 2024, during the Regular Assembly meeting that will begin at 7 p.m. in the City Hall Assembly Chambers. If you wish to comment on this request to purchase Borough-owned property, please arrive before 7 p.m. and sign up under Persons to Be Heard.

Kim Lane, MMC, Borough Clerk
 City and Borough of Wrangell

Publish March 20 and 27, and April 3, 2024



The Southeast Alaska Power Agency (SEAPA) will accept sealed bids on the following surplus item: one (1) two-wheel drive 1984 Case Backhoe. Hours are unknown and there is no minimum bid. The backhoe may be viewed at the Southeast Alaska Power Agency, 55 Don Finney Lane, Ketchikan, Alaska.

A bid form, photographs, and additional information may be downloaded from SEAPA's website at:

<https://www.seapahydro.org/opportunities/bids-projects> or you may submit a request by email to:
 ContAdmin@seapahydro.org.

Bids are due April 5, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. AKDT. All sales will be on an "as-is" "where-is" basis, with no warranties of any kind, express or implied, attached to the property.

Publish March 27, 2024

Police report

Monday, March 18
Complaint about dog.
Indecent photography.

Tuesday, March 19
Found property.
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Found property.

Wednesday, March 20
Agency assist: Public Works.
Found property: Cell phone.
Traffic stop.
Papers served: Order to show cause.

Thursday, March 21
Agency assist: State probation.
Traffic stop.
Pretrial check.

Friday, March 22
Disturbance.

Saturday, March 23
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for driving habits.
Agency assist: Search and Rescue.
Abandoned vehicle.

Traffic stop: Verbal warning for improper display of vehicle registration tags.

Sunday, March 24
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Complaint about a dog.
Citizen report: Possible driving under the influence.
Found property.

More out-of-state work experience could count toward teacher salaries

BY CLAIRE STREMPLE
Alaska Beacon

When Carol Mooers came to Alaska to teach, she was not compensated for all of her previous teaching experience in Maine and Texas. That is because Alaska law allows only six to eight years of out-of-state teaching experience to be counted when school districts calculate salaries.

She is still a school counselor in the Bering Strait region but said Alaska would be more attractive to teachers like her younger self if that limit did not exist.

Mooers testified in support of a new proposal that would allow teachers interested in Alaska careers to be compensated for their previous experience at the discretion of the school district.

"If Alaska wants to bring quality, experienced out-of-state educators, then we must pay teachers according to their

actual experience," she said.

Sitka Rep. Rebecca Him-schoot, a former teacher, proposed House Bill 230, which would eliminate the cap on experience-based compensation from state law. She said the cap is a potential barrier to attracting talent to the state. For example, an experienced teacher with a master's degree can only be compensated for up to eight years of previous teaching experience — even if the district is willing to pay more.

"So you bring that experience in, and you take an immediate potential pay cut by only having eight of the years available to be recognized because of state statute," she said. "I'm trying to get the state out of the way of the districts."

Emily Vanderpool, a veteran teacher and current school administrator in Aniak, said she supports the change because recruitment and retention is a huge challenge in her district

in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

"Teacher recruitment and retention has never held a greater challenge than it does today. Currently, we have 20% of our certified positions unfilled still at this point in the school year. And we have one school that has no teachers in person at all," she said.

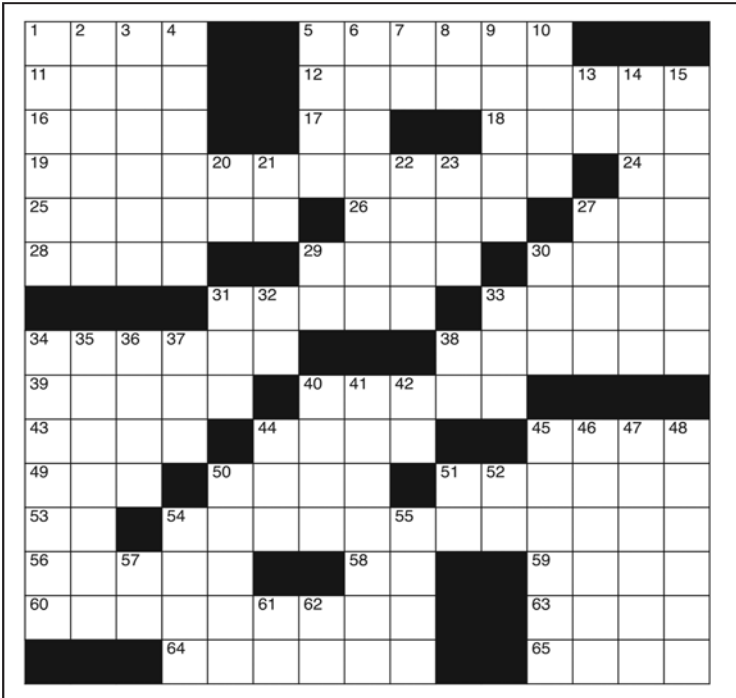
She said the district has not been able to hire any teachers for the coming school year, and is short on special education staff, principals, and district level directors too.

Alaska's university system does not produce enough teachers to fill the job openings each year, so the state must compete with the Lower 48. Some districts have hired international teachers to staff their classrooms.

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Crossword

Answers on page 12



CLUES ACROSS

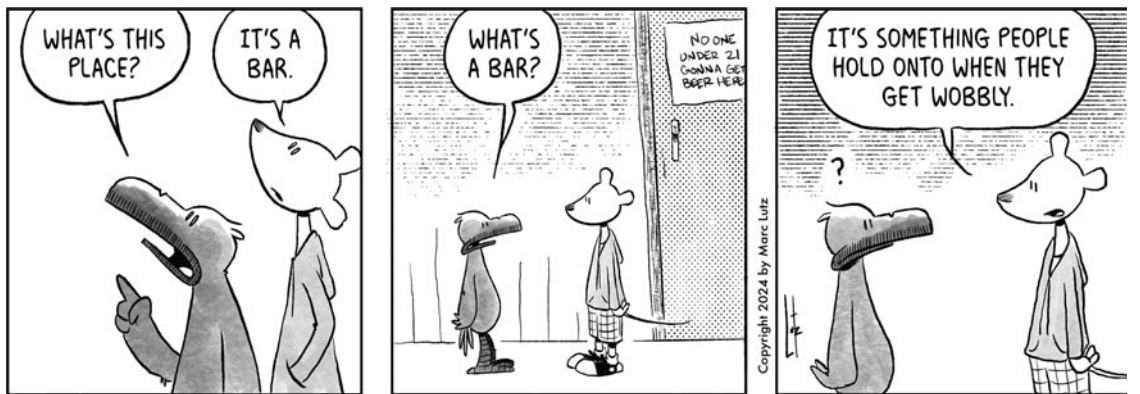
- 1. Database management system
- 5. Medical procedures
- 11. ___ Clapton, musician
- 12. Defender
- 16. Exert oneself
- 17. Indicates position
- 18. Quay
- 19. Atrocities
- 24. A way to address an adult man
- 25. Ends
- 26. Unable
- 27. Taxi
- 28. Gratuities
- 29. A famous train station
- 30. Japanese persimmon
- 31. Sours
- 33. Beneficiary
- 34. Baseball official
- 38. Confused situation
- 39. Unworldly
- 40. Yemen capital
- 43. Type of soil
- 44. Beloved beverage ___-Cola
- 45. Lying down
- 49. ___ Angeles
- 50. Fail to amuse
- 51. Collapsible shelter
- 53. Commercial
- 54. Taste property
- 56. Lordship's jurisdictions
- 58. It cools your home
- 59. Dismounted
- 60. Charge in a court of law
- 63. One less than one
- 64. Spoke
- 65. Famed garden

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Show a picture of
- 2. Small sultanate
- 3. Unfortunate incident
- 4. A way to ski
- 5. Abba ___, Israeli politician
- 6. Observed
- 7. ÒWestworldÓ actor Harris
- 8. Belonging to me
- 9. Shoelace tube
- 10. Takes to civil court
- 13. Early multimedia
- 14. Produces anew
- 15. Horse races
- 20. Of I
- 21. Equally
- 22. Changes color
- 23. A place to stay
- 27. Town in Galilee
- 29. Mathematical figure
- 30. Klingon character
- 31. They ___
- 32. Atomic #58
- 33. Showed up extinct
- 34. Loosen grip
- 35. Unpleasant smell
- 36. Innermost membranes enveloping the brain
- 37. Esteemed college ÓleagueÓ
- 38. Partner to Pa
- 40. Small American rail
- 41. A salt or ester of acetic acid
- 42. Sodium
- 44. Military figure (abbr.)
- 45. Lighted
- 46. Paid to get out of jail
- 47. All of something
- 48. Ohio city
- 50. More abject
- 51. A radio band
- 52. Scientific development (abbr.)
- 54. Monetary unit
- 55. Scored perfectly
- 57. A punch to end a fight
- 61. The Golden State (abbr.)
- 62. The Beehive State (abbr.)

Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter

