

# School district down to four candidates for superintendent

By CALEB VIERKANT  
*Sentinel writer*

The Wrangell School Board has narrowed down the list to four superintendent applicants to succeed Debbie Lancaster, who plans to leave the job June 30. Three of the four candidates work in Alaska, and one is from California.

The board met in executive session Saturday to review applications, and announced in a Sunday press release the four finalists who will be interviewed: Joseph Aldridge, of California; Tim Bauer, of Juneau; Bill Burr, of Delta Junction; and Ralph Watkins, of Hoonah.

A virtual meet-and-greet with the candidates is planned for 6:30 p.m. tonight.

Aldridge has 20 years of experience as a teacher, principal and superintendent according to the Wrangell School District. He currently works as superintendent of the Columbia Union School District in California. He holds a bachelor's degree in special education, a master's degree in educational leadership, and a California administrative services credential.

Bauer has 10 years of experience as a teacher, special education director, principal and superintendent. He works as the human resources director of the Juneau School District. He holds Alaska teaching certificates in secondary English and special education, a master's degree in educational leadership, and an Alaska superintendent endorsement.

Burr has 20 years of experience as a school administrator across Alaska, 18 years at a district level. He works as assistant superintendent at the Delta/Greely School District. He holds a bachelor's degree in social science, a master's degree in educational leadership, and is pursuing an Alaska superintendent endorsement.

Watkins has 12 years of experience in education, the past seven as a school administrator. He works as the superintendent of Hoonah City Schools. He holds an Alaska teaching certificate in elementary education and an Alaska superintendent endorsement.

The board will interview the finalists March 5 — via teleconference, due to COVID-19 precautions.

The new superintendent is expected to start July 1 to replace Lancaster, who has served as district superintendent since 2018. Lancaster in October offered her resignation, effective at the end of her contract June 30.

The public can attend tonight's meet-and-greet with the four finalists via Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84889558530?pwd=U3doe-jlVK1VITFBsR3RaTktBTng0QT09;meetingID84889558530>, passcode: 633978.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KIARA HARRISON

Brody Gardner (left) and Mia Wiederspohn on Tuesday tend to the plants that BASE students set up in the high school hallways to help improve the looks of the school and the mood of students and staff.

## New group wants to improve school and students' lives

By LARRY PERSILY  
*Sentinel writer*

A self-organized group of Wrangell high school and middle school students decided someone had to step up and try to make life better in the schools, and it might as well be them.

"We want students to be motivated and feel supported," said senior Jade Balansag, one of about 10 high school students in BASE — Building a Supportive Environment. "We really want to reach out to the community for support for the schools."

The year-old group's mission is to improve the schools aesthetically, socially and academically, Balansag said.

It's all connected, said senior Jacob Dow, who has spent his entire school life in Wrangell. "Student mental health was suffering even before the pandemic," he said. "I noticed that no one was doing anything."

The students got together and started looking for what they could do to help. Hanging artwork in the halls and putting plants around the school building are visible signs of their effort.

Dow said he had done research into mental health and learned that surroundings can make a big difference.

Balansag described the empty hallways as "boring

corridors of nothingness."

In addition to art prints and masks for the walls, the group is working to get carved Alaska Native wooden paddles for the walls, Dow said.

BASE got its start last year after school staff decided that a peer help group could assist teens in crisis, said Bob Davis, assistant principal. The session did not go all that well with students, he said. "They came into a staff meeting and told us what we could do better as teachers."

Although the training was good, students "didn't know what to do with it," Balansag said. Several students started talking about what they could do to help other students, in particular to show them that people care, she said.

"They were right," Davis said of the message from students at the teachers staff meeting. "I've been a teacher for 33 years, and that's one of the most amazing things that I've seen."

The students told their teachers that while they appreciated their efforts, many of the students have had the same teachers over and over through the years and their methods don't change.

"A lot of teachers were defensive," Davis said. "I'll admit, I got my back up a bit."

Continued on page 3

# Assembly prepares for return to limited in-person meetings

By CALEB VIERKANT  
*Sentinel writer*

The Borough Assembly will hold in-person meetings in the near future, with limits on people in the room to account for the COVID-19 pandemic.

During their meeting Tuesday night, the assembly adopted a resolution repealing and replacing a temporary amendment to municipal code that allows city business to be conducted through virtual meetings. The item was adopted unanimously.

Under the new provisions, six members of the public or city staff at a time, in addition to assembly members, will be allowed in city hall during assembly meetings, which will continue to be streamed via Zoom for unlimited attendance or viewing.

Those who need or want to attend in person will be socially distanced in the lobby outside the assembly chambers. A podium will be set up near the entrance to assembly chambers where the people can speak,

after which the podium will be cleaned before the next speaker.

Face masks or face shields will be required at all times in city hall.

The change to in-person meetings will take effect after the borough clerk publishes a public notice of the assembly action.

The assembly last March adopted a resolution temporarily suspending in-person meetings as concerns over the pandemic grew. The resolution was extended in October, and

then again in January. The city administration now believes the assembly can convene for in-person meetings, though not fully open to unlimited public attendance.

The original plan was to set up equipment for assembly meetings in the Nolan Center, where there would be adequate room for social distancing. However, city staff discovered the audio equipment echoed in the large room and dropped the plan. Staff then tried using a smaller classroom in the Nolan

Center, but found it too small.

It was decided to hold the meetings in city hall, with limitations described in the resolution.

The solution will put the borough assembly and manager on the main floor, with members six feet apart, at individual tables, according to the staff proposal given to the assembly. The Zoom feed will be projected on the screen in the chambers so that members can see and hear anyone participating remotely.

Continued on page 2



# Students

Continued from page 1

BASE is not about picking on teachers. It's about building up students and improving their school life.

"Because of COVID, we're not able to interact with each other normally," sophomore Kiara Harrison said. It's easy for students to feel disconnected when they can't see everyone's faces.

Balansag believes the mental health of students was not a top priority "even before COVID, as it should have been." The challenges include problems at home, pressures of school work and students who are rude to each other, Dow said.

"It really isn't anyone's fault, but we (the schools) don't have the resources," Balansag said, noting that the schools have just one counselor. "As students, we can start to change that," she said, in particular by trying to build more community support.

Students appreciate the art and plants, which "really brighten up the halls," Harrison said. BASE also sells breakfasts at the

high school and middle school. "A lot of people really enjoy the breakfast cart," Harrison said.

The schools do not have a breakfast program. BASE saw the cart "as just another way to support our peers," Balansag said.

Going forward, it will be important for BASE to get more younger students involved, Harrison said. In addition to the 10 high schoolers, there are about eight middle school students in the group.

The group handed out welcome-back gift bags at the start of the school year. They provide teachers with coupons to the breakfast cart, so that they can hand them out for student achievements or acts of kindness, Davis said.

The group also gives out breakfast cart punch cards for students who could not otherwise afford to buy the food, school counselor Addy Esco said.

The new group is doing a lot to help, Esco said, though she reminds them it takes time to change the culture in school.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KIARA HARRISON

BASE students Ashlee Olson (left) and Jade Balansag wait for hungry high schoolers at the group's breakfast snack bar Tuesday.

## Legislature will consider boost to 1970 motor fuel tax rate

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

Alaska's motor fuel tax rate is the lowest in the nation; less than one-third the average of the other 49 states. The 8-cent-a-gallon tax has not budged since 1970.

Lawmakers again this year will consider increasing the tax rate and, in a separate provision of the bill, helping to maintain the dwindling state account for spill prevention and response.

The state Senate approved a motor fuel tax increase last year, boosting the rate to 16 cents a gallon, still far below the national average, but the House failed to take up the measure as legislators rushed to adjourn last March amid the growing pandemic.

The measure cleared the Senate by a wide 12-5 margin before

it ran out of time in the House.

"We should have voted on it March 28 before we hurried out of town," said Anchorage Rep. Andy Josephson, sponsor of this year's legislation to go to 16 cents a gallon.

The national average of the 50 states is 25.68 cents a gallon, according to a Jan. 1 report from the American Petroleum Institute. When other fees and sales taxes are added in, the national average is close to 37 cents a gallon.

The federal motor fuel tax is 18.4 cents a gallon on gasoline and 24.4 cents a gallon on diesel.

The bill, if approved, would raise more than \$30 million a year for the state general fund that could be used for highway maintenance, and more than \$3 million a year for the Spill Pre-

vention and Response Division at the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Part of Alaska's problem is that motor fuel tax revenue is declining due to a long-term trend of better fuel mileage, allowing drivers to travel just as far on less gasoline or diesel, and due to the pandemic's hit to economic activity.

The spill response and prevention account is "woefully underfunded," Josephson said. The Department of Environmental Conservation commissioner acknowledged last fall that the account needs more money to do its job, which includes cleanup at spill sites across the state.

The prevention account "is heading toward a revenue shortfall" in a few years, the department said in its budget

submission to the Legislature this winter.

The account is funded by a four-cent surcharge on each barrel of oil produced in Alaska — which is a declining number — and from a 0.95-cent surcharge on each gallon of refined fuel. This year's legislation, same as the version that died in the House last year, would raise that surcharge on refined fuel by about half a penny per gallon.

In addition to crude oil spills, the account has been used for other cleanups around Alaska. The Legislature in 2018 appropriated \$5 million from the response account to complete the cleanup of the former Byford junk yard about 4 miles south of Wrangell. That was in addition to a previous \$6 million appropriation from the account for the same Wrangell cleanup.

Continued on page 12

## City rejects mayoral recall application

By CALEB VIERKANT  
Sentinel writer

The city has rejected an application to begin the recall process against Mayor Steve Prysunka. Borough Clerk Kim Lane, in a Feb. 17 letter, said the petitioners' list of grievances against the mayor does not rise to the legal threshold required for a recall.

Recall organizers have 30 days from the date of the letter to appeal the decision to state Superior Court.

The petition, signed by 10 members of the community, alleged that Prysunka broke state and municipal laws several months ago, when an emergency assembly meeting was called on short notice to implement a local mask mandate.

Lane wrote that the grounds for recall in state and municipal statute are misconduct in office, incompetence, or failure to perform prescribed duties. The allegations in the recall application do not "rise to the level of 'misconduct or incompetence,'" she said. "Moreover, the allegations contained in the application do not include any statements that Mayor Prysunka has demonstrated lack of ability, legal qualifications, or fitness to discharge his required duties."

Citing an Alaska attorney general 1981 opinion on the Open Meetings Act, Lane wrote that special emergency meetings can be called with 24-hour notice or less in situations which call for "immediate action to protect the public peace, health, or safety." The meeting called to adopt a mask mandate was in response to Gov. Mike Dunleavy's Nov. 11 video speech urging action by Alaskans to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Furthermore, the clerk wrote, Borough Manager Lisa Von Barga called the special emergency meeting, not the mayor.

As for a "failure to perform prescribed duties," Lane wrote that the allegations in the recall application seemed to show only disagreement with actions taken by Prysunka rather than a particular misconduct, failure to follow his duties or incompetent actions.

"The allegations of a petition are inadequate when they indicate only disagreement on matters of policy or political criticism," Lane wrote. "Together, the allegations of the application appear as instances to which the petitioners object to Mayor Prysunka's political positions which are apparently contrary to those of certain voters."

Recall spokesman Don McConachie said Monday that there are a substantial number of residents who support the recall. "I know this by the amount of people that approach me to ask when they can sign."

He added in a prepared statement, "Myself and the others that signed the petition feel very strongly that what has been started was correct and could be accomplished. ... I have not had a chance over the weekend to talk with everyone, but will get it completed this week and make a collective decision as to the way to proceed."

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# EDITORIAL

## Don't we have bigger problems

A state Senate committee is scheduled this week to hear a 13-page bill to rewrite (tighten) parts of Alaska's election code dealing with voter registration, absentee voting, mail-in ballots, and requiring a toll-free hotline number stuck on every voting machine in the state so that people can call in their suspicions.

A kindly interpretation of the legislative motive behind the bill would be that it is necessary to reassure Alaskans that every election for every office, from local to state, is totally free of fraudulent voting and ballot-box stuffing.

A more cynical interpretation is that the bill is part of a nationwide effort by conservative groups to boost the odds their candidates will not lose future elections, just as President Donald Trump lost his reelection bid in November and just as the two Republican U.S. Senate incumbents in Georgia lost their seats to Democratic challengers in a run-off election in January.

Republican lawmakers in at least 28 states have introduced more than 100 bills to tighten voting rules, including new voter registration requirements and scaling back voting by mail, according to a recent report from the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law.

Sure looks like a coordinated effort: If you can't win with the voters, try to make it harder for those voters to defeat your candidates.

The Alaska bill sponsor, Sen. Mike Shower, a Wasilla Republican, submitted reports and one-sided fact sheets from two national conservative organizations into the record in support of his measure, Senate Bill 39, which is scheduled for a hearing in the State Affairs Committee on Thursday.

Really, hotline stickers on every voting machine? Reversing the law approved by two-thirds of Alaskans in 2016 that automatically registers to vote all Permanent Fund dividend applicants? Limiting municipalities in their ability to encourage voting by mail? And a provision that could delay election certifications?

The senator said he does not support everything in his own bill, but he wanted to start the discussion.

At a time when the state has real and immediate problems, such as no fiscal plan to pay bills next year and a pandemic that is ruining the tourism economy, couldn't lawmakers find more pressing issues to consume their limited time while in session?

This bill deserves only a very brief discussion in committee before it is set aside.

— *The Wrangell Sentinel*

# FROM THE PUBLISHER

## These students set a better example than I did

By LARRY PERSILY  
*Publisher*

The 18 or so Wrangell middle school and high school students who belong to BASE — Building a Supportive Environment — are the role models I never paid attention to when I was their age long ago (1960s).

They got together on their own because they saw their classmates dealing with stress, pressures, mental health issues, and even drab hallways, which senior Jade Balansag described as "boring corridors of nothingness."

Senior Jacob Dow did his research and learned that surroundings can make a big difference in mental health.

BASE set to work adding artwork and plants to the hallways, setting up a morning snack bar

for high schoolers and middle schoolers who maybe don't start a food-healthy day at home. They talked with their teachers, suggesting how they could do a better job.

These are not shy teenagers.

Good for them. They want to see their community support the schools. They want to see their classmates do better. And they could see that it was up to them to do something about it.

When I was in high school in Chicago in the mid-1960s, I was the class goofball. I stood on a window ledge outside a classroom one day so that I could disrupt class when I came inside. My friends and I would play board games in the back of advanced placement English, just to see if we could get away with it.

I once got knocked down by a gym teacher for mouthing off, back when teachers could smack a kid in the chest and smile about it.

And I would torment substitute teachers, until one of my more rambunctious days as I was walking out of class and the substitute said to me: "Larry, say hello to your mother for me." Turns out the sub knew my mom. Not a good day for me at home that night.

Other than confessing to my past sins, my point is that the students behind BASE are a positive influence and deserve the community's praise and support for working toward a better school. After talking with them this week, I have hope. They see a problem and want to fix it. I am impressed.

# OPINION

## Republicans must act as a party of principles

By FRANK MURKOWSKI

The Republican Party must soon make some major policy decisions or it will become a split party with two factions — one a single-person party cult and the other a Republican Party based on principles such as small government, free markets, low taxes and individual freedom.

I have been around the political system for a long while, and at the end of the day it's a numbers game. You either have the votes or you don't. If you have control, you can set the agenda and usually prevail. If you splinter your

party, the other side sets the agenda and prevails.

I have always been a Republican. I voted twice for Donald Trump and supported him financially. But this year he lost the election by 7 million votes. Although, without question, there must be uniformity and positive identification in the voting process, nonetheless Congress and the Supreme Court acknowledged the result of the election and certificated the presidency of Joe Biden

Continued on page 5

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Schools ready to help students in need

Due to COVID-19, the level of depression and anxiety our teens are experiencing has skyrocketed. Hospitals across the country — including Juneau — are seeing huge increases in youth attempting suicide and other types of self-destructive behavior. Social services are being overwhelmed.

For instance, the state Office of Children's Services supervisor for all of Southeast Alaska recently told me that the number of child-welfare referrals they are receiving has gone through the roof, along with their levels of severity. They can't keep up.

Communities need to rally around their youth. We can no longer rely on outside agencies to protect our children. We need to do it.

In that spirit, I want to let all parents and guardians know that the school is willing to help. While our resources are limited as well, we will put our students first.

So please, if you are worried about your child in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us. We may not have the answers, but perhaps by working together we can make a difference.

Feel free to contact either one of us at the school at

874-3395, or at the emails below.

Bob Davis, assistant principal  
[bdavis@wpsd.us](mailto:bdavis@wpsd.us)

Addy Esco, school counselor  
[aesco@wpsd.us](mailto:aesco@wpsd.us)

## Ortiz reaffirms legislative priorities

Earlier this month, the Alaska State House of Representatives organized and established their committee memberships. I will a member of the House majority coalition. My primary committee assignment will be to serve as vice chairman of the House Finance Committee. A part of that role is to chair several budgetary subcommittees, yet to be determined. I will also serve on the Fisheries Committee and the Tribal Affairs Committee.

I am blessed with my committee membership and how it will position me to advocate most effectively for Southeast. My priorities remain the same: Protecting the Alaska Marine Highway System, supporting our industries (such as fishing and tourism), maintaining resources for education, and taking care of our elderly population.

As the legislative session gets underway, I need to

continue hearing from you. I encourage folks to take the Commonwealth North survey, which asks you to balance the budget. Please leave your ZIP code, because I will be receiving all the responses from District 36 (which includes Wrangell). You can find the survey at: [www.AKBudget.com](http://www.AKBudget.com).

Feel free to contact me any time at [Rep.Dan.Ortiz@AKLeg.gov](mailto:Rep.Dan.Ortiz@AKLeg.gov) or calling my office at 907-465-3824.

*Rep. Dan Ortiz*

## Churchill family says thank you

We would like to thank all the people who helped during the loss of our mom, Janice Churchill:

Don and Betsy McConachie, for the lovely service; Alice Rooney, for the beautiful music; the Swensons, for plowing; the Petticrews, for shoveling and salting; to everyone who was able to attend; to the ones who brought food to share.

To everyone who sent thoughts, prayers and condolences. And to the EMTs, Wrangell Medical Center staff, medivac team and Providence Hospital staff. Thank you.

*the Churchill family*

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# OPINION

Continued from page 4

I served with then-Sen. Biden for more than 20 years. Nancy and I know he and his wife, Jill, and our families have skied together. They are very decent Americans who have lived through tragic experiences with their children.

During the presidential campaign, Biden espoused numerous causes with liberals, most of which conflicted with many of the GOP ideals, including mine.

But the bottom line is that Trump himself lost his own election due, to a large extent, to his own ego. Time and time again he saw fit to aggressively take issue and attack individuals when it was unnecessary.

Case in point was his loss in Arizona — a Republican state that he should have won easily. But his constant attack on the late Sen. John McCain, a great American patriot and hero to Arizonians, was self-defeating. Because Trump spoke against McCain, his widow, Cindy McCain, actively campaigned against him. Arizona followed her lead and Trump lost Arizona.

Many Republicans had hoped that the Trump family

could temper his tweets and responses, but unfortunately that did not happen.

Alaskans can thank Trump for moving many of our projects along, including leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, leases in more of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, approval of the Amblor Road to mining claims, exempting the Tongass National Forest from the national roadless rule, and support for the Izembek land exchange to allow a road to King Cove.

I personally had the opportunity to provide background and counsel with some of the Interior Department personnel who were working tirelessly to get approval so that these vital projects could be passed into law before the change of administrations. Unfortunately, Biden may rescind many of Trump's executive orders because of pressure from environmental groups.

If we lose control of our GOP and end up with two factions in the party, we will divide our power and lose again to the Democrats in 2022 and say goodbye to all the projects we need to bring back Alaska's economy.

I encourage all our Alaska friends to stay focused on the belief that we have one big Republican tent to accommodate contrasting views with room for all. We must act collectively as a party of people and principles in support of the fundamentals and guidelines of our nation's founders. We are not a party of one person.

*Frank Murkowski served as governor of Alaska 2002-2006, and as U.S. senator for Alaska 1981-2002.*

# Fourth of July needs royalty candidates

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

The Fourth of July is a little more than four months away but it's not too soon to begin planning for the event and start recruiting royalty candidates to help with fundraising.

"We're planning a normal Fourth, and will adjust as needed," said Stephanie Cook, executive director of the Wrangell Chamber of Commerce, which has organized the community celebration for decades.

"We're working out details now" for pandemic-related adjustments to the celebration, she said, such as hand-washing stations and safe distancing at events.

In another accommodation to the pandemic, royalty candidates will not be required to operate food booths this year, she said — it will be optional. One potential royalty candidate already has expressed interest in running a food booth, Cook said.

"We'd like to have food booths," she said. The food sales have been a downtown tradition to help raise money for the Fourth throughout the

month of June, along with raffle ticket sales.

In past years, the food booths helped boost ticket sales, with the proceeds going toward paying for the raffle prizes, fireworks and other Fourth of July expenses, as well as to pay the royalty candidates.

Though the pandemic forced cancellation of many Fourth of July festivities last year, the fireworks went on, as did the parade, though the parade route was strung out through town to avoid people crowding together.

The fireworks were canceled in 2019 due to drought conditions and fire risk.

Back in 2019, raffle ticket sales totaled about \$58,000, Cook said, with about 30% going to the royalty candidates.

"I am hopeful there will be a lot of people in the community who have gotten their vaccinations" in time for a return to a close-to-normal Fourth this year, she said.

Anyone interested in more information about signing up as a royalty candidate, or to help with planning for the Fourth, can call the chamber at 874-3901 or email stephanie@wrangell.chamber.com.

# Petersburg goes to high-risk COVID status

By BRIAN VARELA  
Petersburg Pilot

With a growing number of COVID-19 cases in the community — 36 between Thursday and Wednesday morning — Petersburg officials have elevated the community risk level to red.

The number of active cases are the most in Petersburg since the pandemic started a year ago.

"The cumulative total of cases is growing larger by the day," the Petersburg emergency operation center said in a statement at 4 p.m. Tuesday. "Many of these cases are still under investigation and contact tracing is difficult." The cases are "predominantly

community spread," the statement said.

"Community spread of the virus must be stopped by individual accountability and protective actions within the community," said Tuesday's joint statement by the borough and Petersburg Medical Center.

The Petersburg School District announced Monday it would go to online learning only for Tuesday and Wednesday, with a decision pending for the rest of the week.

Recent numbers were much lower in Wrangell, where two new cases of COVID-19 were confirmed Feb. 17. According to the city, the cases are Wrangell residents who recently traveled together out of state. Both came up positive in travel-related testing, according to the city, and have been in quarantine since arriving in town.

The two are the only active COVID-19 cases in Wrangell, the city reported.

Under Petersburg's red, or high, community risk level, the borough asks that people strictly follow the local face-masking mandate, as well as maintain social distancing and frequent hand washing.

Petersburg's emergency operation center recommended all businesses and municipal buildings close to walk-in traffic while the community is at a high-risk

level of COVID-19 transmission. The recommendations are not mandates, and will be in effect for at least seven days.

Among those who tested positive for the coronavirus were two Petersburg Medical Center employees and a staff member at Rae C. Stedman Elementary School.

Over the weekend, the elementary school notified students and staff who had come into close contact with the infected staff member, Principal Heather Conn wrote in an email to families.

Two positive cases of COVID-19 were identified last Friday within the same Petersburg household, according to the joint press release. One of the household members had traveled within the past two weeks and the infection is thought to be travel related.

Three more residents tested positive for the virus on Saturday; four on Sunday; 10 on Monday; and seven as of 3 p.m. Tuesday.

All residents who tested positive are in isolation.

"The important point of getting these counts out to the community is to inform citizens of the growing outbreak and the increased exposure that accompanies a community spread outbreak," the emergency operation center statement said.

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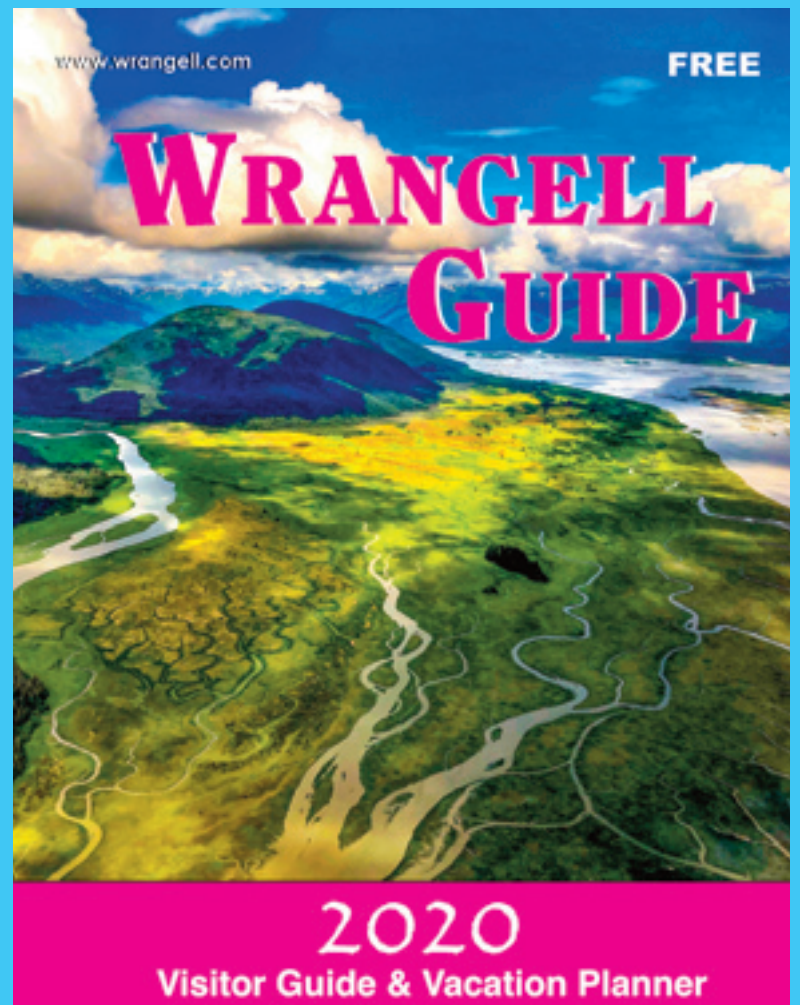
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PHOTO BY CALEB VIERKANT/ WRANGELL SENTINEL

Reagan Smith enjoys her time in the pool at open swim Monday evening. Parks and Rec offers open swim Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Due to COVID-19, the limit is 20 people in the pool at a time, said Lucy Moline-Robinson, with the Parks and Rec Department.

## Water quality back to allowable range

By SENTINEL STAFF

The city reports that levels of haloacetic acids (HAA5) in the community water supply are back down to allowable levels.

HAA5 is a byproduct created when chlorine mixes with organic material during the disinfection process.

The city reported that the level of HAA5 in Wrangell's water was well above the federal standard in late September. Levels have been in steady decline since then, and the test for the month of January showed a level of 42.1 parts per billion, below the federal maximum of 60 ppb.

Even though January's numbers were back in the safe range, the "running average" will be above allowable limits for the near future, the city ex-

plained.

"Wrangell's 'official' HAA5 level is based on an annual running average called the Locational Running Annual Average (LRAA)," the city said in a press release last Friday. "Wrangell takes official samples in February, May, August and November. This January sample result will not be used to determine the LRAA."

A new running average will be issued after the February reading. Until then, the official average for 2020 readings remains above the threshold.

Results for the February test sample will not be available for several more weeks, the city said.

The city has committed to monthly testing for better tracking, at least through June of this year.

## KSTK chili feed, art auction Saturday

By CALEB VIERKANT  
Sentinel writer

Radio station KSTK, instead of its traditional cooking competition, will hold a chili feed at 11 a.m. Saturday at the downtown pavilion. Winners of KSTK's past cook-offs will serve bowls of their winning chili for the fundraising event.

The chili cook-off is a longstanding tradition in Wrangell, said Lucy Moline-Robinson, with the radio station.

It started back in 2000, she said, when the station invited several residents to prepare a pot of chili and compete to see who could make the best. Around 2002, an art auction was added to the competition. It has been an annual event until last year, when COVID-19 forced its cancellation. The most recent winner of the competition was Jeanie Arnold, in 2019.

"We're taking the competition out of it, but yet still getting the chili to the people," Robinson said. "Folks will have a chance to donate and support in other ways."

Nine or ten past winners will participate in the chili feed, Robinson said, adding that the station is still waiting for a few confirmations. She added that there will be door prizes, a silent art auction and KSTK swag.

KSTK is asking that people wear masks while attending the chili feed and socially distance, to keep the event as COVID-safe as possible. The cost is \$10 for chili and cornbread.

Robinson said KSTK will return to the traditional chili competition in the future, as soon as COVID-19 allows.

"I would say as soon as we can get back to it [the cook-off], we will," she said. "That's always a fun piece, the competitive side of things."

## Wrangell basketball teams play at home this weekend

Sentinel Staff

For the second week in a row, poor weather last weekend forced the Wrangell High School boys and girls basketball teams to cancel their travel plans for games in Metlakatla. The contests were to have been the teams' first away games of the season.

Travel should not be an issue for the Wrangell teams when they play at home this week against Haines on Friday and Saturday, assuming the Haines' squads can make it to town.

Tip-off for the boys game is scheduled for 5 p.m. Friday, with the girls game to follow.

The squads will play again

Saturday, with the boys game starting at 5 p.m. Boys senior recognition is set for after the game, with the girls game after that, according to the schedule on the school district website. A senior cheer recognition is planned for halftime of the girls game.

Aside from the normal limitations for spectators, senior basketball players and senior cheerleaders will each be allowed four household members in the stands Saturday, the district said.

The games will be live-streamed on the school district's YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/c/WPSD.usStreaming>.

# Are you struggling to pay your rent or utility bills?

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**[AlaskaHousingRelief.org](https://AlaskaHousingRelief.org)**

**Call or text "relief" to 1-833-440-0420 toll-free**

**Apply by 11:59 p.m. March 5**

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FINANCE CORPORATION



# Sixth graders share technology knowledge

By CALEB VIERKANT  
Sentinel writer

Stikine Middle School students explained to a statewide audience how they are using technology to cope with the pandemic-induced changes in their education.

Members of the sixth grade class spoke at the Alaska Society of Technology in Education virtual conference Feb. 16, talking about ways technology has helped them learn throughout the year.

The organization promotes access to technology information resources for Alaska students.

Laura Davies, teacher for the sixth grade class, said she and her daughter presented at last year's conference, but this year she had the idea to let some of her students do the presenting.

"Madelyn, because she's my daughter, got to travel with me, but I said I wish I could bring my whole class with me," Davies said. "We talked

about that in fifth grade, and because this was virtual, I was able to do this virtually (this year)."

Student Jackson Carney said, "I like the fact that we were able to tell people who had never heard about Flipgrid, or Skype, or the house system, to tell people how to use it in their school," adding, "It was really cool, even though we were younger than everyone else that was watching, almost everyone, to tell them stuff they didn't know."

The students had an hour to give their presentations, which included the Alaska-themed "house system" their school is using to divide up students to keep them safe during the pandemic; collaborative projects with the Wrangell radio station; using Skype to communicate with other classrooms around the world and learn from each other; and using Flipgrid to record videos and collaborate with others for school projects.

"One time, we got to Skype with a Sweden school, which was pretty cool," said student Brody Gardner. "It was pretty fun. We do it once a month-ish."

Student Andrei Siekwitch was in the same presenting group as Gardner. "We presented about Mystery Skype, Flipgrid, and the radio station. We talked about how we used Mystery Skype to connect online with others, and Flipgrid. We talked about the Elizabeth Peratrovich project we did, and also the persuasive

speeches we recorded and played on KSTK."

It was a good learning experience for her students, Davies said. Students picked their own topics, wrote proposals about what they wanted to talk about, and worked in teams to create their presentations. Davies was just the editor and facilitator, she said, explaining this was a mostly student-run assignment.

It was quite popular at the conference too, she said. The class got a lot of positive feedback and heard other teachers

would like to do something similar in the future.

"I want to say thank you to Ms. Davies for getting it all set up for us," Carney said. "It was really cool to be able to do something like that. ... Pretty sure everyone here would definitely present again if they had the chance."

Student Alana Harrison concurred. "I think just overall it was really fun to have that experience. ... I don't think many of us have presented on a big conference like that, so it was just a good experience."

## Bare butt bite blamed on bear

By CERI GODINEZ  
Chilkat Valley News, Haines

Although Shannon Stevens was prepared for the sting of cold when she bared her behind in a Chilkat Lake outhouse Feb. 13, she wasn't expecting the bite of a bear tooth.

"I just sat down and the thing bit me right away. I jumped up, screamed, screamed for my brother," Stevens said.

Her brother, Erik Stevens, who was still inside the yurt at his Chilkat Lake property, 20 miles north of Haines, said he heard his sister shout. "She screamed, 'Something bit me.' I'm thinking, 'Oh, there's probably a mink or some smaller animal in there. Then she screamed again, 'I'm bleeding.'"

He said he grabbed his headlamp and ran to the outhouse, where his sister was bleeding from a single puncture wound on her butt.

"She was still standing there with her pants down. I said, 'What bit you? Where is it?' And she said, 'In the hole.' I shined the headlamp and opened the lid, and right there at the level of the toilet seat was a cinnamon-colored bear face, big enough to fill the hole."

The siblings slammed the seat shut and ran from the outhouse.

The next morning, the outhouse visitor was gone. The pair investigated and found large animal tracks leading from the fire pit, where they had cooked dinner, to the outhouse, which is built on top of a root wad, high enough above the ground for a wolverine or small bear to squeeze through.

Erik Stevens said at first, they assumed it was a wolverine, but after they returned to town and had others look at pictures of the tracks, they were told the tracks looked like bear prints.

"I believe it was a bear as do my colleagues," Alaska Department of Fish and Game wildlife biologist Carl Koch said after looking at photos of the tracks and interviewing both Stevens siblings. He said he's not sure at this point whether the wound resulted from a bite or a swat from the paw.

At first, Koch had a hard time believing the story. He said he's never heard of anything like this occurring.

"I have heard stories of people having scares near outhouses in the spring and summer when bears are normally out, but never in winter and definitely not from underneath while sitting down," Koch said. He said he's not sure why the animal was drawn to the outhouse.

"I would think the odor is cut way down with everything being frozen," he said, adding that he doesn't think the animal was denning in there since Stevens and her companions had used the bathroom earlier in the day without suffering any nips to their rears.

Koch said this is a reminder that running into bears is a year-round possibility in the Chilkat Valley.

"This is the second confirmed bear I've heard of outside of a den during February in the Haines area with rumors of others," Koch said. "Folks should be prepared that some bears are out and about even though the odds of encountering bears is certainly lower in winter than it is in the summer."

Earlier this month, Bart Pieciul was mauled by a bear after he and two other backcountry skiers accidentally disturbed its den above the Glory Hole Road along Chilkoot Lake, about 10 miles from Haines.

Shannon Stevens said the experience hasn't deterred her from using outhouses, but she does plan to practice a "look before you sit" policy on future visits.

She said the wound wasn't too bad, mostly just bruising a week later.

## OBITUARY

### Janice Churchill loved hunting, fishing, and Mexico

Janice Churchill, 77, passed away Jan. 27, 2021, from complications of a stroke. She had lived in Wrangell since her family moved from Tacoma, Washington, when she was 3 years old.

Churchill graduated from Wrangell High School and was active in the community. She worked and volunteered at Benjamin's grocery store, the canneries, Head Start and Johnson O'Malley education programs, the Alaska Native Sisterhood and at St. Philip's Episcopal Church.

"She really liked fishing and hunting. She liked going to Mexico," her family said. "And she enjoyed her church family friends."

Churchill enjoyed her "pet squirrels," which she fed peanuts from her house on the



Janice Churchill

waterfront, where she also watched for her favorite whale, her family said.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Emil Churchill, who passed away January 2014. They were married in 1963, and had three children: Daniel, of Wrangell, Deanne, of Wrangell, and Dawn, of Ketchikan. Emil Churchill's last troller was named Dan Dee Dawn.

In addition to her children, Janice Churchill is survived by nine grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

There was a family gathering earlier in February. In lieu of flowers, the family asks for donations to be made to St. Philip's Episcopal Church for steeple repair/replacement, in memory of Janice Churchill.



### SEARCHC's Pharmacy will open in the new Wrangell Medical Center on Monday, March 1 at 8:00 a.m.

To facilitate the move, both Pharmacy locations will be **closed on Friday, February 26th.**

For more information, please call the pharmacy at 907-874-5005.

SEARCHC is proud to offer enhanced and expanded services in a centralized location at the new Wrangell Medical Center. To learn more about our new facility, visit [searchc.org/location/wrangell-medical-center](https://searchc.org/location/wrangell-medical-center).

**SEARCHC** | healthy is here.



# Judge halts sale of National Archives building in Seattle

SEATTLE (AP) - A federal judge has granted a preliminary injunction to stop the sale of the National Archives building in Seattle.

More than two dozen Native American and Alaska Native tribes and cultural groups from the Northwest, along with the states of Washington and Oregon, sued the federal government to stop the sale and the relocation of millions of invaluable historical records to California and Missouri.

The Seattle Times reported that U.S. District Court Judge John Coughenour asked Brian C. Kipnis, an assistant U.S. attorney in Seattle, if anybody on the five-person Public Buildings Reform Board was from the Pacific Northwest.

That's the little-known entity which recommended the closure and sale of the building in Seattle. The board was created in 2016 to find what it deems to be excess federal property.

Kipnis said he didn't know.

The proposed sale was among the decisions taken in the final months of the administration of then-President Donald Trump.

The judge said on Feb. 12 that the federal government could have avoided a "public relations disaster" if it had "displayed some sensitivity" to how the closure affected the

Northwest.

Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson's office, along with 29 tribes and various groups, filed a lawsuit Jan. 4 seeking to declare the sale illegal. But that lawsuit could take a while to wind its way through the courts, prompting the request for the preliminary injunction, which the judge granted.

The Central Council of the Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska is among the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, as is the Tanana Chiefs Conference from Interior Alaska.

The archives contains irreplaceable documents dating to the 1840s and is used for research of tribal history to Japanese internment during World War II and fur seal hunts on remote Alaska islands.

Having declared the 10-acre site in as surplus, the federal government plans to move archival records from Seattle to facilities in Kansas City, Missouri, and Riverside, California.

The move would box up the histories of 272 federally recognized tribes in Washington, Alaska, Oregon and Idaho, as well as all federal records generated in the Pacific Northwest, including military, land, court, tax and census documents.



PHOTO BY CALEB VIERKANT/ WRANGELL SENTINEL

A bald eagle overlooks Totem Park from its perch on Monday.

## Report says pilot ran out of fuel just short of airport

PORT ANGELES, Wash. (AP) - The crash of a small plane in waters near Port Angeles, Washington, in late January that killed a Kodiak man occurred after the plane apparently ran out of fuel a few miles from an airport, The National Transportation Safety Board said.

The agency said in a report of preliminary findings Feb. 18 that the Cessna

170A airplane with only the pilot aboard left Kodiak on Jan. 25, then refueled and departed from Ketchikan on Jan. 26.

The man texted his mother that afternoon saying a severe headwind was causing concern about whether he had enough fuel to complete the flight, according to the report. He tried to make it to Port Angeles, but broadcast a may-

day call at 4:40 p.m. saying he was "ditching" near a boat that was towing a barge.

Authorities have not named the pilot, but the aircraft registration and family members who spoke to the Kodiak Daily Mirror identified the plane's owner and pilot as 38-year-old Sean M. Hayes, of Kodiak.

The NTSB says the pilot's intended destination was Lake Havasu, Arizona.

The Coast Guard and Canadian rescue crews covered 1,170 square miles searching the waters northeast of Port Angeles for the plane before calling off the search.

Port Angeles is northwest of Seattle on the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

## Judge dismisses Metlakatla Indian Community fishing rights lawsuit

A federal judge on Feb. 17 dismissed a lawsuit arguing that tribal members of Alaska's sole Native reserve — on Annette Island, south of Ketchikan — should not need

state permits to fish outside the reserve's marine boundaries.

Public radio KRBD reported the story.

Metlakatla Indian Commu-

nity sued Gov. Mike Dunleavy's administration last year. Lawyers for the tribe said the 1891 federal law that established the Annette Islands Reserve was intended to create a self-sustaining community — and that the right to fish in waters within a day's travel of the reserve was an essential part of that.

Metlakatla argued that the state's commercial fishing regulations should not apply to tribal members fishing in those waters.

Attorneys for the state argued that Congress never intended to grant Metlakatla such fishing rights, and U.S. District Court Judge John Sedwick agreed. "Such a right simply cannot be implied from the language of the 1891 statute, the congressional record associated with its passage, and the history of the community's relocation to the Annette Islands," Sedwick wrote.

The order said the congressional record shows that 19th-century lawmakers intended the reserve to serve as a self-sufficient Christian Alaska Native community. "Congress sought to provide the Metlakatlas a secure place to live and to encourage the establishment of a self-sufficient, Christian community that other Alaska Natives would emulate."

But the fact that Congress intended to create a self-sustaining community isn't

enough to show that lawmakers intended to grant off-reser-

vation fishing rights, the order said.

## Police report

### Monday, Feb. 15

Agency assist: Fire department.

### Tuesday, Feb. 16

Agency assist: Pre-trial enforcement division.

Traffic stop: Citation issued for speed in a school zone and failure to provide proof of insurance.

Paper summons service.

### Wednesday, Feb. 17

Motor vehicle accident and animal complaint.

Citizen assist.

### Thursday, Feb. 18

Citizen assist.

Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.

Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.

Paper service.

Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.

### Friday, Feb. 19

Traffic stop: Verbal warning for tail light.

Dog complaint: Citation issued for objectionable animal (second offense).

Noise complaint.

### Saturday, Feb. 20

Dog complaint.

Motor vehicle accident.

Domestic dispute.

Welfare check: Person was fine.

### Sunday, Feb. 21

Traffic stop: Verbal warning for not completely stopping at a stop sign, and to update expired tabs.

Traffic stop: Verbal warning for failure to stop at a stop sign.

Traffic stop: Citation issued for no proof of insurance, verbal warning for not carrying driver's license and told to renew tags.

Traffic stop: Verbal warning for expired tags.



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# Alaska Fish Factor

By LAINE WELCH Fisheries columnist

## Russian exports compete with Alaska salmon

Alaskans are preparing for another salmon season of poor to average runs to most regions.

The big exception once again is Bristol Bay, where another massive return of more than 51 million sockeyes is expected. Managers predict that surge will produce a harvest of more than 36 million reds for fishermen.

Bristol Bay is home to the largest wild sockeye salmon run in the world and typically accounts for 42% of the world's sockeye harvest. Those fish and all wild salmon compete in a tough worldwide commodities market, where Alaska salmon claims 13% of the global supply. Farmed salmon production, which outnumbers wild harvests by nearly three to one, is Alaska's biggest competitor. The other is Russia.

According to global seafood trading company Tradex, Pacific salmon catches from Russia are projected to top one billion

pounds in 2021. As a comparison, Alaska's 2020 catch of nearly 117 million salmon weighed in at just over 500 million pounds.

The Russian catch breaks down to more than 700 million pounds of pinks, nearly 206 million pounds of chum, 70.6 million pounds of sockeye, over 24 million pounds of coho and 8.8 million pounds of Chinook.

Regardless of Russian competition, sockeyes are Alaska's big money maker, comprising well over one-third of the salmon fishery's total value each year, and the market outlook continues to be encouraging.

"The global sockeye market continues to strong and it continues to be a popular and a sought after product," said Tasha Cadence, a Tradex spokesperson.

That is borne out at home, said Rising Tides Communications, of Anchorage, which handles marketing across all platforms for the fishermen

funded/operated Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association.

"Despite a wild ride during a global pandemic, the BBRSDA marketing program had an incredibly successful year," Rising Tide wrote in its annual report. "On the retail side, in spite of several pandemic-related retail promotion cancellations, we grew from 800 retail promotions in 2019 to 2,200 in 2020, a 175% increase."

Cadence added, "Prices are high but remain steady, and we should expect pricing to remain this way until the 2021 salmon fisheries in Alaska and Russia start up."

In 2020, the U.S. imported nearly four million pounds of salmon from Russia worth more than \$14 million. More than half was sockeye salmon, valued at nearly \$9 million.

And the competition from Alaska's neighbor will only get

tougher.

Russia is making huge investments to increase and modernize its fishing capacity by building more than 20 new processing plants and 90 new vessels by the year 2030. The plan also includes the launch of a new marketing and supply chain strategy called "The Russian Fish."

And while Russian salmon will compete with U.S. catches at retail counters and restaurants, sales have not been reciprocated and Russia has not purchased an American-caught pound since 2014. (The snub stems from a politically motivated embargo over U.S. objections to Russia's incursions into Ukraine.)

According to the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, the value of Russian seafood exports to the U.S. has grown 70% since 2014 and has more than tripled to nearly \$700 million in 2019. The Russian seafood comes into the U.S. almost entirely duty free.

### WATER WORRIES

Alaska salmon stakeholders are expressing concern over the state's plans to change the rules that regulate the use of water in salmon streams, and they are hopeful Alaskans will weigh in on the side of the fish.

A Jan. 15 letter from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources says the changes are needed "to provide clarity and consistency in the Division of Mining, Land and Water's processes."

Yes and no. "We absolutely agree that the rules need more clarity," said Lindsey Bloom, campaign strategist for the advocacy group SalmonState, based in Juneau. "The problem is that they're proposing to roll the regulations back in the absolute opposite direction and create a lot more red tape and hoops for Alaskans to jump through who want to reserve water and

Continued on page 11

## CLASSIFIED/LEGALS

### FOR SALE

Reliance Harbor tidelands Lot 24, Block 7A, approximately 8,136 square feet. Details at radonservices@hotmail.com. (1 x2-25p18)

### FOR RENT

3-BEDROOM, 1 1/2 -bath townhouse in Wrangell, quiet neighborhood. \$1,200 per month plus tax, 1-year lease. Call 907-738-6639. (3x2.25.ufn.b22)

### HELP WANTED

JOHNSON'S BUILDING SUPPLY is looking for a part-time yard employee to help with customers, freight and deliveries. Work schedule: Tuesday through Saturday. Pay DOE. Application can be picked up at Johnson's Building Supply. (3x2.25.ufnb36)

### THANK YOU

We recognize and thank the following with "Hospice Hearts" for their actions in supporting the organization in 2020: Jim Bailey, Ron "Butch" Merriitt, Loretta Rice, Father Steve Gallagher, Capt. Jon Tollerud, Mayor Steve Prysunka, Heidi Armstrong, the Wrangell Chamber of Commerce, Evergreen Elementary School staff, Pilot Publishing, KSTK Radio, Stikine Stitchers, and the Foundation for End of Life Care.

### SERVICES

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FAX SERVICES at the Sentinel. Send or receive faxes. Please call 874-2301 to arrange drop-off or pick-up since our office is closed to the public. Fax number 874-2303. (tfndh)



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### City & Borough of Wrangell REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS Non-Motorized Transportation System Design

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska is seeking Statements of Qualifications from experienced engineering firms for the *Non-Motorized Transportation System Design* project. The engineering firm will provide engineering design and permitting for a connector trail project. The full Request for Qualifications solicitation may be obtained at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, and it may also be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell's website ([www.wrangell.com](http://www.wrangell.com)) under the Bids and RFPs section. Statements of Qualifications are due in the office of the Borough Clerk by 2:00 PM prevailing time on March 22, 2021.

CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL  
Lisa Von Bargaen, Borough Manager

**Publish: February 25, March 4, 11 and 18, 2021**

### PUBLIC HEARING – PORT COMMISSION for Thursday, March 4, 2021 CITY & BOROUGH OF WRANGELL

The Port Commission will hold a Public Hearing on **Thursday, March 4, 2021** during its Regular meeting beginning at 6:00 PM on the following item(s):

a. **ORDINANCE NO 984** OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL, ALASKA, AMENDING SECTIONS OF CHAPTER 14 (HARBOR AND PORT FACILITIES), AND ADDING SECTION 14.01.030(MM) TITLED "RESIDENTIAL USER FEE" IN THE WRANGELL MUNICIPAL CODE

b. Approval of Harbor Fee Schedule

If you would like to call into the Public Hearing, please call Keeleigh Solverson at 907-874-3736 no later than Thursday, March 4, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. to request the call-in information and to be added to the list of Persons to be Heard.

Keeleigh Solverson  
City & Borough of Wrangell

**Publish: February 25, 2021**



Alaska Department of  
Transportation & Public Facilities  
Southcoast Region

**PUBLIC NOTICE: SEASONAL VEHICLE  
WEIGHT RESTRICTIONS**

Issue Date: February 2021

This notice is to remind the public and the trucking industry that seasonal weight/load restrictions will be imposed soon by the Department on its highway system for all vehicles over 10,000# GVW. These annual weight restrictions are intended to reduce roadway damage caused by heavy vehicles traveling on highways weakened during spring thawing conditions. The weight restrictions are stated as a percentage of legal allowable weight and shall be applied to the maximum axle loading in accordance with 17 AAC 25.013(e).

These annual restrictions are very dependent upon weather, local soil conditions, and frost depth, but usually occur between late February and May each year for Southeast Alaska, Kodiak Island, and the Alaska Peninsula. Since these limitations may reduce the allowable gross vehicle weight by as much as 50%, it would be advisable to transport as much freight as possible prior to the above dates. All State routes may be subject to seasonal weight restrictions.

When imposed, or modified, these restrictions will be posted on the DOT&PF Division of Measurement Standards and Commercial Vehicle Enforcement webpage.

This can be found at: <http://www.dot.state.ak.us/mscve/main.cfm>

- Under Commercial Vehicle tab at the top of the page, click Weight Restrictions.
- Choose the latest Southcoast Region listing to view the current version of our posted seasonal weight restriction notices.

The Department of Public Safety and MSCVE officers will be enforcing these restrictions.

Issued by:

Marcus Zimmerman, Maintenance & Operations Specialist  
Email: [marcus.zimmerman@alaska.gov](mailto:marcus.zimmerman@alaska.gov)  
Phone: (907) 465-4655  
Fax: (907) 465-2021

If you or someone you represent requires special accommodations in order to respond to this public notice, please call or email the project coordinator listed above, or call Alaska Relay at 711, or call

(800) 770-8973 for TTY (800) 770-8255 for voice

(800) 770-3919 for ASCLII (866) 355-6198 for STS

Ask the communications assistant to call the project coordinator listed above so arrangements can be made to assist you.

# Fish Factor

Continued from page 10

streams for fish to ever achieve that.”

For decades, water rights advocates have proposed a simple solution, Bloom said, a blanket reservation that states that a reasonable amount of water will automatically be reserved for fish. The onus would fall to developers to study the hydrology of a water system to prove their project would cause no harm.

“Unfortunately, the Dunleavy administration is choosing to take it in the opposite direction, and make it very, very difficult to reserve the water for fish,” Bloom said. “They’re saying the assumption is there are no fish in a stream, and the fish don’t need the water. And if Alaskans want that water to stay in the stream, they have to prove it with up to five years of specific hydrological data and make an application to the state.”

In addition, the regulations would “take away my right or a tribal government’s right or a fishing organization’s right to hold the certificate for the instream flow reservation,” Bloom said. “It says that even if I go through all of the investment and the work of perfecting an application and getting a reservation of water, then DNR will hold that water right. If that were ever to be challenged in any way, I don’t have any assurance or security that DNR would protect that water right into the future.”

The Alaska Miners Association in its 2018 policy statement blamed “anti-development entities” for using instream flow reservations to stop projects. The AMA said the solution is to “place an immediate moratorium on processing applications and pursue regulatory changes to ensure that only state agencies can hold reservations of state water.”

Public comment on the proposed rules are due by Friday to Brandon McCutcheon at [dnr.water.regulation@alaska.gov](mailto:dnr.water.regulation@alaska.gov) /

## FRANKENFISH CORRECTION

The statement in last week’s column that genetically tweaked salmon will not be clearly identified for U.S. consumers was incorrect.

Fish maker AquaBounty Technologies has pushed back for years against labeling requirements identifying the fish as genetically engineered, but they, and others in the industry, have lost that battle.

In late December 2020, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski secured language in the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Bill that requires the term “genetically engineered” to be included in the market name of any such animal product approved for human consumption by the FDA prior to February 2019.

This requirement will therefore apply to genetically engineered salmon products, which were approved by FDA in 2015, said Hannah Ray, Murkowski press secretary.



PHOTO BY CALEB VIERKANT/ WRANGELL SENTINEL

## A piece of history

St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Wrangell is the oldest Catholic parish in the state. The first church was built in 1879, according to the church’s website, but was dismantled in 1898. A new building was constructed in 1908. St. Rose underwent extensive remodeling in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and has remained largely unaltered since then, though there are always work projects for the more-than-century-old building.

## Governor says senator’s pandemic accusations ‘not based on fact’

The Associated Press  
And Sentinel staff

Gov. Mike Dunleavy said his administration will no longer respond to or participate in hearings led by Sen. Lora Reinbold, telling the fellow Republican in a withering letter Feb. 18 that she has used her position to “misrepresent” the state’s COVID-19 response and that her demands for information are “not based in fact.”

Reinbold has criticized the governor’s pandemic disaster declarations and taken aim at health restrictions imposed by local governments, airlines and the Legislature, including mask requirements. She has used social media to question medical sci-

ence and accuse the Dunleavy administration of seeking disaster declarations to get mass vaccination clinics.

One of the participants in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol — who is facing federal felony charges for her part in the event — had been scheduled to testify before Reinbold’s Senate Judiciary Committee on Feb. 19 about the purported medical benefits of hydroxychloroquine as a COVID-19 treatment.

Senate President Peter Micciche canceled the hearing Feb. 18.

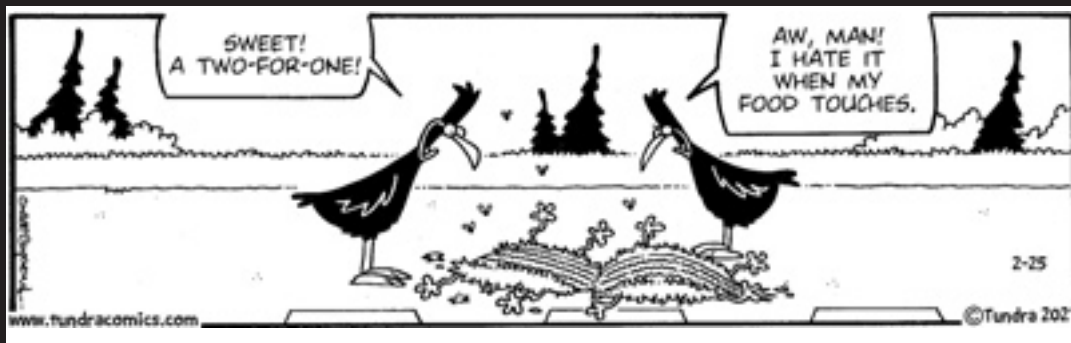
In his letter to Reinbold, the governor said: “I will not continue to subject the public resources of the State of Alaska to

the mockery of a charade, disguised as public purpose.”

Reinbold said in a statement Feb. 19 that Dunleavy’s letter was “full of baseless accusations and complaints” about her role on the Judiciary Committee. Dunleavy’s letter to Reinbold included footnotes, with many references to the senator’s own Facebook posts.

The senator has been a frequent critic of government and private actions during the pandemic. The Eagle River lawmaker in November referred to Alaska Airlines staff as “mask bullies” and said the airline was “part of mask tyranny” after flight at-

Continued on page 12



## More than half of Alaskans over 65 have received vaccination shot

ANCHORAGE (AP) - Alaska public health officials said 58% of residents 65 and older have received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccination since distribution efforts began.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Joe McLaughlin said the state hopes to move the process along faster as more contagious and potentially deadly strains of the coronavirus emerge.

“Right now, it’s sort of a race against the variants to get people vaccinated,” McLaughlin said Feb. 17.

Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anne Zink said the state wants more Alaskans 65 and older to receive vaccinations. “We still want to prioritize that group and, looking at these variants, we just want that group to be vaccinated in every way we possibly can,” Zink said during a video conference with community officials.

“I mean 58% is great, but it would be great to be even higher on that,” Zink said.

After vaccine appointments prioritized for older residents remained opened for several days, the state moved into the next tier of its distribution plan earlier this month. The new phase includes educators, some essential workers and people living and working in congregate settings such as prisons and shelters.

McLaughlin said a variant strain first discovered in the United Kingdom in September is the most concerning to emerge.

About 1,300 cases of the variant have been detected in the U.S. One of those cases was in Alaska, he said.

“It’s associated with a higher transmissibility rate, so probably about 50% higher transmission rate,” McLaughlin said. “And now there’s some evidence to suggest that it may actually be associated with increased morbidity and mortality, so hospitalizations and deaths.”

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicts the variant could take over as the dominant strain circulating in the U.S. at some point this spring, adding more urgency to the state’s efforts to get Alaskans vaccinated, McLaughlin said.

# DMV working through backlog, says police chief

By CALEB VIERKANT  
Sentinel writer

There is a backlog at the driver's license and vehicle registration office in Wrangell, said Police Chief Tom Radke, but they are working their way down the list and hope to have things running smoothly in the near future.

The office in the Public Safety Building on Zimovia Highway has been closed or otherwise inaccessible for several months, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and retirement of the only employee.

The Division of Motor Vehicles office, a function of the state, is working its way

through a backlog of appointments. Radke said there were still 27 appointments to go, as of Monday, and it could take some time due to staffing.

Rhonda Herman took over the office about six months ago, Radke said, but she is not full-time. She is dividing her time between the office and handling phones for the police department.

Furthermore, he said it has been a struggle for Herman to get all the training she needs to fully handle everything expected of a DMV worker. A lot of training is normally done in person, the police chief said, but instructors have not been travel-

ing due to the pandemic, so training has largely moved online.

Herman has been taking training as it becomes available. Within the next few weeks, she is scheduled to learn how to administer on-the-road driving tests, after which she will be fully trained, Radke said.

While they work through the backlog of appointments, Radke said the public is encouraged to see what services can be handled online. "There's some quirks to the system" about what can and cannot be done online, he said, but a lot of the services have moved there since the start of the pandemic.

Radke said they hope to get caught up by summer. Even under the best circumstances, he said, the DMV is not usually the most efficient system. "It's always a pain no matter where you're at."

The office is currently accessible by appointment only. Services offered include renewal of licenses and ID cards, instructional permit testing, vehicle title and registration. Radke said the office now can issue Real ID and driver's license upgrades, too.

The office can be reached at the police department's non-emergency number, 874-3304.

## Legislature

Continued from page 3

Without additional revenues, the department would have to reduce operations and cut positions at the spill prevention and response division, according to its budget book.

Josephson, a member of the

House Finance Committee in his fifth term in the Alaska Legislature, said someone in the House needed to introduce the tax bill this session after the Senate took the lead last year. "I don't do as much 'why me' analysis as maybe I should," but the spill

fund needs the money, Alaska's highways need maintenance, and taxes are the way to pay for it, he said.

"I am at a point in my career," the legislator said, that he can live with criticism from opponents to the tax increase.

The bill has to make it through the Transportation and Finance committees before it can go to the House floor for a vote, and then to the Senate.

In addition to increasing the motor fuel tax on gasoline at the pump from 8 cents to 16 cents a gallon, the legislation would raise the marine fuel tax rate from 5 cents to 10 cents a gallon, though that 5-cent tax increase would be refunded for fuel that goes into the tanks of commercial fishing vessels.

The tax hikes would take effect Jan. 1, 2022. Fuel purchased for heating is exempt from the state tax.

As the intent is that motor

fuel tax revenue goes toward highway maintenance — though not a constitutionally mandated requirement — the bill addresses the fact that a growing number of drivers use the highway as much as others but buy little to no fuel for their

plug-in hybrid and all-electric vehicles.

The bill would create a new \$50 fee, good for two years, for plug-in hybrids that use some motor fuel, and a \$100 biennial fee for all-electric vehicles that use no motor fuel.

## Governor

Continued from page 11

tendants asked her to wear a mask.

Reinbold said in a Facebook post in November that people should bypass the mandatory COVID tests for passengers flying into Alaska. "Sneak by if you are bold (for) they cannot force you," she wrote.

As chair of the Judiciary Committee, Reinbold has had combative exchanges with the state health commissioner and has highlighting testimony from people questioning the usefulness of masks and effects of government emergency orders.

The Senate president said the governor's letter takes to the "next level" long-simmering tensions between Dunleavy and Reinbold. Micciche, a Republican, said he plans to speak with Reinbold and the governor's office and have his caucus discuss a path forward.

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