

Wrangell, Alaska  
February 14, 2024

# WRANGELL SENTINEL

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## Seafood industry expects another bad year

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

"I've never seen market conditions as bad as they are now," Doug Vincent-Lang, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, told a conference of Southeast

business, community and municipal government leaders last week.

"Last year we said we reached rock bottom," Jeremy Woodrow, executive director of the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, said of low

prices, weak markets and reluctant consumers.

But then he added, "we've scraped off more levels," reaching deeper to the bottom.

All of the participants in the fisheries panel discussion at the Southeast Conference Feb.

6 in Juneau talked about the problem facing commercial fishers, processors and communities that depend on fish taxes and jobs.

"It's going to be another bad year," said Julie Decker, president of the Pacific Seafood Processors Association. Though she added there is one good thing to come from the mess: It's brought everyone together to find solutions.

"We've weathered storms before," said Tracey Welch, executive director of United Fishermen of Alaska. But this past year was the worst, she said, hitting most all commercial seafood species.

"We saw a lot of processors quit buying early," alongside falling prices, Welch said of last year's harvest.

Prices were painfully low last year, as the market was still oversupplied with fish caught in 2022.

A Department of Fish and Game preliminary analysis issued in October of salmon prices showed a statewide average in 2023 of 64 cents a pound for sockeye, 49 cents a pound for chum and 24 cents for pinks, though prices were significantly lower later in the season, dropping to around 20 cents a pound for Southeast chum salmon.

Average prices paid for commercial salmon catches in 2023 were less than half the 2022 numbers.

It's going to take a lot of marketing to find more buyers for what's already in warehouse.

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## Wrangell loses third middle / high school principal in three years

By MARK C. ROBINSON  
Sentinel reporter

Jackie Hanson has resigned as principal of Wrangell High School and Stikine Middle School, effective at the end of the school year.

Hanson started with the Wrangell district in August. She was the third principal for the schools in the past three years; each served just one school year.

She responded via email that she was offered a position as superintendent for the Craig City School District. Since most of her family lives in Craig, her parents are getting older and she already has a house there, she decided to accept.

"I plan to finish the school year as strong as I started it and will do everything I can to ensure a smooth transition," Hanson said.

She will start her new job on July 1.

"First and foremost, I want to say thank you to all for welcoming my family and I into the community of Wrangell," she said. "As I embark on my next professional journey, I look forward to advocating on behalf of all of our kids in Southeast," she added.

"Being a multi-school principal is a difficult task, and Ms. Hanson has been flexible and adaptable to helping students and staff," Schools Superintendent Bill Burr said in an email.

"She was essential in the administrative team during the November (landslide) and did a remarkable job of adjusting and finding the pathway for students in need. We will miss her expertise in special education and years of experience in administration," Burr said. "Even if she will be on the other side of the crowd during games, she will always be a Wrangell Wolf."



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Georgianna and Richard Buhler plan to reopen Wrangell's once-popular roller rink this spring.

## New ministry aims to bring back community roller rink this spring

By MARK C. ROBINSON  
Sentinel reporter

After five years, a once-popular community gathering place may finally make a comeback.

Georgianna and Richard Buhler, founders of the nondenominational TouchPoint Alaska Ministries, recently purchased the old Church of God property, which has been shuttered for the past five years. Although one of their long-term goals is to eventually have a day care center at the Bennett Street property, their first priority is to bring back the adjoining roller rink.

"There's a lot of memories in this community with this place," Richard said of the rink, re-

membering how their grandson fondly reminisced about the rink and how he loved having his birthday parties there.

At one point, the rink also doubled as a gymnasium for the church's Christian academy that taught kindergarten through eighth grade from the mid-1990s to early 2000s. The large rink was also once the home of a local roller derby team called the Garnet Grit Betties. "They disbanded a while back," Georgianna said. "But this is where they started."

During the almost two years the Buhlers have been working on this project, she's seen the drive

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## State ferry system now in 3rd year of crew shortages

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

Crew shortages continue to plague the Alaska Marine Highway, the ferry system's director told a gathering of Southeast officials last week.

"Our biggest shortage is in the engineering department," where the 54 ship engineers on the payroll as of Jan. 26 were far short of the 81 needed for full staffing, Craig Tornga told a gathering of community,

business and government leaders at the Southeast Conference on Feb. 7 in Juneau.

"We're short in the wheelhouse," he added, down eight from a full contingent of 79 in the master, chief mate, second and third-mate positions.

Tornga, who was hired last March, inherited the challenge of bringing crew levels back to full staffing. A lack of crew has forced the ferry system into paying overtime and canceling

sailings to manage operations.

"We still have the same crewing challenges," he said.

As of Jan. 26, the system was short about three dozen workers — not counting stewards, cooks and other similar lower-level positions.

"This entry-level-pay position has a very high turnover rate," Tornga said of stewards. "Presently, we are experiencing a shortage of cooks, which is ... affecting operations."

Despite recent improvements, the system lost more mates, pilots and engineers than it hired in 2023. The licensed engineers are responsible for a ship's propulsion system, most machinery and the safe operation of mechanical systems aboard the vessel.

The state-operated ferries have been short of crew since losing trained workers to retirement, resignation and furloughs during deep cuts in the

operating schedule amid the worst of the COVID-induced collapse in travel, which coincided with steep cuts in state funding.

When the ferries tried to resume pre-COVID schedules in 2022 and 2023, the system was unable to hire enough new crew members to staff all the vessels.

From 2019 through early 2022, the ferry system lost 155

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## Senior Center Menu

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

**Thursday, Feb. 15**

Pork chop suey, broccoli, danish salad

**Friday, Feb. 16**

Closed for Elizabeth Peratrovich Day.

**Monday, Feb. 19**

Closed. Shelf-stable meal delivered on Friday, Feb. 15

**Tuesday, Feb. 20**

Chicken fricassee, peas, spicy fruit salad, biscuits

**Wednesday, Feb. 21**

Beef burritos, black beans, spanish rice, fruit slaw

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

**ASH WEDNESDAY** 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. and noon to 1 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 14, at the downtown pavilion. Pastor Sue Bahleda of Island of Faith Lutheran Church will be available for those who would like to receive the imposition of ashes. Island of Faith will also hold an Ash Wednesday service at 7 p.m. Feb. 14.

**COMMUNITY POTLUCK** for Elizabeth Peratrovich Day, 5 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 16, at the Nolan Center. Frybread tacos, silent auction, traditional Native dancing and several speakers via Zoom at 6 p.m. will talk starting about the history of Elizabeth Peratrovich and the struggles by Alaska Natives to win their rights. Co-hosted by Alaska Native Sisterhood and Tlingit and Haida Community Council. Bring a dish to share.

**KNOTLESS NETTED BASKET WEAVING**, with a presentation 6 to 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 16, at the library, open to the public, with the class 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 17 and 18, at the community center multi-purpose room. Registration required for the class; \$20 per person for materials. Space is limited, call the library to reserve your spot at 907-874-3535. Sponsored by Friends of the Library.

**NOLAN CENTER THEATER** "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," rated PG-13, at 7 p.m. Saturday and 6 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 17-18. The action adventure fantasy film runs 2 hours and 4 minutes; tickets are \$7 for adults, \$5 for children under age 12. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

**DADDY DAUGHTER DANCE** 6 to 8 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 17, at the community center multipurpose room. Tiaras, dessert and backdrop for pictures will come with purchase of a \$35 ticket. Flowers will be available for purchase. Fundraiser hosted by Wrangell Burial Assistance.

**WATERCOLOR PAINTING**, 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 17, at St. Philip's parish hall, with Michael Bania. No fees but donations are welcome for supplies. 16 spaces are available. Call Michael at 907-978-7717 to reserve a spot.

**HOSPICE OF WRANGELL** annual meeting and awards presentation at noon, Monday, Feb. 19, at the Catholic Church Father Jerry Hall. Light lunch will be provided. All are welcome.

**MIGRANT EDUCATION FAMILY LITERACY NIGHT** 5:30 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 20, at the Nolan Center. "Night at the Museum" is open to all migrant education students and their families.

**HOMEBUYERS / BUILDERS and FINANCIAL LITERACY SYMPOSIUM**, 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Feb. 24, at the Nolan Center, hosted by the borough. No fee to attend. Contact Kate Thomas at 907-874-2381 for more information.

**GET YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 24, at the Episcopal Church parish hall. Hospice of Wrangell presents a series of speakers on end-of-life planning. Light lunch served. No charge, open to all.

**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. 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](http://www.wrangellrec.com) or call 907-874-2444.

- **YOUTH OPEN GYM** 10 to 11:30 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays at the community center gym for ages 0-10. \$3 for first child, \$2 for second, \$1 for third child, fourth plus is free. Bring clean gym shoes or take shoes off in the hallway.
- **WATER AEROBICS** 10 to 11 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the swimming pool for ages 18 years and up. \$5 drop-in fee, \$3 senior discount or facility punch card.
- **WINTER WORKOUT CHALLENGE** through March 31 is built to encourage consistent movement, with a goal of completing at least 30 minutes of exercise 5 to 6 days per week. This challenge is for people of ALL fitness levels. The participant who completes the most workouts within the challenge dates 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.

## Ferry Schedule

### Northbound

**Friday, Feb. 16**

Kennicott, 4:15 p.m.

**Friday, Feb. 23**

Kennicott, 8:45 p.m.

**Friday, March 1**

Kennicott, 4:30 p.m.

**Monday, March 4**

Kennicott, 5 p.m.

### Southbound

**Monday, Feb. 19**

Kennicott, 6 a.m.

**Monday, Feb. 26**

Kennicott, 7 a.m.

**Monday, March 4**

Kennicott, 1 a.m.

**Thursday, March 7**

Kennicott, 4 p.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		PM		AM		PM	
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
Feb. 14	03:43	17.8	04:06	15.2	09:52	-0.2	09:58	0.8
Feb. 15	04:26	17.1	05:04	13.3	10:47	0.5	10:43	2.7
Feb. 16	05:16	16.1	06:17	11.7	11:49	1.3	11:37	4.4
Feb. 17	06:20	15.1	07:50	11.0	....	...	01:06	2.0
Feb. 18	07:39	14.5	09:18	11.3	00:48	5.8	02:37	2.0
Feb. 19	08:57	14.5	10:26	12.2	02:23	6.4	04:00	1.3
Feb. 20	10:04	15.0	11:18	13.3	03:56	5.9	04:58	0.4

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

**Feb. 14, 1924**

Last Saturday, Dr. Anna Brown Kearsley reported a case of typhoid fever to the Wrangell Board of Health, the patient being James Nolan. The general impression prevailing in Wrangell last week was that W.D. Grant, Mrs. Stephen D. Grant and James Nolan were all suffering from the same malady, as they had all attended the late C.E. Weber during his fatal illness. Therefore, Dr. Kearsley's diagnosis of the case of Mr. Nolan naturally carried significance that extended beyond the individual case reported. Under these circumstances, together with

the high mortality of typhoid, the Board of Health deemed it advisable to send for an outside diagnostician.

**Feb. 11, 1949**

In Wrangell this morning, the low temperature was 5 above. The low temperature so far this winter occurred on Dec. 8, at 2 below zero. The highest temperature this month was 24 above on Feb. 2, when the groundhog saw his shadow. As to snowfall, November delivered 27 inches; December, 71 inches; January, 35 inches, and so far in February, 16 inches, making a total of 149 inches with plenty of chances

more may be added before folks start thinking about Easter bonnets.

**Feb. 13, 1974**

Wrangell's new library has been adjudged complete by the city, but a move-in is going to be delayed to see if funds for new furnishings can be secured, City Manager Herb McNabb said this week. Original plans were to move from the old library this month, using existing shelving and furnishings, but the city has decided to hold off, McNabb said, in hopes of having an "all new" facility. "We are seeking funds now from the state through federal

sources," the manager said. He said \$18,000 would provide new shelving and furnishings, and expressed optimism over Wrangell's chances of securing the funding. "It doesn't make sense to move all the old things over from the present library into the present library into the brand-new facility and then move them back out again," said McNabb. He said a delay in moving of up to 60 days is anticipated.

**Feb. 11, 1999**

The Wrangell City Council in a special meeting Feb. 3 made an about-face in its decision regarding acceptance of the

Nolan grant for the Civic Center/Museum. Changing tactics from the previous vote to put acceptance of the gift on a special election ballot, the council instead voted to accept the \$6 million gift from the estate of James and Elsie Nolan. Factors contributing to the change of mind included some confusion on the part of council members about exactly what issue was to be put on the ballot. Mayor Bill Privett further said the project seemed to have generated disagreement in the community and thought that the responsibility was with the council to start the healing process.

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WEEKLY FARE SALES



FREIGHT FOR LESS

# State issues preliminary report on Nov. 20 landslides

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

State geologists were able to more accurately measure the movement and damage from massive landslides that poured across roads in the middle of the island in November because just a few months earlier the state and U.S. Forest Service had collected detailed images and data — literally laser-

cused — of the terrain.

The Forest Service and the Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys partnered in July to conduct an aerial survey of the entire island, using airborne lasers to map out ground cover, geology and slopes for future reference, said Mort Larsen, who leads the division's landslide hazards program based in Fairbanks.

That timing was fortuitous as the state flew laser-equipped aircraft over the landslide areas in the days after a deadly flow of mud and trees overran three homes and killed six people near 11.2-Mile Zimovia Highway. A second slide that evening took out the nearby Middle Ridge Road but caused no injuries or private property damage.

The state division issued its preliminary report on the Wrangell slides on Feb. 6. The report does not provide a definitive cause of the slides, but rather explains the size and volume of the slides, the differences between the July images and the post-landslide terrain, and the weather on the day of the slide.

The area was soaked by heavy rains which saturated the thin soils on steep slopes in the days before the slides, with strong winds that evening.

The next step for the division is seeking Federal Emergency Management Agency funding for additional mapping work, Larsen said in an interview on Feb. 9. The goal is to develop detailed maps identifying possible slide areas, based on slopes, terrain and geology, he said.

It's not possible to predict when a landslide will occur, just as geologists cannot predict earthquakes. But more information could help local officials and residents make their own decisions about where they build and live, such as zoning decisions, Larsen explained.

The July aerial mapping work in Wrangell cost more than \$200,000, Larsen said.

"It is a game changer for scientists and geologists," he said of advances in lidar technology, which is coming with lower costs as its use increases.

Lidar, which stands for light detection and ranging, uses laser pulses, generally sent out by aircraft, to measure distances and characteristics of the earth's surface as the pulses bounce back to the aircraft. The measurements, "of which there are hundreds of thousands made per second," the division's report explains, are collected and assembled to provide information about the ground surface, including trees and structures.

The data can be used to produce two models: A digital surface model represents the tops of trees and structures; and a digital terrain model represents the bare earth, where trees, structures, and other objects have been electronically removed from the image.

The combined use of the two models "reveals changes in vegetation and soils, which provides a complete picture of landslide activity," the report said.

The borough is working with the state to obtain federal funding for additional mapping, Mason Villarma, interim borough manager, said in a letter to the community on the day the state issued its report.

The borough is applying for a FEMA-Cooperative Technical Partners grant in partnership with the state Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys, "which will enable us to conduct additional research and analysis to better understand and mitigate landslide risks," Villarma said in his letter.

The same FEMA program provided funding for mapping work after fatal landslides in Haines (2020) and Sitka (2015).

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski said she is trying to "move more federal money to Alaska for landslide monitoring." She addressed the issue during video remarks to the Southeast Conference in Juneau, where community, business and government leaders met on Feb. 6.

The state report is available on the borough website, wrangell.com. Just click on the "News" button on the left-hand side of the page.

According to the report, 2.23 inches of rain fell at the Wrangell airport in the 24 hours preceding the Nov. 20 landslides, but it noted that rainfall varies greatly around the island. For example, after the slide, the Alaska Department of Transportation installed a rain gauge in the area of the 11.2-Mile landslide, often measuring up to twice the rainfall as the airport gauge.

And while wind gusts up to 40 mph were reported at sea level at the Wrangell harbor several hours before the landslides, gusts at the 900-foot elevation on Zarembo Island, west of Wrangell, hit 70 mph a couple of hours before the slides, the report said.

The main slide started at almost the 1,500-foot elevation, spilling across approximately 3,750 feet to tidewater, then extending an additional 500 feet into Zimovia Strait.

That slide, which measured about 150 feet wide at the top, picked up and moved an estimated 63,000 cubic yards of material as it flowed downhill, according to the report. That would equal the loads of more than 6,000 standard-size 10-yard dump trucks.

The Middle Ridge Road slide, which started an hour or two after the main slide, ran about 3,600 feet and more than 100 feet wide, crossing the road in three places and following a stream channel as it moved downhill.

The lidar data indicates the slide moved about 14,000 cubic yards of material.

The state geologists also reported the lidar images showed there were much smaller slides that same day that never reached the highway in the area of 11.5-Mile and 11.8-Mile.

Southeast Alaska, a region packed with steep mountains amid a rainforest, is susceptible to landslides, and scientists say vulnerability has increased as climate change brings more extreme precipitation.

Landslides threaten people and infrastructure elsewhere in the state, too. Among the vulnerable spots are coastal areas of Prince William Sound, where retreating glaciers and the thaw of high-altitude permafrost has destabilized mountain slopes.

Through its landslide hazards program, the Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys has been working to identify and map high-risk areas.

Yereth Rosen, of the Alaska Beacon, a statewide online news service, contributed reporting for this story.

## Home buying, building, owning information fair set for Feb. 24

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

"At least once a week I get a call from someone who is interested" in the upcoming borough subdivision land sale of 20 lots, said Kate Thomas, Wrangell's economic development director.

To help those callers, and everyone else who might be interested in anything about buying land, building and owning a home, or buying an existing home, the borough is putting together an information fair for 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Feb. 24, at the Nolan Center.

The borough plans to offer to the public 20 residential-zoned lots at the new Alder Top Village (Keishangita.'aan) subdivision upland from Shoemaker Bay. It's likely the largest municipal land sale ever in Wrangell.

The lots — half will be sold by lottery and half by online auction — are planned to go on sale late summer or early fall, Thomas said.

The Feb. 24 information fair, which is free and open to the public, will start with Thomas giving a presentation on the timeline, eligibility and sales methods for Alder Top, followed by a video showing the lots, which average about a half-acre each.

Borough Public Facilities Director Amber Al-Haddad will follow, answering questions about the streets and utilities the borough will put in at the subdivision, and any other building questions people might have.

An open-house-style information fair will run from about 10 a.m. to noon, giving the public

time to visit tables set up around the room and talk with a wide range of people in the business.

As of Feb. 7, Thomas said she had commitments to participate from Alaska Housing Finance Corp., Tlingit and Haida Regional Housing Authority, Tongass Federal Credit Union, First Bank, Dando Financial, tax preparer Kelley Decker, Anchor Properties and Stik Built Homes.

She is working to bring in building contractors, too.

The borough's electrical superintendent and public works director will join Thomas and Al-Haddad at the fair to answer questions as the public roams around the room.

"It's not just for Alder Top," Thomas said, inviting anyone interested in housing to come learn and ask questions.

Street and utilities work at the subdivision is on hold during winter weather; completion is scheduled for October, she said.

There is no limit on how many of the 10 auction lots any one person or company can purchase, but there is a limit of one lot per person for the 10 parcels that will go out by lottery.

The 10 front lots that will go on sale by auction will start at between \$53,000 and \$70,000 each. The 10 back-row lottery parcels will be sold at a fixed price of between \$45,000 and \$60,000 each.

Anyone interested in setting up an information booth can contact Thomas at City Hall at 907-874-2381, or email kthomas@wrangell.com. There is no charge for a booth.

## ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY NOW HIRING!

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PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

## Coming up roses

Kay Larson (right) observes her finished work as Valentina Bardina continues crafting her flower in a class on making paper roses from the pages of surplus books at the Irene Ingle Public Library on Saturday, Feb. 10. About 10 budding floral artists turned out for the session, which required only paper, scissors, a glue gun and a few other materials to create summer blooms in the winter.

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

# Don't empty the pocket that feeds us

BY LARRY PERSILY  
Publisher

Think of the state's Constitutional Budget Reserve Fund as the rich uncle or rich aunt you can go to when you're short of cash to pay bills and need a loan. But even that wealthy relative has a bottom to their pocket. Take too much out and that pocket could be empty when you really need it.

It's like that with Alaska's budget reserve fund, the voter-approved, 34-year-old savings account that was created to hold excess oil and gas revenues for when the state needs readily available cash to balance the budget.

The budget reserve provides an infinitely more responsible option than pulling money out of Permanent Fund earnings in years when oil prices are too low to cover the cost of public services and the cherished Permanent Fund dividend. As long as Alaska is dependent on the oil industry as the largest source of earned income for the state general fund, we'll be subject to the risk of a dry hole in oil revenues whenever prices take a dive.

Which means it's absolutely essential that the state maintain a healthy balance in the budget reserve. For if that pocket comes up empty, the only option is to pull more from the Permanent Fund earnings account than it can afford. That would be like draining your retirement savings at middle age, leaving you short for a healthy senior citizen life.

Yet, that could be where Alaskans are headed. And it's our own fault for electing the wrong leaders, ignoring the math, burying our heads in dreams of oil wells, and hoping that Taylor Swift will hold a benefit concert for the state treasury.

It takes a little more than \$6 billion a year in general fund revenues to pay a dividend, fund schools, Medicaid, road maintenance and other state-supported public services for 736,000 Alaskans. Most of that money comes from a man-

aged, annual draw on Permanent Fund earnings. And it all balances when oil prices are high enough.

But when prices are low, the Legislature, the governor and the public rely on the budget reserve to cover the gap — as it has done about half of the years since it was created.

As of Jan. 31, the budget reserve stood at \$2.76 billion. That may seem like a really rich uncle, but draws on the account have exceeded \$1 billion in several years of low prices — even more than that in really miserable low-price years.

Which is why it was so disturbing to hear Gov. Mike Dunleavy's budget director tell the Senate Finance Committee on Feb. 2 that while it would be good to keep a healthier balance in the reserve, \$400 million to \$500 million may be all that Alaska can afford.

"While the desire would be to have a larger savings account, upwards of \$2 billion or more," Lacey Sanders told the committee, "the administration recognizes that we are needing to continue operations of the state and have a balanced budget, and that means going below."

Sounds to me like emptying the pocket.

"We also recognize that the state is in a position right now where we do not have a fiscal plan," the budget director said.

That pretty much sums it up. No plan to balance expenses with honest revenues. No political courage from the governor to propose a detailed, realistic plan. Nothing from too many legislators other than to win their next reelection.

Even worse, the governor's proposed budget for next year, which includes an unaffordable PFD, is short about \$1 billion in revenues, which he proposes — yes, you knew this was coming — to take out of the budget reserve.

Draining reserves is not a fiscal plan. It's selfish, and it assumes the aunt or uncle exists only to help the current generation and no one else.

## EDITORIAL

### There is some good news amid all the bad news

It's a good time to take a break from distressing international conflicts and too many deaths, depressing national politics of too much dishonesty and too little compromise, and the difficult state politics of short-funded schools and public services.

The bad news will still be there next week. Meanwhile, for Wrangell, there is some good news to acknowledge.

The borough has organized a public information fair of lenders, financial advisers, builders, zoning and utility officials to help people who are interested in buying one of the 20 subdivision lots that will go on sale later this year. It's likely the largest municipal land sale ever in the number of lots.

The event is planned for Saturday morning, Feb. 24, at the Nolan Center. It's free to the public.

The borough wants the land sale to succeed — not just to sell all 20 lots, but for people to take ownership, build a home and stay in town. Wrangell has been losing population for years. The land sale and information fair are good news.

Besides for needing housing, residents need activities, and Georgianna and Richard Buhler and their TouchPoint Alaska Ministries have purchased the old Church of God property on Bennett Street and hope to reopen the community roller rink for the public by mid-April.

There's still work to do and donations to raise, but the couple is looking forward to skate nights and special events, returning the rink back to the prominent role it held in the community starting in the 1980s.

The other piece of good news for Wrangell comes amid generally bad news for the Alaska seafood industry.

Too much seafood and not enough buyers made for terribly low prices and a lousy 2023 for commercial fishers and processors, with much of the same, or worse, expected this year.

"Last year we said we reached rock bottom," Jeremy Woodrow, executive director of the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, said last week. But, he added, "we've scraped off more levels," reaching even deeper to the bottom.

With Trident Seafoods putting several of its processing plants on the market, and Peter Pan Seafood keeping its huge processing plant in King Cove closed this winter due to weak markets, Wrangell is fortunate that Trident has decided not only to operate its processing plant in the community this summer, but to move more fish and hire more workers than last year.

The company said the Wrangell facility is a highly efficient plant that fits in well with its plans for more value-added products.

The good news for Wrangell cannot overcome the problems and sadness in the country and worldwide, but it's at least a reminder that sometimes good things still happen.

Wrangell Sentinel

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### The wonderful people of our community are always ready to help

This thought often crosses my mind and I decided it's time to share it.

We are so fortunate to live in Wrangell. There are times when people carry on vehemently about things they dislike, but when we need each other there's always tremendous support. The response to the landslide is a prime example.

It seems like we always run into a Wrangellite at the Seattle airport. When we do, it's like old home week.

Recently, Rod and I were

there waiting for our plane which was a couple hours late. I was slowing making my way to the "facility" when someone took my arm and said, "Let me help you." Of course, it was someone from home. He very patiently helped me to my destination and told me to wait there while he returned with a wheelchair. He brought me to where Rod was sitting and made sure we didn't need anything else. He put his number in my cell phone just in case. What a relief!

We share some less than desirable weather at times, but we must remember all the wonderful people make up for it.

Jean Brown

Oldest continuously published paper in Alaska

# WRANGELL SENTINEL

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## Roller rink reopening

Continued from page 1

to bring back the rink shared by many residents, generations that want to see their children create their own memories of the place. "That's kind of what we're excited about, to be able to return a part of Wrangell's memories and to be able to make new ones for the next generation."

The first phase for the Buhlers will be restoring the rink's flooring, walkways and stairwells to make sure that they're safe, with a completion deadline tentatively set for the end of March. They hope to open it to the public by mid-April.

"We'll have regularly scheduled skate nights on Fridays and Saturdays," she said. "It will be open for rentals just like it used to be for birthday parties and stuff. ... We want to run some special events ... and make it available for some free skate nights."

Georgianna said the second phase of the renovation will be the heating systems. The skating rink is noticeably colder than the church. The rink relies on propane heat while the rest of the church uses electric baseboard heaters that are about 50 years old. They want to replace both with sustainable, economically viable heating, and make sure it's fully insulated.

"If we get that all done by Christmas 2024, I will be very, very happy."

Their ministry started in 2020, shortly after the COVID shutdown began, when the Buhlers started using Zoom to organize small groups for Bible study.

Then in March 2022, one of the pastors of their church, Kem Haggard with Harbor Light, put them in touch with businessman Jim Freeman, who had been looking to start a new Christian day care center but all the churches in town were at capacity. That led them all to the Church of God site and its adjoining roller rink, which they realized could provide a unique form of outreach for TouchPoint, combining their ministry with the rink and, hopefully sometime later, a day care center.

"TouchPoint is about points of contact," Georgianna said. "For us, every person who comes in here, it's a point of contact. ... There's a lot of new people in town, and it's an opportunity to get to know them better."

The Buhlers and Freeman had worked with others to try reopening the rink in September of 2022; volunteers cleaned the facilities, the spaces underneath the church and rink, and the outside storage area. "We thought we had a pathway clear," Georgianna said. "And then some other things came along, and it didn't happen."

Things stalled for a while as they looked at different approaches and worked to establish who owned the property, which turned out to be the Alaska General Assembly of the Church of God as well as the local assembly.

By August of last year, the Buhlers and fellow board members of TouchPoint were able to move forward with buying the property. Georgianna posted on her Facebook page on Jan. 21 that they needed assistance with the monthly costs during start-up and the initial costs to get the rink up and running.

She added in her post, "Currently, only one-third of the \$3,500 monthly expenses are covered by monthly partners. An additional \$5,000 is needed to open the roller rink this spring." She has not provided an update on project finances.

Freeman, one of the cleanup coordinators in 2022, had said at the time that the place had been a mainstay of Wrangell social life in the 1980s and that it was "one of the most popular things in town." He hoped that skaters would feel a sense of nostalgia once the facilities are up and running again.

Members in good standing with the Harbor Light Church, the Buhlers have no plans to leave it. "That's our home," Georgianna said. "We didn't start a new church. We're not in competition or anything. The way that the ministry works is that we hold our Bible studies here or our small groups ... here on Wednesdays."

The third phase for the Buhlers will be establishing their day care center at the old Church of God property by early 2025.

## State lacks an available ferry to resume Prince Rupert runs

By SAM STOCKBRIDGE  
Ketchikan Daily News

Numerous challenges are stopping the resumption of Alaska Marine Highway service to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, the ferry system's director said at a conference of Southeast officials last week.

During a Southeast Conference transportation symposium in Juneau on Feb. 8, Ketchikan Vice Mayor Glen Thompson asked for an update about service to the Canadian port, which was a regular stop for Alaska ferries for decades until 2019, with only a brief return to service in 2022.

Craig Tornga, the ferry system's marine director, listed the challenges to resuming service to the convenient port, which offers a closer and less expensive connection to the North American highway system than travelers riding the ships to Bellingham, Washington.

It's about a six-hour ferry ride from Ketchikan to Rupert, and more than 40 hours from Ketchikan to Bellingham.

In order to make runs to Prince Rupert, the Alaska Marine Highway System needs a ship that meets international Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) standards for ship design and staffing levels — and the state has only two ferries that meet that standard.

One is the Kennicott, which will be tied up for the second summer in a row due to a shortage of crew. The other is the 61-year-old Matanuska, which is out of service pend-

ing a decision whether to spend millions of dollars to replace rusted steel and correct multiple safety deficiencies.

The Matanuska, one of the original members of the state fleet, had been compliant with SOLAS requirements as recently as two years ago. But it would be a challenge to maintain that compliance, given the ship's age, issues with its design and a revised system for requesting SOLAS waivers, Tornga explained.

The Matanuska is awaiting its turn in drydock in Ketchikan for a scan of its bottom hull to determine the amount of bad steel. Until the state has that information, it cannot estimate the cost for repairs and to meet SOLAS standards, Tornga said.

In December, Tornga reported that initial scans didn't look rosy, with thin areas of steel in the car deck and the bow-thruster room.

Even if scans find no additional significant issues with the ship's hull, several of the Matanuska's deck corridors stop at dead-ends, which would require the installation of new exit doors.

Tornga also noted that some 60 "antique" doors on the ship would need to be replaced with new ones that would automatically close in the event of a fire. In addition, the crew quarters are located below the ship's waterline, which would need to be addressed to maintain strict compliance with SOLAS standards.

At one time, those structural problems wouldn't have

necessarily prevented SOLAS recertification. The U.S. Coast Guard might have waived some of the deficiencies and allowed the ship to maintain its SOLAS compliance. But under a new agreement between the U.S. and Canada, Tornga said, getting a waiver is much more cumbersome.

"If we want any waiver now, it's not done locally here, as it was in the past," he explained. "It has to go back to Washington, D.C., to get their buy-off on it. And it also has to have a Canadian (approval). ... The reality of that is we would probably never get the 60-year-old Matanuska a waiver," meaning a lot of costly repair work to the ship will be needed.

Beyond SOLAS, the dock that the state ferries use in Prince Rupert is in "bad shape and needs to be replaced," Tornga said. Previous attempts to make those repairs several years ago wound up deadlocked over conflicting U.S. and Canadian regulations, each requiring the use of domestic materials, such as steel, on the project.

A possible solution that has emerged from recent meetings would have Prince Rupert cover the roughly \$35 million replacement cost for the dock, rather than the state of Alaska contracting for the work, with Alaska reimbursing the city by increasing its annual lease payments by about \$1 million a year, Tornga said.

*The Wrangell Sentinel contributed reporting for this story.*

## Seafood industry

Continued from page 1

houses and cold storage, plus what will come this year and in future years, all geared toward pushing prices higher, Welch said.

That's where ASMI, the state's seafood marketing agency, takes the lead.

"People are buying less seafood," Woodrow said. Rising food costs, tight household budgets and overall inflation have made it harder for processors to sell to wholesalers and retailers.

"We have fish to sell. We have a massive supply and demand problem," he said.

About 30% of the value of Alaska's seafood harvest is sold in the United States and the rest is exported, with Japan and Europe the largest direct foreign markets, according to ASMI.

China was the biggest market until 2017, when a trade war between China and the U.S. led to higher tariffs and knocked down Alaska seafood sales to the Asia nation. Alaska's annual exports to China dropped by \$450 million from 2017 to 2020.

China fell from almost 30% of Alaska's seafood exports by value in 2017 to 20% in 2022.

"There isn't a single replacement for China," Woodrow said.

ASMI is working parallel efforts, he explained. It is trying to boost sales to U.S. consumers, while also developing new overseas markets, looking to countries in Southeast Asia, South America, North Africa, India and the Middle East.

"Unfortunately, Americans just don't eat enough seafood," he said.

ASMI markets Alaska seafood as wild-caught, not farm-raised, sustainable and healthy, all of which consumers say they value.

Marketing, however, takes money, and Alaska is outspent. The Norwegian Seafood Council global marketing budget is \$46 million, according to ASMI. Whereas federal funding to ASMI this year totals about \$6 million, Woodrow said.

The Alaska seafood industry, through a self-assessment, contributed about \$11 million to ASMI this year, he said, with the state adding \$5 million for the agency's total spending plan of \$22 million.

"We have a lot of work ahead," Woodrow said in an interview after the conference panel. "There is a lot of uncertainty."

Besides for losing consumers to inflation and China to tariff politics, the Alaska seafood industry also suffered under years of unfair competition from Russia, the panelists said.

Russia blocked the import of Alaska seafood starting in 2014, immediately hitting pink salmon, Decker said. Roe is a big part of the value of pinks, she explained, and Russia was a prime market for the eggs.

Meanwhile, much of Russia's prolific seafood harvest went to China for low-cost processing, entering the global market and undercutting Alaska on price.

The Biden administration in December changed the rules to put an end to Russian fish coming into the U.S. through China, with the change scheduled to take effect later this month, Decker said.

"This will open an opportunity for Alaska seafood to fill a demand," she said, though she worries that all that Russian seafood may just go to other markets around the world, adding to supply and holding down prices.

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# Student athlete creates weight-loss program for her senior project

By MARK C. ROBINSON  
Sentinel reporter

After Lillian "Lily" Younce had knee surgery in September due to past injuries from wrestling, she couldn't resume her sports activities. "I missed out on wrestling this year, which was kind of a bummer," she said. "With me just sitting around and trying to recover from my knee, I ended up gaining weight."

Inspired by her planned course of study of exercise science in college, Younce decided to put together a healthy weight-loss program for her senior year project, in partnership with her father, Joe Younce.

"My dad and I have a schedule of the things that we are to do every day," she said. "We are doing a low-carb diet and just watching what we eat. My mom helps with that because she's normally the one to do dinner when she's not working. I am still researching more things that we can accomplish."

Delayed by her four months of recovery, schoolwork, part-time job, extracurricular activities and a head cold, they finally began their program on Feb. 3. Thus far, Younce said the most fun part has been

spending time with her dad and planning all the different aspects including the various types of exercise. "We start with a stretch," she said. "We ride our bikes for 30 minutes every night."

But she understands that she will need to have patience.

"So far, it's taught me that it's going to take a lot of time and management, especially since I did just have to have surgery and I'm still recovering from it," she said.

The most difficult part of the project for Younce was getting started. "Because I've been sick and busy working," she said. "But we finally maintained a good schedule."

She said her knee is much better now, and she has two more months of recovery.

After graduation, Younce said she will stay with her maternal aunt Penny Macris in Seattle to attend Pacific University in the fall, and her chosen major will tie into sports management. "I got directly admitted into the exercise science major, so I'm pretty excited."

Younce believes her experience in sports will assist her with her chosen field in relating to fellow athletes. "I think it's



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

While recovering from a sports injury and surgery, student athlete Lily Younce was inspired by her choice of upcoming college studies to design a healthy weight-loss program as her senior project.

important because you can get to know the person more, and you can understand what they're going through, especially if you've been through the same thing," she added. "So you can help more one-on-one, and just help them train better and get them to be 100%."

Her major could also lead to other avenues, such as sports medicine, should she choose.

She added she might return to her pas-

sion for wrestling in college if it's available in the athletics program. "Other than that, I've been looking into soccer, which I've never done."

One thing that Younce will miss most about high school is her time as an athlete. "Being on the mat and being able to cheer on our teams," she said.

One thing that she will not miss? "Waking up early," she said. "I just don't like the mornings."

# School funding supporters continue work in state Capitol

By CLAIRE STREMPLE  
Alaska Beacon

Supporters of education funding crowded a legislative committee room on Feb. 5, advocating for a permanent increase in the state funding formula for public schools.

Though the advocates were unified in their message to a joint meeting of House and Senate education committees, Gov. Mike Dunleavy and Education Commissioner Deena Bishop don't support a permanent increase to the school funding formula. Instead, they have proposed targeted investments in certain areas, such as charter schools.

Education administrators from across the state attempted to make the case that years of stagnant funding has damaged Alaska schools' ability to hire and retain teachers — and that the high turnover rates are hurting Alaska's students.

Lisa Parady, executive director for the Alaska Council of School Administrators, painted legislators a dire picture of hiring and retention woes. Department of Labor data shows teachers are

leaving the state faster than they can be replaced.

"We are struggling in the worst crisis Alaska has ever seen in terms of turnover. We can't recruit teachers. Fundamentally, that's very important to high quality instruction," she said. "This is an emergency at a level that we have never seen before in Alaska."

Roy Getchell, superintendent of the Haines Borough School District, said his district would have to spend down its reserves by half if the proposed budget is enacted, which would make it financially precarious.

"I think that we're all walking toward the cliff. Some are already there. But we're all on the way," he said.

The Wrangell School District also has been relying on its reserves to balance its budget, lacking a permanent increase in the state's per-student funding formula, which has not changed since 2017, and the expiration of federal pandemic relief aid.

Yukon-Koyukuk School District Chief Financial Officer Heather Heineken's voice caught

as she related that the neighboring Fairbanks North Star Borough School District may close two more schools and increase class sizes by about 15%. "I do have a stake in that as a family member," she said. The district estimated class sizes could increase to 30 students per classroom in elementary school and 35 in high school.

In a Senate majority coalition press conference the day after the committee hearing, lawmakers said the funding formula increase that it proposed last year is now too low.

Sen. Jesse Bjorkman, a Nikiski Republican and teacher, said that to keep districts from making cuts and taking educational opportunities away from kids, the increase needs to be more than \$680 per base student. That's what legislators approved as a one-time boost last year, but which the governor vetoed in half.

"Costs have increased. Costs for energy, costs for transportation. Insurance costs have skyrocketed, putting immense pressure on district budgets, and

ultimately leaving less money available for the actual educating of our children," Bjorkman said.

"There's no sugarcoating. That's the math. When you get bills, and the bills come due, these school districts have to have money in the bank to pay those bills. They don't get to go and raise revenue or run a deficit to operate every year."

Bishop, who had supported more state funding when she was superintendent at Anchorage schools, told legislators she does not now support an increase to the formula, but rather a change to it. She said schools need investment, but it should be targeted.

"If it's teachers, let's invest in teachers if that's the need. If it's our smaller districts dealing with energy, let's crack the energy nut," she said.

The governor, who opposes a permanent increase in state funding without other provisions included, such as boosting charter schools, also supports paying bonuses directly to teachers. In a press conference on Feb. 8, he defended the strategy, which education administrators have said is insufficient to meet their needs.

"I would bet my retirement, if you just put money into (the funding formula), there'll be no change in performance. Because we've done that year after year," he said. "Why don't we target it to the problem we know we have: classroom teachers and retaining them. What's wrong with that idea?"

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

## Hospice Hearts awards event set for Feb. 19 luncheon

By SENTINEL STAFF

Hospice of Wrangell will give out 16 "Hospice Hearts" next week to people who have helped the nonprofit organization in the past year.

The hospice group started providing services in Wrangell in 2002, and each year honors volunteers for their services.

This year's event is planned for noon Monday, Feb. 19, at the Father Jerry Hall at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, starting with a light lunch. The community is invited.

This year's Hospice Hearts will go to Kathie Angerman, Michael Bania, Jim Bailey, Cathy Carson, Artha DeRuyter, John DeRuyter, Tyler Eagle, Katie Fitzjarrald, Joe Gartrell, Sanoe Harrison, Sandy Massin, Duke Mitchell, Georgia Selfridge, Kathy Watkins, the staff at the Irene Ingle Public Library and the Stikine Stitchers.

Hospice of Wrangell operates the community loan closet of medical equipment, gives out comfort quilts, provides the Wrangell senior resource

directory and end-of-life information booklets and community education, and also organizes the annual Dove Tree ceremony to remember loved ones around the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

The effort to start a hospice group in Wrangell began in 2000 when several health care professionals, church leaders and social workers gathered to discuss the need in the community and available training so that locals could provide services, according to a "Hospice of Wrangell History" provided by Alice Rooney, one of the founding members.

"The motivation for the (2000) meeting was an upcoming PBS series on dying called 'On Our Own Terms,'" according to the group's history.

A couple of people from Hospice and Home Care of Juneau came to Wrangell to provide training in March 2001, and the new group finished its organizing efforts and started providing services the next year.

### The American Legion Auxiliary Unit 6

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Community members who shopped for the seniors and all the other numerous volunteers that donated many hours of set-up, assisting, clean-up, wrapping gifts and delivering them.

This year we served 186 children and 75 senior citizens. Thank you all again for being so giving of your time and money. These events wouldn't have happened without all the community's support!

# Wolves boys split against Metlakatla, putting end to Chiefs' winning streak

By MARK C. ROBINSON  
Sentinel reporter

The Wolves varsity boys basketball team split against top Southeast team Metlakatla last weekend, Feb. 9-10. Wrangell lost to the Chiefs in their first matchup but came back determined the following day and dealt the Chiefs their first loss after eight straight victories.

Initially, the Wolves held their own on Friday afternoon and by the end of the first half Metlakatla was ahead, 31-29. However, in the second half, they pulled further ahead until the Chiefs won 65-51.

"In the first game, the third quarter was really what hurt us," said Cody Angerman, the Wolves head coach. "The first night we didn't do as good a job defensively."

Angerman cited junior Carter Marsden as a key to Metlakatla's win. "If they give them the ball, he's just hard to stop."

On Saturday, Angerman said the Wolves focused on winning one quarter at a time. "It worked out in our favor," he said. "Even though they were undefeated, I felt we could be the ones to take them down. ... It's a good thing to end that streak, giving (our team) the feeling that they can beat anybody."

Foul trouble was one factor in Metlakatla's loss on Saturday. The Chiefs got another blow in the second quarter when junior Brody Booth suffered a painful injury to his lower left leg that took him out of the game. "Injuries happen," Angerman said. "It didn't look very good, but often young kids can bounce back quick, and I hope that's the case for Brody."

Juniors Kyan Stead and Trevyn Gillen led the Wolves in defense, while the top scorers in both games were juniors Stead and Daniel Harrison, with Stead scoring 23 points and Harrison

19 on Friday, then 29 points for Stead and 26 points for Harrison on Saturday. A sizable part of their scoring came from the free throw line. "It's a good place to get extra points," Angerman said.

He also praised the growing camaraderie and teamwork between Harrison and Stead since the season began. "It's really nice to see."

Harrison led in rebounds. "It's one of the things that gets unnoticed about him," Angerman said.

The junior varsity team lost both of their games against Metlakatla, with the Chiefs winning Friday, 58-53, and on Saturday, 71-36.

Sophomore Brody Knecht earned top scores in both matches, with 13 points on Friday and 14 on Saturday. Other notable scorers on Friday were sophomores Ben Houser with 11, and Timothy Pearson with 10.

In preparation for the last games of the regular season,



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Boomchain Loucks lets go with a shot in Saturday's game against Metlakatla. The Wolves won 63-51, after losing the first game on Friday.

then the regional playoffs, Angerman said, "We're going to keep practicing. It's unfortunate that we have a bye week this weekend. Just keep practicing

and stay healthy. Make sure that when we play Craig in two weeks that we're ready."

The Wolves will play at Craig on Feb. 23-24.

## SEARHC raises hourly minimum wage to \$25 for direct-hire workers

By MARK SABBATINI  
Juneau Empire

A minimum wage of \$25 an hour for direct-hire employees is being implemented by the SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, the Native-run health care organization announced Feb. 7.

The change applies to about 85% of SEARHC's total workforce and will result in pay increases for about 16% of the organization's employees, said Kathryn Sweyer, a SEARHC spokesperson, in an interview Feb. 8. She said various assistant positions, clerks, technicians and care attendants are among the employees who were paid less than \$25 an hour.

Contractor employees, such as food service workers, are not covered by the new pay scale.

"We considered the market dynamics, including cost of living for Southeast Alaska, as well as insight and feedback from existing employees," Sweyer said.

The new hourly minimum wage equals \$52,000 a year for an employee working 40 hours a week.

The new wages at SEARHC are higher than the minimum hourly wage of \$19.39 an hour at Juneau's Bartlett Regional Hospital, according to Erin Hardin, a spokesperson for the hospital. In an email, she noted the minimum pay is "for positions that require no prior experience and serve as an entry point to a career with the hospital."

She gave as examples food service work, home attendants and laundry staff.

Health care industry wages have been a concern both nationwide, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic when high demand and low availability of workers meant paying high salaries for traveling nurses and other professionals.

The health care industry is expected to be among the fastest-growing in Southeast Alaska during 2024, according to a report presented last week during the Southeast Conference in Juneau. An update to the annual "Southeast Alaska by the Numbers," published by Rain Coast Data, states an additional 200 health care jobs in the region are expected.

The region's 3,540 public and private health care workers comprised 10% of the regional workforce in 2022, according to the report.

"There are too few Alaska health care workers to fill the current demand for services in Alaska, and job vacancies in the industry are increasing," the report notes. "Southeast Alaska medical facilities must compete statewide and nationally for high demand health care workers. ... Southeast Alaska providers have repeatedly adjusted wages up to remain competitive in attracting and retaining workers, resulting in significant overall wage increases."

## Varsity girls lose 2 games against Metlakatla squad

MARK C. ROBINSON  
Sentinel reporter

The girls varsity basketball team suffered two blowout defeats at home to Metlakatla last weekend. "I thought our girls really put in a lot of effort, defensively," said head coach Christina Good. "We're a young team; we're still learning. ... I'm really proud of our girls for keeping their heads up and putting in the effort. I feel like both nights they did that."

The Lady Wolves knew that the MissChiefs would be tough opponents. Before the Feb. 9-10 games in Wrangell, the Metlakatla girls had won 12 in a row. "Metlakatla, they are so good at pounding the paint and hitting their shots," Good said. "They're a darn good team, and we're learning from those good teams."

In Friday's game, the Lady Wolves got off to an early start with a trey from senior Kayla Meissner, putting them ahead 3-2. But Metlakatla took control and won 61-27.

Saturday's game was almost halfway through the first quarter before freshman Alana Harrison scored the Lady Wolves' first two points to the MissChiefs' 8 points. The score once again widened from there, with Metlakatla winning 85-29.

High scorers for the varsity girls were Harrison and Meissner, earning 10 points and 9 points, respectively, in both games. "Alana Harrison did well on both nights, rebounding," Good said.

The junior varsity team also lost both of their games against Metlakatla, with the MissChiefs winning in a close contest Friday, 37-33, then Saturday, 54-33.

On Friday, Harrison was the top scorer for the JV team with 13 points, followed by freshman Sophia Martinsen and sophomore Christina Johnson, who both scored 5 points. On Saturday, Martinsen was the top scorer with 11 points, while Harrison got 8.

Good said that the key to improvement is more rebounds, fewer turnovers and definitely more scoring. "We have to attack and block out," she added. "Running our offense, taking care of the ball and getting our rebounds."

The team will prepare as the regular season nears the end, making way for the Southeast regional tournament in March. "Tournament is a whole new ball game," Good said. "We just have to stay the course."

The Lady Wolves will next play at Craig, Feb. 23-24.



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Shailyn Nelson is blocked as she goes up for a jump shot late in Saturday's game against the Metlakatla MissChiefs.

OBITUARIES

**Services in March for longtime resident Patty Jean Kautz**



**Patty Jean Kautz**

Patty Jean Kautz passed away on Jan. 7, 2024. She was 80 years ago.

Patty was born Jan. 29, 1943. A celebration of life will be held at 2 p.m. March 23 at the Marine Bar. Patty owned and operated the Marine Bar for 41 years.

She is survived by husband Bruce Kautz; sister Darlene Kenner (Dewight); sons Van Dunbar and Jason Dunbar; daughters Rhonda Dunbar and Terri McGee; several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**Susan "Suzy" Virginia Hay  
Nov. 18, 1941 - Feb. 4, 2024**

Susan "Suzy" Virginia Hay passed on Feb. 4, 2024, at Wrangell's Long-Term Care with a family member at her side.

Suzy was 83 years old and had begun to reminisce about friends and family who had passed on in recent years and some long ago. She knew she would see them again, and was looking forward to that.

Suzy was born in Bakersfield, California, to Joyce and Virginia Hay on Nov. 18, 1941, joining her older brother Mike. They lived in Bakersfield until 1945, when the family chose to move to Wrangell. Our mother's brother Uncle Tom lived in Wrangell. He was a fisherman. He told them, "You can live off the land!" In 1951 another daughter, Georgia, joined the family.

Wrangell remained Suzy's beloved home — even with the years spent apart, Wrangell was it.

She attended Wrangell Public Schools through high school, graduating with honors in 1960.

One of her favorite honors was when the Alaska Sportsman magazine featured Suzy and the moose she had bagged up the river. The article and picture were titled, "Suzy gets her moose." This was in the fall of 1960. Suzy was 18 and received many letters, including



Susan "Suzy" Virginia Hay

several marriage proposals!

In the late fall of 1960, Suzy married Charles Merle Stewart. They spent their married years living in Mill City, Oregon, a beautiful small town heading up into the Oregon Cascade Mountains. Suzy and Merle had four children: Kristi Merle, Susan Denise, Michael Hay and Sara Virginia. They had three beautiful grandchildren: Georgia, Samantha and Tanner.

As children grew up, Suzy attended Chemeketa College in Salem Oregon, graduating with a

nursing degree. She began working at Santiam Memorial Hospital in Stayton, Oregon. Suzy loved Oregon! But she missed Wrangell!

In the 1970s, Suzy moved back home for good. She began working at Wrangell General Hospital.

She loved adventure and treasured the beauty of life, the camaraderie of old friends and new, whether traveling to Terrace, British Columbia, to attend the music festival; sitting on the Blue Bird with Ginny and the "gals" watching for the moose and the moose hunters; sitting around a bonfire with family and friends — guitars playing and all but a few singing out of tune with a glass of champagne in hand.

Suzy loved being on the water, with everything it offered — the beauty, the freedom, the sounds of the boat motor, the Stikine River, Telegraph Creek, trips into Shakes and LeConte.

Her favorite was fishing the ocean of Southeast with her partner.

She was home. She is home.

Thank you Doug for all the joy you brought to Suzy these past few years.

Thank you Long-Term Care. You guys were awesome.

*Suzy's family.*

**Southeast trollers pull in record king salmon catch in January**

By SHANNON HAUGLAND  
Sitka Sentinel

Despite the rough weather, Southeast trollers recorded a record chinook salmon catch for January in the winter troll fishery, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The January catch totaled 7,200 kings, well above the previous record of 4,800 in 2016.

"I knew it was good but didn't realize we were that far above the previous high," said Grant Hagerman, Fish and Game Southeast troll biologist in Sitka.

But "it's not all roses," Hagerman said. The fish are smaller on average, and the prices are below the five-year average. "We're hovering around \$9, which is still pretty good, and we're at about \$8.32 for the seasonal average,

but that fluctuates," Hagerman said. Prices have peaked historically around Valentine's Day, he added.

Comparing January catches, trollers last year caught 4,100 chinook last year.

For Sitka-based trollers, the average catch per boat this year was 26 kings, compared to the five-year average of nine.

"What that metric tells us is that there's an abundance of fish right now, the abundance of the mixture of stocks here for January is up and is looking good," Hagerman said.

The winter chinook season opened Oc. 11 and will continue

through March 15.

Fishermen so far have caught 24,000 kings this season, including 1,600 Alaska hatchery fish which don't count toward the 45,000 non-Alaska hatchery guideline harvest level (GHL) set to comply with U.S.-Canada treaty limits.

"If fishing continues to be good in February, March and even April, they could potentially catch the winter GHL, which they haven't done since 2016," Hagerman said of trollers.

Fish and Game said the number of permits fished for the winter troll season this year is 189, up by 34 boats from last year.

The winter catch of kings has been a "a nice bump" for trollers, Hagerman said. "The 2023 summer coho season wasn't bad, but there's a lot of residents who hang their hat on what goes on in winter. so even though the price has been down, and the sizes down a bit, there's definitely more fish out there than

we've seen the last few years."

He said the winter troll season gives Fish and Game "the earliest indication of a very general coast-wide health of chinook. ... It's an indication stocks harvested in the winter troll fishery are coming in fairly strong, so hopefully other stocks along the coast will be too."

**Jacobus (Jack) Pino**  
passed away peacefully  
on January 26, 2024  
in Wrangell.

*An obituary will follow.*

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# Alaska governor would like to send state Guard troops to Texas

By JAMES BROOKS  
Alaska Beacon

Gov. Mike Dunleavy told reporters on Feb. 7 that he'd like to answer Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's request for National Guard soldiers to support a state-run effort along the Mexico border, but he's not sure the Alaska Legislature will approve the cost.

"To send the Guard down will cost us about — according to Adjutant General Saxe — about a million dollars a month for 100 folks. We'll test the waters with the Legislature to see if they're willing to fund that, and I wouldn't mind

helping Texas with their issue on the border," Dunleavy said.

The governor's remarks followed the announcement that the federal National Guard bureau has asked the Alaska National Guard to prepare for the deployment of 20 soldiers and two helicopters to support U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials along the American border with Mexico.

Since 2021, citing the perceived inadequacy of federal efforts, Texas has conducted Operation Lone Star, its own state-run effort to fortify the international border and prevent crossings between the

usual American ports of entry.

Those efforts have at times conflicted with federal border-protection efforts, most notably with Texas' recent decision to install razor wire along portions of the border. The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that Texas cannot stop federal officials from removing that wire and cannot interfere with federal officials carrying out their duties.

Many Republican politicians have criticized the federal approach to the border, and former President Donald Trump said "willing states" should "deploy their guards to

Texas."

Dunleavy and Alaska Attorney General Treg Taylor have issued statements in support of Texas' position of fortifying and guarding its border, and this month Taylor and Adjutant General Torrence Saxe conducted a series of closed-door briefings with legislators about planned and possible National Guard deployments to the border.

If Alaska National Guard soldiers were to deploy at Texas' request, it would be under Dunleavy's authority and the state would pay the bill, the governor said.

Dunleavy also said on Feb. 7 that he wants to see more immigration, particularly to Alaska. "I think we need more people. I think we need more immigrants. And I've always said, build a strong wall with many doors, many ways to get into this country," he said.

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

## Alaska courts still dealing with backlog of cases from shutdown during COVID

By CLAIRE STREMPLE  
Alaska Beacon

Alaska's courts have had a backlog of cases since courts shut down for months during the COVID-19 pandemic. The backlog has persisted, in part because of attorney shortages.

The court typically carries many pending cases, but the number of pending cases is currently 27% higher for felonies and about 13% higher for misdemeanors than it was in 2019, pre-COVID.

"The overall numbers are going down, which is what we want to see," said Stacey Marz, the Alaska State Court System's administrative director. "We want to see fewer cases that are pending."

In the year before the pandemic, the courts usually carried 4,000 to 5,000 pending felony cases. At the height of the backlog, in January 2022, the courts had 7,348 pending felony cases. In January 2024, the courts had reduced that number to 6,440 pending felony cases.

There were just over 8,000 pending misdemeanors in January of 2019, more than 13,000 in January of 2022 and 9,312 in January of 2024.

The courts processed roughly 92,000 cases in the 12 months that ended in June 2023, so the current number of pending cases is roughly equivalent to 15% of a year's cases.

Court records show that the typical amount of time it takes to process a case roughly doubled during the pandemic and has stayed high for both felonies and misdemeanors.

In his State of the Judiciary address before legislators on Feb. 7, Chief Justice Peter Maassen called it one of the court system's most daunting challenges. He said the courts will bring back retired judges to preside over cases whenever necessary.

"We recognize the impact this has on not just the criminal defendants but also the victims, family members, potential witnesses, and the public at large, and we want to make sure that the court system is never the cause of delay," he said.

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### CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL

During the Jan. 23 Regular Assembly Meeting, the Borough Assembly approved writing-off delinquent account balances and sending them to collections. To avoid getting sent to collections, listed individuals below must pay their account balance in full prior to 4 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 28.

UTILITIES							
Account #	Name	Current	30-60	60-90	90-120	120+	Balance
10930-08	Allen, Lorraine	\$15.24	\$15.24	\$15.24	\$15.24	\$1,774.99	\$1,835.95
10360-27	Ambrose, Calvyn F	\$5.32	\$5.32	\$5.32	\$5.32	\$627.49	\$648.77
13177-02	Anderson, Jannette G	\$2.01	\$2.01	\$2.01	\$2.01	\$254.86	\$262.90
10464-28	Barcelo, Sherry A	\$6.07	\$6.07	\$6.07	\$6.07	\$737.09	\$761.37
12343-11	Bartlett, Darryl J	\$2.56	\$22.38	\$2.38	\$2.38	\$301.07	\$330.77
13896-03	Berglund, Hilary C	\$0.80	\$0.80	\$0.80	\$0.80	\$115.84	\$119.04
14079-04	Berglund, Hilary C	\$0.37	\$0.37	\$0.37	\$0.37	\$59.13	\$60.61
12085-28	Boakes, Spencer	\$1.43	\$1.43	\$1.43	\$1.43	\$205.15	\$210.87
12403-09	Coddington, Bob	\$1.05	\$1.05	\$1.05	\$1.05	\$145.32	\$149.52
10361-39	Coicoechea, Cory M	\$2.62	\$2.62	\$4.33	\$184.84	\$114.09	\$308.50
12327-14	Crandall, Justin S	\$6.30	\$6.30	\$6.30	\$6.30	\$753.49	\$778.69
11622-06	Delong, Lonny	\$4.99	\$4.99	\$4.99	\$4.99	\$794.36	\$814.32
13162-24	Delong, Lonny	\$2.04	\$2.04	\$2.04	\$2.04	\$272.76	\$280.92
14073-06	Duncan, Elmer G	\$1.44	\$1.44	\$1.44	\$1.44	\$172.12	\$177.88
11681-14	Emens, Cary	\$6.15	\$6.15	\$6.15	\$6.15	\$797.07	\$821.67
12458-05	Emens, Cary	\$1.95	\$11.50	\$11.41	\$11.33	\$207.89	\$244.08
12080-23	Foster, Kelly	\$0.58	\$0.58	\$0.58	\$0.58	\$82.77	\$85.09
11018-12	Gadd, Caleah	\$4.63	\$4.63	\$4.63	\$4.63	\$569.02	\$587.54
10145-08	Garcia, Victoria	\$1.44	\$7.77	\$158.01	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$167.22
10642-25	Gillen, Matthew	\$9.90	\$29.72	\$9.72	\$9.72	\$1,166.50	\$1,225.56
10049-03	Goodman, Robert	\$0.54	\$0.54	\$0.54	\$0.54	\$69.00	\$71.16
11432-03	Goodman, Robert	\$3.06	\$3.06	\$3.06	\$3.06	\$392.92	\$405.16
11446-01	Griffis, Daniel	\$6.83	\$6.83	\$6.83	\$6.83	\$837.90	\$865.22
10323-12	Hale, Jacob O	\$1.04	\$1.04	\$1.04	\$1.04	\$127.48	\$131.64
11012-06	Howell, Nicholas	\$0.23	\$0.23	\$0.23	\$0.23	\$26.39	\$27.31
11012-07	Howell, Nicholas	\$1.53	\$1.53	\$1.53	\$13.08	\$164.00	\$181.67
10196-17	Johnson, Debrah D	\$6.24	\$6.24	\$6.24	\$6.24	\$804.00	\$828.96
11770-01	Joseph/Estate, Johanna	\$2.79	\$2.79	\$2.79	\$2.79	\$346.37	\$357.53
10124-03	Keith, Paula	\$2.91	\$2.91	\$2.91	\$2.91	\$378.07	\$389.71
10461-41	Krages, Thomas	\$1.10	\$1.10	\$1.10	\$1.10	\$130.59	\$134.99
10461-38	Larsen, Nels J	\$0.76	\$0.76	\$0.76	\$0.76	\$93.35	\$96.39
10450-41	Lemma, Matthew W	\$4.04	\$4.04	\$4.04	\$4.04	\$519.55	\$535.71
11005-10	Lewis, Nicholas D	\$7.64	\$7.64	\$7.64	\$7.64	\$999.55	\$1,030.11
10325-31	Loomis, Christina R	\$4.09	\$4.09	\$5.83	\$185.99	\$284.32	\$484.32
12058-21	Martin, Adrian J D	\$0.38	\$0.38	\$0.38	\$0.38	\$45.53	\$47.05
12018-11	Mathieu, Jason Devyn	\$2.58	\$88.31	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$90.89
10247-03	Mickey, Diane R	\$1.42	\$1.42	\$1.42	\$1.42	\$180.30	\$185.98
14013-06	Nestle, Kevin	\$1.42	\$1.42	\$1.42	\$1.42	\$177.73	\$183.41
13178-25	Notley, Theresa Marie	\$8.06	\$9.16	\$9.16	\$9.16	\$957.75	\$993.29
10368-25	O'Connor, Dominique	\$5.96	\$5.96	\$5.96	\$10.34	\$718.96	\$747.18
10464-26	Oglend, Pamela	\$15.09	\$15.09	\$15.09	\$15.09	\$1,987.39	\$2,047.75
10462-35	Oyler, Barry J	\$3.02	\$3.02	\$3.02	\$3.02	\$385.77	\$397.85
11592-42	Richter, Connor M	\$3.20	\$3.20	\$3.20	\$3.20	\$428.19	\$440.99
12141-04	Ridgeway, Jennifer D	\$0.20	\$0.20	\$0.20	\$22.39	\$0.00	\$22.99
10247-05	Rincon, Colleen R	\$5.87	\$5.87	\$5.87	\$5.87	\$695.68	\$719.16
11015-11	Rue, Bill	\$7.37	\$26.46	\$58.27	\$212.90	\$568.79	\$873.79
12360-09	Saunders, David	\$13.35	\$13.35	\$13.35	\$13.35	\$1,609.72	\$1,663.12
12353-22	Sims, Benjamin	\$0.37	\$42.02	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$42.39
10940-09	Smith, Chris L	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$2.00	\$247.77	\$255.77
13323-08	Steinbrueck, Steven R	\$4.78	\$4.78	\$4.78	\$4.78	\$622.06	\$641.18
12353-21	Templin, Donald C	\$0.28	\$0.28	\$0.28	\$0.28	\$36.14	\$37.26
10195-11	Tennant-Miller, Monica	\$0.89	\$0.89	\$0.89	\$0.89	\$117.01	\$120.57
10140-13	Van Evey, Rick	\$1.21	\$1.21	\$1.21	\$1.21	\$151.75	\$156.59
14260-01	Vertical Bridge Development LLC	\$1.74	\$1.74	\$1.74	\$1.74	\$215.78	\$222.74
12327-13	Watts, Jonathan E	\$0.78	\$0.78	\$0.78	\$0.78	\$127.63	\$130.75
12018-10	Williams, Reginald K	\$2.41	\$2.41	\$2.41	\$2.41	\$280.97	\$290.61
11621-11	Zeutzius, Andrew J	\$4.69	\$5.79	\$17.15	\$17.15	\$613.12	\$657.90

# Police report

**Monday, Feb. 5**  
 Agency assist: Public Works and Harbors departments.  
 Agency assist: Ambulance.  
 Agency assist: Public Works for icy roads.  
 Agency assist: State troopers and U.S. Forest Service.  
 Reckless driving: Citation issued for driving on the wrong side of the road, and verbal warning for expired registration tags.

**Tuesday, Feb. 6**  
 Parking complaint.  
 Domestic violence order service.  
 Parking violation.

**Wednesday, Feb. 7**  
 Agency assist: Ambulance.  
 Parking complaint.  
 Agency assist: State troopers.  
 Letter served for removing a person from a licensed establishment.  
 Pretrial transfer.

**Thursday, Feb. 8**  
 Violation of condition of release.  
 Report of suspicion of driving under the influence; arrested for driving under the influence.  
 Suspicious circumstance.  
 Agency assist: Petersburg Police Department.  
 Agency assist: Summons service.

**Friday, Feb. 9**  
 Suspicious activity:  
 Unfounded.  
 Parking complaint.

**Saturday, Feb. 10**  
 Suspicious circumstance:  
 Scam call.

**Sunday, Feb. 11**  
 Dog complaint.  
 Agency assist: Ambulance.  
 Disturbance: Verbal.  
 Citizen assist.

# Alaska legislator wants to require armed volunteer on school grounds

By JAMES BROOKS  
 Alaska Beacon

A new proposal from Palmer Republican Sen. Shelley Hughes would require Alaska school districts to train a volunteer able to carry a concealed handgun on school grounds.

Schools would be exempted only if no one agrees to accept the duty or if no one is able to do so.

Hughes' proposal, Senate Bill 173, received its first hearing in January in the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee.

The K-12 School Shooting Database includes 346 shootings and near-shootings at schools or school buses in the United States in 2023. Hughes said many of Alaska's schools are rural, remote, and away from law enforcement.

"There have been times when it can take — because of weather — three to five days to get to a remote village that doesn't have any kind of law enforcement present, that are armed. So, SB 173 is a needed stopgap," she said.

Front-end interventions, such as mental health treatment and resources to help students, are still needed, she said, but if the worst happens, she said she wants help nearby.

No public testimony was taken during the bill meeting, but letters sent to the committee overwhelmingly opposed Hughes' bill. Of 51 letters received through noon Jan. 24, only two were supportive.

Dr. Charles Ross Baldwin, a trauma surgeon in Anchorage, was one of those who wrote in opposition.

"As a trauma surgeon, I see a large number of self-inflicted and accidental gun-related injuries. While there are a lot of emotions around protecting children, the reality of putting guns in schools, in the hands of inadequately trained civilians, would

likely increase risk of harm to students more than it would help prevent violence," he said.

April Rochford of Anchorage said in her testimony that it doesn't make sense, at a time when school districts are pleading for more funding, to require them to pay for the training.

"This bill is ... frankly, quite stupid," she said, adding that if legislators were serious about reducing gun violence, they would consider a safe-storage bill and one about extreme-risk protective orders.

Hughes' proposal is similar to one introduced in the Utah Legislature in November.

Current state law prohibits someone from carrying a deadly weapon on school grounds without the permission of the chief administrative officer of the school or district.

Larger schools and those in urban areas frequently have armed "school resource officers" permitted by the district, and Hughes said her legislation would be an extension of that effort.

Under the language of the bill, school districts would have to create written policies and procedures for the armed volunteer, and they could limit the role to a school district employee, but that isn't required.

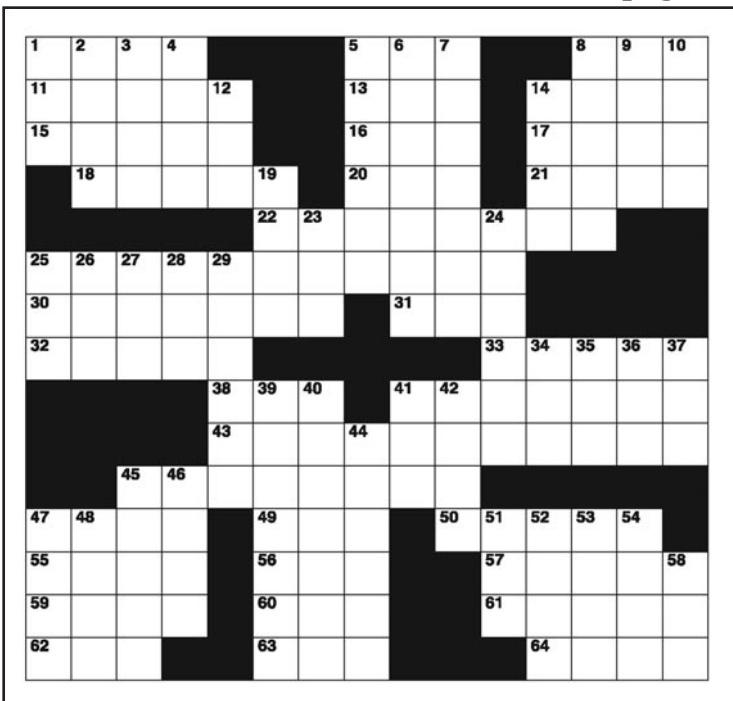
If the volunteer is an employee, the district would have to pay for any mandated training. If the volunteer isn't an employee, the district would be required to reimburse them for their costs, if they ask for reimbursement.

Hughes' legislation has picked up just two co-sponsors in the 20-member Senate. None of the three sponsors are part of the controlling majority in the Senate, reducing the odds of the bill winning passage in the body.

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# Crossword

Answers on page 12



### CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Golf scores
- 5. Shock therapy
- 8. Ballplayer's tool
- 11. Quench one's thirst
- 13. Female relatives of American war vets (abbr.)
- 14. Every one of two or more things
- 15. Member of Muslim people
- 16. Play
- 17. Type of cheese
- 18. Type of lounge chair
- 20. \_\_\_ King Cole, musician
- 21. Fellows
- 22. North, Central and South
- 25. In an early way
- 30. Foes
- 31. Georgia rockers
- 32. Cryptocurrency
- 33. Narrow path along a slope
- 38. Disallow
- 41. Joyousness
- 43. Inaccessible
- 45. Evoke emotions
- 47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
- 49. Boston Celtic punk rockers (abbr.)
- 50. Sword
- 55. Actor Idris
- 56. Affirmative (slang)
- 57. Afflicted
- 59. One point north of northeast
- 60. Born of
- 61. Arabic name
- 62. Traumatic brain injury (abbr.)
- 63. Extremity
- 64. Post

### CLUES DOWN

- 1. Pacific Standard Time
- 2. Protruding ridge on nematodes
- 3. Indian king
- 4. Type of milk
- 5. One who brings home the bacon
- 6. More comprehensible
- 7. Connected with sense of touch
- 8. Red mineral
- 9. Breezed through
- 10. Therefore
- 12. Supplement with difficulty
- 14. Early kingdom of Syria
- 19. Satisfy
- 23. They confuse doctors (abbr.)
- 24. Brass instrument
- 25. Domesticated animal
- 26. Ribonucleic acid
- 27. Snakelike fish
- 28. Woman (French)
- 29. Economically-minded aircraft
- 34. When you hope to get somewhere
- 35. Tease
- 36. Actress Gretchen
- 37. Midway between northeast and east
- 39. Inoffensive
- 40. Yellowish cotton cloth
- 41. Consume
- 42. Does not tell the truth
- 44. Improved something
- 45. Spiritual leader
- 46. Abba \_\_, Israeli politician
- 47. Fix
- 48. Evergreen tree genus
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Prejudice
- 53. Major C. European river
- 54. Long, narrow strap
- 58. Male parent

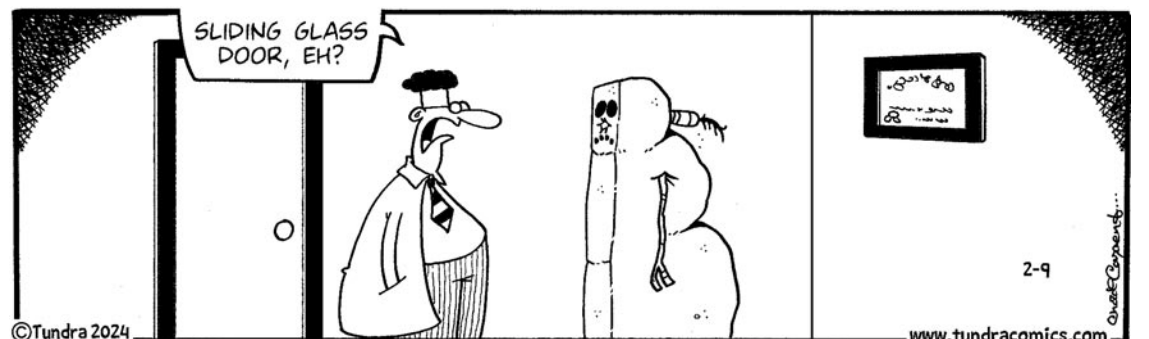
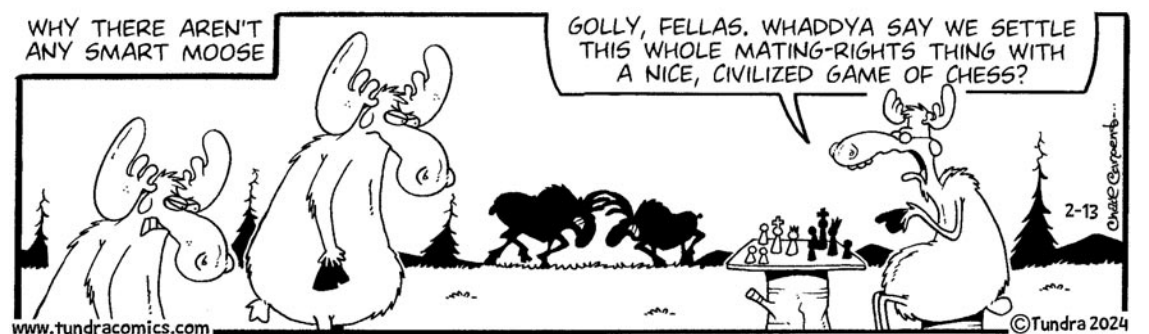
# Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



# Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



# State troopers, other agencies struggle under high vacancy rates

By **CLAIRE STREMPLE**  
*Alaska Beacon*

To keep Alaska communities safe and workloads manageable, Department of Public Safety Commissioner Jim Cockrell said he would need 35% more state troopers than he has now. After he fills the 62 vacancies in the department, he wants to ask for about 90 more positions. But he said things used to be worse — at one point last year the department had 70 vacancies of 411 trooper positions.

“The bottom line is we’re making steady progress,” he said. “We’ve made some huge steps forward between the administration and the Legislature.”

The Department of Public Safety isn’t alone — most of

Alaska’s state agencies have significant vacancy rates. That can cut into state services and even sometimes add to the state budget, depending on the job, according to budget experts.

Cockrell traces the high vacancy rate in his department back to budget cuts from 2014-2018, when he said the department experienced “disastrous” cuts that resulted in the loss of more than 80 positions and the closure of 12 posts. Oil prices were low those years, pushing down state revenues.

He said the department is recovering, but recruitment doesn’t look like it used to: When he started in the early 1980s, he said the department would get 2,000 to 3,000 applicants for each class of troopers.

“Now we’re happy if we get 150 to maybe 200 per class application,” he said.

In general, governments budget for some vacancies — finance analysts anticipate that there will be unfilled positions at any given time — but Alaska’s current vacancy rate is about double the high end of what a state may typically plan for, Alexei Painter, director of Alaska’s Legislative Finance Division, told legislators Jan. 25. The division provides budget analysis for the Legislature.

December’s 14% vacancy rate for state jobs in Alaska is high but an improvement over a year ago, when the rate was 17%, he said. While the broad trend is good, he said some state departments are making progress while others are losing ground.

As of December, Painter said, state job positions with the highest vacancy rates included unemployment benefit workers (37.7%), public health nurses (33.3%), emergency services dispatchers (27.3%), and child support specialists (24.3%).

“Burnout appears to be a problem,” he told the Senate Finance Committee, listing several state agencies with high vacancy rates and heavy “unsustainable workloads” — the Division of Public Assistance, public defenders office and Division of Personnel.

In economic terms, high vacancy rates are a mixed bag for the state. While the money that would have gone to salaries for unfilled positions could be considered cost savings for some positions, Painter said it is actually more expensive for many jobs to go unfilled.

“In some cases, you’ll see vacancies cause increased costs, and then sometimes they create decreased costs depending on the type of position.”

In state agencies where there is a fixed amount of work, such as the Department of Corrections, vacancies can cost more than full-time employees because it is more ex-

pensive to pay current employees overtime or contract the work out. “They can’t just say, ‘Well, we don’t have enough people, I guess we’re going to close a prison,’” Painter said. “They have to keep those institutions staffed.”

Fortunately, he said, the Department of Corrections has seen the number of vacant positions shrink over the past year. But in the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, where vacancies are increasing, he said, Alaskans have felt the effects. Service has been reduced on the Alaska Marine Highway System, where limited staff means the agency cannot fully staff its vessels and runs a reduced schedule, keeping ships tied to the dock.

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### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of Otto Heinz Florschutz III, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that Christina Florschutz 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 presented to:

Christina Florschutz  
PO Box 547  
Wrangell, AK 99929

**Publish Feb. 14, 21 and 28, 2024**

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of Harold Marshall Snoddy, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that Elizabeth Perman 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-23-17PR) or be presented to:

Elizabeth Peterman  
PO Box 695  
Wrangell, AK 99929

**Publish Jan. 31, Feb. 7 and 14, 2024**

### PUBLIC NOTICE

Alaska Charters and Adventures LLC, dba Alaska Charters and Adventures, is making application for a new liquor license, per AS 04.09.260, located in Alaska waters.

Interested persons should submit written comments to their local governing body (Wrangell Borough Assembly), the applicant, and to the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board at 550 W. 7th Ave., Suite 1600, Anchorage, AK 99501, or email alcohol.licensing@alaska.gov

**Publish Feb. 14, 21, & 28, 2024**

### CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE OF JOB OPENING Borough Manager

The City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, is looking to hire a dynamic, motivated individual to be our Borough Manager. This is a full-time, permanent position with all City and Borough benefits.

Wrangell operates under an Assembly-Manager form of government. The Assembly and community expect you to chart the path forward toward new opportunities and growth. Come join us as we continue our journey.

Preference is given to candidates who hold a degree from an accredited four-year college or university, with a master’s degree in public administration or business administration. A combination of related education and/or municipal experience may be considered.

For a complete job description, please contact the Borough Clerk’s Office at 907-874-2381 or email clerk@wrangell.com, or visit the Borough website <http://www.wrangell.com/jobs>.

Please send a cover letter, detailed resume and references to: City and Borough of Wrangell, P.O. Box 531, Wrangell, AK 99929, or fax (907) 874-2304, or email clerk@wrangell.com.

This position will be open until filled, with the first review date of March 1, 2024.

**Publish Jan. 31, Feb. 7, 14 and 21, 2024**

### CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL

During the Jan. 23 Regular Assembly Meeting, the Borough Assembly approved writing-off delinquent account balances and sending them to collections. To avoid getting sent to collections, listed individuals below must

HARBOR						
Name	Current	30-60	60-90	90-120	120+	Balance
Allen, William	247.17	243.57	240.03	236.53	1868.83	2836.13
Barker, Justin	0	0	0	0	3283.54	3283.54
Berglund, Hilary & Eric	18.22	17.96	17.7	17.44	1179.7	1251.02
Botsford, Tristan	256.07	252.33	249.39	245.76	1136.38	2139.93
Duncan, Elmer	0	0	0	0	3795.61	3795.61
Easterly, Wayne	761.8	1126.47	104.07	102.55	3341.65	5436.54
Far West Vessels	109.43	1096.45	1136.98	1120.41	943.75	4407.02
Gerard, Steve	321.72	317.03	312.42	307.76	1218.02	2476.95
Gore, Matthew	22.51	22.18	21.86	21.54	1457.42	1545.51
Grey, Russell	10.87	10.71	10.56	10.4	703.81	746.35
Hergert, Doug	14.94	16.9	19.13	21.29	655.52	727.78
Jenkins, James	10.23	10.08	9.94	9.68	662.38	702.31
Jenkins, Josh	10.88	10.74	94.84	72.27	557.92	746.65
Lindsey, Patrick	75.77	74.67	73.58	72.51	4905.28	5201.81
Mundt, Corey	645.49	644.83	644.09	649.35	1963.39	4547.15
Shiple, Marie	6.96	9.78	12.55	15.3	436.37	480.96
Stevens, Mark	138.71	136.69	134.74	132.74	2594.26	3137.1
Watts, Jonathan	22.76	22.43	22.1	21.78	1323.23	1412.3
Young, Brett	14.47	18.63	22.31	24.91	617.37	697.69
Zarro, Alberto	1.43	1.41	1.39	1.37	92.54	98.14

### CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE OF JOB OPENING WRANGELL POLICE DEPARTMENT Correctional Officer/Dispatch

The City and Borough of Wrangell is accepting applications of employment for the position of **Correctional Officer/Dispatch** through Feb. 23, 2024, at 5 p.m. This is a permanent position with all City and Borough benefits.

The Dispatcher/Corrections Officer receives emergency and routine calls and assists with all aspects of Corrections. The position performs telephone investigation, preparation of call information, operation of computer terminals, operation of telephone equipment, and includes considerable contact with the general public and public service agencies. The position also assists with booking, processing and surveillance of inmates.

This is a full-time, hourly position with full benefits, paid at Grade 14. Employment is based on a successful background check and pre-employment drug screening, including additional prerequisites outlined in the job description.

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

The City and Borough of Wrangell is an equal opportunity employer.

Mason Villarma, Interim Borough Manager  
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

**Publish Feb. 14 and 21, 2024**

# U.S. preparing to claim ownership of large areas of Arctic seafloor

By YERETH ROSEN  
Alaska Beacon

United States ocean territory could expand by an area more than twice the size of California, with most of that in ocean areas off Alaska, under a claim being prepared by the federal government.

The U.S. State Department in December announced results of a two-decade program to map the extended continental shelf areas beyond the nation's 200-mile exclusive economic zone. Much of the focus was on the Arctic Ocean, where bathymetric and geologic surveys by federal agencies produced the first detailed maps of a complex seafloor with a series of canyons, ridges and deep-sea plateaus.

In all, the mapping reveals that the U.S. has rights to an additional 381,000 square miles, an area about twice the size of California, according to the State Department. Of that, more than half — 201,000 square miles — are in the Arctic Ocean beyond the 200-mile exclusive economic zone off Alaska's North Slope.

An additional 68,000 square miles are contained in a triangular section in the Bering Sea that abuts the U.S.-Russia maritime border. There are also claims in the works to territory off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, the Gulf of Mexico and the Mariana Islands area.

The decades-long project to map the extended continental shelf (ECS) involved the Na-

tional Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey and other agencies and, within the Arctic, numerous research voyages by the U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker Healy. It sets up a formal claim to be made to the international community, the State Department said.

"The continental shelf is the extension of a country's land territory under the sea. Like other countries, the United States has rights under international law to conserve and manage the resources and vital habitats on and under its ECS," the State Department said in its Dec. 19 announcement.

Under international law, countries have the right to claim sovereignty over areas of the ocean that lie beyond the 200-mile limit, as long as those areas are physically connected to underwater shelves that extend from continental masses. Sovereignty includes control over resource development.

But for the U.S., there is a catch: The U.S. Senate has not ratified the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the treaty under which such claims are adjudicated.

Ratification requires a vote of two-thirds of the U.S. Senate, and key Republicans, starting with then-President Ronald Reagan, have rejected the idea for decades.

For Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, the Arctic Ocean mapping adds some urgency to

her latest effort to win ratification.

A bill she introduced in November, her third such attempt at passage, might be successful now that there are potentially tangible benefits to ratifying the treaty, she said at a Dec. 22 news conference.

"I'm really optimistic that things are different," she said. Resistance has always been within her party, she noted. "But as I have talked with different colleagues, there has been a genuine interest in knowing and learning and understanding more."

Murkowski said her understanding is that the U.S., without ratification, has the right to make claims but it does not have the right to mount challenges. Without ratification, she said, "we're limited in terms of our ability to not only defend our claim, but then to push back on others as well."

Being part of the Law of the Sea treaty would help the U.S. assert more control in not only the Arctic, as climate warming opens up the waters to more activity, but in disputed areas like the South China Sea, Murkowski said.

Former Lt. Gov Mead Treadwell, who chaired the U.S. Arctic Research Commission from 2006 to 2010, has also argued in favor of ratification.

Without it, he said, the U.S. claim could run into some trouble. "It's a problem if somebody challenges us who

believes they're got other rights to the same land," he said.

In fact, the extended continental shelf mapped out by the U.S. in the Arctic does overlap a bit with the extended continental shelf claimed by Canada, a matter that the State Department said will have to be settled sometime in the future.

Within the Arctic territory that the U.S. is intending to claim as its extended continental shelf is a topographical feature called the Chukchi Borderland, located 600 miles north of the Bering Strait. There, underwater ridges and plateaus rise from the seafloor at a point where warmer, saltier water flowing in from the Atlantic meets the colder, fresher water flowing from the Pacific.

The Chukchi Borderland is clearly an extension of land in Arctic Alaska, according to the State Department's documents.

"Extensive geophysical data and interpretation show that the Chukchi Borderland and the northern Chukchi elevation share a fundamental morphologic, structural, geochemical, geophysical, and tectonic connection with the Chukchi Shelf and northern Alaska," said the department's executive summary.

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

## Ferry crew shortage

Continued from page 1

more employees than it hired, management told legislators in 2022. In May 2022, 60% of the Alaska Marine Highway's jobs were vacant, the highest vacancy rate among any state agency.

The state has improved its hiring numbers of late, Torgna said, and recruiters continue to go after new hires from marine academies nationwide and at career days at Alaska high schools.

"The hardest sell is to get them to come to Alaska," he said of recruiting from maritime academies. "We find we retain Alaskans at a better percentage than out-of-state hires."

Unless more crew members are hired soon, the Kennicott will spend its second summer tied to the dock in Ketchikan, unable to put enough workers on board to meet U.S. Coast Guard minimum staffing levels.

The ferry system is not the only state agency dealing with a worker shortage.

As of December, state job positions with the highest vacancy rates included unemployment benefit workers (37.7%), public health nurses (33.3%), emergency services dispatchers (27.3%), and child support specialists (24.3%).

Torgna also updated Southeast Conference attendees last week on the upcoming summer schedule and work plans to upgrade or repair several vessels.

The LeConte will be delayed coming back to service in May from winter maintenance after workers found "rotten steel" on the ship and had to schedule more time in the shipyard for additional repairs, he said.

The Alaska Marine Highway expects to go to bid in March to add sleeping quarters for crew to the Tazlina, which has seen limited service since its launch six years ago because it cannot run more than 12 hours without a second crew on board.

A major upgrade to the controllable-pitch propellers system will take the Columbia, the mainstay of service between Southeast Alaska and Bellingham, Washington, out of service for a period in 2025.

Also in 2025, the state plans to upgrade the generators aboard the Kennicott to reduce air emissions to meet federal standards, Torgna said.

The 61-year-old Matanuska, the oldest vessel in the fleet, remains out of service for the second year until "we can get it in the air and take a look at the double bottom" to check for rusted steel plates, he said.

After management has more information on necessary repairs and costs, the state can make a decision whether it is worth it to do the work to put the ship back into operation, Torgna said.

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PUZZLE SOLUTION

### The Wrangell Sentinel and Wrangell Convention and Visitor Bureau are working together to create a visitor guide showcasing all that Wrangell has to offer!

The guide will be available online year-round, in addition to 10,000 high-quality printed copies to mail out, take to trade shows and hand out to spread the word of Wrangell as a great destination.



**The deadline to reserve your ad space is March 1.**

Call or email Amber at the Sentinel today to ask about advertising in the guide.

**907-874-2301 • wrgsent@gmail.com**

