BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

POMV AND SPENDING CAP MUST BE . . .

Put on ballot

THERE ARE THOSE who stubbornly cling to the notion that there is no real reason to change the Permanent Fund's method of managing its income to a percent-of-market-value approach

They tend to believe the growing push toward a POMV approach is little more than a ruse to "raid," "take," or "steal" the fund by greedy legislators They should take a minute and read columnist Tim Bradner's Sunday piece in the Anchorage Daily News "Money" section. It lays out the very good reasons to make the change

"What the POMV would replace is the fund's present system of reporting its investment profits, which is on the basis of cash received from interest on bonds or sales of stock," he says

That was appropriate in the fund's early years when it was mostly a bond fund, he says, but now the fund is heavily invested in stocks A POMV approach, which would take up to 5 percent of the funds value each year for government use and dividends, will better protect the fund in the long run

Legislators are considering several POMV proposals, with one offered by Senate President Gene Therriault of Fairbanks getting at least a preliminary nod last week from Gov Frank Murkowski

While a pure POMV approach depends only on market growth to protect a fund's corpus and is the method used by some of the nation's largest funds, Therriault's measure offers a few wrinkles, offering added protection in bad years

FIRST, IT sets up a constitutionally protected earnings account. Profits from bonds, stock and real estate sales during the year would be deposited in the account. The POMV for a particular year would be calculated at 5 percent of the fund's average value over five years That would be the amount used for dividends and, in Therriault's bill, education

If profits from bonds, stock and real estate sales accumulating in the earnings account is larger than the POMV figure, only the POMV amount would be taken from the earnings account, leaving the rest. If the amount in the earnings account is smaller than the POMV, only the money in the account could be used The fund corpus is never touched

Therriault's proposed constitutional amendment also would provide a "soft enshrinement" in the state constitution stipulating that fund earnings could only be spent for dividends and education. It leaves the split between the two to lawmakers

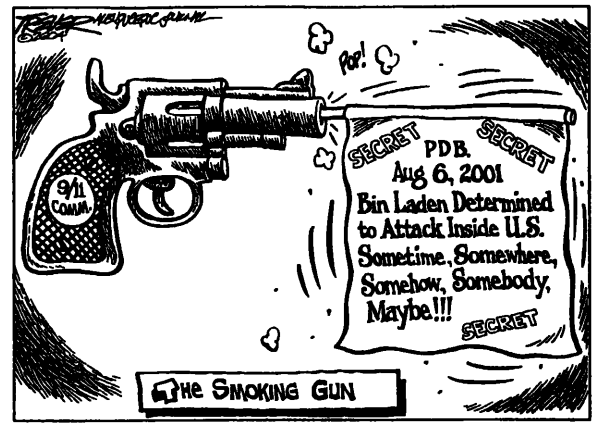
A "pure" POMV approach is favored by several lawmakers in the House That would not enshrine dividends and education in the constitution Some lawmakers complain such restrictions would handcuff future legislatures

Much debate lies ahead, but whatever else lawmakers do this year, they must put on November's ballot proposed constitutional amendments dealing with POMV and a state spending cap for voter approval

Any less will not be enough.

Should only property owners pay?

By ELISE PATKOTAK



Up on the North Slope, we never met a bond proposition we didn't like In 30 years of voting there, during 25 of which there were always bond propositions on the ballot, every one of them passed with flying colors If some bond proposition only got 65 percent approval, that was viewed as close to failing

As in Anchorage, property taxes are the main fuel of local government and the backbone for financing the payback of bond sales Unlike Anchorage, however, on the North Slope we had industry property at Prudhoe Bay that fed hundreds of millions of dollars to the borough for these bonds

As a private property owner in Barrow, bond propositions had only a limited relationship to my property taxes thanks to a limited special exemption on private property I don't remember the ins and outs of how that worked, but I know that industry ultimately paid for the bulk of those bond issues while I got to enjoy the results

Patkotak

When I moved to Anchorage, I was hit with the reality of a local government that funds its bond propositions on my property taxes It wasn't pleasant When I was deciding how much of a house I could afford based on what my monthly payment would be, there was the big unknown of how much higher my property taxes would be in any given year

When you first look at this issue and find out that your taxes will only increase by $40 this year or $30 next year, it doesn't sound so bad But after a few years of that you find your monthly payment has risen significantly, especially if you haven't had a concomitant increase in income It's not my mortgage payments that are pricing me out of my home It's the slow creep of property taxes

Despite this reality, I go into the voting booth each time bond issues are up for a vote with a sense that if this is my city and I want a decent quality of life in it, then I have to help pay for that So I read up on the propositions before I get to the booth and try to vote intelligently I try to avoid the knee-jerk impulse to vote no on everything that probably caused the equestrian question to fail even though it would have cost us nothing

I read the bond propositions carefully, look at what they will add to my taxes and then try to make reasoned choices among them since I know I can't afford all of them And I work hard to fight off a growing sense of resentment at the inexorable increase in my taxes, even if they are used to better our quality of our life

I'm betting that an exit poll done after one of these "off-year" elections would show that property owners make up the vast majority of the 27 percent of registered voters who actually turn out to vote That's because we have a much greater stake in the future of the city

I don't like to pay taxes any more than the next person, but I accept them as a necessary evil to enjoy such amenities as police protection, fire services, parks and libraries However, I would be less than truthful if I didn't admit that a growing sense of indignation over the fact that a group I belong to has been singled out to shoulder more of the burden for these amenities than everyone else

I don't like that feeling and I don't like how it is causing me to view the community in which I live An us against them mentality has never been known to foster healthy civic discourse or improvements in community life But there you have it. It's in my brain and I'm having trouble dislodging it

There should be a better way to distribute the tax burden for these bond issues It's the only way I see Anchorage even starting to get beyond the negative impulses that dominate the voting on new bond issues

As for that equestrian center, could someone please put it back on the ballot with a huge red $0 superimposed on the wording so that even the densest of voters will realize they have nothing to fear from it?

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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HAMMOND'S INCOME TAX PLAN STILL . . .

Won't work

FORMER GOV. JAY Hammond professes to be mystified at the lack of widespread support for his idea of imposing a state income tax.

If he had his way, Hammond would distribute all the earnings from the Permanent Fund, expected to be about $1 4 billion this year, and then "claw" it back as needed with a 5 percent income tax based on an individual's federal tax obligation The tax would kick in only if the amount in the Constitutional Budget Reserve were to fall below $1 billion

There are myriad reasons not to support Hammond's tax. Among them

• Hammond's plan would reinstitute the state income tax that Alaskans fought to repeal years ago, a tax dumped by Hammond and his pals in the Legislature only after voters, led by Libertarian Dick Randolph, forced the repeal onto the ballot,

• The proposed 5 percent state income tax would raise only an estimated $90 million for the state in those years the CBR had to be replenished, hardly enough to dent the average budget gap,

• Alaskans would pay an additional $14 million to $15 million annually in federal income taxes for the larger dividends, and,

• Setting up a new bureaucracy to collect the taxes would cost about $6 million and as much as $8 million to operate annually

Hammond is on record lamenting the demise of the income tax, and this plan is a little more than a smoke and mirrors attempt to breathe renewed life into such a levy

Does anybody really believe that such a tax would be equally applied, even at 5 percent, for very long? You can bet that there would be immediate calls for those who make more to pay a higher rate on a graduated scale Is the 5 percent just an enticement to lure the public into supporting what is nothing more than a state income tax that would grow and grow? And it would have to grow A lot

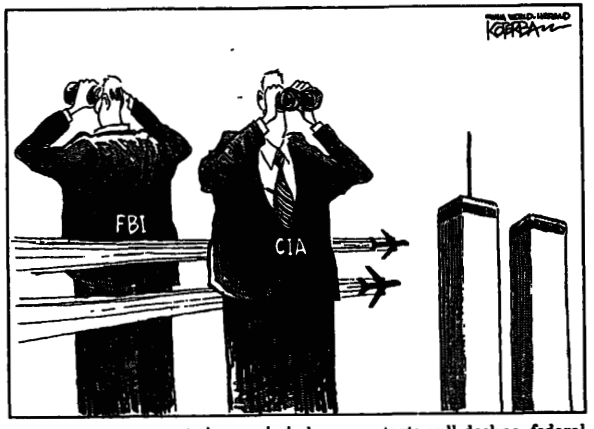
Hammond wrote recently that if there were no other taxes imposed and development did not occur in the state to lighten the fiscal load, Alaska could face a $1 billion fiscal gap in the not-too-distant future No problem, he says Assuming the fund's earnings would be $1 6 billion and all of that would be disbursed as dividends, about $900 million would be "clawed back" from Alaskans and $100 million would come from nonresidents Alaskans would still share as dividends about $700 million, close to the amount now used for the annual payout

How in the world would the approximately $90 million collected by a 5 percent state income tax even begin to allow $900 million to be clawed back from Alaskans? State Revenue officials estimated that an onerous 34 15 percent levy on Alaskans' federal tax liabilities would raise only $682 million.

What Hammond fails to grasp is that Alaskans do understand his plan — probably better than he does

Alaska risks fiscal 'Perfect Storm'

By BOB RICHARDS



Today, Alaska's economy is being driven by the following three predominant forces

• Inordinately high federal spending;

• Expansion of the retail sector propelled by Permanent Fund dividends, and,

• A vibrant housing market spurred on by historically low interest rates

Profuse displays of the huge federal spending and the high visibility of expansion of the retail sector and housing construction have created the illusion of economic vibrancy in Alaska, but the underlying private basic sector has not grown Hence, what exists now could be labeled an illusory economy

We know for certain that none of these three forces is going to last much longer Alaska being represented by the senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee will cease someday Most educated guesses suggest that at least $2 billion of the nearly $8 billion of federal spending in Alaska is extraordinary due to the "Ted Stevens Effect"

New retail stores (Home Depot, Lowes, Costco, Barnes & Noble, Wal-Mart, and myriad others) popping up has already subsided The retail sector has also been buoyed by the lower mortgage rates, with the average monthly house payment falling by one-third from $900 to $650, increasing considerably families' disposable income

Consumer spending and housing starts will decline and home values will soften when interest rates start to climb in response to the U S economy accelerating Mortgage rates, which bottomed at around 5 25 percent last summer eventually will move upward toward 8 percent which they averaged in the 1990s Finally, state spending has already turned down in response to diminishing oil-related revenues, and Permanent Fund dividends are declining in response to the recent stock market downturn

It is quite reasonable for Alaskans to be under the impression that everything is fine with the economy The three driving forces of the Alaska economy over the past few years have been highly visible The tragedy is that the current visible momentary prosperity has masked the underlying reality of an absence of expansion of Alaska's private sector base

So the first element of Alaska's current condition is an illusory prosperity based on forces that have either run their course or which are already turning down Now let us turn to the second element of Alaska's current condition.

State government faces a severe fiscal crisis Because the Constitutional Budget Reserve has been depleted to precariously low levels, the current fiscal year 2004 budget was balanced by further slashing state expenditures Looking forward, if Alaskans balance the budget by either slashing expenditures further to unacceptably low levels and/or taxing themselves to cover the deficit, a harsh recession will follow

It does not take too much of a stretch of the imagination to picture arrival of the financial "Perfect Storm" If within the next few years mortgage interest rates rise, the federal largess declines to more normal levels, oil prices fall by $4 per barrel (as they have every five years on average), or the stock market falls as it did from 2000 to 2003, the outcome is certain retail sales will subside, new housing starts will decline, federal spending will drop by 20 percent, spending by the state and/or individual Alaskans will fall, all contributing to a loss of 10,000 jobs over a five-year period

The financial "Perfect Storm" could be even worse Oil prices could easily fall to an annual average of $13, as they have three times in the past 10 years Clearly, Alaska is hanging on the edge — an irresponsible position.

The good news is that none of this is necessary The Conference of Alaskans has recommended to the Legislature a fiscal program that will avoid the negative outcomes described above and get Alaska back on track toward an exciting future

Further, Gov Frank Murkowski has clearly enunciated a sound fiscal program with both short-range and long-range components The short-range program understands that the critical first step is to get the state's fiscal house in order The second step is proactively taking the initiative with economic development

Bob Richards, a Seattle resident, was an Alaska economist for 20 years and currently serves as an advisor to the Fiscal Policy Council of Alaska.

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NEW YORK TIMES PULLS . . .

Sleazy trick

THE NEW YORK TIMES is up to its old tricks Now the East Coast newspaper wants to pin the "pork-barrel spender" label on Congressman Don Young because he is pursuing funding for the Knik Arm Crossing

Its main point is that the Knik Arm Crossing would link Anchorage to an area where only one man lives The New York newspaper doesn't say who the lucky guy is, but the suggestion that the justification for building the two-lane bridge is to link Anchorage to "a small port that has one regular tenant" is sleazy journalism

Nowhere in its rant does The New York Times mention that connecting Anchorage to what is now Port MacKenzie is an infrastructure dream going back 50 years and more

Spanning Knik Arm would provide Anchorage with much-needed expansion room for its overcrowded port, for industries supporting both the port and Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, and for new residential and office developments

It would serve half of Alaska's population, improve Glenn Highway traffic congestion and provide better access to Wasilla, Fairbanks and points in between. And it would provide much-improved access from Anchorage to the vast recreation areas in the Susitna River Basin and the Alaska Range

THE NEWSPAPER also trivialized the benefits of building a bridge between Ketchikan and its island airport, noting that the bridge "would connect the depressed town of Ketchikan with an island one mile away The island has 50 residents and a small airport"

Both of the bridges would carry hefty price tags, the Gravina Island bridge would have to be 200 feet high to allow clearance for ships and would cost an estimated $200 million.

But The New York Times put an estimated cost of "up to $2 billion" on the Knik Arm Crossing That figure is based on expensive options that were required to be considered but were rejected early on The Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority estimates the actual cost from $400 million to $800 million — serious money but nothing like $2 billion.

Whether either can be built is a question. Young has only been successful in winning funding for additional research.

To match The New York Times' cynicism we should point out that its Manhattan home was purchased for a few measly beads and is connected to surrounding land by bridges and tunnels that would cost hundreds of billions if built today

Alaska's transportation infrastructure is a much-neglected area of Alaska's development, one that Washington has ignored for years even though Alaska is part of the national highway system Don Young is now chairman of the House Transportation Committee and seeks to correct the problem as best he can during his tenure in that post.

The New York Times is making the job more difficult with journalism more appropriate for a tabloid than a major American newspaper

What happened to statehood spirit?

By TOM BRENNAN

There are many things I don't understand This will come as no surprise to regular readers — some of whom make just that point on a frequent basis — but I must admit the list gets longer every day

Let's start with why anyone would run for public office I'm glad people do, especially when the candidates are good ones with abilities appropriate for the job, people whose motivation is to create a better Alaska, a better Anchorage, a better Talkeetna or whatever

But then there are those without whom this would be a better place, the folks who enter a room and give you the feeling that somebody just left In a democracy there are inevitably dipsticks who put themselves forward as potential leaders It's up to the voters to pick the keepers and bounce the losers, and sometimes that isn't easy

The good news is that the voters often identify and reject those whose principal qualifications are the ability to breath in and out. The bad news is that sometimes they don't and the wild cards can get elected In addition to their breathing abilities, the dipsticks sometimes have charisma that causes people to overlook their less desirable qualities and put them in office

Brennan

That part of the puzzle I do understand Democracy is a messy business and based on the assumption that, in a competitive situation, good candidates will rise to the top and the rest will fall off somewhere along the line It's probably just a coincidence that the dipsticks tend to be liberals — at least from my point of view — and even that is not always true

But why good people would willingly submit to the inevitable abuse and derision that come with the elective process is beyond my understanding The determination and willingness of good candidates to put up with the bruises that come with bare-knuckle politics is admirable if incomprehensible But thank goodness they do

And while we are on that subject, here is another question for inquiring minds Do Alaskans have a sense of community these days? Could the people of the Last Frontier today mount a years-long effort requiring relative unity like the one that brought statehood in 1959?

That seems highly unlikely I wasn't here during the statehood struggle, my wife and I came eight years after it ended and President Eisenhower signed the paperwork. But many of the people who fought the good fight were still active then and their spirit was very much in the air It was a sense of shared destiny, a feeling that an important public purpose could be achieved by pulling together

That attitude, willingness and ability to tackle big problems arose again and became an important factor in the struggle to win approval for an oil pipeline across Alaska, the pipeline that brought riches to a brand new state

Some of the statehood advocates are still with us, though their numbers are dwindling, but the spirit they embodied is almost nowhere to be seen in the Alaska community these days

Public attitudes have changed Since the advent of Permanent Fund dividend checks, for instance, many people's concept of community is what might be called "Me, myself and I" Or to put it another way "What's in it for me?"

That is perhaps inevitable, it is one of the less desirable results of the dividend entitlement culture Though folks like Jay Hammond and Eddie Burke have no problem with it, and actually encourage it, such a culture is not something most of us should be proud about.

A contentious society is not necessarily an unhealthy one, but the starting point for a great many community discussions these days is that very line "What's in it for me?" And when the answer is "a better Alaska," the speaker can count on seeing eyes glaze over almost instantly

I wish my cynicism were only a sign of advancing years, but I'm afraid it is not. It could be a result of watching the process too closely for too long, but I don't have any confidence in that diagnosis either

Let's hope the community spirit that brought statehood can be revived yet again Alaska needs it now more than ever

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times

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WHAT EXACTLY DID RUEDRICH DO?

Time will tell

THE PROPER WAY to look at the attorney general's investigation of Randy Ruedrich is to recognize that due process is at work.

The former commissioner of the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission is accused of doing a lot of Republican Party business on company time — including sending e-mails here and there that were directed more to GOP politics than to matters of state petroleum affairs

. . . a matter that now is under close study by the attorney general's office.

Ruedrich is the chairman of the state Republican Party, but he's no longer one of the three oil and gas commissioners He resigned the $118,000-a-year state post last November when ethics charges were raised against him

Democrats and the media have been in a howl about this for months, and Ruedrich's aggressive style and his strong advocacy of Republican positions have helped fuel the headline fires That's no surprise, considering that Ruedrich is no stranger to controversy and political warfare

But he shouldn't be found guilty unless and until the facts show that he overstepped ethical rules

When the specifics of the accusations against him were made public a few days ago, Ruedrich characterized the charges as overblown and exaggerated

To decide whether they are, or whether the GOP leader in fact did violate state ethics laws, is a matter that now is under close study by the attorney general's office

That's the way it should be

Tax cuts

SOMETHING LIKE 30 million people waited until last Thursday to send in their 2003 federal tax returns

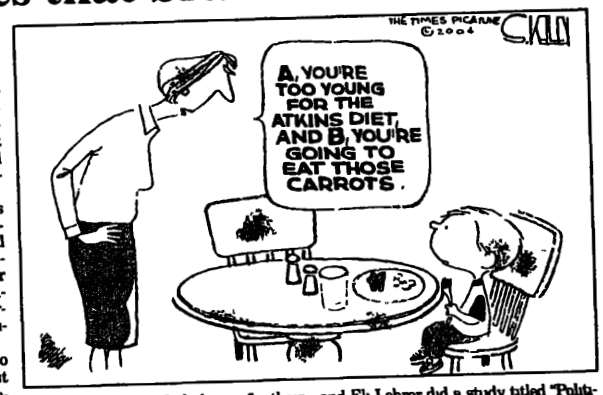
For many, filling out those tax forms at the 11th hour offered their first real understanding of the impact on them and other average Americans of the tax cuts promoted and pushed through Congress by the administration of President George W Bush

For most filers, the cuts meant lower tax payments, and in many cases larger refunds Though derided by office-hungry Democrats as welfare for the rich, the tax cuts allowed millions of middle-income Americans to retain more of their earnings rather than shipping them off to be spent by Washington

The tax cuts also stimulated the national economy, created jobs and increased retail sales — all of which are good things Bush wants to make the tax cuts permanent, a sentiment likely to be shared by millions of others

Avoid colleges that brainwash students

By WALTER E WILLIAMS



In far too many instances, what passes as college life and education today is no less than shameful Under the name of diversity and political correctness, billions of taxpayer dollars and donor contributions are used to promote what might be charitably called enlightened racism, uniformity of thought and political proselytizing Let's look at some of it

The student code of Pennsylvania's Shippensburg University said that students had a "right to express a personal belief system" but only if such expression did not "demean," "annoy" or "alarm" others Thus, if a student expressed a distaste for race or sex preferences in admissions, he might be disciplined for a code violation

Fortunately, Shippensburg's code no longer exists due to a successful First Amendment lawsuit brought by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.

Williams

The Collegiate Network (www collegiatenetwork org) keeps a running tally on gross behavior at the nation's colleges For the grossest behavior, it confers its "Polly Award " University of Mississippi won second place last year Why?

After finding racist graffiti at the University of Mississippi, a university police official threatened that the students responsible would be prosecuted for "criminal charges, possibly a felony, or it could be a federal offense " One month later, the punishment was reduced to community-service hours and therapeutic "reflection papers" when it was discovered that the culprits were not white students but three black freshman students

At the University of Louisville a "White Privilege Forum" was held to talk about how "white persons run and/or own nearly half of the United States " A tape that I received showed a panel of three white students and two white professors and a black professor as moderator The white students appeared to feel shame for their so-called "privilege," which probably wasn't anything more than hard work and sacrifice by their parents

What might have motivated the forum was an earlier incident where two students, in exchange for applying for a credit card, were offered T-shirts with a caricature of a black couple titled "10 Reasons Why a Beer is Better than a Black Man." Bank One apologized with a $50,000 donation to the University of Louisville's diversity lecture series To promote better racial understanding, its first speaker was Sister Souljah

Cornell University's Gannett Health Center, "as a commitment to affirming women's sexuality," had decided to sell vibrators to students The people running the health center backed away, as is so often the case, when their agenda started receiving negative publicity through Accuracy in Academia (www academia org) They were sensitive to the impact it might have on parental decisions to send their children to Cornell, not to mention the impact it might have on donors.

Diversity is all the rage on college campuses, many have established offices of diversity with diversity personnel One thing for sure is that college administrators are not calling for political and intellectual diversity David Horowitz and Eli Lehrer did a study titled "Political Bias in the Administrations and Faculties of 32 Elite Colleges and Universities " The overall ratio of Democrats to Republicans they were able to identify at the 32 of the nation's elite schools was more than 10 to 1 (1,397 Democrats, 134 Republicans), while for the American population, Republicans and Democrats are roughly equal in number

The same political lopsidedness is found in university administrations David Horowitz and Eli Lehrer report "In the entire Ivy League, we identified only three Republican administrators "

The brainwashing of students and other shameful college practices occur because as taxpayers and donors we're lazy and indifferent, and college administrators take advantage Before legislators make an appropriation to or before you donate one dime to a college, check out its Web site

If you see a diversity office, women's studies or transgender studies, that college is the wrong place to send your money Administrators tend to have closed minds, but the sounds of pocketbooks snapping shut just might open them.

Walter E Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc , 5777 W Century Blvd , Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003.

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LEGISLATURE SHOULD PASS . . .

POMV now

WITH TIME RUNNING out in this year's legislative session, Gov Frank Murkowski has put the spurs to a plan that would use a percent-of-market-value approach in calculating Permanent Fund earnings for annual dividends and education

The POMV proposal that has won Murkowski's approval is one of several such plans wending their way through the Legislature The brainchild of Senate President Gene Therriault, the plan would restrict, by a constitutional amendment, use of the fund's earnings to only dividends and education The split would be decided by the Legislature in this so-called "soft enshrinement" There is also a provision that would protect the fund's corpus All in all, not a bad plan

Over the years, the state has managed to make ends meet by dipping into the Constitutional Budget Reserve, set up by voters as a holding account for windfall profits from such things as tax and royalty settlements with the oil industry

The bad news is that the state's bond-rating agencies see the continued draw on the CBR as reason enough to threaten reduction of the state's bond rating That would increase costs to the state for any future borrowing

The Murkowski administration wants to keep that fund above a minimum level of $1 billion to deal with unexpected oil fluctuations and to keep bond agencies at bay, but projects the fund will dry up in April 2007

THE GOOD NEWS is that the spring revenue forecast this week predicted the highest oil prices in memory, but even at that, Alaska will find itself some $60 million in the hole this fiscal year That money comes from the CBR

We do not believe Alaska is facing an immediate, dire fiscal crisis, but with soaring oil prices buying time, we encourage lawmakers in the next few weeks to deal responsibly with the problem Revenue projections are just that — projections — and world events could cause the bottom to drop out of prices tomorrow

Another factor to be considered is that constitutional questions can only be placed on the ballot every general election No action this year means no action for two more years That may be far too late

There should be reservations about the "soft enshrinement" of the earnings It makes Therriault's plan more salable to voters, but it handcuffs the Legislature We oppose any kind of enshrinement, but recognize that politics is the art of compromise

While the Legislature's efforts continue, there are those same old tired voices on the left wailing for a POMV plan and a progressive income tax — this in a state with $29 billion in the bank that spins off $1.4 billion in earnings each year Those pleas should be ignored

The Legislature should instead stay the course and settle the POMV question, putting it to a vote of the people this

Casino would bring jobs and revenue

By PERRY GREEN

A recent survey by KTUU Channel 2 asked, "Should the state of Alaska allow a single casino concept in a borough of 150,000 population in Alaska? Are you in favor or opposed?"

A startling 67 percent of the more than 500 respondents were in favor; 1 percent were undecided and 32 percent opposed The respondents were informed viewers as they were watching the newscast and one must conclude they are people who know and appreciate reality

They understand the reality of Alaska's situation and what the future holds They understand the state needs sources of revenue and jobs — good jobs — *for its people*

The huge, state-owned, now-vacant Alaska International Seafood building offers an exciting opportunity

Forty-eight states rely on gaming as a revenue source and it has revitalized cities, counties and even entire states Not one state has seen fit, once gaming was established, to do away with it

Louisiana, after five years, decided to have a referendum on whether gaming should continue Seventy-six percent of voters said, "yes" And this was after they had experience with gaming This was an affirmation that this smokestackless industry afforded good jobs and that the myths associated with gaming were just that.

In the very conservative state of Mississippi, gaming started in Tunica County, where a sizeable segment of the population had never held a full-time job Unemployment topped 25 percent and many of the available jobs paid little Today, Tunica's unemployment rate is lower than 4 3 percent and the gaming-created jobs pay well Food stamp claims have fallen 70 percent.

Mayors of cities with gaming have come to realize that employment instead of welfare is good and the gaming benefits far outweigh the negatives

What would be the net result of just one casino for Alaska?

• In the next 10 years, the state would receive a minimum of $200 million in revenue, a tax, I might add, on the "willing"

• Anchorage would receive during the next 10 years $50 million in taxes and assessment value of this valuable property

• Added retail sales of $3 billion statewide would result This would boost sales tax revenues for different cities within Alaska Additional taxes on hotel stays would also benefit local governments from Ketchikan to Barrow

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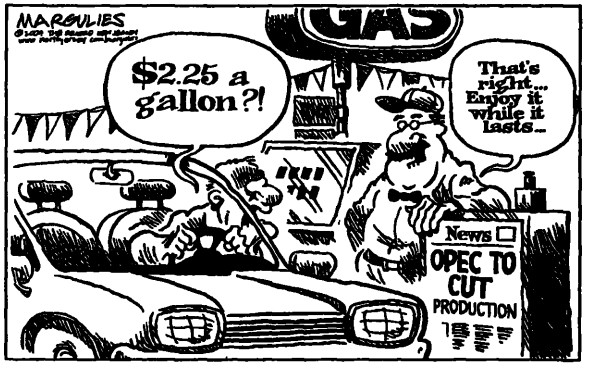
Nevada has no income tax. Las Vegas for the past 17 years has been the nation's fastest-growing city It also is the ninth-most-livable city While I do not believe we ever will be Las Vegas, nor do I think we should be, the fact that 1,000 jobs would be created here without harming our quality of life will be a positive thing

We, who are blessed with an abundance of oil, are considering an income tax, changing the Permanent Fund distribution and even a state sales tax. We must diversify our economy — and this is but one small step we should take first.



Perry Green is an Anchorage businessman, a world-class poker player and gaming proponent.

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25044122445

BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

LEGISLATURE SHOULD PASS . . .

POMV now

WITH TIME RUNNING out in this year's legislative session, Gov Frank Murkowski has put the spurs to a plan that would use a percent-of-market-value approach in calculating Permanent Fund earnings for annual dividends and education

The POMV proposal that has won Murkowski's approval is one of several such plans wending their way through the Legislature The brainchild of Senate President Gene Therriault, the plan would restrict, by a constitutional amendment, use of the fund's earnings to only dividends and education The split would be decided by the Legislature in this so-called "soft enshrinement" There is also a provision that would protect the fund's corpus All in all, not a bad plan

Over the years, the state has managed to make ends meet by dipping into the Constitutional Budget Reserve, set up by voters as a holding account for windfall profits from such things as tax and royalty settlements with the oil industry

The bad news is that the state's bond-rating agencies see the continued draw on the CBR as reason enough to threaten reduction of the state's bond rating That would increase costs to the state for any future borrowing

The Murkowski administration wants to keep that fund above a minimum level of $1 billion to deal with unexpected oil fluctuations and to keep bond agencies at bay, but projects the fund will dry up in April 2007

THE GOOD NEWS is that the spring revenue forecast this week predicted the highest oil prices in memory, but even at that, Alaska will find itself some $60 million in the hole this fiscal year That money comes from the CBR

We do not believe Alaska is facing an immediate, dire fiscal crisis, but with soaring oil prices buying time, we encourage lawmakers in the next few weeks to deal responsibly with the problem Revenue projections are just that — projections — and world events could cause the bottom to drop out of prices tomorrow

Another factor to be considered is that constitutional questions can only be placed on the ballot every general election No action this year means no action for two more years That may be far too late

There should be reservations about the "soft enshrinement" of the earnings It makes Therriault's plan more salable to voters, but it handcuffs the Legislature We oppose any kind of enshrinement, but recognize that politics is the art of compromise

While the Legislature's efforts continue, there are those same old tired voices on the left wailing for a POMV plan and a progressive income tax — this in a state with $29 billion in the bank that spins off $1 4 billion in earnings each year Those pleas should be ignored

The Legislature should instead stay the course and settle the POMV question, putting it to a vote of the people this year

Casino would bring jobs and revenue

By PERRY GREEN

A recent survey by KTUU Channel 2 asked, "Should the state of Alaska allow a single casino concept in a borough of 150,000 population in Alaska? Are you in favor or opposed?"

A startling 67 percent of the more than 500 respondents were in favor; 1 percent were undecided and 32 percent opposed The respondents were informed viewers as they were watching the newscast and one must conclude they are people who know and appreciate reality

They understand the reality of Alaska's situation and what the future holds They understand the state needs sources of revenue and jobs — good jobs — for its people

The huge, state-owned, now-vacant Alaska International Seafood building offers an exciting opportunity

Forty-eight states rely on gaming as a revenue source and it has revitalized cities, counties and even entire states Not one state has seen fit, once gaming was established, to do away with it

Louisiana, after five years, decided to have a referendum on whether gaming should continue Seventy-six percent of voters said, "yes " And this was after they had experience with gaming This was an affirmation that this smoke-stackless industry afforded good jobs and that the myths associated with gaming were just that

In the very conservative state of Mississippi, gaming started in Tunica County, where a sizeable segment of the population had never held a full-time job Unemployment topped 25 percent and many of the available jobs paid little Today, Tunica's unemployment rate is lower than 4 3 percent and the gaming-created jobs pay well Food stamp claims have fallen 70 percent

Mayors of cities with gaming have come to realize that employment instead of welfare is good and the gaming benefits far outweigh the negatives

What would be the net result of just one casino for Alaska?

• In the next 10 years, the state would receive a minimum of $200 million in revenue, a tax, I might add, on the "willing "

• Anchorage would receive during the next 10 years $50 million in taxes and assessment value of this valuable property

• Added retail sales of $3 billion statewide would result This would boost sales tax revenues for different cities within Alaska Additional taxes on hotel stays would also benefit local governments from Ketchikan to Barrow

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
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JUST SAY NO TO . . .

Reserves tax

A FEW FRUSTRATED legislators and the Anchorage Daily News are pushing once again for a tax on North Slope gas reserves The thought, if you can call it that, is that the tax would provide a financial incentive for the North Slope producers to move ahead with construction of a gas pipeline

There are some obvious problems with the proposal, most notably that trying to bludgeon the producers into making an investment decision favorable to the state is about as unproductive an approach as we can imagine No amount of bullying is going to improve the economics of a gas pipeline despite the frustration of liberals in the Legislature and the news media

Building the gas pipeline would require an enormous investment on the order of $20 billion And Pedro van Meurs, the state's chief oil and gas consultant, warns that an unsuccessful pipeline project could ruin ConocoPhillips and seriously damage ExxonMobil and BP

Van Meurs urged caution and patience, but the liberals seem disinclined to either one The time does seem to be approaching when such a massive investment would make sense, though there is no guarantee when that will happen.

"This is the largest project in the world," van Meurs noted, "and large projects take time"

ONE POWERFUL reason why Alaska should avoid a reserves tax is that such a measure could all but kill exploration for either oil or gas on the North Slope Gas is almost always found during the search for oil And while the trans-Alaska oil pipeline has substantial unused capacity whose existence is an incentive for continued searches for oil, a gas reserves tax would be a major disincentive for such ventures

The obvious disincentive would be that adding to gas reserves — one of the most likely results of new oil exploration — would add to the producers' annual tax bill Such costs could be avoided by killing exploration drilling

But the state still very much needs exploration dollars, both to add to its oil production and to increase its discovered gas reserves The Alaska Journal of Commerce last week quoted one expert as saying that another 15 trillion cubic feet of gas needs to be available to justify a pipeline — that would be on top of the already-discovered 35 tcf — for a total of 50 tcf

That additional 15 tcf, and much more, is believed to exist on the Slope, but it can't be found without new drilling

A tax on gas reserves could kill exploration at the time when it is most needed, and when it could do the state the most good both in increasing oil production and in building up needed gas reserves

Since industry continues to invest here, creating business and jobs for Alaskans, punitive taxes would be counterproductive Those advocating a gas reserves tax should be ignored.

Gov. Murkowski: a man of action

By LEW WILLIAMS JR

Well, all I know is what I read in the papers So wrote Will Rogers 12 years before he was killed in an Alaska plane crash

By reading Alaska newspapers, this writer learned that Alaska has a governor — 71-year-old Frank Murkowski — who can't be bought, or intimidated He is doing exactly what he told the voters needed doing before he was overwhelmingly elected governor

He said Alaska doesn't need broad-based tax increases, especially an income tax. It needs to cut the cost of government And it needs to build infrastructure to attract resource development to boost the economy to cover the fiscal gap Judging by the complaints, he sure is cutting the cost of state government Small wonder a group of state workers seek his recall

Williams

He merged the permitting department of Fish and Game into that of the Department of Natural Resources to eliminate duplication. He has directed the Alaska State Troopers and the Department of Fish and Game to work out an agreement to jointly use boats and aircraft instead of each agency having separate fleets

He has ordered centralization and standardization of state purchases He is moving the headquarters of the state ferry system to Ketchikan to be nearer the state's marine maintenance facilities He is working out new contracts with ferry system unions to assure affordable service with up to four new high-speed ferries by 2007

They will operate with 10 crew members vs the current 50 to 100 It means the state can discontinue advertising for ferry workers The high-speed ferries will be day boats Crew members will live at home between shifts The new ferries and crews will work 49 weeks a year for more frequent and affordable service for Alaskans The newest of the old mainliners will continue to operate

"He wants to sit with his back to the wall."

He moved the home port of the state's new fast ferry from Sitka to Juneau for more efficiency He told leaders of state workers' unions that new contracts will be negotiated in the state capital where the records are, not all over the state

He introduced legislation to take state managers out of unions so someone represents Alaska instead of union members negotiating with other unions He eliminated the longevity bonus for a special group of Alaska seniors and created a less costly aid package for needy seniors

He was the first governor in more than 10 years to meet with the Senate Finance Committee to encourage devising a long-range fiscal plan

In developing infrastructure

He is working with Congressman Don Young and Sens Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski to secure transportation funds for new ferries and roads to complement them, for a road into the state capital from Skagway; for a road up Bradfield Canal to give Southeast a faster hookup to the continental highway system, for the Knik Arm Crossing; for roads into potential mining areas, for a road from King Cove to the airport at Cold Bay, including a land exchange to allow crossing what is now part of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, for a $25 million grant to enlarge the state's Ketchikan shipyard, for a bridge to Ketchikan's airport and for dozens of other economy boosting projects

He is working with gas producers and pipeline companies to construct a line to take natural gas from Prudhoe Bay to the Lower 48, and to construct a pipeline to deliver natural gas to the port of Valdez for export.

He is working with Native groups along the Arctic coast so that this fall the state can lease for oil and gas exploration more than 1 million acres of submerged land off the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska without inhibiting whaling In the past year, he reached agreements with two of the largest Alaska Peninsula Native land owners to open up areas for oil and gas exploration.

He flew to Taiwan to interest companies in Alaska resources The Taiwanese made a return visit to examine Alaska coal and other resources. He flew to Victoria to meet with British Columbia officials on extending a railroad to meet with the Alaska Railroad and on constructing the Bradfield Canal Road A meeting in Juneau followed, attended by representatives of Canadian provinces and Canada's national government to discuss mutual projects.

He is pushing the Department of Interior to transfer to the state 5 million acres of land reserved in the trans-Alaska pipeline corridor, but not used, so the state can use it for a natural gas line He is pushing the Park Service to complete its regulations to allow more cruise ships into Glacier Bay to boost tourism He seeks federal recognition of the rights-of-way for historic trails (RS 2477 routes)

A major accomplishment was to call that conference of 55 to recommend a solution to the state's fiscal problem. Recommendations from the 55 will be offered to the voters in November, even if the lawmakers have to stay in office in successive special sessions until they act.

This governor has shown he will take action to reach promised goals Contrary to rumors, he is not seeking to break unions, but he is not intimidated by them, by his critics in the Legislature, or by the carping ultra-conservatives in his own party

That is what we learned from following Will Rogers' advice

Lew Williams Jr is a retired publisher of the Ketchikan Daily News His e-mail is lmwjr@worldnet.att.net

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TIMID ALASKANS SHOULD HEED PIONEERS . . .

Dream big

ALASKANS WHO fought the statehood battle would surely look at today's generation of Alaskans and shudder What has happened, they might ask, to the spirit that compelled the pioneers to dream big dreams, to plan big plans, to reach for the unreachable?

Now we have produced a generation of nay-sayers The it-can't-be-done crowd seems to have taken over Propose something, anything, and someone will stand up and rail against it It costs too much. It won't work. There are too many hurdles It will harm the environment. There are other needs that must be addressed first It will hurt my property value It will increase traffic and noise and blah-blah-blah

You know the routine You see it every day, in headlines and stories in the paper, in the yak-yak-yak of the talking-head interviews on the evening telecasts Those who say no are in the spotlight. Those who say yes are trampled in the dust. Don't think so?

Well, look no further than the proposed Knik Arm crossing as an example of a good idea coming in for an assault from the ag'iners

Spanning Knik Arm is an idea — and a good one — that has been around for 50 years, back into territorial days In the past, even its supporters knew the odds against it were long — for two simple reasons

The territory and later the state didn't have the money to do the job And the federal government, still regarding Alaska as more of a national park and zoo than a full partner among the other states, simply brushed off the idea

UNTIL NOW, however Finally, until now Until now because the congressman from Alaska, Republican Don Young, has risen so high in seniority that he chairs the House Transportation Committee, and is in a position to make other congressmen listen. He has his hands on the nation's highway purse strings

His committee approved a national highway construction bill that includes $3 million for the planning and design of a Knik Arm bridge

So here comes the anti-crowd, all full of bluster and puffery, in editorials and letters to the editor, in TV interviews, and long commentary in the paper Can't do it. Won't work. Will cause property values in Anchorage to collapse There's nothing over there The existing road is perfectly adequate We've gotten along without it so far, we don't need it now Put that $3 million into education — or child welfare, or more bicycle trails, or flower baskets, or parks, or a dozen other things.

Pioneer Alaskans would have grabbed that $3 million and started pouring concrete They had faith in the future They had a conviction that Alaska could and would grow and prosper

There was nothing timid about those who gave us statehood and dreamed big dreams

Offshore leases can reduce imports

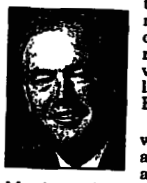
By GOV FRANK H MURKOWSKI

This October, Alaska will be offering leases for oil and gas exploration in state waters offshore of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

This may be considered a radical step by some In fact, it is just about the only rational option the state has to access the state's oil and gas resources to help address the nation's energy problems

Environmental groups have blocked opening ANWR. They said we should go to the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) instead We did, and were hit with lawsuits from those same environmental groups If Alaska can't explore for oil in a petroleum reserve, where can it?

We currently produce oil and gas from three major fields offshore in the Beaufort Sea near Prudhoe Bay, including Northstar, Point McIntyre and Endicott. We already operate a number of miles of oil pipeline coming onshore from those offshore oil fields



Murkowski

The Native village of Kaktovik is another significant factor in this debate because its 300 residents own 92,000 acres of land surrounded by ANWR. Federal policies are in conflict at Kaktovik.

On the one hand, Congress gave the Natives the land so they could develop their resources to create an economy, provide jobs and hope for their young people, and enjoy a 20th century standard of living On the other hand, that hasn't happened because Congress has acquiesced to the extreme environmentalists and kept oil and gas development out of ANWR. Kaktovik is landlocked by this federal policy

The state of Alaska will include offshore ANWR tracts in its October 2004 lease sale After those leases are developed, Kaktovik will have an access route to get its oil and gas resources to the trans-Alaska pipeline at Prudhoe Bay

We are highly aware of the concern of the Inupiat at Kaktovik and other communities on the North Slope about oil drilling in the Beaufort Sea They are rightly on alert, because the sea provides the bounty on which their culture lives We will not risk despoiling the Beaufort Sea coast

The state has a working agreement with the whaling captains, which we achieved when exploring the McCovey area, that we will not engage in drilling activities during the bowhead whale migration We are listening to the Inupiat

The Department of Natural Resources will continue the dialog with all North Slope residents throughout the upcoming months as we approach the scheduled lease sale I am confident there will be alignment with all Alaskans on lease term issues

Americans this summer are faced with average gasoline prices above $2 per gallon. While OPEC set its target price at $22-$28 per barrel of oil 2-1/2 years ago, it obviously prefers it at $37, and has agreed to cut production to maintain the high price America finds itself truly held hostage by the Middle East for its oil.

At its peak, the trans-Alaska pipeline moved 2 million barrels a day from Prudhoe Bay, accounting for one-quarter of the nation's domestic production It is currently transporting one-half its capacity, only 1 million barrels per day

The U S Geological Survey estimates ANWR contains enough recoverable reserves to provide 1 3 million barrels a day, which would offset an increase in imports — and our dependency — from some foreign source

Congress passed a bill allowing exploration and development in ANWR in 1995 It was vetoed by then-President Bill Clinton If it had not been, oil would be flowing today from ANWR.

Political decisions such as this one of Clinton's cost America thousands of jobs, which were simply exported to the Middle East, along with billions of dollars out of our economy The major factor in our high balance of payments deficit is the cost of imported oil

Today, Congress is stymied over the energy bill, mired in disputes over MTBE and ethanol subsidies Bowing to pressures from the extreme environmental lobby, ANWR is no longer in the bill

But the state of Alaska is not hobbled by Congress's legislative process We are able to add leases of as much as 350,000 acres of state land offshore of ANWR to ongoing Beaufort Sea lease offerings

Alaska intends to do its part to bring our energy sources back home to America Leasing offshore of ANWR is one important step in that direction.

Frank H Murkowski is governor of Alaska

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THEY'VE REDUCED THEMSELVES TO . . .

Fringe group

ONCE IN A while the debate over how best to, or even whether to, use Permanent Fund earnings to fund state government gets nastier than it really needs to be

The most recent foray over the line came in a release from "Alaskans, Just Say No," a group of disparate political folks who believe any use of the earnings, no matter how responsible, would be a "raid" on the Permanent Fund. They fired off their missive last week after the House Finance Committee passed a resolution dealing with one aspect of the Percent of Market Value approach to using the fund's earnings

Of course, the fund itself is protected by the state constitution and cannot be raided by anyone, despite the claims to the contrary Of course, a POMV is not a blank check. Of course, many people have stopped listening to "Alaskans, Just Say No" because of its strident approach to the issue

But the group may have done itself irreparable damage when Soren Wuerth, the group's treasurer, after calling Gov Frank Murkowski a liar, said in a written press release, "This guy has hired people like Cheryl Frasca who have been wanting the peoples (sic) dividend like a wolf over dead meat."

Nice imagery, if ungrammatical, but way off the mark. Good grief Anybody can say anything about an elected official, right or wrong, because it simply goes with the job That's the heat and kitchen thing

But to malign a public servant like Cheryl Frasca — who has spent years building a reputation as a meticulous, conscientious worker — goes beyond the pale It is unnecessary and unforgivable It is the mark of a losing cause

Perhaps "Alaskans, Just Say No," and folks like Wuerth should take a step back, breathe deeply and get a renewed grasp on what passes for reality nowadays They are beginning to sound more and more like a fringe group whose stock in trade is dark paranoid hysteria churned up by sins real and imagined They have, by their antics, removed themselves from the mainstream of the debate

They are perhaps finding that hip-shooting groups such as theirs are their own worst enemies

Give Fido a bed

IF YOU want to do something kind for animals, we have a way you can contribute in a big way

The Anchorage Animal Care and Control Center is trying to acquire beds for its kennel areas so that dogs do not have to sleep on the shelter's concrete floors

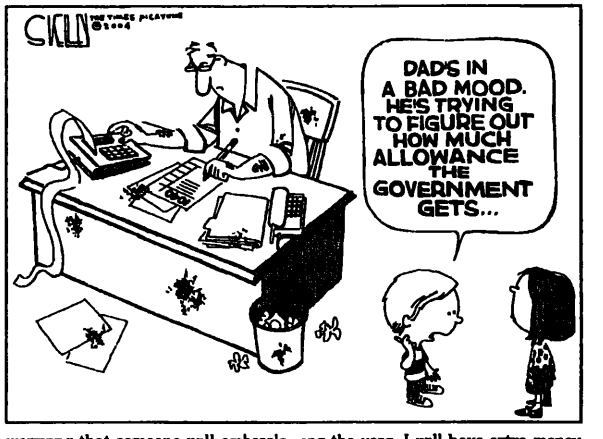
The shelter will use Kuranda Dog Beds because of positive responses about their durability and ease of cleaning The beds can be had for a special wholesale price of $64 75

You can go to www kuranda.com and click on "Donate a Bed," or you can call the company directly at 1-800-753-5308 You can reach shelter volunteer Summer Jones-Martinez, who is heading up the bed drive, at 677-0384

Give Fido a break, even he is not your Fido

Tax talk is simply music to my ears

By ELISE PATKOTAK



One of my favorite cartoons shows a man shaking his finger at a dog sitting in front of him The man is saying, "Bad dog Bad dog Don't do that or you won't get any treats and I won't take you for a walk today"

In the next panel, we see the same scene from the dog's point of view Here's what the dog is hearing "Dog, blah, blah, blah, treat, blah, blah, blah, walk, blah, blah, blah, today "

That's about what I hear when I speak with my accountant and the man who invests what little money I have been able to salvage from my profligate lifestyle of doggie and birdie surgeries They seem to be speaking the same language and it sounds an awful lot like this "bonds lalalalalalalala stock lalalalalala tax liability lalalalalala "

It's clear that the language being used resembles English and that some of the words actually are English But that's where the similarities stop and that lalala sound starts in my head

Patkotak

My cousin, Toni, once tried to explain stocks and bonds to me because she felt that as a woman alone in this world, I needed to understand finances better than I apparently did She was about three sentences into her explanation when that lalala sound started Unfortunately, we had just begun a car ride that would take almost an hour to complete By the end of the hour, the lalala's had formed into a musical tribute to the Beatles in my head

I felt her concern about my finances was a bit out of proportion to what my finances actually were Without giving away any state secrets, let me just say that Nick Nolte would probably run through my entire life savings in the first two hours of one of his binges and he wouldn't even be very high when the money ran out.

So I'm not apt to spend a lot of time worrying that someone will embezzle the funds Once they used them to buy a ticket to Mexico, they wouldn't have enough left to book a hotel room for a week.

But this time of the year I am forced to seriously look at how uselessly I spent my money last year and how much Uncle Sam wants to charge me for my wanton ways I get papers from my bank, my investment counselor, my accountant — just all sorts of people who seem to feel I should have a handle on a variety of numbers and percentages and stuff that apparently, taken together, add up to the sum total of the federal government's interest in me since I stopped protesting the Vietnam War

And so at tax time I find the lalalas running a continuous loop in my mind — like the refrain from "It's A Small World"

People seem to come out of nowhere at tax time to try and explain to me how, if I just followed their suggestions, I could pay the government less during the year and end up with more, even after paying taxes They are usually working under the theory that if I don't let the feds take the maximum out during the year, I will have extra money each month that I will then invest wisely

Right Like that's what I'd really do with that money I would carefully put aside the extra money, invest it wisely, have it available to pay the IRS in April and have the interest it bore me to show for my efforts Lalalalalala

I would prefer to do it the way my father taught me Let the feds take the maximum out during the year and you will always be assured a refund when you file It's the way I've done it my whole life and, so far, dad never has been proved wrong

And so again this year, as friends beat their heads against the wall trying to figure out their tax forms, I pay my accountant to do them for me, secure in the knowledge that my refund will cover his costs and leave me with enough extra to buy that new cage my birds have had their eyes on

Tax time lalalalalala!

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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25044122450

BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ANOTHER SIGN OF . . .

Media agenda

IF YOU HAVE ever wondered whether some of the Alaska media may have an agenda, here is something to consider involving Gov Frank Murkowski and Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich

During his State of the State address, Murkowski had the temerity to ask the Permanent Fund board of trustees to talk to national and international companies where millions of the fund's dollars are invested to come up with ideas on how they can help create jobs in Alaska

"While we want the Permanent Fund to make good investments, there's no reason why we shouldn't direct attention to those companies willing to provide jobs here," Murkowski said "We must be more aggressive in leveraging our investments "

He struck a nerve It would be "bad management," one editorialist lamented while suggesting such a "quid pro quo" approach would put us on the "first step on a slippery slope that could easily lead the fund into financial trouble "

A fulminating columnist lashed out that Murkowski was trying to use the fund to "muscle corporations around" and that he wanted to "coerce the companies into opening up shop in Alaska " "Frank," he warned, "is casing the Permanent Fund the way a bank robber cases a bank "

BUT THEN, last month, Begich announced he was trying to refinance city bonds to save a wad of dough During an Assembly meeting, Begich, who says he sees Anchorage someday filling a specific niche for international investment firms, assured those present he already had started working on the bond firms to have more of a presence here

He said he wanted to leverage the firms doing business with the city to ensure they had more of a presence here than a clerk answering the telephone We want people who do the city's investments to do them from here, he said this week

Ah, the uproar The anger The angst You say you don't remember any uproar, anger or angst? That is because there was none Nada Zip The mayor got a free ride, almost to the point that the media paid little, if any, attention to his idea of leveraging bond investment companies to set up shop in Anchorage Odd, don't you think?

Murkowski and Begich had very similar, and very good, ideas Why in the world would we not give more of our attention to companies doing business in Alaska? Why not leverage what we have to ensure more spending in Alaska by the companies and more jobs? As long as the approaches are financially prudent, legal and wise, we would be foolish not to use what we have to improve the state and the city

And the media? Well, go figure

Leftist sleight of hand on terrorists

By WALTER E WILLIAMS

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines magician as "one who performs tricks of illusion and sleight of hand" and "one skilled in magic," a "sorcerer "

That's an apt description for the parade of Democrats, leftists and peaceniks attacking President Bush on his efforts to manage the war on terrorism. Millions of Americans have bought into the illusions created by Bush's critics in their attempt to unseat him in the fall election. Let's look at it.

During the 9/11 Commission hearings, former Secretary of State and magician extraordinaire Madeleine Albright told the panel that the Clinton administration did all it could think of to defeat al Qaeda and fight terrorism

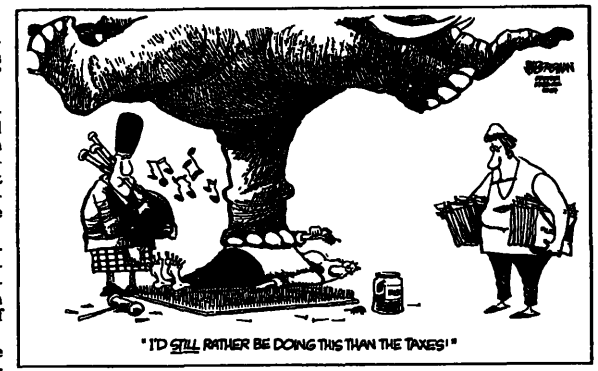
OK. You tell me what it did about the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center How about the 1996 bombing of a U S Air Force housing complex at the King Abdul Aziz Air Force Base near Dhahran, Saudi Arabia? What about the bombing of the USS Cole and the 1998 bombing of the U S embassies in Africa?

Williams

Not only did the Clinton administration do nothing decisive about these attacks that cost hundreds of U S casualties, it even refused Sudanese President Bashir's offer to arrest and hand Osama bin Laden over to the United States

That's the magician's gift, he creates the illusion that events which happened really didn't happen and those which didn't happen happened Being mesmerized by an illusion is the only way one can accept Madeleine Albright's claim that the Clinton administration did everything it could think of to fight terrorism and defeat al Qaeda

Then, there's magician Richard Clarke, former White House terrorism adviser, whose book "Against All Enemies Inside America's War on Terror" was released just in time for the 9/11 Commission hearings



"I'D STILL RATHER BE DOING THIS THAN THE TAXES!"

During the hearings, Clarke testified that the Clinton administration had "no higher priority" than destroying terrorism and that, for Bush, it was "an important issue but not an urgent one " And to CBS correspondent Leslie Stahl, Clarke said, "I find it outrageous that the president is running for re-election on the grounds that he's done such great things about terrorism He ignored it "

Only sorcery can get you to buy into Clarke's statements In 2002, Richard Clarke told Fox News correspondent Jim Angle that the Bush administration decided to increase CIA resources fivefold to go after al Qaeda and that its plans called for the rapid elimination of al Qaeda instead of simply a rollback Was Clarke lying then or is he lying now about President's Bush's war on terrorism?

Another part of the Democrats' magic work is to convince the American people that Bush places a higher priority on the ouster of Saddam Hussein than going after al Qaeda That's believable if you can be made to believe that our armed forces attacked Iraq before they attacked Afghanistan

But suppose Bush had "done something" like taking military action against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan prior to Sept 11 I'm betting there would have been the same howls of protest from the United Nations, France and Germany and the Democrats that there were prior to the Iraq invasion

Fighting terrorism as well as rogue dictators requires a policy of pre-emption During the 1930s, there should have been a pre-emptive strike on Nazi Germany Had Britain and France had the guts to do that, 60 million lives lost in World War II might have been spared

After World War II, when we held a monopoly on nuclear weapons, we should have told the U S S.R. that if it started making nuclear weapons we'd bomb its facilities We would have avoided Soviet adventurism and trillions of dollars fighting a cold war Today, we should give axis-of-evil member North Korea notice to destroy its nuclear weapons or we'll do it for them.

You might ask, "Williams, are you a warmonger?" No, I'm not, but here's the way I look at it. If you hate my guts and have designs to hurt me, and I see you building a cannon aimed at my house, I am not going to wait for you to finish construction.

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ODDS IMPROVE FOR NEW . . .

Meeting center

THE MUNICIPALITY of Anchorage is now reviewing two attractive proposals for the new Alaska Civic and Convention Center

The two plans were both submitted by developer teams with extensive track records in the Anchorage marketplace and proven ability to deliver on promises for major projects

The interest and abilities of the two teams suggests that Anchorage may well have a new civic and convention center in its future, fulfilling a years-long hope of the city's tourism industry

Selection of the two finalists moves the process to Phase Two, which will involve refined proposals, detailed financial information and answers to questions posed by the city's review committee

One developer team includes John Blomfield and George Swift and proposes to place the center on Alaska Railroad property near Ship Creek. That plan calls for a new 352-room Sheraton Suites Hotel and a 300,000 square-foot conference center

The competition is a team composed of JL Properties Inc. and Venture Development Group, LLC Major investors would be Jonathan Rubini, Leonard Hyde, Mark Pfeffer and Jerry Neeser

THAT PLAN calls for a new 190,000-square-foot facility to be built on Block 80, which is bordered by 7th and 8th avenues and F and G streets, between the Atwood and ConocoPhillips buildings

One important consideration in the deal will be the future of the existing William A. Egan Civic & Convention Center The Blomfield/Swift group proposes to sell or lease the Egan Center for retail and/or office space The JL Properties/Venture Development Group would incorporate the new facility with the old and use both for civic and convention events

The new convention center may be funded in part by a 4 percent increase in the hotel/motel bed tax, which now stands at 8 percent. Such an increase would have to be approved by Anchorage voters and could be on the ballot for the state primary election in August

The need for a new center continues to increase and becomes especially obvious when overflow civic events must compete for space with athletic events at Sullivan Arena, which has come into its own as a sports arena.

Anchorage has become a popular venue for state, national and international conventions, but that potential has barely been tapped Continuing to recruit those conventions — and doing a good job of hosting them when they are here — will enable a big business to grow into a genuine industry

One key to realizing that potential will be in providing a new or expanded center appropriate for the need.

School bonds took everything down

By TOM BRENNAN

One likely reason for last week's bond issue debacle is that the voters came down with a bad case of sticker shock. Faced with bond packages totaling almost $250 million, many people voted against everything that wasn't nailed down.

That decision was unfortunate, especially when one of the casualties was a long-term lease on 335 acres in Ruth Arcand Park for use by the Anchorage Horse Council as a therapy program for handicapped people

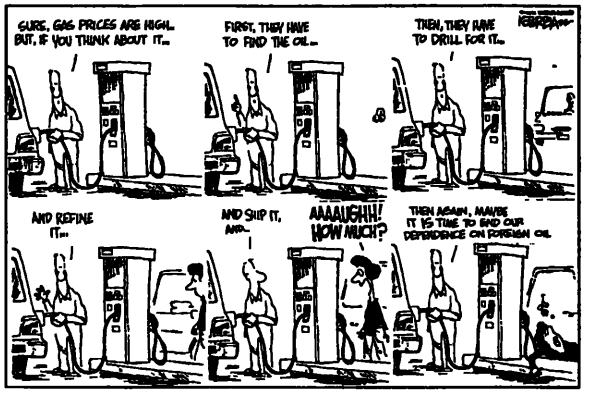
The horse park was almost certainly an innocent victim, since it would have cost taxpayers nothing It might even have made the city a few bucks But when voters are in a lopping mode, they don't always stop to read the fine print.

Who is the villain here? Obviously there is more than one, but at the top of the list comes the Anchorage School District The district over-reached and asked for $162 million in projects, including almost $96 million in school construction, $30 million for a new district headquarters office and $36 million for upgrades and improvements at existing school buildings

Brennan

The district's problem seems genuine — it needs new classroom space and is looking for a cost-effective way to house its headquarters But the $30 million district headquarters building went down the tube along with $95 8 million in construction bonds that would have paid for, among other things, a new Muldoon middle school.

With another $86 million in bonds on the line for things like fire and police services, roads and road improvements, ambulances, parks and recreation projects and such, the bottom line — $250 million — was much too big for most people So the big sucking sound on April 6 was the sound of bond issues being flushed down the ballot box of history The only school-related bonds to pass were $36 4 million for heavy equipment and major maintenance



The debacle was probably not necessary But the Anchorage School District, unfortunately, has a lousy sense of timing It failed to realize that this is not the best of times to ask Anchorage voters to put that kind of money on the line, not when the state is looking at potentially major league deficits and possibly a new broad-based tax, either an income tax or a statewide sales tax.

Alaska does have a $28-billion savings account, but too many people consider the Permanent Fund to be their personal piggy bank and not a pot of public money to be used for public purposes Regardless of its original purpose — or what people thought they were voting for when the fund was established — proposing to use any of it for state expenses is considered heresy these days

Count me as one of those who think Alaska's free-money program was the worst piece of public policy ever to come down the pike I enjoy those dividend checks as much as anybody, and have never sent one back, but I'm convinced that the free money has brought many people here who would not otherwise have come, and whose presence is not a net benefit for the state

I'm also convinced that the free-money program has brought out the least admirable character traits of a great many of our fellow citizens, traits like policy paranoia, even some who were here long before the state started the handouts.

Unfortunately, the problem is likely to get much worse before it gets better Using just a portion of Permanent Fund earnings to pay state expenses could make a huge dent in the looming deficit. It might even make possible enough growth to make the deficit go away indefinitely And it could change attitudes about incurring public debt like that in the bond issues

But that would require a level of legislative wisdom that voters would surely punish at the ballot box. Some legislators are already nursing bruises from constituent reaction to relatively benign concepts like calculating Permanent Fund earnings as a percentage of the fund's market value

The POMV would actually benefit many of the people who oppose it most strongly, but suspicion runs deep these days Those same people refuse to consider any change to the fund.

They assume somebody is trying to steal their dividends

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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FOR THE CHRISTIAN WORLD, EASTER IS . . .

A day of joy

FOR 2,000 YEARS, the resurrection of Jesus has been celebrated as the greatest of all religious feast days It is, to Christians the world over, the promise of eternal life, made possible by one who gave his life on the cross

It also comes at the time of the year when in this country we rejoice in the arrival of spring — a new birth as the land emerges from the dark and cold of winter, a flowering of nature that brightens the spirits and enriches our days

It is, in every sense, a blending of the holy and the secular Churches fill with those who worship the risen Christ And it is a day for dressing up, for dining out, for stuffed bunnies and Easter baskets filled with brightly colored eggs

This year Easter also comes at a time when the nation confronts evil forces in Iraq pledged to kill American troops who are in that torn and troubled land in an effort to rebuild its cities and give its citizens a new life of freedom

These radical and fundamentalist killers have declared death to all of those who are of different faiths and different beliefs — trying to make a religious war out of this battle for freedom in their own country

IN DOING SO, they have defiled the tenets of their own Islamic faith — desecrating and mutilating the bodies of four victims who were slain a week ago while working to protect the delivery of food supplies to needy Iraqis

War, unfortunately, has been a part of the world since cavemen took stone axes to attack others or defend themselves Through the ages, as civilizations advanced and religions emerged, people have prayed for peace — all the while, in troubled times, arming themselves against their foes

This Easter celebration comes as Americans sacrifice once more in a commitment to freedom that calls on young men and women to serve in the face of peril in a foreign land.

The Easter prayers that will fill churches today also will include petitions for peace — as well as prayers of thanksgiving and joy for the events that followed the passion and death of Jesus on Calvary

The disciples of Christ on the third day found his tomb empty, and heard the words of an angel telling them that the Lord was not there, that he is risen

It was the fulfillment of Christ's life on earth

It proclaimed then the joy of Easter, as it does again today as we celebrate with colorful bonnets, with chocolate candy, with festive brunches, and most of all, with a day celebrating the faith of our fathers

Happy Easter to you and yours

Easter 1964: a day of worship and work

By WILLIAM J. TOBIN

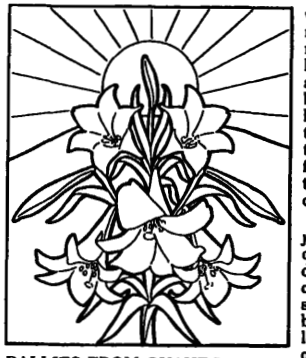
FORTY YEARS AGO on Easter Sunday churches in Anchorage were crowded with men, women and children wearing work clothes, jeans, wool jackets and metal-toed boots and shoes Among the ladies, Easter bonnets were few and far between Hard hats and heavy gloves were what the men brought to church It was not a dress-up day, as Easter usually is It was, instead, the aftermath of the massive earthquake that struck Southcentral Alaska late on a Good Friday afternoon, when the skies were leaden and a few light snowflakes were in the air And there was work to be done that Sunday

THE ENORMOUS quake began at 5 36 p m and lasted 4 1/2 minutes When the churning stopped, when the eerie roar of ripping earth and asphalt suddenly ceased, when the sounds of breaking glass and twisting timber came to an abrupt end, people stood in shock and awe For brief moments, they were frozen in place, trying to comprehend what had happened In Turnagain, survivors struggled to climb from the debris of broken homes and towers of tumbled earth Downtown, buildings slumped along Fourth Avenue and the north wall of the J C Penney building lay broken across automobiles parked at the curb

Tobin

THE FIRST RESTORATION work began on Holy Saturday Aid from Outside started to arrive Those who experienced the overwhelming fright and emotional trauma caused by the quake got their emotions in order — thankful that sons and daughters were spared, grieved by the death of others here and in Seward, Kodiak, Valdez and elsewhere along the coastal edge of Alaska

AS EASTER SUNDAY dawned, another overcast and gray day, a new spirit was evident in town "CITY



RALLIES FROM QUAKE," said the headline across the front page of The Anchorage Times as it printed early that afternoon its first-ever Sunday edition, an "extra" of extraordinary importance — filled with photos of the quake damage, a first tentative list of the names of victims, and, as a special touch to help the youngsters, a page of comics

AT MASS IN the city's Catholic churches, at services in Protestant churches all over Anchorage, people gathered to pray — to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on the most holy day of the Christian year, to give thanks for the blessing of life in the face of a natural disaster of unbelievable magnitude, to pray for those who died, and to offer consolation to those who lost loved ones on Alaska's unforgettable Good Friday

THAT EASTER raised spirits that the quake had knocked temporarily awry The season of Lent was over Forty days of sacrifice were past The cold of winter had yielded its grip on the land The brightness of spring and nature's new birth were at hand Soon there was to be the freshness of the new season — buds on the trees, tulips bursting from the ground, grass showing the first glimpse of green.

THE SAME IS true today Church pews often uncrowded on other Sunday mornings will be shoulder-to-shoulder with Easter worshippers acknowledging a faith in the passion, death and resurrection Maybe that inherent belief is what makes Easter, more than any other day of the year, a time for bright dresses, straw hats with ribbons, white shirts and colorful neckties It's a day when families dress in their Sunday best and gather at home for an elaborate brunch or to go out on the town for a bountiful buffet at a fancy restaurant

EASTER SIMPLY abounds with joy Hard-boiled eggs dyed in a rainbow of colors Easter baskets for the children, filled with green cellophane grass, candy wrapped in a blaze of color, stuffed bunnies with gaily colored ribbons around their necks, and flowers galore — not yet from the garden, but overflowing from coolers where florists keep fresh supplies on hand to bring brightness into your home You just can't help but have fun on Easter By the very nature of the day, it's a happy time

IN AN ERA in which there are those who would ban God from society, Easter is a reminder that a belief in Christ's resurrection has been the most powerful force in the world for two millennia Over the ages, sinners and saints alike have looked to it as the greatest miracle of all — a matter of faith embedded in the hearts and souls of the high and the lowly in every part of the globe

WE CELEBRATE Easter as both a moving religious event and a wonderful social occasion — mixing the divine with the secular in a perfectly lovely way Religious feasts always have been an occasion for parties and festivals, for processions and dancing, for prayers and laughter — but none more so than Easter Today, in a world beset by sorrow, terror and hatred, Easter is evidence that faith and hope live in the hearts of millions and millions of people who believe that 2,000 years ago Jesus offered himself on the cross in atonement for the sins of mankind — and rose in glory on the third day

William J. Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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WILLIAM PENN'S PRAYER IS STILL . . .

Inspirational

THE ALASKA CIVIL Liberties Union is all in a snit because Mayor Steve Thompson of Fairbanks has defended placement of a copy of the Ten Commandments in the City Council chambers there

It's unconstitutional, a lawyer for the ACLU roars — just as the organization hurrumps about anything that reflects the traditional values that have made America strong for 200 years

Well, let's call to the attention of the local ACLU that in Old City Hall in Philadelphia, where the Founding Fathers cobbled together this nation, is a bronze plaque that presents William Penn's "Prayer for Philadelphia," which he wrote more than 320 years ago It reads

"And Thou Philadelphia the virgin settlement of this province named before thou wert born, what care, what service, what travail have there been to bring thee forth and preserve thee from such as would abuse and defile thee O that thou mayest be kept from the evil that would overwhelm thee, that faithful to the God of thy mercies in the life of righteousness, thou mayest be preserved to the end My soul prays to God for thee that thou mayest stand in the day of trial, that thye children may be blest of the Lord and thy people saved by His power"

Good for William Penn

Good for Philadelphia

Good for Mayor Steve Thompson

Good for Fairbanks

Non-driller Kerry

A PIECE OF friendly advice for Tony Knowles, the Democratic candidate for the U S Senate

Telephone John Kerry, the Democratic candidate for president, and tell him to endorse oil and gas exploration and development on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Were Kerry to agree, it would do the Knowles campaign a world of good.

It also would give the Massachusetts senator something positive to do about his stated desire to reduce gasoline prices

Increasing U S crude oil production is the way to do that Unfortunately, Kerry is firmly opposed to tapping the giant reserves believed to lie beneath the northern reaches of ANWR.

His only real plan, actually, is to try to make political points by beating up on President George W Bush.

And it sure isn't a plan to help Tony Knowles

French prefer U.S. as the victim

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Look. I know it is shooting French in a barrel But when yet another insufferable penseur — first Chirac, then de Villepin, now the editor of Le Monde — starts lecturing Americans on how they ought to conduct themselves in the world, the rules of decorum are suspended

In an article in the Wall Street Journal, Jean-Marie Colombani, who wrote the famous Sept 12, 2001, Le Monde editorial titled "We Are All American," gives us the usual more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger lament about America's sins We loved you on Sept. 11 We were all with you in Afghanistan But, oh, what have you done in Iraq?

This requires some parsing We loved you on Sept 11 means We like Americans when they are victims, on their knees and bleeding We just don't like it when they get off the floor — without checking with us first.

Colombani glories in Europe's post-Sept 11 "solidarity" with America "Let us remember here the involvement of French and German soldiers, among other European nationalities, in the operations launched in Afghanistan to free the Afghans"

Come again? The French arrived in Mazar-e Sharif after it fell, or as military analyst Jay Leno put it, "to serve as advisers to the Taliban on how to surrender properly"

Afghanistan was liberated by America acting practically unilaterally, with an even smaller coalition than it had in Iraq — Britain and Australia, with the rest of the world holding America's coat

But then came Iraq "The problem was not so much the war itself, but the fact that it was launched without U N approval," Colombani explains

Rubbish The Kosovo war was launched without U N approval and France joined it Only two wars have ever been launched with U N approval the Korean War (an accident of the Soviets having walked out of the Security Council on another matter) and the Persian Gulf War

"I can't explain now, but I have been called away on business for three months"

It is touching to hear such legalistic objections to deposing a man who has killed more Muslims than any person on Earth — particularly when the objection is offered from a pose of superior international morality from a country whose commandos once blew up a Greenpeace ship monitoring French nuclear tests in the South Pacific

Moreover, Colombani complains, George Bush "lied about the weapons of mass destruction — the official pretext for the war — as now publicly established by recent investigations" More rubbish

The investigations have established that the weapons have not been found and may not exist The claim that the president knew so at the time, and lied about it as a "pretext" for war, is a malicious falsehood

There is more Colombani grieves that the Bush administration has taken "axes" to the two great pillars of Western success following World War II containment and free trade

Colombani decries the fact that containment has given way to preemptive war But containment was designed for the Soviet Union, which died 10 years before Bush even took office Only a fool would advocate containment against the new threat that has risen in its place terrorists and terrorist states acquiring weapons of mass destruction

When dealing with undeterrables (like al Qaeda) or undetectables (like an Iraq or an Iran passing WMDs to terrorists) there is no such thing as containment There is no deterrence, no address for the retaliation There are two options do nothing and wait for the next attack, or get them before they acquire the capacity to get you That is called preemption.

Warming to the ax theme, Colombani decries the Bush administration's "return of protectionism" This (plus preemption) "is why John Kerry is, a priori, perceived with so much sympathy" in Europe

Good grief Only an ignoramus oblivious to what is happening in American politics could prefer Kerry over Bush on grounds of free trade

Has no one told Colombani that the Democrats have made protectionism — attacking everything from NAFTA to the World Trade Organization — a theme of this campaign, radically reversing the Clinton policies of the 1990s?

It is not John Kerry's fault that he is endorsed by a Frenchman (Or by Kim Jong Il of North Korea, whose media have been running some of Kerry's speeches verbatim!) But Kerry has made the major — indeed, only discernible — theme of his foreign policy "rejoining the community of nations" and being liked abroad again.

Which is why he does not just court foreign support, he boasts about it. "I've met foreign leaders, who can't go out and say this publicly," he told a Hollywood, Fla , fundraiser, "but boy they look at you and say, 'You gotta win this one, you gotta beat this guy'"

For the world For France

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.

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MURKOWSKI MOVE ON DRILLING A . . .

Bold stroke

GOV. FRANK MURKOWSKI'S decision to offer oil and gas leases in state waters off the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska was a bold stroke aimed at extreme environmentalism

The rabid greens undoubtedly will try to block the lease sales, scheduled for October, but the battle may bring attention to the hysterical nature of their arguments Exploring for and developing oil and gas resources in an Arctic environment utilizes technologies that are well understood by Alaska oil experts — and have been safely used for more than a generation.

Alaska's experience at nearby Prudhoe Bay and the surrounding area suggests that the northern environment can be well protected while drilling and development proceed, and wildlife can actually thrive

One critical consideration will be deciding on measures to protect whales migrating through the area and fish and wildlife resources vital to North Slope whalers and other subsistence users Special measures have been incorporated in past efforts, measures such as shutting down drilling operations when whales are in the area

THE NEW offering will include 350,000 acres of submerged lands off ANWR and 670,000 acres off NPR-A. Some of the ANWR acreage is in the same area as tracts that are already leased and producing oil The producing acreage, near Prudhoe Bay, includes the Northstar, Point McIntyre and Endicott fields

Murkowski has ordered National Resources Commissioner Tom Irwin to initiate discussions with North Slope residents to learn their concerns and win their support Area residents strongly endorse ANWR drilling but will need assurance that any new offshore activity will not impact whales or other wildlife resources important for their subsistence needs

The state announcement noted that wells drilled directionally from state leases offshore the ANWR coastal plain "could help delineate onshore deposits, could identify deposits that collectively might justify investment in onshore pipelines and could even discover more oil than is ever found onshore"

The extreme greens and their political supporters — like Sen John Kerry of Massachusetts — have been adamant about blocking the oil and gas potential of the ANWR coastal plain

Now let's see if Kerry's grandstanding can prevent Alaska from drilling on its own submerged lands Nothing would surprise us, but Gov Murkowski's in-your-face approach is a welcome change and hopefully a way to educate the American public about what is really at stake in northern Alaska.

If successful, the state's new initiative could be a high-profile way to demonstrate again how Alaska's fish, birds and animals can be protected while subsurface resources are developed and sent to market

The Good Friday story told again

By JOHN LEO

My current theory is that Christians and Jews see two different films when they watch Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" For example, when Satan slithered through the crowd, I saw nothing objectionable

It's conventional Christian theology that the temptation to do evil (or Satan himself) is everywhere But many Jews saw Satan acting through a specifically Jewish gathering, yet another in a long line of Christian libels For Jews, this film was very close to the traditional passion play so often used to incite anti-Semitic violence

Jews also noticed that when God becomes angry at the killing of Jesus, he doesn't wreak havoc on the Roman forum or Pilate's house He doesn't even confine the damage to Herod's palace and Caiaphas's house He destroys the temple

Jews don't understand why Christians don't seem to get this They tend to think that Christians are either blind to the movie's message, or insensitive to the feelings of Jews I don't think that's it I think the emotional impact of this film was so powerful that it tended to blot out concerns about history, accuracy and blame

These concerns dominated among intellectuals and media types But ordinary Christians were so overwhelmed by the film that they didn't much want to involve themselves in yet another debate about whether a few Jews or a few Romans were mostly responsible for killing Jesus

This was the first movie, available to a mass audience, that powerfully portrayed the scope of Jesus's sacrifice and what it means for the way Christians lead their own lives That's why so many came out of the theater shaken, weeping or talking about their need to become better Christians Nobody came out wanting to talk about Mel Gibson's father

The Christian unwillingness to analyze this film showed in a more obvious way The core audience, evangelicals and fundamentalists, is meticulous about literal reading of Scripture and at least stand-offish about Catholic interpretations

"Your boss didn't want you to lie here worrying about the work piling up, so he fired you"

Yet they flocked to a film with a profoundly Catholic sensibility, based on the sometimes eccentric visions of a 19th century nun, and filled with free-wheeling scenes found nowhere in the Bible You could argue that Gibson's movie departed from the Gospels almost as much as Hollywood potboilers like The Robe

But to audiences, this didn't matter much It was emotionally true to the Gospels, and audiences found that good enough.

There's also a culture-war aspect to the film Christians are very much aware that they are increasingly held in contempt by so many in the elites and the arts community

This treatment is everywhere, and runs from anti-Christian plays and movies to dung-and-porn-covered madonnas and attempts to degrade Christian symbols and rituals, such as the ridiculous and swishy Jesus figures in gay parades

After a year-long campaign to destroy Gibson's movie before anybody had seen it, The New York Times ran a review of the film that compared "The Passion of the Christ" to a Simpsons episode What are the odds that a Times reviewer would compare a serious black play to an episode of Amos and Andy?

Many Christians were clearly relieved that "The Passion of the Christ" wasn't yet another attempt to trample their values In this context, the hundreds of millions of dollars that "The Passion of the Christ" is ringing up amount to a large cultural statement.

The columnist Mark Steyn nicely jabbed at the elites this way "All those liberal columnists who champion the necessity of brave transgressive artists when it comes to giving us a horny Jesus (The Last Temptation of Christ), a gay Jesus (the Broadway play Corpus Christi), or a Jesus floating in the artist's urine have finally discovered a Jesus it would be grossly irresponsible to show to the public"

On anti-Semitism A survey released last week by the Institute for Jewish and Community Research reports that Gibson's film is not producing resentment against Jews and may actually be reducing anti-Semitism

According to the survey, 83 percent of people familiar with the film say it made them neither more likely nor less likely to blame Jews today for Jesus's crucifixion Two percent said they are more likely to blame Jews Twelve percent said the film made them less likely to do so

The numbers in the poll were small It was done in early March when only 146 of the 1003 people surveyed had actually seen the film. But the results are an indicator that the dire predictions of a big wave of anti-Semitism were wrong

Some 40 to 50 million Americans have seen the film, and the mainstream press still seems to be awaiting an explosion of anti-Jewish feeling among Christians It hasn't arrived I don't think it will

John Leo is a columnist for U S. News & World Report, Copyright © U S News & World Report, LP Reprinted with permission.

The Anchorage Times

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

VOTER DECISIONS WERE A . . .

Mixed bag

THE MESSAGE in Tuesday's voting seems clear the public generally is willing to pay for school and road upgrades and repairs, but is less enthusiastic about library improvements, or building a new East Anchorage middle school or a school district administration building

Voters also gave the skunk eye to public transportation improvements and fixing public buildings, along with saying "no" to upgrading parks and recreation facilities

All of that is understandable The public is weary of soaring property taxes and the ballot requests totaling more than $240 million in additional bonded indebtedness would have meant even more levies Into all of that, stir the state's fiscal problems, which made the promises of state reimbursement for some of the bonds seem dubious, at best Folks were left to wonder about being forced to pick up the tab if the state were to renege

But the apparent rejection of Proposition 3 is beyond understanding Early Wednesday, it was failing 24,945 to 23,855, or 51 12 percent to 48 88 percent

The ballot question would approve a long-term lease of 335 acres in Ruth Arcand Park to the Anchorage Horse Council to allow The Rainbow Connection to build a facility for year-round horse therapy for challenged individuals It would have cost taxpayers nothing and nothing would have changed in the park. Nothing The Horse Council would have assumed financial responsibility from the city for the first time and made an annual payment. What was not to like?

PERHAPS IT was not described well enough for voters Perhaps it was just that too many people ignored their civic duty to know and understand the issues before voting and opted, instead, to say "no" to anything and everything, good and bad alike Who knows?

There are something like a thousand questioned and absentee ballots to be counted yet Perhaps the tally will turn around, although that seems unlikely We hope a way can be found to make the therapy center a reality

At least two Assembly races remain in the balance, awaiting examination of those ballots and then there likely will be recounts, so it will be a few weeks before we know whether Ken Stout or Bill Wielechowski will be the Assembly representative in Seat J, or whether Dave Werdal can hold out against Pamela Jennings for Seat D Those races are razor-thin. We congratulate Debbie Ossiander, Dan Coffey and Janice Shamberg for their Assembly victories

Eventually, needed new schools will be built and the school district will find a way to combine its administrative offices into one building Libraries will be upgraded and public buildings will be repaired and challenged people will get their horse-therapy facility

But not right now

Another chance to do things right

By LEW M. WILLIAMS, JR.

After the Alaska Legislature blew the first $900 million received from oil leases at Prudhoe Bay, there were bumper stickers pleading for another $900 million, "This time we won't blow it."

Alaska received several new chances On one occasion, the late Rep Oral Freeman of Ketchikan and Sen Rick Halford of Chugiak took advantage of the Prudhoe Bay production boom and promoted putting $1 8 billion (twice the $900 million) into the principal of the Alaska Permanent Fund Legislatures have added to the principal of the Permanent Fund, aside from what normally goes in it, by transferring $4 5 billion of unappropriated earnings into the untouchable fund principal.

The unappropriated earnings are the earnings after dividends and inflation-proofing are paid They totaled $454 million on June 30, 2003 So the Legislature moved $354 million of that into the principal of the Permanent Fund as a pre-payment toward 2004 inflation-proofing It is estimated the unappropriated reserve will be $872 million on June 30 this year

Williams

It would be irresponsible to dump all of that $872 million into the principal of the Permanent Fund when less than $150 million of it will cover the fiscal gap if put in the general fund of the state Another chunk of it could provide substantial revenue sharing for local governments — reducing local taxes — and cover the $84 5 million the House has approved for education Dividends, inflation-proofing and the fiscal gap will be covered without additional taxes or tapping the Constitutional Budget Reserve

This is possible because Alaska is getting another chance Royalties are climbing, with oil over $30 a barrel Alaskans should take advantage of this until they can amend the state constitution to provide a payout from the Permanent Fund based on percent of market value It's the simplest long-range plan. The amendment should authorize the Legislature to determine how much of a 5 percent payout goes to dividends and how much to state services

A fifty-fifty split right now would pay a dividend about the same as last year — with a promise of annual growth — cover the fiscal gap, provide revenue sharing and for increased education costs The growth of the fund and inflation-proofing are automatically protected by earnings that are consistently above 5 percent

Another good plan before the Legislature is in HB 333 It endows public education in Alaska — K through 12 and the University — with 1 percent of the revenue from state land

Rep Dan Ogg, R-Kodiak, the bill's author, says that the University of Alaska is 49th among the states in the size of its land grant to education He also points out that using land revenue to support education goes back to 1634, four years after establishment of the Massachusetts Colony The colony's founders gave the town of Dorchester an island Revenue from the island financed the first free schools in America

* * *

Gov Frank Murkowski is doing his part to attract industry and development to Alaska We know because his absences from the state are reported as greater than those of Gov. Tony Knowles No governor can do much toward developing his state by warming a chair on the third floor of the State Capitol He won't get approval of the natural gas pipeline by hanging around Juneau. He has to sell it in Washington, D C , and to gas companies

Gov Ernest Gruening traveled a lot in territorial days promoting Alaska statehood May Murkowski be as successful as Gruening

The governor isn't neglecting duties in the state He is merging and realigning departments for more efficiency And judging by the complaints of those who dislike change, he is around Juneau enough to do a lot He is getting state managers out of unions Under the current procedures, Alaskans have union members (managers) negotiating with state workers' unions Unions negotiating with unions Who is negotiating for the taxpayers?

Last year, he merged permitting divisions How many do we need?

The governor's plan to modernize the ferry system and supplement it with road extensions is under fire, as is moving 40 headquarters jobs for the ferry system to Ketchikan, near the state shipyard There wasn't any complaint from Juneau — Sitka was unhappy — when the governor changed the home port of the new high speed ferry from Sitka to Juneau to provide more service for Alaskans

Alaska's three original mainline ferries are more than 40 years old, older than any of the ships that Alaska Steamship Co ran to Alaska in the days Alaskans referred to them as "Rust Buckets " (The exception was the old SS Victoria. It was an 1800s classic, loved as a classic car is today)

How much do Alaskans use their ferry system? Go to the system Web site and notice the dramatic drop in traffic between 1992 and 2002 passenger boardings down 29 percent and vehicle boardings down 23 percent. Meanwhile, the fares have gone up again this year Something must be done

Lew Williams Jr is a retired publisher of the Ketchikan Daily News. His e-mail is lmwjr@worldnet.att.net

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25044122456

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

A MAN OF MANY SEASONS . . .

Jim Parsons

MANY PEOPLE are active as volunteers working to make Anchorage a better place to live Some are involved in a limited number of things, but their contributions are in no way small Others take part in a great many different ways, and their efforts all help the city move ahead

But in measuring volunteerism over a long span of time, it may well be that no one in Anchorage ever participated in a wider variety of community affairs than Jim Parsons

When it came to getting involved, this witty and charming activist was a dynamo — in the arts, in civic service, in education, in government You name it, and in his more than 50 years in Anchorage, he was into almost everything

That service, and that remarkable record of community involvement, came to an end last Sunday morning when he died at home, a victim of cancer that all too quickly took his life

Many who have come to Anchorage only in recent years may not have known him or known of him, because the passage of time had made him less active and less publicly involved Too bad They missed the joy of seeing and working with a man of vision and exuberance, whose interests touched on all aspects of Anchorage life in his younger years

A NATIVE New Yorker, Jim Parsons came to Anchorage in 1953 — a staff sergeant in the Army Medical Corp in World War II with undergraduate and graduate degrees in psychology at Pacific Union College, the University of Minnesota and Columbia University He pursued his career in important assignments with the state Division of Mental Health, the Anchorage School District, Alaska Methodist University and the Municipality of Anchorage He founded the Alaska Mental Health Association and served on the executive committee of the National Mental Health Association

He was elected to the Anchorage School Board in 1954, and to the state House of Representatives in 1959, serving two terms in the Second and Third state Legislatures He was elected to the Anchorage Charter Commission in 1975, and helped pave the way for merger of the old city and borough governments

But it was in other areas of service that he was best known — as president of the Alaska World Affairs Council, as president of the Anchorage Concert Association, as founding chairman of KSKA public radio, as a board member of the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts, as president of the Anchorage Kiwanis Club, and as one with enduring commitments to the Salvation Army, to the Citizens Advisory Committee of the University of Alaska Anchorage, to the Anchorage Ski Club and to a host of other activities

Jim Parsons was a mover and a shaker He made Anchorage better than it might have been

It's only right to listen carefully

BY ELISE PATKOTAK

I remember that one of the things that made the Inupiat people of the North Slope the angriest was when environmentalists suggested that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was a vast trackless expanse of land that man had never touched They used this as the reason why industry should not be allowed there now no matter how small a footprint it leaves behind

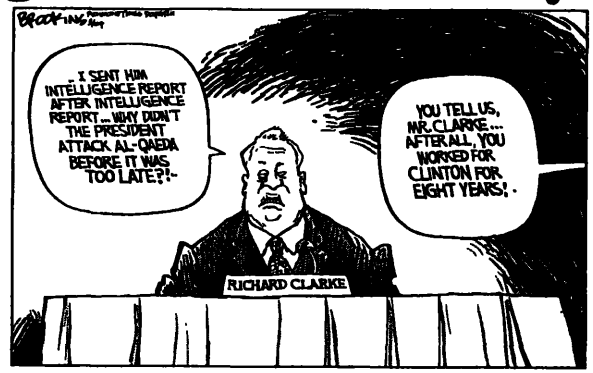
This angered the Inupiat because the simple truth is that they have been part of the Arctic for as long as their cultural memory can reach and Western science can confirm And during that time, they did not fly on winged feet over that land They walked on it They dog-sledded on it. They hunted, loved, created families and died on it

This same can be said about the Arctic seas, which the Inupiat view as their gardens They harvest from them in the same way a farmer harvests his field Among other benefits, the mammals of the Arctic carry in their blubber the vitamins we get from vegetables, the vitamins that allowed the Inupiat to be healthy in a land where the sun never rose for three months and the land did not produce vegetables and fruits

Patkotak

The presence of men and women has been felt in the Arctic since time immemorial. It is not a vast wasteland as some would suggest who are eager to sell its virtues as an oil-rich bounty for America's energy needs And it is not some virgin waiting to be defiled by the rapaciousness of an uncaring oil industry As always in real life, the truth lies somewhere in the middle where most of us actually live.

Gov Frank Murkowski, apparently frustrated over his inability to open the ANWR coastal plain to development, has announced he will offer offshore areas for leasing in the Arctic. Whether this is a viable business concept, and whether anyone will even be interested in these tracts is something that remains to be seen.



The issue I see as much more immediately important is the message this once again sends to the only people in the world who can honestly claim a love of the Arctic land and seas that goes beyond what bounty they provide and is inextricably bound up with who they are Anyone who has seen the changes on the North Slope since the development of Prudhoe Bay must admit that along with the negative impacts the money had on the culture, from which the culture is still struggling to emerge, the positive impacts are undeniable

There are sanitation and clean water systems in each village There are health clinics, good roads, fire departments, local schools and safe housing all attributable to the money brought in by that development. North Slope people are well aware of their good fortune and have worked hard to be good neighbors with the oil industry But they have always rightfully insisted that they be integral to any development on the North Slope so that their heritage of good stewardship of their land and seas will pass untainted to the children's children. They have never been willing to trade their culture for a paycheck. They have worked hard for 40 years to make sure that it has not had to be a trade, but could be a mutually beneficial relationship

When Gov Murkowski vents his frustration over opening ANWR's coastal plain by announcing he will lease land in the Inupiat's garden, the people of the North Slope rightfully recoil from what seems like a slap in their face It is as though they are being punished for something over which they have no control. I'm guessing the governor did not intend it in this way but that's how it looks from out here. The sea is sacred to the Inupiat in a way that a thousand of my columns could not fully explain

The bowhead whale defines the Inupiat The seal, walrus and polar bear are part of the cycle of life in any Inupiat village The danger of offshore drilling to these resources is something almost beyond comprehension because it is the kind of damage that once done could destroy an entire culture

The Inupiat people are proud to be Alaskans and proud that the bounty of their land has helped strengthen their state After all, sharing is at the heart of this culture and sharing the wealth of their oil is just an extension of what they have always done with any of their bounty They deserve to be heard about their seas and we need to listen carefully to what they say It's the right thing to do

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company

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BILL J. ALLEN
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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

THERE IS NO RUNNING . . .

From terrorism

THE COMMISSION studying what might have been done to avoid the 9/11 disaster has dissolved into little more than a political sideshow The main effort now seems to be a Democratic full-court press to put the blame on George Bush and his administration — and to absolve the administration of Bill Clinton of any failure to prevent the terrorist attacks

This has become a tool in the Democrats' bid for the White House in this election year A war against terror and those who conduct it has been shuffled to the side

Too bad. The focus should be on today's fact of life America is at war Its enemies are ruthless and sinister men who are motivated by hatred and a desire to stamp out Western society — in this country, and in all countries that support the U S and which share with us a tradition of liberty and freedom.

Former Secretary of State George P Shultz has summarized the challenge by saying "for us and for our allies, failure is not an option."

The brutal deaths of four civilian U S contract workers in Iraq this past Wednesday offered grisly testimony to what Shultz said during a Kissinger Lecture at the Library of Congress, and which was excerpted in the Wall Street Journal Last Monday

"The stakes are huge and the terrorists know that as well as we do That is the reason for their tactic of violence in Iraq"

THE VIOLENCE erupted in a sickening way in the town of Fallujah, a Sunni Triangle city about 32 miles west of Baghdad. The four were killed in an ambush that set their vehicles on fire on the town's main road, their bodies incinerated and mutilated. At least two bodies were tied to cars and dragged through the streets Some body parts were pulled off, according to a Reuters report, and left hanging from a telephone cable

A young boy beat one of the mutilated bodies with his shoe while the crowd cheered

As the victims lay burning, Reuters said, a mob of about 150 men chanted "Long live Islam" and flashed victory signs "This is the fate of infidels," shouted one man.

Try appeasement in the face of this demented, religious zealotry Aggressive and committed preemptive action is necessary to combat such evil. This country and Americans everywhere in the world are at peril so long as terrorists are permitted to run rampant No amount of 9/11 hearings, tainted by political agendas, will make this country and the world safe

Said Shultz "If we put this in terms of World War II, we are now somewhere around 1937. In the 1930s, the world failed to do what it needed to do to head off a world war Appeasement never works Today we are in action We must not flinch. With a powerful interplay of strength and diplomacy, we can win this war"

If Proposition 3 passes, we all win

By BENTON L. DIBRELL

A funny thing happened not too long ago right here in Anchorage Someone came up with an idea that allows the city and two separate, private non-profit organizations to work hand-in-hand to deliver enormous benefits to the physically, emotionally and mentally challenged members of our community — without costing the city a penny

Proposition 3 asks voters' approval of a long-term lease of 334 acres in Ruth Arcand Park, set aside for equestrian activities in the 1980s Since 1985, the Anchorage Horse Council has been the steward of that land under a management contract with the municipality It has built and maintained the William Clark Chamberlin Equestrian Center, including five outdoor arenas, a series of summer use stables and numerous multiuse trails Its mission "to promote the recreational, educational, and therapeutic use of horses and to provide comprehensive education, offer therapeutic and rehabilitative training for handicapped individuals, and provide general riding programs for youth and disadvantaged children"

To do that, it joined with Rainbow Connection some 20 years ago to provide extraordinary opportunities for individuals with challenges, challenges most of us cannot even imagine Despite this dedication, Anchorage remains the only major city in the U S that does not have a year-round therapeutic horseback riding center available to its special needs community

Now, Rainbow Connection wants to make that dream a reality by building a world-class facility that will be functional year-round for therapy, using horses — and Rainbow Connection has committed to build this facility solely with private funds The lease described in Proposition 3 will provide the land where the facility can be built At the end of the 30-year lease, the facility will belong to the city

Rainbow Connection currently provides an excellent therapeutic riding program but must drastically limit the number of riders The waiting list is about 10 times greater than the number of individuals they are able to serve The limitation is space Rainbow Connection has no arena or facility to call its own.

During the summer months, the program operates outdoors at the William Clark Chamberlin Equestrian Center From September through April, however, Rainbow Connection must provide its services out of a private barn, Huffman Horse Center Rainbow Connection is able to do so only because of the generosity of its owner and tenants, who give up their own riding time so that Rainbow Connection can function, albeit at a significantly reduced level, during those difficult winter months The time allotted is limited to about three hours a week, wholly inadequate given the large number of children who wait for an opportunity to participate

While Rainbow Connection's name will not appear in the ballot language, a "Yes" vote on Proposition 3 ultimately will provide the organization with a 10-acre lease where it can build the much-needed facility for year-round services Neither the Anchorage Horse Council lease nor the Rainbow Connection lease will change the traditional use or accessibility of Ruth Arcand Park in any way The Anchorage Horse Council will continue to maintain multi-use trails, as it has since 1985, for participants of many disciplines including cross-country skiing, hiking, and trail riding

A "Yes" vote also benefits the city financially The council's current contract with the city is structured so that the municipality must pick up the tab if the Horse Council cannot meet its expenses The proposed lease removes financial responsibility from the city and places it on the Anchorage Horse Council and Rainbow Connection

The lease actually will return 5 percent of all revenues to the city while shifting liability from the municipality to the organizations

The lease, and the subsequent privately financed construction of a year-round facility, will meet the needs of handicapped individuals for decades to come The proposal is a perfect example of private, non-profit entities working in concert with the city to meet the needs of individuals within the community

A Rainbow Connection rider recently said, "I cannot run I cannot play baseball or soccer But I can ride a horse and when I do, I feel just like everyone else" This is the crux of what Rainbow Connection strives to accomplish

The next chapter of the story is inexorably tied to the passage of Proposition 3

Benton L Dibrell is president of The Rainbow Connection and a resident of Anchorage

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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IN TUESDAY'S ELECTION, OUR . . .

Assembly picks

VOTERS HAVE an opportunity Tuesday to fix Anchorage's dysfunctional Assembly, which nowadays seems little more than a showcase for liberal ideologues and a rubber stamp for Mayor Mark Begich. While we would not presume to tell you how to vote, we will share our choices

For Assembly Section 2, Seat A, in Chugiak, Debbie Ossiander. Her more than 10 years on the School Board prepared her well for the Assembly Ossiander, while on the School Board, had a reputation for being tough, meticulous, knowledgeable and a hard worker

For Assembly Section 3, Seat D, in West Anchorage, Dave Werdal. His six years experience on the Anchorage School Board and his extensive community involvement make him a good choice As a School Board member, Werdal was engaged, energetic and a true asset to the panel as it dealt with complicated education issues and budget problems

His strongest opponent, Pamela Jennings, has wide union support and is the choice of Begich and his cabal on the Assembly

For Assembly Section 4, Seat F, in Midtown, Dan Coffey. His extensive service to the city and the state while working with officials of every political stripe provides ample evidence that he can work with other Assembly members for the good of the city His business and legal background will stand him in good stead

His strongest opponent, incumbent Doug Van Etten, has an abysmal Assembly record In addition to breaking state election laws and the city's ethics code, he was a leader in the mean-spirited effort to deny the Simonian Little League baseball fields To win re-election, he is running the dirtiest election campaign in recent memory

For Assembly Section 5, Seat H-3, Ken Stout. A retired Army officer, Stout is a longtime Anchorage businessman and business professor He formerly headed the Alaska Republican Party He wants to streamline the business permitting process and spur the economy

His opponent, Bill Wielechowski, is supported by Begich and a host of other Democrats, left-leaning Assembly members, unions and activists, including the Alaska Conservation Voters

For Section 6, Seat J, in South Anchorage, Tim Bridgman. He has more than 40 years experience as an engineer and in construction That will be an asset as the city wrestles with building and zoning issues

His strongest opponent, incumbent Janice Shamberg, has an Assembly record nearly as bad as Van Etten's She is supported by the usual suspects on the left, including unions and activists

All the candidates running in these races — those we favor, those we do not, those not mentioned — have worked hard and long to provide Anchorage residents with choices

Do your part and go vote on Tuesday

Spring is here, hiding under the snow

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

Spring has sprung
The grass is rizz.
I wonder where
The flowers izz?

WELL, WHERE THE flowers izz is under three or four feet of snow that still covers everybody's lawn in Anchorage, the leftover from the record 100-plus inches of the white stuff that fell over the winter season — which, we note for the record, was still roaring along as April began on Thursday, with temperatures around town in the range of zero and below

BUT WE KISSED March goodbye on Wednesday, said a chilly and sunny hello to April the next day, and turned our clocks ahead to Daylight Savings Time at 2 o'clock this morning So surely it's now safe to say that spring is here Its arrival is still garbed in white, and breakup lies ahead over the next two or three weeks — so call it a long winter and a late-arriving spring But winter wasn't too severe, and the heavy snow kept the city, the countryside and the mountains looking their best for a good five months The bet here is that spring will pass swiftly, giving way quickly to an eagerly awaited summer

Tobin

AND ALMOST BY surprise, we need to note we're only a few weeks away from the start of the tourist season Just in case you've been wondering whether our town has enough hotels to accommodate all the visitors, worry not. Some of them, for sure, will find rooms in three more hotels fresh on the scene Aspen Hotel's new 138-room property at 34th Avenue and the Old Seward highway is scheduled to open July 1 In case you're looking for a place to put up Aunt Sally and Uncle Fred when they arrive in town, the number to call for reservations is 274-2151 Out off C Street and International Airport Road, the Fairfield Inn & Suites will offer four floors and 106 rooms, in a $5 5 million project also due to open in early July Its phone number is 222-7611, and the actual address is 5060 A Street Eyeball-to-eyeball with the Fairfield Inn is a $3 million, 83-room Motel 6, which is looking for an opening in early May Its address is 5000 A Street The phone number is 677-8000

"You were stronger on our first honeymoon"

VISITORS ARRIVING for an Alaska adventure no doubt will be hearing local folks still talking about the 2004 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, won in grand fashion by Mitch Seavey of Seward And before all the loose ends of that race are bundled up, a special cheer is in order for 18-year-old Ellie Claus, the youngest musher ever to make the thousand-mile journey from Anchorage to Nome The race began just 12 days after she turned 18, and in 11 days, 19 hours and 24 minutes she and her 11-dog team crossed the finish line Her 45th-place finish earned a $1,049 share of the purse for the glamorous youngster who was born in Alaska and grew up at her parents' remote lodge in Wrangell-St Elias National Park. She honed her mushing skills at the same time she led tourists on rafting, hiking and fishing trips Her winnings were a tad less than the $69,000 Seavey took home for his Iditarod victory Seavey, as everybody who followed the race knows, reached Nome in 9 days, 12 hours, 20 minutes — with eight dogs trotting ahead of his sled.

AND NOW THAT April is here, the Chef's Inn will spend all this month observing its 40th anniversary at the same location — on the north side of Northern Lights Boulevard, almost at the corner of Arctic Boulevard It opened there a week after the 1964 Good Friday earthquake To celebrate, owner Frank Dahl promises a lot of specials, prizes, and music galore In the old days, the Chef's Inn featured dancing atop a giant piano bar and a fireplace in one corner where patrons grilled their own steaks. In recent years it has been noted for the best French-dip sandwich in town — along with a lot of blues played by a host of popular local and touring bands

IF YOUR MUSICAL tastes run more to operetta, your April treat will come in four performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Mikado " This comic opera classic was first staged at London's Savoy Theatre on March 14, 1885, and made its American debut on Aug 19, 1885, at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City Its Anchorage revival will play at the Discovery Theatre in the Performing Arts Center on April 10, 14, 16 and 18 Steven Sulich will be the conductor, Brad Carroll the stage director, and the ever-popular soprano Kate Egan will sing the lead role of Yum-Yum Tenor Eric Van Hoven, making his Anchorage Opera debut, has the role of Nanki-Poo Tickets are available at all Carrs TIX locations

ALSO ON THE horizon, the American Red Cross of Alaska will present its fifth annual Real Heroes Breakfast at the Hotel Captain Cook at 7 30 a.m on April 20 There is no charge for admission, but only a limited number of seats are open to the public Your request for a reservation must be made by April 12 The number to call is 646-5411

SUNDAY PUNDAY: Two Mexican detectives were investigating the murder of Juan Gonzalez "How was he killed?" asked one detective "With a golf gun," the other detective replied "A golf gun?! What is a golf gun?" "I don't know But it sure made a hole in Juan."

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

A WAY TO DRAW ATTENTION TO . . .

State spending

PEOPLE OFTEN SAY that passing an income tax would encourage voters to pay closer attention to how legislators spend their money

They are right to an extent, but that close attention would come only at the time the tax was up for consideration If a tax were passed, afterward public scrutiny would almost certainly fall back to its normal level — low

Except for exciting things like hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, sled dog races, Martha Stewart trials and Super Bowl half-time shows, the public's attention span is limited, to say the least, especially on public policy issues

But here is another idea if you want to keep the general population focused on the legislative process, give the people a major stake in it, not just general dyspepsia caused by the fact that they are being taxed

Say, for instance, the Legislature were allowed to take a portion of the Permanent Fund earnings to fund the state budget Then say that anything left over from those earnings after state spending were to be used for individual dividend checks

Would the people pay close attention to how much the Legislature was diverting to the state budget and how much was left for them? You bet In fact, the voters could get downright huffy about it

This may be an unlikely scenario The pressure on legislators to reduce spending and pay big dividends would be enormous

But it would certainly get the public interested in how the Legislature spends money

School Board

VOTERS ON TUESDAY must decide who will fill two Anchorage School Board seats now held by incumbents Tim Steele and Jake Metcalfe

Steele, board vice president, now holds Seat A. He is facing Richard Wanda and Russell Mjolsnes Steele, who describes himself as middle-of-the-road politically, has served the board and the community well and should be returned to office

Metcalfe, president of the board, and now holding Seat B, is facing opponents Thomas Lamb and Andrée McLeod.

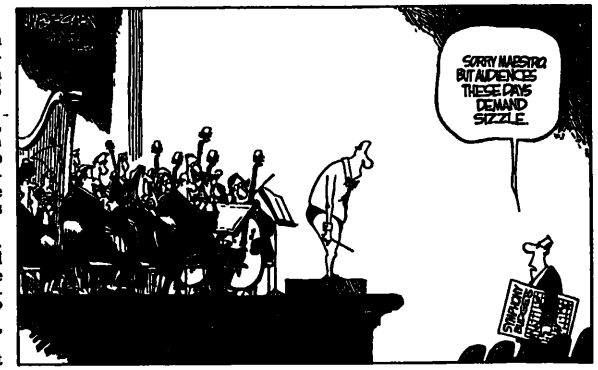
While Metcalfe has served the board well, and McLeod would be an interesting addition to the panel, we like some of Lamb's ideas about cutting the district's administrative costs and spending We think new blood might be good for the board.

The sad part about these races is that there are not more highly qualified, highly motivated people vying for a spot on this most important board

Vote Tuesday

Low-price law kills free coffee

By WALTER E. WILLIAMS



A couple of weeks ago, heading down to George Mason University, I pulled into my favorite Wawa gasoline station just off the Bel Air Md , exit on I-95 South.

At each of the 20 gasoline pumps, there was a sign posted that Wawa would no longer dispense free coffee to its gasoline customers Why? The station was warned that dispensing free coffee put it in violation of Maryland's gasoline minimum-price law

Here's my no-brainer question to you. Do you suppose that Maryland enacted its gasoline minimum-price law because irate customers complained to the Legislature that gasoline prices were too low? Even if you had just an ounce of brains, you'd correctly answer no

Then, the next question is just whose interest is served by, and just who lobbied for, Maryland's gasoline minimum-price law? If you answered that it was probably Maryland's independent gas-station owners, go to the head of the class

Williams

Let's first establish a general economic principle Whenever one sees statutory or quasi-statutory minimum prices, he is looking at a seller collusion against customers in general as well as against particular sellers, those who are seen as charging too low a price

This economic principle applies whether you're talking about minimum wages, minimum dairy prices or minimum real-estate sales commissions Members of a seller collusion call for statutory and quasi-statutory minimum prices so they can charge customers higher prices than they could otherwise in the absence of a statutory minimum

You say, "Williams, that's preposterous, how can they sell legislators on the idea? After all, buyers of gasoline are more numerous than sellers of gasoline " To answer that question, you have to recognize a couple of other facts

First, legislators aren't known for being rocket scientists Secondly, legislators love campaign contributions, and satisfying the interests of lobbyists is more important to their political careers than serving the interests of consumers in general

Lobbyists such as WMDA Service Station & Automotive Repair Association, the Gasoline Retailers Association and the Petroleum Marketers Association of America are able to sell legislators on the fairy tale that if high-marketing gasoline outlets such as Wawa, Sheetz, Wal-Mart and others are allowed to charge prices that are too low, they'll drive all other gasoline stations out of business

Having done so, these high-marketing outlets could charge any price they pleased and make huge profits

In economics, we call this strategy predatory pricing It's an argument that has a ring of plausibility, but there's little evidence anywhere anytime that a predatory pricing scheme produced results even remotely close to what would-be predators envisioned Questioning this fairy tale and asking for evidence would never cross the mind of a legislator

Another reason legislators can get away with establishing these minimum-price laws has to do with another economic phenomenon called "narrow well-defined benefits and small widely dispersed costs " The beneficiaries of the gasoline seller collusion are relatively few in number and well organized The victims, mainly gasoline customers, are difficult to organize, and the costs they bear are relatively small and widespread

In other words, how many gasoline consumers would be willing to spend their time and energy fighting to unseat a legislator whose actions imposed, say, a nickel a gallon additional cost upon them? It's cheaper just to pay the nickel a gallon more and forget about it, but that's not true about gasoline retailers It is worth their time and energy to pressure legislators for minimum-price laws, and politicians know this

Maryland is not the only state with statutory minimum gasoline prices It's joined by 12 other states, including New York, Michigan and Wisconsin Wisconsin legislators have the gall to call its government-sponsored seller collusion the "Unfair Sales Act "

Walter E. Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc., 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003.

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VOTERS FACE LENGTHY LIST OF . . .

Ballot props

THE 39 PROPOSITIONS on Tuesday's municipal ballot touch on everything from trying to wiggle out of Selective Service draft registration to approving bonds for schools and much-needed road work.

Our ever-growing ballots are beginning to look more and more like California's, and while some are urging "no" votes right down the line, some merit your attention.

Propositions 1 and 2 are a waste of time and paper, in our view, and not worth your vote The first seeks to eventually exempt Anchorage residents from the Selective Service registration. The second is a partisan political ploy in the form of an advisory vote urging the Legislature to come up with a long-range fiscal plan. They rate a "no" vote

Proposition 3, however, deserves a "yes " It would approve a long-term lease in Ruth Arcand Park that would allow The Rainbow Connection to build, with private funds and at no cost to taxpayers, a year-round facility to allow therapy, using horses, for individuals with unimaginable challenges

Proposition 4 seeks approval of $36 million in general obligations bonds for code upgrades, sprinklers, security upgrades and such for Anchorage schools About $35 million of that amount qualifies for possible legislative reimbursement. It rates a "yes" vote, in our view

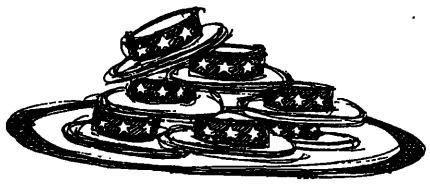
Proposition 5 asks for approval of $95 8 million in general obligation bond debt for school construction, design and site acquisitions In addition to that increase in the tax cap, it also asks to raise the cap by an additional $2 million for "annual operations and maintenance costs " Because of Municipal Code requirements, the proposition, in essence, asks you two questions — Do you approve the debt? Do you want to add the operations and maintenance costs? — but allows only one answer Despite that, we support the bonds

Proposition 6 is the school district's controversial second attempt to find a home for its administrators and staff It asks for $30 million in general obligation bonds to refurbish the vacant Kmart store near the Northway Mall for office and training duty The good news? The project qualifies for possible 60 percent to 70 percent reimbursement by the state, and could save the taxpayers perhaps $2 million annually in rent and lease payments, and by reducing overlaps and other inefficiencies It also could spur sorely needed development in the area to increase the tax base The bad news the building would be removed from the tax roll It is worth a "yes" vote

Propositions 7 and 8 address fire and police capital improvements They seek approval of $7 6 million in general obligation bonds — but they, too, contain language that would increase the tap cap by about $36,000 more than the bonds They deserve a "yes" vote

Proposition 9 seeks $1 2 million for ambulances, communications systems upgrades and other capital improvements If you think you may ever need an ambulance, you likely should vote "yes "

Muni Election '04



Proposition checklist

- Proposition 1—No.
- Proposition 2—No.
- Proposition 3—Yes.
- Proposition 4—Yes.
- Proposition 5—Yes.
- Proposition 6—Yes.
- Proposition 7—Yes.
- Proposition 8—Yes.
- Proposition 9—Yes.
- Proposition 10—Yes.
- Proposition 11—Yes.
- Proposition 12—Yes.
- Proposition 13—Yes.
- Proposition 14—Yes.
- Proposition 15—Yes.
- Proposition 16—Yes.
- Proposition 28—No.
- Proposition 29—No.

JUST WHEN YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH HERE'S . . .

Even more

PROPOSITIONS 10 through 39 contain the nuts and bolts part of the ballot, dealing with everything from roads and drainage to continuation of limited service areas

Proposition 10 seeks $46 5 million in general obligation bonds for roadway and drainage improvements It, too, would boost the tax cap by $285,000 for operations and maintenance costs. We support the bonds The work is badly needed.

Proposition 11 proposes to use $1 5 million in general obligation bonds to upgrade public transportation in Anchorage The bonds would provide a 20 percent match for federal funding If you ride a bus, you'll vote "yes "

Propositions 12, 13 and 14 deal with general obligation bond debt to fix or improve public buildings and recreational facilities The total request is for about $9 million. They rate a "yes" vote

Proposition 15 asks for $7 6 million in general obligation bonds to buy land and build or remodel various public libraries It would increase the tax cap by $203,700 for maintenance and operations costs

Proposition 16 would boost the mill levy in the Eagle River-Chugiak Parks and Recreation Service Area by 50 mill for capital improvements The levy is worth a "yes" vote by the folks who live in the service area.

Almost all of the rest of the propositions are an esoteric grab bag of mill levies in various service areas from road maintenance and construction, to creating new service areas for road lighting and road services

But then, there are Propositions 28 and 29

Proposition 28 would de-annex Powder Ridge from the Chugiak Fire Service Area. Only voters there will see the ballot question. It would remove Powder Ridge from the Chugiak Volunteer Fire Department area and place it under Anchorage Fire Department coverage If approved, the move would be a blow to the volunteers' tax base — the department is funded by a 1 mill levy in the service area — and that money would go to Anchorage, which charges more for its fire coverage The proposition depends on Proposition 29 also being passed.

Proposition 29, seen on the ballot by only those living in the Anchorage Fire Service Area, would annex Powder Ridge into the Anchorage Fire Service Area.

Both propositions, 28 and 29, must pass before any change can occur, and both, in our view, deserve a "no" vote because the change is unnecessary

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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STATE "MEDDLING" BRINGS OUT . . .

Crying towels

THE HOWLS of indignation from the Assembly and various city officials about Sen Ben Stevens' measure to return election of a mayor in cities of more than 100,000 residents to 50 percent, plus one, seem a bit comical to us

His move set off an uproar in Anchorage, the only city that qualifies, and he now finds himself accused of meddling in city business

But his detractors are the very same folks who took a partisan slap at state lawmakers by placing on the April 6 municipal ballot Proposition 3, an advisory vote "urging the Alaska Legislature to adopt a comprehensive long range fiscal plan for the state of Alaska in open session "

The politically motivated vote came at the urging of (who else?) Assemblyman Allan Tesche and his merry band of left-wingers Assemblyman Doug Van Etten, part of that group, momentarily got confused, and actually argued against Tesche's measure, saying, "It 's not going to bring us any good " A moment later, after talking with Mayor Mark Begich, Van Etten changed his mind and was the key vote in putting the ill-advised measure on the ballot

Talk about meddling

Stevens' rightly believes the chief executive of Alaska's largest city should be put into office by a majority of voters, and the state senator questions how a ballot proposition that rolled back the "50 percent, plus one, requirement" to 45 percent could be made to affect the mayoral election on the same ballot

Political observers at the time laughingly dubbed the ballot measure the "Elect Mark Begich" proposition and, sure enough, Begich swept into office with 45 03 percent of the vote — that's fewer than 20 votes above the limit

It is easy to understand why Stevens would push legislation to return the requirement to 50 percent, plus one, and he has good reasons There should be raucous political debate about the legislation and its effects

But for the Anchorage Assembly and other city officials to whip out their crying towels and moan about his meddling is as silly as calling the Assembly and the mayor non-partisan

Correction

In a March 17 column by Elise Patkotak, the institution Geraldo Rivera exposed years ago for mistreatment and neglect of kids was misidentified It was Willow Brook on Staten Island

Oil spill stories contained errors

By DR ERNEST L BRANNON

The Anchorage Daily News recently published allegations of long-term damage to Prince William Sound fish and wildlife resulting from the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989

I am concerned about the inaccurate portrayal and misrepresentation of information in the article

The claim that billions of fish eggs were killed, herring, sea ducks, loons, cormorants and sea otters are not recovering; and killer whales and harbor seals are still declining from oil exposure, is not consistent with the scientific data

I am the fisheries biologist responsible for Exxon's investigations of the spill effects on pink salmon in the sound My team of scientists studied spill effects on incubating pink salmon in oiled streams in the sound over the last 15 years

We found no impact of the spill on salmon eggs and embryos immediately after the spill or at any time since

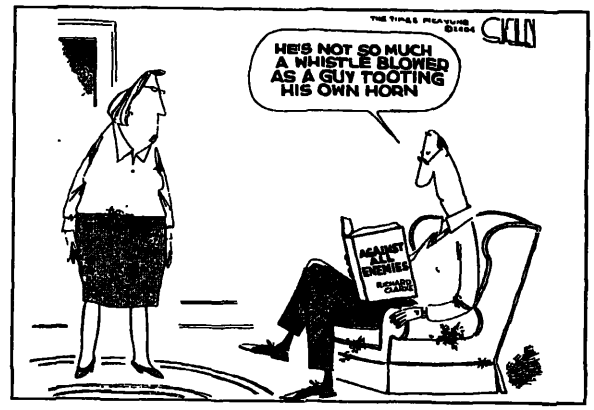
The key determinant of oil effects is the hydrocarbon load in the tissues of the affected fish (greater than 6,000 parts per billion is lethal), and the facts are that incubating embryos showed little or no tissue accumulation of petroleum hydrocarbons (less than100 ppb) following the spill

Even the mean levels of hydrocarbons found in the incubation gravel of oiled streams (less than 270 ppb) were orders of magnitude below reported lethal concentrations (3,800 ppb)

Early reports by the state of egg mortality from oil exposure was later found to have been caused by the hydraulic pumps used to extract eggs from the stream gravel

The pink salmon embryos were sensitive to physical shock at the time of sampling and were killed by the extraction process, not from oil exposure

There was never a need for Prince William Sound pink salmon recovery because there was no measurable oil



impact or reduction in numbers They have continued to increase from before the 1980s and the all-time record runs of pink salmon that have been returning to the sound since the spill (53 million adults in 2003) testify of their continuing long-term good health

Regarding continuing toxic contamination of oil on the beaches, the allegations again are exaggerated It has been suggested that the oil becomes more toxic with weathering, but that is misleading

Toxicity of weathered oil should be viewed relative to its solubility, and not on toxic potential per unit mass

As oil weathers, the remaining fraction becomes less soluble, and the remaining high molecular weight hydrocarbons reputed to be most toxic are of little risk because they are the least soluble and form the pieces of asphalt in evidence on some beaches

My team of scientists tested oil toxicity for three years on the most oiled beaches in the sound Pink salmon eggs placed in artificial nests on the beaches showed low tissue hydrocarbon accumulations (less than 50 ppb) over an extended period of a month

Even when next to buried oil deposits, tissue concentrations of pink salmon embryos were minimal (19 to 2,400 ppb) because of low solubility of weathered oil, and the diluting effect of tidal flushing These data indicate oil deposits still buried in beaches pose little ecological risk.

Regarding killer whales, otters and ducks, I suggest that those interested for more reliable information should read the scientific reports on work conducted in the field on the actual animals, birds and fish alleged to have been impacted

For example, I know of no supporting data that shows the spill caused killer whale mortality Even the (Exxon Valdez Oil Spill) Trustee Council is uncertain whether the orcas sustained any damage

Those wanting more information on pink salmon should contact representatives of the agencies for government reports, and contact me [aqua@uidaho edu] for copies of reports on our research in the sound

Dr Ernest L. Brannon is a professor at the University of Idaho and senior scientist on pink salmon investigations for Exxon-Mobil in Prince William Sound

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FELONY CONVICTIONS SHOULD MEAN . . .

No teaching

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL District Superintendent Carol Comeau did the right thing in placing on administrative leave a Clark Middle School math teacher who pleaded no contest to a felony charge of drug possession.

The teacher, Centivon "Maurice" Ballard, last summer was found to possess Valium, Ecstasy and Oxycodine, in addition to marijuana and a veterinary anesthetic that can be used, according to a news report, "as a date rape drug"

He pleaded no contest to fourth-degree misconduct involving a controlled substance, a Class C felony which carries a possible maximum sentence of five years in prison and a $50,000 fine Instead, he received three years probation and 200 hours of community service

The district learned of Ballard's plea on Sept. 2 and placed him on administrative leave with pay the next day, then later on unpaid leave During that time, he successfully underwent treatment, the district says

Ballard in January returned to the classroom, outraging some in this community Why was he there? State law and the district's policies are so tightly written that Ballard falls into a legal crack.

Comeau says that what Ballard did, he did during the summer, in July, when he had no contract with the school system, and it had no effect on his job, where he is seen as an "outstanding" teacher

UNDER STATE LAW, a teacher can be sacked only for incompetence, immorality or "substantial noncompliance with the school laws of the state, the regulations or bylaws of the department, the bylaws of the district or the written rules of the superintendent"

Because he was not selling or distributing drugs while working for the district, Ballard does not fit neatly into any of those categories, officials say, and moving against him would trigger arbitration the district likely would lose

Comeau says escalating anger among parents and a possibility the school might suffer prompted her to reassign Ballard to non-classroom duties as of Monday, which likely is as much as she can do His case, however, is being reviewed by the Professional Teaching Practices Commission, which can take a wide range of actions

Some parents angered by Ballard's return to school contended it sent a terrible message to students, that breaking laws, even drug laws, is no big deal There must be consequences, they say, and balked at the notion of having a felon teaching their children.

To ensure that such a thing does not happen again the district must re-evaluate and change its policies, where needed, and the Legislature must change the law and state regulations so that drug possession or a felony conviction are ample reasons to fire a teacher The Assembly, at the urging of Assembly Chairman Dick Traini, already is considering action.

The sooner, the better

Don't cry; spring is really on its way

By ELISE PATKOTAK

Here's what happens when you take your kids out of Alaska while they're growing up

They have no concept of what real life is all about. If you bring your kids to a place like San Diego, they grow up thinking that life is all sunshine and 72-degree weather with blue skies and calm seas

So when they get married and their new husband is stationed in Hawaii, they don't understand why they aren't getting a lot of sympathy when they call to complain about being bored in Paradise because it's raining They have obviously grown up with unrealistic expectations of what the world should be like and think others feel the same way

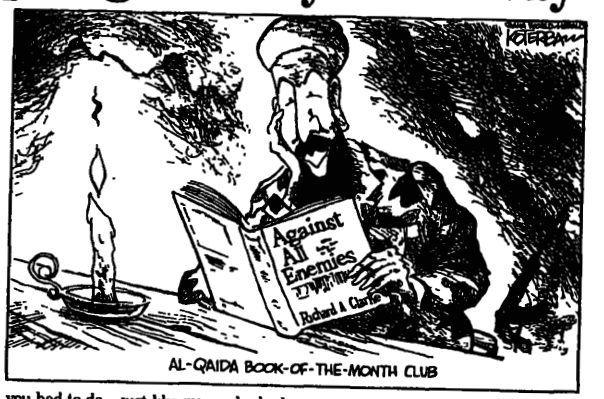
Now if this same child had been raised in Alaska, she would have been pathetically grateful that it was above 30 degrees in March and there was no ice to navigate and no thaw happening that made the world look as though the second flood was approaching Just the idea that a day could be cloudy *and* warm would be such an amazing concept, that her mind would constantly be occupied with trying to grasp that idea thus excluding any possibility of boredom.

Patkotak

Instead of complaining about the rain, an Alaskan kid would be out walking in it, reveling in the fact that it was wet but not icy; rainy but not bone-chilling

When I first came to Alaska many, many, many decades ago, I was surprised at the fact that Alaskans viewed Hawaii about the same way my family from Philadelphia viewed the Jersey shore The shore was where you went for sunshine and fresh air and, if you were very lucky, the summer home you bought there was eventually converted into your retirement home

In Alaska, I found out, people thought of Hawaii that way Going to Hawaii for a break from the winter darkness and cold was seen as just what you had to do – just like my uncles had to bring their wives and families to the shore for the summer I was amazed at the number of people in Barrow who were paying on a condo or home in Hawaii Walking down the streets of Honolulu, you were apt to run into as many Alaskans you knew as you would walking through the 5th Avenue Mall



AL-QAIDA BOOK-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB

It's not that most Alaskans don't love snow and ice and all the fun things you can do in this climate It's just that by the time you are staring at a snowstorm in April, your normally balanced sense of life in this great land starts to fray around the edges

You find yourself walking out on your deck every day to check and see if there are any buds starting to form on the branches of your trees You brush away the snow and look longingly at every bump on the branch thinking that maybe that's a bud You wonder if it's too early to get the patio furniture out of the shed You realize it is when the snow is still so high you can't get the door opened

Kids raised in places like California have never seen their parents stomping through four foot of snow trying to outline their garden in the yard so they can start planning the summer harvest. It gives these kids a whole new perspective on just what kind of mental health stock they come from

So we really are doing our children a favor by raising them in a state in which even a daily sunrise can't be taken for granted Keep telling them that no matter how incredulous the looks are that you will get Stuck to your guns and eventually they may forgive you for telling them that living in Hawaii would be bad for their skin because of all the sunshine they would encounter

Of course, the key to doing this is to do it with a straight face If you start to break down and sob in February as you try to convince them they wouldn't like Hawaii, they may get suspicious And if they find you in your closet fondling your bathing suit in March – well, you just may not be as convincing as you would otherwise be when you tell them that cold and dark preserve our bodies and skin much better so that we will live longer, if not necessarily happier, lives

Now you'll have to excuse me, I have a flowerbed to find in my yard

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company

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ANIMAL RIGHTS GROUPS TARGET . . .

Zoo's Maggie

SHOULD MAGGIE the elephant remain at the Alaska Zoo or should she be sent to a refuge in Tennessee?

The issue is being raised by animal rights activists who argue, many of them without the slightest idea of how Maggie actually is cared for, that an elephant doesn't belong in Alaska. They contend that Maggie is unhappy, and they have stirred up a letter-writing campaign to pressure the zoo board. Among other things, they claim that Maggie is kept chained in the dark.

The contention is ludicrous Maggie lives very well, thank you, in heated quarters, plays in the snow in her own yard when she wants to, and is taken for walks by a handler she obviously likes and who adores her in return.

Those arguing to send Maggie to a rest home for old elephants in Tennessee paint a picture of a new life for the 9,000-pound pachyderm in a warmer climate with others of her species But they gloss over more than a few important facts

Maggie was only 2 years old when she came here more than two decades ago Born in Zimbabwe, she was one of five survivors of a herd that was machine-gunned to death as part of a government plan to reduce the number of the animals Essentially, the Alaska Zoo is the only home she has ever known.

OUTSIDE EXPERTS who have closely followed the growth of the African elephant since she came to Anchorage say she shows every sign of being quite happy where she is They say she might be unhappy if uprooted and sent away

After all, an earlier generation of worriers insisted that a new elephant be brought to Alaska to be a companion to Annabelle, around whom the zoo was built in 1968 A local grocer won Annabelle in a contest and gave her to Sammye Seawell, who kept her on her property on O'Malley Road and expanded her animal collection until it became one of Alaska's featured attractions

Those who insisted Annabelle needed company actually created a difficult situation. Maggie and Annabelle didn't hit it off and Maggie became a behavior problem. She remained one until Annabelle passed away in 1997 When she was alone at last, Maggie blossomed and her behavior improved tremendously

The Alaska Zoo is one of Alaska's greatest institutions Its collection of creatures — mostly birds and animals from northern climes — is outstanding and seeing them is an experience nobody should miss

Maggie is Alaska's only elephant, widely loved by the children and adults who visit her Sending her away would be a great loss to the zoo and to Anchorage

The matter remains under discussion, but the zoo board needs to listen more to those who know Maggie best, not the do-gooders looking for a way to keep their fund-raising prospects alive and well

Let's hope the experts decide the best thing for Maggie is to stay right here

Will the real Clarke please stand?

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

It is only March, but the 2004 Chutzpah of the Year Award can be safely given out It goes to Richard Clarke, now making himself famous by blaming the Bush administration for Sept. 11 — after Clarke had spent eight years in charge of counterterrorism for a Clinton administration that did nothing

The 1990s were al Qaeda's springtime Blissfully unmolested in Afghanistan, it trained, indoctrinated, armed and, most fatally, planned For the United States, this was a catastrophic lapse, and in a March 2002 interview on PBS's "Frontline," Clarke admitted as much "I believe that, had we destroyed the terrorist camps in Afghanistan earlier, that the conveyor belt that was producing terrorists, sending them out around the world would have been destroyed " Instead, "now we have to hunt [them] down country by country "

What should we have done during those lost years? Clarke answered "Blow up the camps and take out their sanctuary Eliminate their safe haven, eliminate their infrastructure That's the one thing in retrospect I wish had happened "

It did not And who was president? Bill Clinton Who was the Clinton administration's top counterterrorism official? Clarke He now says that no one followed his advice Why did he not speak out then? And if the issue was as critical to the nation as he now tells us, why didn't he resign in protest?

Clinton had one justification after another for going on the offensive American blood spilled in the 1993 World Trade Center attack, the embassy bombings of 1998, the undeniable act of war in the attack on the USS Cole in 2000 Response A single, transparently useless, cruise missile attack on empty Afghan tents, plus a (mistaken!) attack on a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory

As Clinton Defense Secretary William Cohen testified, three times the CIA was ready with plans to assassinate Osama bin Laden Every time, Clinton stood them down, because "we're not quite sure "

"My daughter tells me you're hoping for a career in shipping."

We're not quite sure — a fitting epitaph for the Clinton anti-terrorism policy They were also not quite sure about taking bin Laden when Sudan offered him up on a silver platter in 1996 The Clinton people turned Sudan down, citing legal reasons

The "Frontline" interviewer asked Clarke whether failing to blow up the camps and take out the Afghan sanctuary was a "pretty basic mistake "

Clarke's answer is unbelievable "Well, I'm not prepared to call it a mistake It was a judgment made by people who had to take into account a lot of other issues There was the Middle East peace process going on There was the war in Yugoslavia going on. People above my rank had to judge what could be done in the counterterrorism world at a time when they were also pursuing other national goals "

This is significant for two reasons First, if the Clarke of 2002 was telling the truth, then the Clarke of this week — the one who told the Sept 11 commission under oath that "fighting terrorism, in general, and fighting al Qaeda, in particular, were an extraordinarily high priority in the Clinton administration — certainly [there was] no higher priority" — is a liar

Second, he becomes not just a perjurer but a partisan perjurer He savages Bush for not having made al Qaeda his top national security priority, but he refuses even to call a "mistake" Clinton's staggering dereliction in putting Yasser Arafat and Yugoslavia(!) above fighting al Qaeda.

Clarke gives Clinton a pass and instead concentrates his ire on Bush. For what? For not having preemptively attacked Afghanistan? On what grounds — increased terrorist chatter in June and July 2001?

Look. George W Bush did not distinguish himself on terrorism in the first eight months of his presidency Whatever his failings, however, they pale in comparison to those of his predecessor

Clinton was in office eight years, not eight months As Clarke himself said in a 2002 National Security Council briefing, the Clinton administration never made a plan for dealing with al Qaeda and never left one behind for the Bush administration

Clarke says he pushed very hard for such critical anti-al-Qaeda measures as aid to and cooperation with Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan's Northern Alliance By his own testimony, the Clinton administration then spent more than two years — October 1998 to December 2000, the very time the Sept 11 plot was hatched — fruitlessly debating this and doing absolutely nothing

Clarke is clearly an angry man, angry that Condoleezza Rice demoted him, angry that he was denied a coveted bureaucratic job by the Bush administration Angry and unreliable He told the commission to disregard what he said in his 2002 briefing because he was, in effect, spinning "I've done it for several presidents," he said He's still at it, spinning now for himself

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.

The Anchorage Times

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BILL J. ALLEN
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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

FAIRBANKS MAYOR SHOWS . . .

Alaska guts

PEOPLE WHO are fed up with seeing America's traditional values eroded by liberal lawyers, judges and left-leaning special interest groups will take heart in what happened in Fairbanks the other day

Mayor Steve Thompson took a plain-spoken stand against a threatening letter from the Alaska Civil Liberties Union Foundation Sadly, however, he eventually may be on the losing side in this case because the courts might not let the Fairbanks City Hall stand up for principles in which it believes

At issue is nothing more than a framed copy of the Ten Commandments that hung on a wall in the City Council chambers on March 8

But it made the ACLU shiver in its boots One of its lawyers wrote a blistering letter to the Fairbanks city attorney saying display of the Ten Commandments "indicates that the city government endorses the purely religious message it conveys, and that any reasonable observer would conclude that the city was endorsing either religion in general or Judeo-Christianity in particular, either of which which is patently unconstitutional"

The city attorney asked Mayor Thompson for advice The mayor told him "to send the letter back to them and inform them that we weren't going to remove them"

One council member, Donna Gilbert, was quick to support the mayor "I'm so sick and tired of groups like the ACLU thinking they can control our city," she said

THE SHOCKING THING here is that you'd think the ACLU — or any other group that really cared about honest and decent government — would applaud elected officials who believe people should not lie or steal or kill, and should honor their parents, among other moral principles to which they should adhere

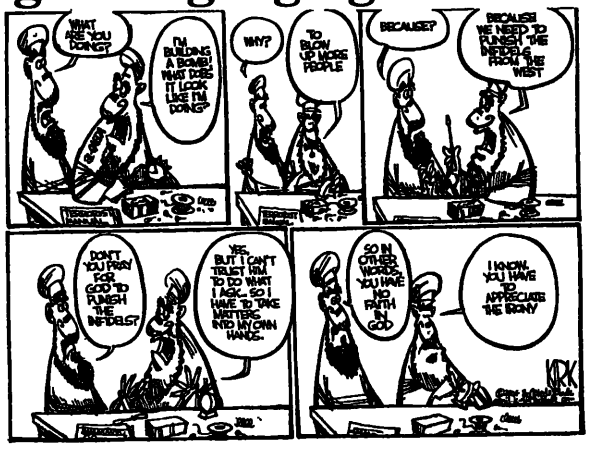
But that's not the case Moral standards are viewed by these activists as so religious in nature that our Founding Fathers would banish them from our nation's life They brush into the dusty bin of history that these founders were the same men who called on "the protection of divine Providence" as they declared this an independent nation

Society has been so skewed by the attacks on American values that the country is weakened daily by those who work relentlessly to keep God from our public life They find support from judges afraid to rule for moral right

Mayor Thompson has guts Thanks, and good for him. And we hope, for once, his side will prevail in this assault on those things in which America believes

Price gouging? Tax gouging is worse

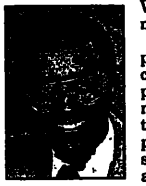
By WALTER E. WILLIAMS



The Virginia Senate just passed the Virginia Post-Disaster Anti-Price Gouging Act of 2004, which now awaits Gov Mark Warner's signature In part, the act says, "During any time of disaster, it shall be unlawful for any supplier to sell, lease, or license, or to offer to sell, lease, or license, any necessary goods and services at an unconscionable price within the area for which the state of emergency is declared. Actual sales at the increased price shall not be required for the increase to be considered conscionable"

Background for the law was last year's devastating impact of Isabel, a Category 5 hurricane that caused widespread property damage and destruction in parts of Virginia that included losses associated with power outages, flooding and wind damage In Virginia alone, Isabel's death toll was about 36, with many more injured The hurricane's effects were felt for months and in many cases still linger

Whenever a major disaster strikes, the public is confronted with all sorts of unpleasantness The source of the unpleasantness is a sudden change in scarcity conditions The immediate demand for many goods and services exceeds their immediate supply What to do? The typical response is for prices to rise dramatically While buyers are not thrilled by rising prices, rising prices are one of the ameliorative responses to changes in scarcity conditions They get people to voluntarily do what's in the social interest Let's look at it using a couple of goods and services important to disaster recovery and ask a question or two



Williams

In Isabel's wake, private contractors from nearby states brought their heavy equipment to Virginia to clear fallen trees from people's houses Producers and shippers of generators, plywood and other vital supplies worked overtime to increase the flow of these goods to Virginians What was it that got these people and millions of others to help their fellow man in time of need? Was it admonitions from George Bush? Was it conscience or love for one's fellow man?

I'll tell you what it was It was rising prices and the opportunity for people to cash in on windfall profits Windfall profits are one of the vital signals of the marketplace It's a signal saying that there are unmet human wants, leading people to strive to meet those wants It stimulates the supply response to a disaster

Imagine for a moment that prices aren't allowed to rise Would it be reasonable for anyone to expect workmen to give up their nights and weekends and drive hundreds of miles to Virginia to remove trees from people's houses? Yes, there would be some motivated by charitable instincts, but I'd hate to count on charitable instincts as the major source of help If, as the Virginia Senate has decreed, prices are not allowed to rise in the wake of a disaster, lest they risk being deemed unconscionable, pray tell me what will produce the incentive for people to travel long distances, work overtime and make other personal sacrifices to provide goods and services to Virginians?

The Virginia Senate has provided a defense for sellers against charges of selling goods at an "unconscionable" price, saying, "Proof that the supplier incurred such additional costs during the time of disaster shall be prima facie evidence that the price increase was not unconscionable" That vision reflects gross economic ignorance on the part of the Senate Costs alone do not determine price, demand plays a role as well When there's a disaster, demand is likely to be the major element driving prices up

Here's my recommendation to the governor and Virginia Legislature if they're really interested in doing something about price gouging Their energies would be better focused on their ever-increasing charges for government services and their subsequent tax gouging of Virginia taxpayers

Walter E. Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc., 5777 W Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045; (310) 337-7003.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

SEN. BEN STEVENS' PLAN IS . . .

On target

SEN. BEN STEVENS has come up with what looks like a good way to tackle the state's fiscal gap without impacting Permanent Fund dividends or reducing the fund's inflation-proofing

Senate Majority Leader Stevens filed a bill last week that would replace money usually taken from the fund's earnings reserve for inflation-proofing with the 25 percent of oil and gas revenues constitutionally mandated for deposit in the Permanent Fund That would free up hundreds of millions to pay back money borrowed from the Constitutional Budget Reserve, which often is used to balance the state budget.

The Legislative Finance Division estimates that the change would make up to $1 1 billion available for deposit into the CBR from the Permanent Fund's earnings reserve account, after inflation-proofing and paying dividends, and as long as $250 million is left in the earnings reserve account That might not all be needed if high oil prices hold and the state's deficit continues to shrink.

Deciding how much of any excess would be held in the CBR and how much would go into the Permanent Fund would be a judgment call. It would represent but a fraction of the total borrowed from the CBR in deficit years And though legislators have been ignoring the obligation, the rules of the CBR do require that borrowed amounts be repaid

THE DOWNSIDE, if you could call it one, is that the Permanent Fund would grow more slowly than it would under the existing system But blindly and unnecessarily dumping money into the fund when the state has genuine needs — especially in education and public safety — is a formula for disaster

Continuing dividend payments and protecting the fund against real inflation are high public priorities But Stevens says that by failing to consider the fund's 25 percent share of oil and gas money as protection against fiscal erosion, the state has been "over-inflation-proofing" the fund.

Those who want a personal income tax to bring in money to pay the dividends would be disappointed, of course They are committed to a Robin Hood approach in which the state would rob the working people and give their money to the poor

Such a tax may become unavoidable some day, though there is an excellent chance that thoughtful development of natural resources could postpone the day indefinitely And a state with $28 billion in the bank and billions more flooding into state coffers each year should not even be thinking of such a tax without first making sensible use of its existing assets

Ben Stevens proposal looks like just such a sensible approach

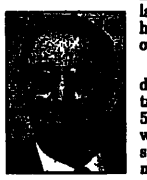
In the land of sunshine and high prices

By WILLIAM J. TOBIN

SAN DIEGO, Calif. — Welcome to the land of high-rent districts They're everywhere you turn. Spend a couple of weeks in this place where the sun shines every day, and you'll wonder how anybody can afford to live here But a lot of folks do This area is big, sprawling, growing, expensive and California to the core

BUT ALL THAT doesn't make it a bad place to visit Far from it. There is a lot to do and see — especially knowing that you don't have to buy a house you can't afford, and knowing that you won't be forever stuck with the enormous taxes, auto registration fees, and other assessments facing residents As a visitor, you'll be hit only with local and state sales taxes, airport fees, auto rental surcharges and other wallet-nipping levies Hey, after all, this is the Golden State

ACCORDING TO the California Association of Realtors, San Diego is the state's least affordable metropolitan area for housing The statewide median price for a home is $386,760, and it takes an income of $90,000 to afford that — and only 16 per cent of San Diego's households qualify The only California spot more expensive is in the non-metropolitan Napa Valley wine country



Tobin

JUST WHAT DO homes hereabouts cost? Well, a four-bedroom, 2 5 bath home in Coronado, facing the golf course and with "a peek of the bay," can be had for $1 8 million In Carlsbad, a little to the north, a four-bedroom home overlooking the seventh fairway at the Aviara resort goes for $2 5 million Eight years ago, during a last visit to this area, Aviara had a new Four Seasons Hotel atop a hill, a golf course a quarter of a mile away, and a lot of empty land Today, the area is plastered with magnificent homes, sweeping wide streets, and a lot of neighbors who enjoy the good life

"I think my memory's coming back! Ask me who won the World Series in 1200 B C "

HOW BIG has the San Diego area become? Big, that's how big The county alone has five congressmen An amazing array of freeways have eight and 10 lanes, packed with endless traffic And highway construction, with cloverleafs over cloverleafs, is going on everywhere

FLYING INTO SAN Diego's downtown airport is something of a treat, too Incoming planes pass about 50 yards above I-5, eyeball-to-eyeball with high-rise buildings and industrial sprawl The rental car agencies are a mile from the airport terminal, a 15-minute bus ride away — hardly convenient when you're toting more luggage than you really need.

TWO BIG attractions are the San Diego Convention Center and the new stadium for the National League San Diego Padres, where the home season-opener is April 5 The 15-year-old convention center spans eight blocks along the waterfront, has played host to more than 10 8 million people, has had an economic impact of more than $10 billion and generated nearly $228 million in tax revenues The Padres' stunning new home, Petco Park, may do that in less than 15 years The 42,000-seat ballpark, close by the convention center, has upper-level seats that are cantilevered over the playing field, putting fans only 34 feet above the action.

IN DOWNTOWN San Diego, everything is close. The five-star Westgate Hotel is a great place to stay Standard rooms are big, the views spectacular, and the staff offers outstanding service — including a ride in a sleek van to wherever you want to go, and pickup service when you're ready to return. One suggestion Take a trip to Old Town, San Diego's famous Mexican district, and dine at El Agave restaurant. It calls itself a "tequileria," with good reason. It has a thousand bottles of different brands of tequila standing glass-shoulder to glass-shoulder on shelves that line every wall No refried beans slathered alongside cheese-covered glop here This is cooking from Old Mexico, with emphasis on half a dozen amazing moles, served over chicken or pork and laced with chile pasilla, ancho, mulatto, tomatillo, clove, chocolate, garlic, cinnamon, coriander, guajillo, pine nuts, chipotle chili, bananas, epazote, cinnamon, oregano, and don't ask what else, because it's all a delicious blur

ACROSS THE bay, beyond a great bridge that soars high above the San Diego Naval Yards, lies the historic Hotel del Coronado It's a popular convention hotel, a tourist spot for Sunday brunch, and something you need to see at least once. How old is it? A brass plaque in the lobby provides the answer "Rotary Club of Coronado meets here Wednesday noon. This club has been meeting at the Hotel Del Coronado since 1927 "

A FEW MILES to the north is the lovely town of La Jolla It, too, is part of the high-rent district, maybe the king of them all But it's a wonderful place to spend a week. There are no traffic lights, no parking meters, dozens of shops, many fine restaurants, and the La Valencia Hotel — a charming home-away-from home, albeit a pricey one The hotel, built in 1926, has only one elevator — old-fashioned, operated by a real live person, and with an accordian-style sliding gate at the door But the La Valencia's rooms are modern, its restaurants superb, and its service top tier Worth the cost. And absolutely worth the visit.

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

KERRY'S RECORD IS . . .

Anti-Alaskan

WHEN YOU CONSIDER it, there is not much in Sen. John Kerry's record to make him appeal to very many Alaskans In fact, it's fair to say that he is downright anti-Alaska, which makes him a hard pill to swallow, even for loyal Democrats

As they obviously feel they must, however, the party faithful here are doing their best not to gag while at the same time they give their blessing to the ultra-wealthy Massachusetts liberal who is ready to accept the Democratic presidential nomination when it is offered in Boston during the July 26-29 conclave

The problem is particular grave for former Gov Tony Knowles, who is loping along an easy path which will lead to his becoming the Democratic nominee for the U S Senate

He has no choice, really, except to be for Kerry the presidential contender It's the Democratic thing to do

Sen John Kerry

Yet at the same time he has to face the ugly fact that Sen Kerry is on record a thousand times over as being opposed to oil and gas exploration in the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — and whose opposition to that certainly will be even more bold if he is elected to the White House

And no amount of sweet talk from Tony Knowles, now or then, is going to make one whit of difference So much for Knowles having much appeal for those Alaskans who support the economic prospect new oil discoveries would bring

And that's just one sack of bricks that Kerry is carrying

Alaska also is made of men and women who support the military, and who are proud of those in uniform here and elsewhere around the state

The man from Massachusetts, living in the lap of luxury provided by his millionaire wife's Heinz ketchup fortune, has a record of non-support for the armed forces

Republicans are happy to point out that Kerry, as a senator, voted to kill appropriations for the Bradley fighting vehicle, the M-1 Abrams tank, the Aegis anti-aircraft system, the F-15 Eagle, the Patriot anti-missile system, the FA-18, and for battle armor for ground troops, among other things

As a presidential hopeful, however, he parades the military decorations he was awarded for service in Vietnam, even though years ago he supposedly trashed them while standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Jane Fonda.

There are a lot of good Democrats in Alaska and all over the U S But Kerry is not one in whom many can take pride

And certainly not when he opposes matters of huge concern in Alaska

Tony Knowles is stuck with a dead horse in this election

Letters to The Times

Larger scheme at hand

You are right on target in your editorial, "Another scheme to dodge The tax cap?" But you may not be aware that this is just part of other larger moves to do the same thing with our electric rates

Anchorage Municipal Light and Power wants to leave the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) rate regulation also We are concerned that Mayor Begich looks on this as a way to raise electric rates and deliver more money to city government and get around the tax cap

There is also HB 453 being pushed hard by Chugach Electric, Golden Valley Electric and Anchorage ML&P It would remove wholesale power sales from RCA regulation.

Normally we would tend to favor a deregulation effort but without a truly competitive market it's hard to see that this could be a good idea in any of these cases

Ray Kreig, Chairman
Chugach Consumers

Double cheese, please

Would somebody at "The Voice of the Times" please help get Paul Jenkins out of the office so he can see something new in this state?

For probably the 100th time in two years he drags out his same story about Doug Van Etten's opposition to spending city funds on unneeded ball fields and a first timer's mistake on filing out the voluminous paperwork associated with campaign finance

Jenkins has never been above slinging mud at any candidate who didn't run on the Republican ticket If he showed any political insight or even a desire to understand the competing needs of running a city government he might be an interesting reporter

Hey, Paul, if you want to be a real political reporter, how about devoting a few columns about Randy Ruderich and his alleged raising of funds while on the state payroll? You can follow that story up with a column finding out why Gregg Renkes refuses to investigate Ruderich How about a follow up story on legislators who get the police involved in an argument over bowling scores? What's that? Those are all Republicans and you only sling mud and slime Democrats?

With Jenkins method of reporting it is easy to understand why "The Voice of the Times" now buys its ink by the quart instead of the barrel Please start sending Jenkins McDonald's lunches each day If Bill Allen won't get rid of him perhaps Ronald will

John-Marcy Baker
Anchorage

Duncan disagrees

Your editorial of March 25, entitled "This is what Alaskans Face in the Real World," was entertaining but completely misrepresented my position regarding why contract negotiations between ASEA and the state of Alaska should be rotated among Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Juneau

It is an issue of fairness that the state and the union should share in shouldering the burden and cost of negotiations The Knowles administration recognized this and in 1999 contract negotiating sessions were held in Fairbanks, Anchorage, & Juneau The current administration has refused to rotate the location of the sessions and therefore refused to treat the union fairly in the negotiation process

Your focus should be on the real issue in these negotiations, the reluctance of the Murkowski administration to negotiate a fair and reasonable contract for our 7,500 members As a result ASEA has declared that we are at impasse and contract negotiations have stopped until the ALRA determines if impasse exists

Many of our 7,500 members live in Anchorage Your focus should be on the contribution made by your friends and neighbor in providing needed state services This is what needs to be recognized by the state at the bargaining table

Personally, I haven't changed in my support of Juneau as the state capital nor do I think it is too costly or inconvenient to get there As the state senator from Juneau I did lead the fight to block moving the capital out of Juneau and I would do it again

Jim Duncan
Business Manager
ASEA/AFSCME Local 52

Explain it to the new guy

I am new to Anchorage and have had the pleasure of living in cities with competitive second newspapers with a conservative voice (e g Washington Times and New York Post)

Why is the Anchorage Times relegated to such a small portion of the Anchorage Daily News (which I consider a very liberal paper)? Why did the Times have to capitulate? Do you think there will come a day when a conservative paper can arise to offer the citizens of Alaska an alternative voice?

I want you all to know I appreciate the little you do offer and only wish there were more

Thomas Mezzetti, M D
Anchorage

Resurrect power project

Cheryl Heinze's column "What happens if the lights go out?" failed to mention the Susitna Hydroelectric project, which had been submitted by the Alaska Power authority in 1985 to the Federal Energy Regulation Committee for building permits When oil and gas were discovered in the Cook Inlet region, the project was shelved

It is time now to revive this project that would resolve the future energy crises in the Railbelt area with a surplus of energy to spare for the production of hydrogen, the fuel of the future

Henry P Lang P.E
Anchorage

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ONE BRIEF PLAYER IN PIPELINE IS . . .

Bowing out

MIDAMERICAN ENERGY was not a longtime player in the ongoing efforts to bring Alaska's North Slope natural gas to market. It entered the picture with a bang It left with hardly a whisper, announcing its departure in a press release issued yesterday

The Salt Lake City-based company, operating as Alaska Gas Transmission Co , came on the scene with something of a take-it-or-leave-it attitude, setting out the terms and conditions under which it would be willing to construct a $6 3 billion pipeline to the Alaska-Canada border

Its withdrawal announcement, however, apparently caught Gov Frank Murkowski by surprise

In fact, at just about the same time the press release was being issued, Murkowski faxed a letter to David Sokol, chairman and CEO of MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co , expressing hopes to continue negotiations with the company

The governor's letter noted that his administration had offered "to grant you sole rights to a state pipeline right-of-way for five years in connection with the commitment of the state to support, and take no action to inhibit, your eventual construction, ownership and operation of the Alaska portion of the gas pipeline "

He pointed out that this proposal was rejected "apparently because it did not provide you with the level of security you desired " But, he added, "Let me first be absolutely clear that we wish to continue working with you and to do everything prudently possible to support your business interest in developing the pipeline project "

IN OUR VIEW, the governor would be wise to accept MidAmerican's decision

It had presented a rush-rush sales pitch seeking an exclusive contract signed right now, right away, by early May When that stalled, it picked up its ball and went home

Many will think that's just as well.

The withdrawal by MidAmerican should give the governor the opportunity to provide his Stranded Gas Act team the time and resources necessary to address the application submitted by the state's major producers Unlike a Johnny-come-lately firm, these companies have demonstrated a decades-long commitment to Alaska and to Alaska workers A true partnership between the two parties which have the most to gain and lose is a must.

The producers already have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in design, routing and feasibility studies Many issues are still unresolved, but those will be decided in due time and in a proper way

Certainly the negotiations between the state and the producers involve complex issues Taxes and royalties alone are two extremely knotty items that are very important to the state and to the owners of the gas

In our view, MidAmerican is now free to look elsewhere for its next opportunity

Dems dumb as box of rocks on ANWR

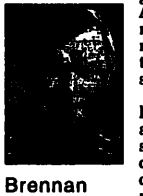
By TOM BRENNAN

A friend in Homer told me his dog Clueless thinks my dog Jack is as dumb as a box of rocks

I felt bad about that until my wife reminded me that my dog is a Democrat. He doesn't have any deeply held political convictions, Jack became a Democrat when another friend gave him a food dish bearing a Fran Ulmer sticker I guess that makes him a fairly typical Democrat.

Jack recently asked me why the Alaska Democratic Party endorsed Sen. John Kerry, the Massachusetts liberal who is adamantly opposed to oil drilling on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

He wondered why they would do that since every sane person in Alaska thinks drilling on the ANWR coastal plain is a good idea — with the exception of a few hardcore greens and assorted belly-button gazers Tapping the huge oil-bearing formations on the coastal plain would produce billions of barrels of crude oil and hundreds of thousands of jobs in the United States, and provide Alaska a strong economy for a generation or more


Brennan

And that could easily be accomplished with minimal impact on the environment and near-zero impact on the big caribou herd that migrates through the area every summer

There isn't much chance they will turn him around — Kerry has sold his soul to Outside greens, who control a huge portion of Congress and can muster lots of votes these days. But the Alaskans will at least be in a position to get their side heard, however faintly That probably won't help, but you never know

He also asked me if those who oppose drilling know what it is they are opposing I told him that, no, most don't have the faintest idea what the issues really are and aren't in ANWR. They're knee-jerk reactors and their knees are being jerked.

Of course, some people just don't want drilling anywhere, especially on a refuge, no matter what it does to the price of gasoline, the number of jobs available for American workers or the Alaskan economy And no matter how minor the impact might be on the refuge and the critters that hang out there — almost all on a seasonal basis

That's just the way it is, I told him, the loonie toons can lead gullible liberals around by their noses. Few care what the situation really is in Alaska or on the coastal plain. With them it's the idea that counts, whether the idea is a reality or not.

"I may be as dumb as a box of rocks," he said, "but I can figure that one out Don't those people have any sense of proportion, any grasp of what's right or wrong?"

"You're a good dog," I said, hoping to change the subject. "Have a cookie."

He snapped at the cookie but would have none of my changing the subject. He watches television all day and needs to talk when I get home I sighed, ate a dog biscuit and settled in for the nightly harangue

At least his heart is in the right place, I thought. Alaska has been in the economic doldrums for quite a while and we could all use some good news, even my dog with the mind of a box of rocks

Such good news could come any day, but it could also take a few years Not ANWR, that's unlikely anytime soon, but a gas pipeline is always a possibility Things are happening in both Alaska and Washington that could make it a reality

There is a lot of incentive for building the line The gas reserves on the North Slope are one humongous resource, too big a resource to sit idle when the nation is running short on gas But there are a few hurdles to be leaped before anything can happen — and even my dog knows it.

There are some other things happening, like political movement toward opening the area around Bristol Bay and on the Alaska Peninsula to oil and gas drilling Industry is also looking at smaller prospects on the North Slope in and around the National Petroleum Reserve, Alaska, the kind of prospects that could become the state's bread and butter, if we encourage their development and don't throttle them with taxes

We are overdue for some good news on the economy front. But whether we will recognize it when it comes is a good question. As Richard Farña said in the title to his 1966 novel "Been down so long it looks like up to me "

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

THIS IS WHAT ALASKANS FACE IN THE . . .

Real world

HERE'S ONE for the books Former state Sen Jim Duncan is business manager for the Alaska State Employees Association and he's miffed because the state insists on negotiating union contracts only in the capital city That, he says, is unfair because it is too costly and inconvenient for the union.

Somewhere, dogs are sleeping with cats and the end of the world is visible on the horizon.

Duncan, a Juneau Democrat and failed candidate for the U S House of Representatives, was Gov Tony Knowles' commissioner for the Department of Administration. He was a legislator from 1972 to 1999, and was House speaker in 1981, before being elected to the Senate He was a leader in the fight to block moving the capital out of Juneau, where at least half of the residents work for the government

But that was then, this is now Juneau has lost its luster

Duncan, whose office nowadays is in Anchorage, objected last year when the state did not go along with the union's proposed ground rules for negotiating a pact covering the period July 1 of this year to June 30, 2007 He wanted the talks held in Fairbanks and Anchorage, as well as Juneau

The state balked, with Commissioner of Administration Mike Miller saying, "The capital is the most effective place to conduct internal business This is where the Legislature is located, where agency records are kept and where the Division of Labor Relations is located Juneau is the seat of government, where the commissioners live and where the business of state government takes place "

DUNCAN'S UNION recently filed an unfair labor practice charge with the Alaska Labor Relations Agency to protest the inconvenience and expense of traveling to Juneau to negotiate

"The cost to the union to transport contract negotiating committee representatives is substantially greater in relation to the costs to the employer whenever the negotiations are held in Juneau," the union's complaint says

In an effort to reduce travel costs for the union, state officials have offered, at no cost, use of the state videoconference facilities, which are more advanced than those used by the court system or the Legislature The union refused

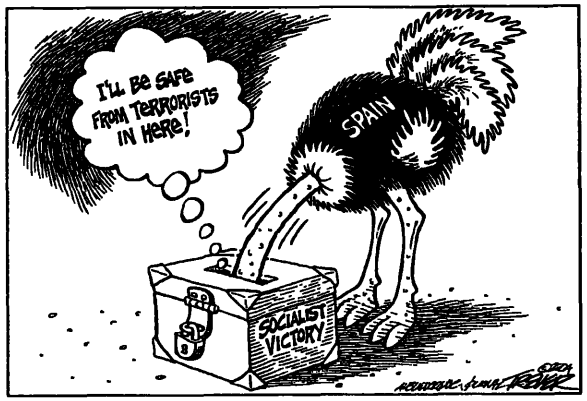
"Frankly, we are appalled that a level of access to the capital and to policy-makers not readily available to the greater part of our state's citizenry is not acceptable to you and your bargaining team," wrote Art Chance, director of the state's Division of Labor Relations, in a Dec 10 letter to Duncan.

Frankly, we are, too Duncan is facing the bitter truth that Alaskans from Barrow to Ketchikan have had to live with since Juneau became the capital in 1906, it costs a small fortune to get there and the average citizen never will see it in person or be able to attend legislative meetings there

Welcome to the average Alaskan's world, Mr Duncan

Here's why income tax is bad choice

By DONALD N ANDERSON, Ph D



With the economic benefits strongly favoring a retail sales tax, why do some people still favor an income tax? There may be almost as many reasons as there are people, but here are a few

Some think an income tax, with its higher rates on the "rich," will reduce higher incomes and provide benefits to the poor After all, under the federal income tax the lowest 50 percent of the population pays less than 5 percent of the taxes, while the top 5 percent pay 50 percent of the taxes Surely the folks with high ability to pay are paying most of the bills and the poor are receiving most of the benefits

Using simple arithmetic and ignoring the important secondary effects, it seems that the lower-income half of the population pay about 5 percent of the taxes for about 50 percent of the benefits of government Even with typical government efficiency, spending one dollar to get 10 dollars of government services is a great deal

Unfortunately for those concerned with income-leveling, their discriminatory tax rates result in throwing more of the poor out of work, not a desirable or "leveling" effect

For example, the high rate on the rich (actually high current income, not wealth) provides an incentive to use more of their time for doing the less-skilled jobs at home that they could have contracted out A person at a 35 percent marginal rate has to earn $100 to pay $65 to another person At some point it is more cost effective to do it yourself

The "progressive" income tax is directed at the so-called rich, but the impact of this tax is felt most strongly at lower incomes, where it leads to higher unemployment This and other attempts at shifting wealth from the more economically capable to the less economically capable fails because the resulting damage hurts both groups Jobs disappear when the wealthy are unable to invest.

This reduces the division of effort, reduces efficiency and restricts job formation at the low end Both rich and poor are less wealthy than they otherwise would be Motivating high earners to adopt more leisure also reduces the chance they will create new jobs Have you ever been hired by a poor man?

It may be a great disappointment to the levelers, but income inequalities are the price we pay to obtain the best efforts of our fellow citizens Any deviation from freely negotiated compensation produces less wealth for all to share

Some realize that, once new taxes are in place, it is easier to tinker with the rates of an income tax than it is to change the sales tax rate An increase in the sales tax rate generates immediate opposition from all levels of society But the "progressivity" of the income tax can be used to divide potential opponents into "rich," "middle class" and "poor "

Proponents of the income tax increase can then define their proposed winners and losers to avoid having a majority opposed to the increase Normally, everyone not connected with government employment or contracts gets taken by this scam

Alaskan legislators have restrained increases in spending better than 48 of the other 49 states With the flexibility and deceptive impact shifting inherent in the income tax, their ability to say no to the ever-increasing requests for more expenditure would be even more difficult

There are political benefits to an income tax Some need an issue that can be used to divide the citizens in a way that is politically beneficial Since a majority identify with the poor or the middle class, illusions created by the so-called progressive income tax work well for those who gain political office with support of the envious

There are some who like the income tax because they live on savings or inherited wealth and so pay none Others find the constant nickel-and-dime additions to each purchase to be an irritating annoyance about the sales tax.

Still others like the "one big payment and we're done" aspect of the income tax. Some dislike or fear investors and don't know or care about the economic consequences, and still others wish to reserve the sales tax for local government

All in all, the arguments for an income tax are simple but weak, and are often dependent on class warfare illusions For Alaska, a retail sales tax is the better choice, remembering that any tax increase has negative impacts on our economy

Donald N Anderson is an Anchorage business manager

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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THE ARMY'S NEW LOOK ARRIVES . . .

At Fort Rich

A NEW UNIT which has been linked with a storied past is on duty at Fort Richardson. It's the 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment. It is one of three infantry battalions assigned to the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team

The planning to put the 700-man Stryker force at Fort Rich has been in progress for three years, and its formal activation this past Friday moved our troops here into the forefront of what the new Army is to be The Stryker force packages rapid mobility, greater firepower and high technology with some of the best-trained, combat-ready soldiers in the world.

The 23rd Infantry is one of three infantry battalions assigned to the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, headquartered at Fort Wainwright, near Fairbanks

By designating the new units the 23rd Infantry and the 4th Battalion, history was revived According to the Army, the 23rd traces its roots to the Civil War, the Indian Wars, and service in territorial Alaska from 1869-71 It saw battle in World War I, World War II, and in Korea

It served at Fort Rich in 1963-66, saw duty in Vietnam, and returned here in 1971 Its flag was moved to Fort Lewis, Wash , in 1983, it was deactivated there in 1990

Now, 14 years later, it returns to duty as part of the Army's new look, the first Stryker force at Fort Rich Anchorage and all Alaska can take pride in the men and women of this new unit We know they will serve with honor

In self-defense

FOR ALL THE claims of not second-guessing Michael Vogel, there certainly is a lot of second-guessing

Vogel was skiing March 17 at Kincaid Park when he was forced to shoot a moose to save his own life Now, he is a hapless target for animal worshippers, elitist skiers, gun-haters, tut-tutting editorial writers and cartoonists

They suggest he could have stopped the moose with pepper spray, or he could have just skied away And, they ask, how dare he carry a gun in a park? What claptrap

A year ago, Vogel suffered severe facial injuries when a moose charged him on the Coastal Trail This time, he fired twice with a 44-caliber revolver as the moose closed to within seven yards, its head down and its ears back.

The usual suspects, in their own bizarre way, allowed that carrying a gun for self-defense against criminals could be tolerated in city parks — but, heavens, not for animals about to kill you Instead, people should be vigilant and aware, they say It seems to us that Vogel luckily was both, as well as armed, and is alive today as a result

Moose have killed two people in this community, and there will be more such conflicts as long as huge wild animals roam the city's neighborhoods and parks

As for Vogel, he is alive and unhurt. He did the right thing Good for him

Mentally ill kids need better facilities

By ELISE PATKOTAK

Back in my misspent youth, I studied nursing in New York City Part of the curriculum involved going out to an adult mental institution called Manhattan State on an island in New York harbor

There were three tall buildings on the island The higher the level, the more extreme the affliction Student nurses rarely, if ever, got above the third floor

About that same time, a young reporter named Geraldo Rivera did some investigative journalism that led to the exposure of an institution for kids called Stony Brook The place was a horror house of kids with mental illnesses and low mental functions thrown together and left in their own excrement, often without even clothes

Not long after that, mental institutions were emptied out across the country with the promise that community mental health centers would replace them and help the mentally ill or challenged to live more normal lives, integrated in society but supported by specialists within easy reach in each neighborhood

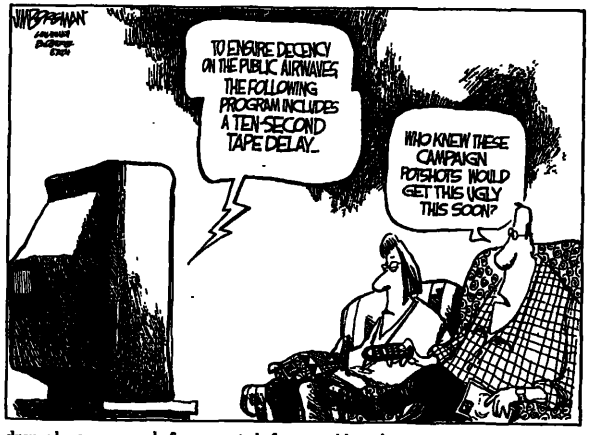
Patkotak

That promise has yet to be fulfilled

I can't imagine us going back to a time when we shut the mentally ill up in tall buildings with big locks and let them waste away I hope that places like Stony Brook will forever remain in the past. But there are times when institutionalization is the only answer, at least temporarily, for some people, including some kids on my caseload

There are no long-term, locked treatment facilities in this state for our most damaged children The only locked facilities for children in Alaska are places like the McLaughlin and Fairbanks Youth Facilities

There is no way to spin those facilities into something other than what they are — kiddy jails They are for children who are accused of or convicted of a crime, not for children who have a mental illness and need the security of a locked program to protect them from their own unsafe behaviors



Locked treatment facilities available to Alaska's children, as noted in an article in the Daily News not too long ago, are in the Lower '48 Sending a child that far from home and family creates its own set of problems over and above the initial problem with which the child is dealing

When children are in treatment far from family, it makes it difficult for family to participate in counseling — an often critical part of successful recovery And if a child does make progress and starts to open up, that invariably leads to a review of the child's status If that review shows enough progress, then the kid no longer qualifies for that level of care

What this means is that at a time when a kid is finally willing to trust a counselor enough to open up, the child is packed up and sent back to Alaska to start from scratch in building a new relationship with a new counselor

It means that the children who most need stability, who need the most time possible to learn to trust enough to disclose their issues, go through a major upheaval just as they are reaching that point

When state health officials blithely talk about building these facilities in-state so our kids aren't sent away, I want to ask where they are going to get the money And it's not just construction money

Where will the annual operating budget come from? State health officials talk about building new facilities while they cut funds from programs already critical to children — like foster care payments

Words are cheap Facilities that can serve our most needy children are expensive Robbing Peter to pay Paul is both voodoo economics and voodoo health care And sound bites with no substance behind them are just voodoo public relations

(OK, yes, it was *that* Geraldo Rivera)

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ALASKA NEEDS TO REGAIN . . .

Lost values

FOLKS LIKE those who want Alaska to renege on the production tax deals the state made on some small oil fields were a familiar sight during the Gold Rush

They were miners who became partners with others in the exhausting search for riches After finding what they sought, the two-timers ignored their own growing share of wealth and coveted the contents of their partners' gold pokes Though they already owned half or more of the mine's proceeds, they wanted even more Such greed-motivated conflicts were often settled with a 44

Nowadays, business-deal avarice in the public arena is more likely to be written into legislative bills and sold through speeches and newspaper columns Ultimately it is resolved at the ballot box

That may be a more civilized approach, but coveting a partner's poke can be as corrosive to a business relationship today as it was in 1898 Those who constantly push forward proposals to raise industry taxes give Alaska a reputation as having an unstable business climate, a place where investments carry a high risk factor

AS A RESULT, industry investments are often confined to oil and gas prospects that are anything but marginal The less lucrative deals — which are becoming the state's best option for new development — become even riskier and are avoided by sensible business people

The existing situation represents a big change For the last generation, Alaska was the place where industry people had to put their money It was the hottest oil province in North America and one of the best outside the volatile Middle East

But the bloom is now off the rose North Slope production has fallen by more than half, the best available prospects have been tapped and the fields are maturing The available new prospects are much smaller and easier for industry executives to pass up

Such fields can and should be developed Doing so would assure Alaska a strong economic future, one where revenue can be produced to fund the state budget and create jobs that will allow our children and grandchildren to build their lives here if they choose

But adapting to the world of aging and smaller oil and gas fields will not be easy It will require a change of attitude, a return to values the state seems to have lost Alaska needs somehow to regain the sense of purpose and strength of character prevalent in the years before and after statehood

It needs to make well-thought-out deals and stick to them, ignoring those who covet its partners' share, and concentrate on the growing size of its own wealth

Spain appeases Islamic terrorists

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

When confronting an existential enemy — an enemy that wants to terminate your very existence — there are only two choices appeasement or war

In the 1930s Europe chose appeasement Today Spain has done so again Europe may follow

One can understand Europe's reaction in the 1930s First, it could almost plausibly convince itself that Hitler could be accommodated. Perhaps he really was only seeking what he sometimes said he was — the return of territory, the unification of the German volk, a place in the sun — and not world conquest.

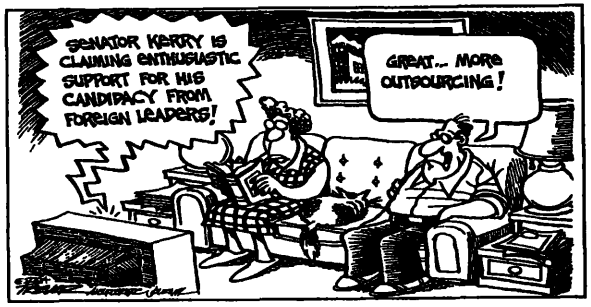
Today there is no doubting the intentions of Arab-Islamic radicalism It is not this grievance or that (U S troops in Saudi Arabia) It is not this territory or that (Palestine, Andalusia) The intention, endlessly repeated, is the establishment of a primitive, messianic caliphate — redeeming Islam and dominating the world They have seen the future Taliban Afghanistan, writ large

Moreover, Europe in the 1930s had a second excuse The devastation of the first world war, staggering and fresh in memory (France and Germany lost a third of their young men of military age), had made another such war unthinkable This does not excuse appeasement — it cost millions more lives in the second world war — but provides context and possibly humility One has to ask oneself Am I sure I would not have chosen the cowardly alternative?

Nonetheless, it was still the cowardly alternative And today Spain has chosen it — having suffered not Europe's 20 million dead of World War I but 200 dead in the Madrid bombings

The Socialist Party placed the blame for the attack not on the barbarians who detonated the bombs but on the Spanish government that stood with the United States in its war against the barbarians The Spanish electorate then voted into office the purveyors of precisely that perverse view

Spain will withdraw from Iraq, sever its alliance with America and, as Prime Minister-elect Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero has promised, "restore magnificent relations with France and Germany"



Nonetheless, Spain is just Spain. The really big prize is Europe Which is why the most ominous development of the week was the post-Madrid pronouncements of Romano Prodi, the president of the European Commission.

"It is clear that force alone cannot win the fight against terrorism" Sounds reasonable until you hear Prodi's amplification of the idea just two days earlier "We know that international terrorism wants to spread fear," he said "Fear generates not so much justice but rather vengeance, which chooses war to answer the need of security We become prisoners of terror and of terrorists" In other words, making war on terror is unjust, fearful, mere vengeance and ultimately a victory for terrorism

If not war, then what? A centerpiece to Prodi's solution to terrorism. a new European constitution. I'm not making this up "to defeat fear we only have democracy and politics Today for us, politics means building Europe completely with its constitution and its institutions"

This is beyond appeasement. This is decadence Terror rages and we tend our garden

Prodi is right that the war on terror is not resolved by force alone How is it won apart from hunting down terrorists and destroying terrorist regimes? By reversing the Arab-Islamic world's tragic collapse into oppression, intolerance and destitution, in which popular grievances are cynically deflected by repressive regimes and clergy into the virulent anti-Americanism that exploded upon us on Sept. 11, 2001 Which means trying to give desperate and oppressed people a chance at the kind of freedom and prosperity that we helped construct after World War II in Europe and East Asia.

Where is this project most engaged? Iraq, where day by day the U S -led coalition is trying to build a new civil order characterized by pluralism, the rule of law and constitutional restraints Even a modicum of success in this enterprise would constitute a monumental strategic advance, a historic change in the very culture of the Middle East.

Spain's response to this challenge? Abandon the effort.

So when Zapatero and, more important, Prodi speak of nonmilitary means to combat terrorism, they don't mean draining the swamp by gradually building free institutions They mean buying off the terrorists, distancing themselves from America and seeking a separate peace.

Sure, they will continue to track down individual al Qaeda terrorists But that's no favor to anyone They want to make sure there's not another Madrid, in case European appeasement is not quite thorough enough to satisfy the terrorists But on the larger fight, the reordering of the Arab world that produced the terrorists, they choose surrender

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.

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IS AN END NEAR TO . . .

AMATS battle?

STATE SEN. Ben Stevens has offered what looks like a good compromise to concerns about representation on the AMATS policy committee But its welcome at City Hall won't be all that warm.

Some local government officials and civic leaders were miffed because Stevens' earlier proposal to add members from the state House and Senate would have shifted the balance of power on the committee from local government to the state

AMATS is the decision-making body for roads and trails in the Anchorage area. Stevens is attempting to change the committee's makeup because he feels it is spending too much of its money on trails, sidewalks and landscaping rather than roads

Much of the AMATS funding comes from federal coffers, but the state provides some matching dollars The current AMATS three-year plan calls for spending 17 percent of its budget on trails and amenities

The new proposal would make the legislative members non-voting and add two other voting members, one to be appointed by the mayor of Anchorage and one by the governor That would increase total membership on the committee from five to nine, giving local government four members to the state's three plus the two non-voting members from the Legislature

The committee presently is composed of Mayor Mark Begich, Assembly Chairman Dick Traini, Assemblyman Doug Van Etten and representatives of the state departments of Transportation and Environmental Conservation.

STEVENS' NEW PROPOSAL is moving through the Legislature but is unlikely to meet any better reception from municipal government than an earlier version And unless the Anchorage Assembly approves the proposed changes, federal rules on program oversight will likely kill them.

Traini said increasing the membership on the policy committee would be "tinkering with a system that works Sen Stevens is a good man but he is barking up the wrong tree on this one He should let it go "

The dispute might be solved by an advisory panel that Mayor Begich is working on. The panel could include legislators and other members from the community

The feud between Stevens and Begich over AMATS developed when the mayor was pushing for a southward extension of the Coastal Trail That project would cost somewhere between $37 million and $60 million, depending on whose estimate you believe.

Stevens' South Anchorage district includes the area He battled the project on behalf of constituents outraged at both the cost and the fact that it would have absorbed too much trail money and others who hated the selected route, which would have crossed their property

A settlement might be in the offing, but the battle may not be over yet.

Justifiably, many believed the worst

By WALTER E WILLIAMS

Listening to the political and media rhetoric about the war in Iraq, you'd think that only President Bush thought Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction Here are just a few past statements made by Bush's critics

President Clinton (1998) "One way or the other, we are determined to deny Iraq the capacity to develop weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them That is our bottom line "

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (February 1998) "Iraq is a long way from here, but what happens there matters a great deal here For the risks that the leaders of a rogue state will use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons against us or our allies is the greatest security threat we face "

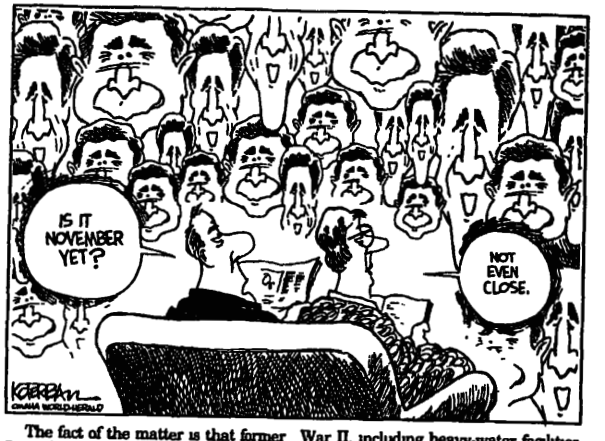
In 2002, Al Gore said, "We know that he has stored secret supplies of biological and chemical weapons throughout his country "

Williams

Also in 2002, Sen Ted Kennedy said, "We have known for many years that Saddam Hussein is seeking and developing weapons of mass destruction "

Sen John Kerry, Democratic presidential front-runner, said in 2002, "I will be voting to give the president of the United States the authority to use force — if necessary — to disarm Saddam Hussein because I believe that a deadly arsenal of weapons of mass destruction in his hands is a real and grave threat to our security "

In January 2003, Kerry added, "Without question, we need to disarm Saddam Hussein. He is a brutal, murderous dictator, leading an oppressive regime He presents a particularly grievous threat because he is so consistently prone to miscalculation And now he is miscalculating America's response to his continued deceit and his consistent grasp for weapons of mass destruction So the threat of Saddam Hussein with weapons of mass destruction is real "



The fact of the matter is that former President Clinton, as well as many members of Congress, believed, just as President Bush did, that Saddam Hussein possessed or was developing biological, chemical and nuclear weapons

The widespread attacks on President Bush are little more than political demagoguery and grandstanding and depend on public forgetfulness and ignorance to succeed

Military intelligence will probably always be an inexact science Let's go back to President Roosevelt's administration. By mid-1940, the "evidence" became so promising about Germany's nuclear-weapons program that British and American scientists judged it imprudent to continue to publish new results

Further research in the United States and Britain was done in secret to prevent German scientists from using the findings to develop an atomic bomb of their own for use in the war then underway

The frightening possibility that Germany might succeed in providing Hitler with a nuclear weapon was one of the driving forces for the U S Manhattan Project. It was also the reason for some of the strategic targeting during World War II, including heavy-water facilities in Nazi-occupied Norway

When World War II ended, it was discovered that Germany wasn't nearly as close to developing an atomic bomb as intelligence experts had thought.

Fortunately, back during that time, we didn't have today's hustling politicians and gullible public around to criticize either our war strategy or the atomic bombing of Japan Back then, Americans were thankful we got the bomb first and used it to end the war

Listening to today's politicians and what goes for informed media commentary, George Bush should have waited for unambiguous proof that a megalomaniac tyrant like Saddam Hussein had nuclear-chemical-biological weapons

I'm wondering if that unambiguous proof sufficient for America's political hustlers and gullible public would have been a mushroom cloud over one of our cities or millions of Americans suffering and dying from chemical or biological toxins

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The Anchorage Times

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25044122472

BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ALASKA SHOULD FORGET ABOUT BOOSTING . . .

Oil taxes

LET'S HOPE Rep Les Gara and his liberal/green friends heard the message given by ConocoPhillips' Kevin Meyers to the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce last Monday

That may be wishful thinking, given that the Gara crowd would like nothing more than to push investment dollars away from Alaska and into foreign oil and gas provinces that are competing for that money Their vision is apparently of an Alaska with fewer people and an environment untroubled by the challenges of managing new development

Gara surely knows that putting a lid on industry growth would result in fewer jobs and ultimately less money flowing to the state treasury — far less But he is a lawyer who derives his skewed vision of business from the Alaska Public Interest Research Group, a liberal Ralph Nader-style bunch whose idea of the public interest is jamming up the gears of the state's economic engine

Gara wants to raise production taxes on marginal fields because of the current upward trend in oil prices But the oil price increase undoubtedly is temporary, whereas investments in the fields are necessarily for the long term

HE STRESSES that some small fields like the North Slope's Midnight Sun pay zero production taxes under the economic limit factor, known as ELF But he gives short shrift to the fact that the state has a royalty interest of 12 5 percent in the field and receives significant benefit from corporate income taxes and property taxes paid to the state by its owner companies, BP, ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips The state, therefore, has plenty of financial incentive to keep the field flowing, even without production taxes

Gara notes that Midnight Sun produces 3 8 million barrels of oil a year, underlining it as though that were a lot of oil By comparison, the Prudhoe Bay Field produces 158 million barrels per year and the Kuparuk River Field produces 58 4 million. The fact that Midnight Sun is producing at all, providing jobs and pumping money into the state treasury, is a testimony to the state's program to encourage development of Alaska's less lucrative oil patch prospects

Meyers told the chamber in his luncheon speech that if Alaska reneges on the deal made to encourage industry spending on smaller and economically marginal fields, those investments will begin spiraling downward

The oil executive put it simply "If you drive up the cost of doing business in Alaska," he said, "it's going to make Alaska a less attractive place to invest "

Meyers said that if taxes are held at their present level, enough industry investment is likely to maintain Alaska's overall production at 900,000 barrels per day But if they are increased, exploration and production could drop by 10 percent a year, making Alaska a minor-league oil producer within a decade

We suspect Gara and his friends would like that just fine

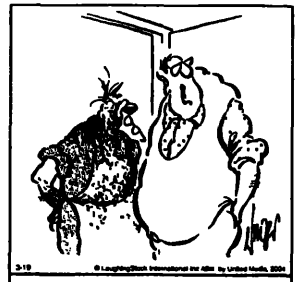
Unforgettable for those who were here

By WILLIAM J. TOBIN

IT WAS A FRIDAY back in 1964 — Good Friday, that year — when the strongest earthquake ever to strike North America turned a lot of Southcentral Alaska upside down This coming Saturday is the 40th anniversary of that shattering 4 1/2-minute event, one that is seared into the memory of all of those who experienced the magnitude 9 2 quake that did enormous damage in Anchorage, Kodiak, Valdez, Seward, and much of coastal Alaska hereabouts In the quake and the resulting seismic waves, 115 people died in Alaska, four in Newport Beach, Ore , and 11 in Crescent City, Calif The Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks says it was the second-largest earthquake ever recorded, anywhere in the world The grand champion a magnitude 9 5 quake that rocked Chile in 1960

Tobin

CITY SCAPES: It's good to hear broadcaster Dick Lobdell back on the air on a morning, drive-time show — after an absence of a year or more You can listen to the mellow delivery of this veteran Anchorage radioman from 5 30-9 a m on KHAR, at 690 on your AM dial When the new C Concourse at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport opens this summer it will have the only moving sidewalk in Alaska It will speed passengers along at three miles an hour, past a vast expanse of Alaska Airline gate positions The whole main terminal expansion will have 64 new restrooms, 156,000 lighting fixtures, and 380 miles of wiring, cable and fiber lines — among other things Locally owned La Mex restaurant celebrates its 35th birthday on April 1 Not many dining places anywhere manage to survive so many years It's planning a big whoop-de-do block party to mark the occasion on June 5 at its Dimond Boulevard location, one of three where it serves fine Mexican cuisine



"Lily, run upstairs and see if this guy's gas barbecue is in our bedroom "

SPEAKING OF such things, Japan Airlines is making a little whoopee to observe the 50th anniversary of its passenger service between Tokyo and Honolulu. Okay We'll just have to wait another three years to drink a toast for the 50th anniversary of service that once linked Tokyo and Anchorage It was on June 27, 1957, that JAL began serving Anchorage and Tokyo with a DC-7C — in case you've forgotten That was back in the good old days, when Anchorage truly could claim to be the "Air Crossroads of the World," as the Chamber of Commerce proudly asserted

WHILE ADDRESSING airline business, the sad report is that Northwest Airlines' downtown Anchorage ticket office has closed, along with all the others the company operated in 24 cities across the country The ax also fell on Northwest offices in such places as Atlanta, Detroit, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York City, Phoenix, Seattle, and Washington, D C Some of these ticket offices, Anchorage among them, had been open for 40 years That leaves only Alaska Airlines with a city ticket office here, in the Hotel Captain Cook. It's one of the busiest places in town, manned by some of the airline's most friendly and expert agents Say a prayer that Alaska's corporate honchos in Seattle don't get the idea they should follow in Northwest's footsteps Fair warning, however Alaska Airlines closed is downtown Seattle ticket office a couple of weeks ago

SINCE THE subjects of airlines and birthdays are on the plate, some may recall that Lorene Harrison, Anchorage's grand lady of fashion who celebrated her 99th birthday two weeks ago, once served as a stewardess aboard an Alaska Airlines military troop charter flight to Japan. It happened in 1950 at the start of the Korean War Frank Hansen, who later flew triple-tail Constellations for Pacific Northern Airlines and later became a senior captain with Western Airlines, was the pilot of the flight

LONG-RANGE PLANNING: Assets of the Alaska Permanent Fund, now at about $28 billion, will increase to $46 1 billion in another 10 years Such is the projection of the fund manager But don't count your dividends until the interest is hatched

ON THE AGENDA: Congregation Beth Sholom will present its 2004 Shining Lights award to Congressman Don Young at a dinner April 25 at the Sheraton. He is being saluted, says the sponsoring committee, for "not only his dedicated service to Alaska but also for his steadfast support of Israel's security" The Alaska World Affairs Council's International Bazaar and dinner dance will be held May 1 at the airport railroad terminal Chef Ric Manrique will be in charge of the meal Dr Helen Bedder is the event chairman, backed by a committee that's busy lining up all kinds of prizes for those on hand The third annual Alaska Conference on Volunteerism is scheduled here April 15-16 The commission operates out of the state Department of Community and Economic Development and is charged with coordinating various volunteer activities hither and yon throughout the state. Elsa Sargento is the agency's executive director

SUNDAY PUNDAY: A man recovering from surgery was asked how he was feeling "I'm O K.," he replied, "but I didn't like the four-letter-word the doctor used in surgery " "What did he say?" asked the nurse "OOPS!"

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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ANOTHER SCHEME TO DODGE . . .

The tax cap?

IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T noticed, your city water and sewer bills have gone up — by a bunch

Effective Feb 24, you are being charged 13 61 percent more for water and 8 06 percent more for sewer services

The kick in the pants would have been bigger, however, were it not for the Regulatory Commission of Alaska As things now stand, the city can't willy-nilly raise water rates Instead, it has to ask the RCA for permission to do so, and that requires a lot of red tape and time-consuming actions that the city would just as soon do without

Well, wait a minute

The commission exists to protect consumers from runaway actions by monopolies, which the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility happens to be It has no competition, save for those who have their own wells and septic systems

But there is more to this game than just the immediate rate increase The big scheme is to win approval for a bill in the Legislature that would completely remove the utility from state regulatory review

THE ARGUMENT is that getting out from under the restrictions imposed by the commission would save the city a lot of money, which benefits utility users Not exactly

What the city asked of the commission was a two-stage rate increase 14 2 percent for water and 8 06 percent for wastewater this year, and another 7 17 percent for water and 6 83 percent beginning next Jan 1

Without having to go before the utility commission, you'd already be paying the first of those rate increases now and the next stage nine months from now

If the Legislature would agree to let Anchorage do its thing with utility rates, whenever it feels the need, you can bet all kinds of future kicks await you

As it is, the commission ordered a stay of the city's total rate request pending a full review, but it granted as an interim boost the higher utility bills that went into effect last month

The measure to exclude Anchorage from state regulatory procedures, House Bill 515, is sponsored by Rep Tom Anderson, R-Anchorage The belief, no doubt, is that deregulation is good

In this case, however, considering the city's already well-established attempts to beat restrictions imposed by the tax cap, it has all the signs of being not as sweet as it might appear.

Big ideas flow fast at Spenard diner

By DAN SULLIVAN

Sitting around a popular diner in Spenard, a group of us old-timers regularly practice the art of solving everyone else's problems The future use of the Permanent Fund was the discussion recently and here is our proposal

PERCENT OF MARKET VALUE (POMV) POMV sounds like one of those new-fangled anxiety disorders While we normally rely on the folks at Cash Alaska for our financial advice, this methodology is endorsed by the Permanent Fund board and other financial experts It's worked for major foundations around the country That's good enough for us

PERMANENT FUND DISTRIBUTION Under the POMV methodology, it is assumed that the fund's value will grow by an average of 8 percent annually Three percent remains in the fund for inflation proofing The remaining 5 percent is available for dividends and general government spending The girls in Spenard say "show me the money!" Voters will say the same thing Our plan calls for the dividend to be no less than 60 percent of the available funds The remaining 40 percent may be appropriated by the Legislature If the full 40 percent is not needed to balance the budget, it can be used for even larger dividends, remain in the fund, or be deposited in the Constitutional Budget Reserve (CBR)

Sullivan

CONSTITUTIONAL SPENDING LIMIT A constitutional spending limit is essential for controlling the growth of government and for attracting voter approval of the POMV methodology In Spenard, our spending limit kicks in when there is no change left under the sofa cushions Politicians typically need it spelled out in law, such as with the municipality of Anchorage's tax cap

2005 SUPER DIVIDEND If the POMV idea is approved this fall, the Spenard Plan proposes using 5 percent of the Fund's value in 2005 only for dividends This will amount to an estimated dividend of over $2,200 for every currently eligible resident. The current high price of oil will result in a much smaller draw than anticipated on the CBR and allow for this higher dividend This "super dividend" will help achieve voter approval as well as stimulate (without overheating) the Alaska economy

REPLENISHING THE CONSTITUTIONAL BUDGET RESERVE (CBR) While the concept of a savings account is foreign to many of us in Spenard, we do know that if our income might suddenly drop, it probably makes sense to have a coffee can full of cash in the freezer Our idea provides that some or all of the revenue required to be deposited in the Permanent Fund from oil revenues (25 percent of the total oil revenue paid to the state), be re-appropriated into the CBR if it drops below a certain level The governor has suggested a minimum level of $1 billion That sounds like a good number There could also be a ceiling if the CBR reached a certain value, say $5 billion Once reached, the required oil revenue deposit would stay in the fund

OTHER DEPOSITS TO THE PERMANENT FUND It has been proposed that all available revenues and liquid assets should be deposited in the fund, including the billions of dollars held in AHFC, AIDEA and the other state agencies Government, including dividends, would eventually be totally financed from the earnings of the much larger fund On the surface, this seems to make sense This idea should be analyzed by top professionals, working in conjunction with visiting Nobel Prize winning economist Dr Vernon Smith and ISER. If it makes sense, let's do it.

TAXES AND ADDITIONAL BUDGET CUTS Let our good friends in the Legislature and the governor's office decide what additional steps may be needed to complete a long term fiscal plan, with an emphasis on finding more spending reductions The "Spenard Plan" reconciles the differing views of the Permanent Fund as the "People's Savings Account" versus the "Rainy Day Account " Most importantly, it provides the necessary incentives to achieve a positive vote on the constitutional amendment needed to change the fund's earnings and distribution policy Remember, without voter approval, all the Permanent Fund proposals and schemes are merely intellectual exercises For the gang at the diner, that's enough heavy lifting for this month.

Dan Sullivan represents West Anchorage on the Anchorage Assembly

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POOR RECORD LEAVES VAN ETTEN . . .

Slinging mud

WITH JUST a few weeks left until the April 6 municipal election, Assemblyman Doug Van Etten is attempting to set a new slime record for campaign advertising

In a particularly vicious attack ad, he suggests that Dan Coffey, who is running against him, along with Stephen Johnston and Troy Maulden, is a shill for the liquor industry because he has represented its interests before the Assembly He goes on to brag about his support from the Anchorage Police Department Police, the ad says, understand alcohol is a public safety issue and know a "threat" when they see one He actually was endorsed by the police union, not the department

In a second, very similar ad, Van Etten touts his firefighters union endorsement, and again suggests Coffey is a "threat" to public safety (We note the assemblyman did not bother to mention his support from a host of other unions and green interests, or that $1,000 check from a lobbyist who recently received a fat $65,000 contract from the city)

For the record, Coffey is a lawyer He has, from time to time, represented people and businesses associated with the liquor industry That is the kind of thing lawyers do Van Etten would have us believe that because of that, Coffey should not sit on the Assembly Following that inane logic, Van Etten, who works in real estate, should be disqualified because the Assembly deals with real estate questions on a fairly regular basis

WHY IS Van Etten resorting to negative attack ads now? It might be that his campaign is faltering and he needs to divert attention from his sorry record on the Assembly

He was, you will recall, instrumental in the Simonian Little League fiasco that embarrassed this city More recently, the Alaska Public Offices Commission fined him a record $11,000 for breaking election laws

He somehow failed to complete conflict-of-interest statements over a three-year period, and did not file complete campaign financial disclosure forms for his 2000 and 2001 Assembly election campaign. The state commission could have fined him $122,000, but gave him a break.

Because of that, the city ethics board found Van Etten had, indeed, run afoul of the ethics code, but it could not bring itself to recommend even a slap on the wrist He had, the thinking went among the usual suspects on the left, already been punished enough

With all of those bones rattling around in his closet, it is no wonder that Van Etten is toiling long and hard to toss mud at Coffey

You would think that in a city with growing pains of every description, from clogged roads to zoning problems to budget woes, Van Etten would be focused on the issues in his campaign instead of engaging in character assassination. You would think he would talk about his record

But, then again, how can he?

Why income tax suppresses growth

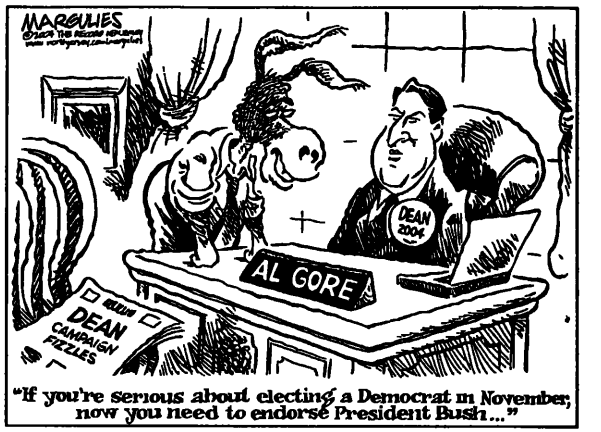
By DONALD N ANDERSON, Ph D

Using a "progressive" income tax to punish people for successfully doing the things that other people find most beneficial is truly perverse

If one sells a product that makes others healthier, wealthier or wiser, an income tax allows the government to extract a "progressive" proportion of the proceeds

Income taxation deprives people of resources and discourages efforts to improve the lives of others It also dilutes the usual economic signals and lowers one's response to other's needs The people whose services are most in demand can successfully demand higher wages to compensate for the tax

Those with less clout are stuck with less income, lower savings and investment Lower investment leads to reduced employment This can lead to an apparent (but not necessarily real) after-tax widening of the income gap between "rich" and "poor"



"If you're serious about electing a Democrat in November, now you need to endorse President Bush..."

We can only speculate on why eight high-income-tax states have a 40 percent higher cost of government than the sales tax-only states. It is quite likely that sales taxes are so visible, pervasive and uniform that people cannot be as easily convinced to raise them.

What some tout as a means of "redistribution" (another pretty term to disguise theft) to narrow the range of incomes, often has the perverse effect of achieving the opposite

For starting workers or those along the bottom edge, unemployment has the real effect of a 100 percent tax — hardly the goal claimed by the "redistributionists."

As a small businessman I find that the income tax pushes me to invest money in less than optimal ways For example, if I take profits out of one business and invest it in another, I lose a sizable chunk of those funds to the income tax.

On the other hand, if I find a way to use the money in the originating business, the full amount is available Obviously, this latter use can be a significantly poorer investment and still make overall sense

If we use a "regressive" sales tax to punish people for consumption, they can be expected to be a bit more cautious in their spending Saving and investment become very attractive Currently, our national savings rate hovers near zero, a change toward more investment would be clearly positive

Several long-term research studies show that wages closely follow invested capital More invested capital equals more production Machinery, computers, transportation, communications, and other capital investments make us productive at levels inconceivable to past generations

That greater productivity translates almost directly into higher wages Some studies suggest that 97 percent of the variation in real wage rates can be explained by variations in the amount of capital invested per working hour

This explains why sales tax states have seen superior growth in wages compared to income tax states The definitions of "progressive" and "regressive" taxation are truly counter-intuitive. One suspects they were part of a "snow job" to sell income taxation to the American people

We can only speculate on why eight high-income-tax states have a 40 percent higher cost of government than the sales tax-only states It is quite likely that sales taxes are so visible, pervasive and uniform that people cannot be as easily convinced to raise them

Progressive income taxes on the other hand can more easily be deceptively raised under the claim that "someone else will pay them" rather like the old Chilkoot Charlie's slogan, "We cheat the other guy and pass the savings on to you"

Donald N Anderson is an Anchorage business manager This column drew on material from "The Truth About Falling Wages," Gary and Aldona Robbins, Institute for Policy Innovation

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PUBLIC'S INTERESTS NEED IMPROVED . . .

Protection

DESPITE THE HOWLS and distortions from unions that want to continue to be represented on both sides of the table when negotiating state labor contracts, Gov Frank Murkowski is on the right track in trying to end the practice

The governor has introduced measures in both chambers of the Legislature — Senate Bill 352 and House Bill 518 — aimed at amending the Public Employment Relations Act to end the insane status quo

He wants to remove from union protection those who perform "confidential or managerial" work for the state Those workers are supposed to represent state interests in union negotiations and personnel matters

Murkowski rightly sees the current law as fostering a serious conflict of interest by allowing managers and confidential employees to participate in collective bargaining — in effect, having unions on both sides of the negotiating table

While some would mislead the public by claiming Murkowski's aim is to open the way for more political appointments, even labeling his legislation the "crony bill," it actually would get union cronies out of management

There is nothing really novel about Murkowski's plan. This is the only state in the nation that allows confidential workers to be in collective bargaining units on a statewide basis And only two other states allow managers to be in unions The practice puts the public interest in the back seat when it is time to negotiate union contracts

IF THE proposal becomes law, classified workers and managers would have their status changed to "classified, but excluded " The Alaska Labor Relations Agency would make the call on who would receive the new designation.

Those in the new category still would be protected by constitutional and statutory requirements They would be subject to merit hire, merit promotions and could be fired only for cause The state Personnel Board would resolve labor beefs

Murkowski is right in concluding that state workers in key management and bargaining positions should represent the public employer's interests first There certainly should not be union workers on both sides of the negotiating table

The governor's legislation would end that, and bring Alaska's collective bargaining laws into line with other states and private industry And it would recognize sensible federal exclusions of classified employees and managers from bargaining

The only people who win under current practices are those in state employee unions The public, without representation at the table by people who put its interest first, gets only the short end of the stick.

Past administrations, recognizing the problem, have tried to resolve the issue without success Make no mistake, it needs to be fixed

Hopefully, this is the year

Recipe for health and happiness

By ELISE PATKOTAK

My godchild got married recently and I went a bit nuts trying to think of just the right wedding gift to give her She's a very special young lady and, though I've never met him, the word I've received is that her new husband is a very special young man. So you can see that no ordinary gift would do

After much perusing of catalogs and Internet sites, I decided that the best gift I could give her was a book of family recipes The recipes would range from traditional dishes that have been in my family since we sailed from Italy, to a great Chinese spareribs recipe I once found in a Sunday magazine, to recipes I made up in desperation on nights when there was little in the refrigerator and I didn't want to eat out alone

As I was putting this book together, I started seeing articles in various periodicals that said that people who cook at home do not tend to get as obese as people who eat out a lot. So maybe by giving her this book, I'm giving her more than a wedding present Maybe I'm giving her something that will ultimately benefit her long-term health and that of the children I am secretly longing for her to have

Patkotak

Not that anyone would call some of my family recipes healthy They come from an era where you just couldn't get enough butter, eggs and cheese But over the years I've found that with a little modification, they can be healthy and still taste great.

The thing, though, that I most want her to learn from this book is that cooking should be, above all else, a fun and creative activity I think this gets lost in today's busy world where pots have been replaced by take out containers and the smell of food in the kitchen means the microwave has finished it's reheating function

My cousin Tom has a theory that if a recipe is available, use it. She feels it's the result of someone who spent a long time working on it and so it gives you the best possible outcome

I think that holds true only up to a point. When I'm in the kitchen, my motto is "Don't be afraid to experiment and don't be afraid to fail " Of course, it helps if you keep a big hungry dog around who will think that most of your failures are manna from heaven

And if you can get your spouse in the kitchen with you well, you just can't believe the great conversations you can have while chopping onions or how truly peaceful just stirring a pot can be after a crazed day at work Cooking from scratch forces you to stay in one place and focus on something very mechanical which leaves your mind free to daydream and find its quiet place

And for the working mom, I would just like to remind her that a wooden spoon can be your best friend You can stir the pot with it, scratch your back with it and whack a recalcitrant kid on the head with it as they try to sneak by you in the kitchen after doing something wrong — all without moving from your original position at the stove

I know that in my family, food played a role that non-Italians might find too central And I am old enough to know that it is not necessarily healthy to equate food with love But that's the way it was when I was growing up I can never eat that Sunday sauce or bite into a piece of strufoli without wonderful memories flooding back to me — memories of a childhood filled with love, laughter, cousins, aunts, uncles and food Lots and lots of food

And that alone should be a good enough reason to find the time to cook meals at home

Not just because it's healthier for you and your family, but because when you get old and your memory starts to slip a little, there is nothing like the aroma of some favorite family dish baking in the oven to jog it and bring back the good times The smell of reheated Chinese takeout just doesn't carry the same punch.

I guess if I had any philosophy to pass on to my godchild as she starts her marriage, it would be to live her life with a wooden spoon in one hand and her husband's heart — as reached through his stomach — in the other

And to never let go of either

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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SUBVERSIVE ANTICS CAUSE HER . . .

Legal woes

IS SUSIE LINDAUER a spy or a self-appointed international emissary?

In traveling to Iraq, dealing with Iraqi Intelligence Service agents and accepting their money, was she a functioning and dangerous intelligence agent herself?

Or was she just an overzealous and misguided peacenik whose hubris makes her still think she did — in her own words — "more to stop terrorism in this country than anybody else?"

Was she a secret operative on a subversive mission or just an extreme liberal flake with too much time on her hands?

The jury is still out on all those questions And the 41-year-old Lindauer, daughter of former Alaska newspaper publisher and prominent politician John Lindauer, may indeed face a jury before her adventure plays out

The fact that she was released to a halfway house instead of jailed suggests federal authorities may be leaning toward the liberal-flake interpretation of her actions.

The charges against her are serious indeed They include conspiring to act as an unregistered agent and illegally accepting money from the Iraqi government The $10,000 apparently was for expenses involved in travel between Iraq and the United States She was not charged with espionage

SOME OF her activities could be perceived as a fruitless and illegal, if well-meaning, attempt to head off war with the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq But others — if they became a reality — presumably could have resulted in the deaths of American soldiers and civilians in Iraq and of Iraqi citizens

Lindauer was arrested after several meetings and prolonged e-mail correspondence with an FBI agent posing as a Libyan intelligence officer who pretended to seek help in supporting resistance groups inside Iraq At his request, she made two covert document drops in a park near her home

The fact that she was released to a halfway house instead of jailed suggests federal authorities may be leaning toward the liberal-flake interpretation of her actions But her legal problems seem unlikely to go away soon

Susan Lindauer grew up in Anchorage and attended East High School. She reportedly craved attention and now she definitely has it, she has the attention of the nation and much of the world.

Alaskans learned never to be surprised when her often-controversial dad was in politics and became the Republican Party's candidate for governor But this incident seems a stretch even for a member of the Lindauer family

Stay tuned for more hype of the day

By TOM BRENNAN

My dog Jack just came out from under the bed He went in there when the news networks began broadcasting all-Martha, all the time, and he only came out for meals, walks and sanitation breaks He's afraid they'll do it again.

I'm not sure what to tell him Even if the 24/7 news channels are over their Martha Stewart obsession, they'll just start wallowing in something else That's one of the great failings of the news media these days

The Wall Street Journal is one of the world's great newspapers and an astute critic of the business it is in — journalism In a recent editorial, the Journal took its fellow media to task for mindlessly passing on criticism of President George W Bush.

The paper was incensed about the flap raised over the president's use in campaign commercials of images from the ruined World Trade Center after the the terrorist attacks in 2001

Brennan

"September 11, 2001, marked the worst foreign attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor," the Journal editor wrote "It's certainly been the defining event of George W Bush's presidency But according to Democrats and their media echo chamber, it now shouldn't be a campaign issue

"Yes, that was the message being peddled by reporters provided with outrage-laden quotes from a single firefighters union and activist relatives of victims of the World Trade Center attacks "

The Journal pointed out that the leading spokesman for the complaining firefighters was a man who endorsed John Kerry way last September, hardly an objective critic

Hypocrites in the Democratic camp are delighted by Kerry's exploitation of medals he received during a dangerous though relatively brief assignment in Vietnam, but are tut-tutting about television commercials centered on the seminal event of Bush's years-long presidency and the ongoing battle against terrorism.

None of that is surprising, but how do you tell a dog that much of the news he follows so closely is more hype than real news It would be like telling him there is no Geraldo Rivera.

Garrison Keillor did a wonderful takeoff on media exaggeration on his "A Prairie Home Companion" radio show recently It was a repeat of a show broadcast last year from Nashville, but to those who hadn't heard it before, it was all brand new

Actually, my memory is so bad these days that people can tell me the same jokes over and over, and each time I enjoy them like it was the first. I'm easily entertained

Keillor and his staff did a promotion for the fictional University of Maui School of Meteorology Now, I think our broadcast weather folks here do a good job — without them I would be wandering around in my underwear in February — but the point the Prairie Home Companion people were making was valid for much of the journalism world

"If you're a young person with wonderful hair looking for a lucrative job in broadcasting," the skit went, "you should think about TV weather forecasting We're looking for young attractive men and women with good teeth who can stretch a little tiny forecast into an eight-minute TV segment including two commercials — AND to stand in front of a blank screen and make it look as if you're pointing to Ohio AND make every day sound like a life-threatening situation."

The show's Sue Scott acted out this example "This is Debbie Flexner, Eyewitness Weather, with a winter sun warning from the U.S Weather Service Sunshine has now reached levels that could cause blindness if you look directly into the sun and even reflections of sunlight off glass or metallic surfaces could cause you to lose control of a vehicle and skid into a bridge abutment. Details at 10 "

Unfortunately, though the Prairie Home skit was very funny, it was too much like reality to dismiss lightly Most of the media do, indeed, hype up the news something terrible and — as a result — much of what their audiences know for sure contains but a kernel of truth, at most

I've been in the news business 13 years in all and I know filling newspaper space and broadcast time with truly important material isn't always easy

And no newspaper can realistically lead Page One with a headline saying "Nothing important happened yesterday; have a nice day "

But we can hope, can't we?

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

The Anchorage Times

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

HOUSE DEMOCRATS DEMAND . . .

Pork payoffs

WHILE THE usual suspects are touting the education bill recently adopted by the state House as a shining example of "setting aside partisanship" and "cooperation" between Republicans and Democrats in the Legislature, it looks more like a stickup

Gov Frank Murkowski's budget would hold education spending to about the same level as last year Word of that triggered fainting spells in school districts faced with skyrocketing costs for retirement funds and insurance Several districts across the state warned they would be forced to lay off teachers and implement other serious cuts if no money were found, and the Legislature listened

The Senate tried to pass a measure that would give education $82 million more than Murkowski's budget proposal, and add about $6 million for the University of Alaska. That failed.

The House went much further, passing a measure that would tack onto Murkowski's proposal $84 million for education, $16 million for the university — and $10 million in giveaways that have absolutely nothing to do with education

It was a pork-for-votes payoff to persuade Democrats to give up the leverage they would enjoy if their votes were needed to take the money for the measure out of the Constitutional Budget Reserve

RURAL DEMOCRATS apparently are miffed that they did not get as much as they wanted in last year's capital budget The House measure add-ons would make them feel a lot better It sets aside $100,000 to buy a bulldozer for Rampart, a community of about 20 people, $500,000 for dock upgrades in the Bristol Bay Borough and $3 4 million for erosion control in Shishmaref, a community of about 600 that already is seeking federal funding to relocate from Sarichef Island in the Chukchi Sea.

The bill also includes $250,000 for a boat haul-out in Craig, $50,000 for fire equipment in Hoonah, $200,000 for a power house rehabilitation in King Cove, and on and on and on, including a guarantee that the Power Cost Equalization program would not be cut To top it off, the legislation stipulates that if a single word is changed by the House or the Senate or by the governor, the measure dies and the deal is off

Alaskans likely can understand, and perhaps even support, dipping into the Constitutional Budget Reserve, if necessary, for education — but for bulldozers and dock projects? Is that really the best use of money from the Constitutional Budget Reserve if the needs cannot be met by the general fund?

We are left to wonder: If House Democrats truly support education, and we believe they do, why do they have to be bribed to do the right thing? Why not just trim all the pork and add that $10 million to education?

It would be the right thing to do and, if it were to become necessary to draw from the reserve to fund the measure, it would as least be justifiable

Mel Gibson film not anti-Semitic

By JOHN LEO

Two brief and minor scenes in Mel Gibson's movie stick in my mind During the long torment of Jesus, a flashback shows stones dropping slowly to the ground

We are not sure what we are seeing Is this some sort of boccie-like game? As the camera pulls back, we understand It's the stoning of the adulteress, halted by Jesus's words "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" The placement of the flashback draws a contrast between the punishment Jesus recommended for the woman (none), and the punishment he suffered

Later Gibson shows Mary, on her knees in terrible grief and pain, picking up and tightly clenching two handfuls of pebbles as she watches her son being tortured on the way to Golgotha She relaxes her grip and drops her stones, too — no room for hatred or revenge for those who wish to follow Jesus Two intertwined lessons in forgiveness, in a few seconds, with no words This is brilliant filmmaking

You can see why Gibson originally planned to release this film, "The Passion of the Christ," without subtitles, with a sound track in three languages that nobody understands It's a visual experience He seems to say, of course you all know the story, but you live in a visual culture and have never understood it visually In his last words to Mary, Jesus says, "See, Mother, I make all things new"

It's a familiar line turned into an emotionally wrenching scene Another image I found unforgettable Simon of Cyrene and Jesus linking arms over each other's shoulders as they bear the cross up to Golgotha. Simon has grown more and more protective of the abused Jesus He is no longer the randomly selected onlooker forced by the Romans to help carry the cross He is literally walking with Jesus

In one evocative image, lasting just a few seconds, Gibson places all serious Christians in the scene in the figure of Simon Some of us will never again be able to hear the phrase "walk with Jesus" without thinking of Gibson's image here Many viewers will not be able to think of the passion and death of Jesus except in Gibson's images

So far, Gibson's achievement here has been overwhelmed by the argument about anti-Semitism His most dogged critic has been hounding him on this issue for a full year, arguing that while Gibson is not an anti-Semite, he holds anti-Semitic views — a way of alleging serious bigotry while seeming to deny it

One red herring after another has been hurled Gibson's way His father seems anti-Semitic, Gibson is an unorthodox pre-Vatican Council Catholic, and he has been in a lot of violent movies and must therefore be in love with gore for its own sake (a charge rarely raised against the makers of "Kill Bill Vol 1," which shows heads and many arms and legs coming off, or the makers of "Hannibal," which features a man forced to eat part of his own brain)

Gibson contributed to the mess by a single outburst against a columnist (endlessly rehashed by his detractors) and by seeming to downplay the horror of the Holocaust in a recent interview in Reader's Digest

Is the film anti-Semitic? It didn't seem so to me, but after talking to friends, maybe I underrated some of the film's touches, the fussing over the 30 pieces of silver, for instance, which some people say is an attempt to connect Jews and greed At least Gibson is clear that Jesus is not to be viewed as a victim of Jews or Romans, either He wills his own death "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord," Jesus says

Gibson thinks that some critics came close to saying that a Christian is not allowed to film the Christian Scriptures as written (i e, with the charge that some influential Jews wanted Jesus killed) He has a point

But Gibson's adherence to the literal text of the Bible is selective He had no trouble inserting many things not found in the Scriptures (pretrial abuse of Jesus, Mary mopping up Jesus's blood, the vast extent of the scourging) However, he declined to tweak the script to reflect biblical and historical scholarship that points primarily to the Romans as those responsible for the Crucifixion Thus is not a liberal plot or a political attempt to placate Jews

It is simply where the scholarship is, and has been, for some time Early Christians were in no position to provoke the Roman conquerors by blaming them for killing Jesus On the other hand, the first Christians were harassed by synagogue authorities and bitter that their fellow Jews were not accepting Jesus as the messiah

In sum, I think the film is not anti-Semitic and not likely to provoke anti-Semitism It has way too much carnage for my taste, but it's a serious and powerful film

John Leo is a columnist for U.S. News & World Report. Copyright © U.S.News & World Report, L.P. Reprinted with permission.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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PIPELINE ANNOUNCEMENT OFFERS HOPE FOR . . .

More jobs

THE ANNOUNCEMENT by Alyeska Pipeline Service Co on plans to upgrade and reconfigure four pump stations contained good news and bad news

The pump stations will be redesigned to be operated and controlled remotely Three of the locations are north of the Brooks Range and the fourth, Pump 9, is near Delta Junction.

The bad news is that the streamlining will eliminate 350 jobs from the pipeline's 1,600-person work force, about half contractor positions and half company employees Some of the lost jobs will be field positions and some from support staff in Anchorage

Though many of those losing their jobs will face the disruption of change, the improvements overall will be beneficial to the state and enhance the outlook for oil development on the North Slope.

The good news is that the move will reduce oil throughput costs, which will increase the value of crude sent through it — including the state's royalty oil — and improve the economics for new oil development on the North Slope

SOME MAINTENANCE and spill response employees will be repositioned from the pump stations to regional response centers at Prudhoe Bay, Fairbanks, Glennallen and Valdez That would change average response time to spills, increasing it in some areas and reducing it in others The longest delay would be about an hour

Jerry Brossia, pipeline regulator for the federal Bureau of Land Management, said the changes would result in no change in response times to 106 of the pipeline's containment areas, somewhat slower response for 50 sites and faster response to 65 sites

The project received regulatory approval in December Alyeska said in its announcement that the changes will improve maintenance and spill response effectiveness by deploying response personnel and equipment to regional centers

Upgrading the pump stations will be completed by the end of next year and the personnel reductions will be phased over the next two to three years

Though many of those losing their jobs will face the disruption of change, the improvements overall will be beneficial to the state and enhance the outlook for oil development on the North Slope Lower transportation costs will better the prospects for putting smaller and relatively marginal oil prospects into the win column

That could prove to be an important boost for Alaska's economy by brightening the investment climate and creating far more jobs than will be lost in the reconfiguration.

Confront educational ineptitude

By WALTER E. WILLIAMS

What passes for educational enlightenment these days boggles the mind Matt Gouras of The Associated Press, writing in the Jan 5 Seattle Times, tells a story about Tennessee schools The success of some students has made other students feel badly about themselves

What're the schools' responses? Public schools in Nashville have stopped posting honor rolls Some are considering a ban on posting exemplary schoolwork on bulletin boards Others have canceled academic pep rallies, while others might eliminate spelling bees

Nashville's Julia Green Elementary School principal, Steven Baum, agrees, thinking that spelling bees and publicly graded events are leftovers from the days of ranking and sorting students He says "I discourage competitive games at school They just don't fit my worldview of what a school should be"

This is a vision all too common among today's educationists, but there's a good reason for it. Too large a percentage of teachers represent the very bottom of the academic achievement barrel and as such fall easy prey to mindless and destructive fads

Williams

Retired Indiana University (of Pennsylvania) physics professor Donald E Simanek has assembled considerable data on just who becomes a teacher Freshman college students who choose education as a major "are on the average, one of the academically weakest groups Those choosing non-teaching physics and math are one of the academically strongest groups

"Some of the more capable who initially chose teaching will find the teacher-preparation curriculum to be boring and intellectually empty, and shift to curricula that are academically more challenging and rewarding" Simanek adds "On tests such as the Wessman Personnel Classification Test of verbal analogy and elementary arithmetical computations, the teachers scored, on average, only slightly better than clerical workers A rather low score was enough to pass Yet half the teachers failed."

There are other causes for the sorry state of today's primary and secondary education. There's been the politicizing of education. Teachers have recruited students to write letters to the president protesting the war and participate in demonstrations against school budget cuts

Very often, good teachers and principal are faced with the impossible task of having to deal with administrators and school boards who are intellectual inferiors and motivated by political considerations rather than what's best for children.

One of the very best things that can be done for education is to eliminate schools of education There's little in the curriculum that contributes directly to the development of the mind Simanek says that "most teachers have learned 'methods and skills' of teaching, but don't have a solid understanding of the subject they teach So they end up 'teaching' trivia, misinformation and intellectual garbage, but doing it with 'professional' polish.

"Most do not display love of learning, nor the ability to do intense intellectual activity of any kind Lacking these qualities, they cannot possibly inspire and nourish these qualities in their students"

According to a recent study by the North Central Regional Education Laboratory titled, "Effective Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies in the Midwest," 75 percent to 100 percent of the teachers that leave the profession are ranked as either "effective" or "very effective"

To improve teaching, we must attract people of higher intellectual ability and we must make teacher salaries related to ability and effectiveness We must ensure that teachers have more academic freedom, better working conditions and a suitable environment for teaching

An important component of that environment is the capacity to remove students who are alien and hostile to the education process Finally, we should consider curriculum changes that eliminate courses that have little, if anything, to do with reading, writing and arithmetic.

The low academic quality of many of our teachers is neither flattering nor comfortable to confront, but confront it we must if we're to do anything about our sorry state of education.

Walter E Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc., 5777 W Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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AMATS SHOULD SPEND MORE MONEY ON . . .

Area roads

STATE SEN. Ben Stevens and Mayor Mark Begich are fighting over how decisions are made on road and street spending in the Anchorage area and how much is diverted to trails and amenities

Republican Majority Leader Stevens is fuming because AMATS, the roads decision-making body for Anchorage, has been spending 15 percent of its budget on trails, sidewalks and landscaping That's well over the federally required 10 percent

And — despite the fact that Anchorage area roads are inadequate and jammed with traffic — the AMATS three-year plan calls for spending about 17 percent of those dollars on niceties

The basic plan includes $129 million for Anchorage, with 90 percent coming from federal coffers and 10 percent from the state Of that total, $22 6 million would be spent on trails and amenities Those figures relate only to roads and streets that are not considered part of the national highway system AMATS will receive another $46 million during the three years for work on major roads and highways

Stevens has tried several routes to change AMATS' ways, but so far he has been frustrated. He is but the latest in a line of Anchorage legislators who have tried to get AMATS to put more of its road and street dollars into roads and streets

AMATS is governed by a five-member policy committee that includes Begich, Assembly Chairman Dick Traini, Assemblyman Doug Van Etten, and representatives of the state departments of Transportation and Environmental Conservation

STEVENS' LATEST attempt to force change came in January when he filed a bill to increase the AMATS policy committee from five members to seven, adding one Anchorage area member from the Alaska House and one from the Senate Since the state would then have four members to the municipality's three, the bill would shift the balance of power on AMATS from local to state

Whether he'll succeed remains to be seen. The bill passed in the Senate but the Assembly is strongly opposed and its approval may be needed. Stevens' frustration is understandable AMATS is ignoring the intent of the Legislature, which authorizes spending of scarce state funds for urgently needed road improvements

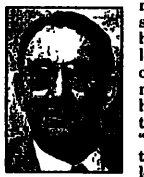
The problem was underlined at a hearing on roads spending last year in Juneau. One testifier wanted more money spent on trails and amenities and said they "are part of what makes Alaska a wonderful place to live "

Now there is no question that trails, sidewalks and landscaping add to the quality of life here But what makes Alaska a wonderful place to live is its natural environment and the beauty surrounding its cities Anything man-made — no matter how nicely designed — comes in a distant second. AMATS should quit competing with nature and focus on its primary mission, making sure Anchorage has an adequate road system Right now, it doesn't

A perfect book: 'Perfect Mountain'

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

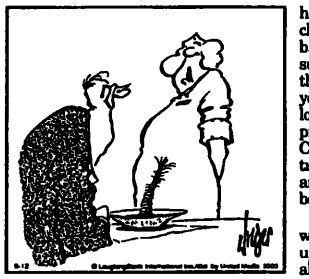
QUITE SIMPLY PUT, a gorgeous new book from Epicenter Press, "Alaska's Perfect Mountain Stories from Girdwood and the Alyeska Resort," is marvelous — an absolutely great addition to anyone's library of Alaskana It has 120 slick pages, in a hard-bound volume that is packed with profiles of the colorful people of Girdwood and the fascinating history of how the town and the resort developed, all illustrated by stunning photos of this special place 40 miles south of Anchorage The author, Lana Johnson, a Girdwood resident since last year, is a former managing editor of the old Anchorage Times and an Anchorage public relations executive for more than a decade The breathtaking black-and-white and color photos are the work of Randy Brandon, who arrived in Girdwood in 1972, found work in the ski support business, became a professional photographer in 1980, and who now owns Third Eye Photography in Girdwood They were a perfect team for this perfect book.



Tobin

THIS $29.95 VOLUME is dedicated to the memory of Nina von Imhof, whose husband, Chris, has been the leading figure from Day One in the making of Alyeska Resort, and whose unflagging high spirits and resolve in the face of almost unending roadblocks and challenges over the years have resulted in a world-class hotel and a great ski destination right in our own backyard Nina, a lively redhead, died at the age of 58 in 2002 after a long battle with cancer She was one of Girdwood's most vibrant personalities, the community's flower queen, party-giver and dance leader

SPEAKING OF LIVELY folks, the four finalists for the job of chancellor of the University of Alaska Anchorage bring some diverse credentials to the table If the post goes to Susan Kelly,



"What did you *expect* to find in oxtail soup?"

now the associate provost of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, you can bet that she will be the only academic leader in Alaska who earned a bachelor of arts degree at the University of Tasmania That degree, in 1971, preceded her doctorate in 1986 from the University of Melbourne Her doctoral thesis "Changing Course Women Returning to Study" Judith Ramaley, now on leave from a professorship at the University of Maine at Orono while serving as assistant director of the Education and Human Resources Directorate at the National Science Foundation, earned her doctorate in zoology from UCLA in 1966 Her dissertation "The Neural and Hormonal Control of Puberty in the Female Rat" Elaine Maimon, provost of Arizona State University West in Phoenix, earned all of her college degrees at the University of Pennsylvania — including a doctorate in English, magna cum laude, in 1966 The only male candidate, Herman D Lujan, earned his Ph D in political science from the University of Idaho in 1964 Lujan, provost and vice president of academic affairs at California State University, Los Angeles, earned an A.B degree in 1958 from St Mary's College of California, majoring in political science and labor relations, and his master's in political science from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1960

THE PASSING PARADE: Hope Turpin's death last Tuesday in Kerrville, Texas, saddened many old friends here A long-time member of the Anchorage social scene, she and her husband, Frank, were visitors here last summer — making an annual return to the city which was home for so many years As old-timers will recall, he had a lot of big jobs here before his retirement. president of Alyeska Pipeline Service Co , state commissioner of Transportation, president of the Alaska Railroad, and president of the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce

HIGH STEPPING: A gaggle of well-known local boys will be kicking it up as can-can dancers at the 14th annual Catholic Social Services Charity Ball, "April in Paris " It's the big fund-raising gala that helps finance the Brother Francis Shelter, McAuley Manor, Clare House, Covenant House and eight other agencies that serve the city's less fortunate Picture Dan Hisey of Alyeska Pipeline, Al Parrish of Providence Alaska Medical Center, Kevin Meyers of ConocoPhillips, Bill Allen of VECO, and others doing the can-can — and you get an idea of the fun in store Reservations for the April 17 event can be made by calling Barbara Whitehurst at 297-7752

SMALL WORLD: Nancy and Bill McHugh, back from Hong Kong to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary with their children on a New York holiday, took in the Broadway hit show, "Hairspray " And who did they run into in the lobby during an intermission between acts? Former Mayor Rick Mystrom and his wife, Mary, also taking in the Manhattan sights For the last three years the McHughs have been in Hong Kong, where he heads all CSX operations in the Orient A decade ago their home was in Anchorage, where he was president of Yukon Pacific's gas pipeline efforts and CEO of CSX in Alaska. Between Anchorage and Hong Kong, the McHughs lived in North Carolina, where he was based as chief of CSX's Latin America operations

AND DON'T FORGET: Wednesday is St Patrick's Day, a grand time for the wearin' of the green — and a fine day to be Irish

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ANCHORAGE LAYS CLAIM TO . . .

Glorious music

ADMITTEDLY, NOT everybody is into classical music But even those who are not can be glad that some great musical talent has helped put Anchorage front and center on the national — and maybe even the international — symphonic scene

Call it all part of raising the quality of life here, right alongside ski trails and wilderness and scenery without end

Our town's newest boost up the musical ladder came a week ago when the Anchorage Symphony Orchestra, with pianist Juliana Osinchuk as the featured artist, presented the world premier of Philip Munger's Piano Concerto, Op 72

It was a stunning performance The orchestra, under the direction of Randall Craig Fleischer, was brilliant Ms Osinchuk, an internationally acclaimed pianist who is an Anchorage resident, was glorious And the concerto in three movements by Munger, also an Alaska resident, was a smashing success — the story, as he explains it, of a trip by a tugboat, the Ruby XIV, between Kodiak and Seattle during mid-summer 1999, a journey he says was "a combination of danger, turbulence and expectation"

THE AUDIENCE, which filled the Atwood Concert Hall to the rafters, loved it They greeted this premier performance — one of only 44 presented in the last year in the United States — with a standing ovation.

As if that weren't enough, Ms Osinchuk returned to the stage as the principal artist in the orchestra's presentation of Piano Concerto No 1 by Franz Liszt This concerto was premiered by Liszt 149 years ago — but as presented by Maestro Fleischer and his Anchorage symphony players with Ms Osinchuk at the piano, it may never have earned a more rousing reception

One of the factors that made the evening a highlight in the local symphony's history was the pairing of Ms Osinchuk with Munger and his composing artistry Both are fascinating people

As a pianist, Ms Osinchuk has performed to rave reviews all over the United States and Europe She made her debut in Carnegie Hall at the age of 11, studied at the Conservatoire de Musique in Paris, and received her bachelor's, master's and doctor of musical arts degrees at the Juilliard School in New York City Yet Anchorage is her home

Munger grew up in Seattle and became a commercial seiner and gillnet fisherman in Cordova, a tugboat skipper, a harbormaster and director of a halfway house He moved to the Mat-Su Valley in 1983 and is a teacher and band director at the Matanuska-Susitna College in Palmer He has been composing symphonic music for more than 25 years Colorful artists? To be sure

Beautiful music? Absolutely Something wonderful for Anchorage? Indeed, yes

Letters to The Times

Let Habitat do its job

Am I missing something? Why are the mayor and Assembly getting involved with how Habitat for Humanity is providing homes for low-income families in Anchorage? It seems to me that the city should be grateful for the work this organization is doing I thought the idea was to get low-income families into affordable housing that they needed and helped build

Since when did it become a requirement that each house be supplied with a garage before it was acceptable for a family in need to move in? Did anyone ask the families involved what they really need and can afford to maintain? Let Habitat for Humanity do the job it is tasked with and does so well Let's support and thank them for their efforts

Jeanne Wolf
Anchorage

People would end up losers

I have always thought Mayor (Mark) Begich was a smart man and was glad when he was elected. However, I am thoroughly disgusted and angry about the way he and Allan Tesche are handling the business with Habitat for Humanity

I saw the news flash on TV the other day and just read the story in the Voice of the Times (March 10) The mayor and Tesche want to dictate the terms of building for an organization that knows much more about the needs of the people they are serving than they do

Another sad part about this is that the $300,000 the Housing and Neighborhood Development Commission would be donating to Habitat for Humanity is not for the building of the houses at all, but for acquiring of land to build houses on

The Housing and Neighborhood Development Commission recommended the transfer of funds after looking carefully into the situation Yet Begich and Tesche in their infinite wisdom want to change the deal because they know better than the commission which they set up to look into the matter

If Habitat for Humanity has to turn the city's money down because of these demands, the city will be the loser along with some very good people that

Habitat for Humanity could help, but will not be able to do so

I am 80 years old I shake my head at their egos

George Bucholz
Anchorage

Fund is collectively owned

Whether or not Alaskans agree with Roger Cremo's recent column (Voice of the Times, Feb 19), the question of who owns the Permanent Fund deserves an answer or at least a debate When Alaskans die, they have no personal stake in future earnings of the Permanent Fund and further payments are not made to their estate for years to come because they no longer receive a dividend

Likewise, when Alaskans move Outside, they don't sell as property their claim to dividends, they simply become ineligible to collect them So, it would seem, the Permanent Fund does not belong to us personally, it belongs to Alaskans collectively and that collective is the state of Alaska.

As Alaskans, we have a vested interest in the success of the Permanent Fund We would have no less interest in its success if the dividend were limited to excess earnings after funding state government As for the idea to distribute by guaranteed entitlement and then redistribute via income tax There's a word for that — it's called socialism.

Trish Berg-Baker
Anchorage

Income tax discriminates

I was pleased to read the column written by Donald P Anderson on March 6 Finally I was able to read the thoughts of someone who thinks as I do regarding the concept of a "progressive income tax"

I have yet to understand why it is unlawful to discriminate against another on the basis of race, age, gender, sexual orientation and most likely a host of other attributes, while it is perfectly acceptable to discriminate on the basis of income or wealth.

The economic damage of this type of taxation was well laid out by Mr Anderson This article should be required reading for ex-governor Jay Hammond

The idea that we need a tax of any kind with $28 billion in the bank is ludicrous

Frank Huber
Anchorage

Glory be

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Thank you. Again you delivered my message far better than ever I could It's like the old Times

In 1982, I gave my "Outaugural" before the Anchorage Chamber I said I had chosen it as a forum for delivering my swan song since I felt none would more appreciate hearing from my very own lips that old "Zero Growth" Hammond was departing the political scene

Upon conclusion, after three standing ovations for saying precisely what they had been booing me for saying during my entire tenure, Bob Atwood came up and said, "I'm finally beginning to understand where you're coming from and I'm kinda sorry about the eight years of grief we've given you"

"You don't have to apologize, Bob I've always known you actually were a 'closet' Hammond supporter By championing one losing cause after another, at odds with me, you so enhanced my credibility at the expense of your own I can conclude nothing less"

Now in cherished memory of what Bob would have done, you've kept the faith by so ridiculously garbling my message readers will feel compelled to find out just what it really was

Jay Hammond
Port Alsworth

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

A 90-DAY LEGISLATIVE SESSION . . .

Makes sense

WITH SOME pleasure we note that the Legislature, at least in a committee hearing, is discussing a proposed constitutional amendment that would shorten the length of Alaska's annual lawmaking sessions

As it is, lawmakers meet in Juneau for four months every year, beginning in early January and winding up in mid-May — one-third of every year, to enact laws for 600,000 people That's way too long

This new proposal, sponsored by Republican Reps Ralph Samuels and Norman Rokeberg of Anchorage, and co-sponsored by eight others, would put a 90-day limit on the length of the regular sessions Special sessions, of course, could still be called any time emergencies arise

The problem here is that the change to the session length is proposed as a constitutional amendment, and that raises the bar for passage If approved, it would then go on a statewide ballot for approval by voters

We are confident that voters would overwhelmingly vote in favor a 90-day limit, given the chance

Alas, we fear too many legislators who like being in Juneau for four months at a time will vote no, and the measure will never reach the ballot for voters to act on

But we applaud the effort — and hope Reps Samuels et al will continue to press ahead

What gap?

COLUMNIST TIM Bradner made a good point recently when he said "Alaska should be the laughingstock of the nation" because of its inability to solve its fiscal gap

Bradner, who writes for an Alaska economic reporting service, said people in other states must find it inconceivable that Alaska can't handle its budget problems when it has a $28 billion Permanent Fund and a lot more going for it

The Permanent Fund makes more than a billion dollars a year in profits and the state has a million barrels a day of oil production and 35 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves that should be flowing to market within a decade

Bradner's recommended solution was "Use some Permanent Fund profits, levy some taxes and continue to restrain spending while adequately funding what we need to keep our economy growing for the long-term"

We disagree with the need for taxes Those might be required in the future — hopefully the distant future — but using a portion of Permanent Fund earnings for essential needs and restraining spending on the rest are obvious solutions that can be used now

Pssst . . . Hey kid, ya wanna vote?

BY PAUL JENKINS

Some politicians, like Doug Van Etten and Janice Shamberg, are shameless

The other day, these two liberal Assembly members popped up at high schools in their districts to work with something called "Next Generation Voters" That's a laudable program set up by Municipal Clerk Barbara Gruenstein and her elections coordinator, Guadalupe Marroquin, to register 18-year-olds to vote

The thing is, Van Etten and Shamberg were not invited

In fact, Marroquin specifically, correctly and wisely left them off the Feb 26 e-mail invitation sent to incumbent Assembly and School Board members and others "I did not include Assembly and School Board members running for re-election," she wrote

So far, so good

Marroquin was not having much luck in getting responses to her e-mail requests for volunteers A lot of those e-mailed were busy or had conflicts, she says In fact, the only elected official to respond positively, she says, was Assemblyman Dick Tremaine, who is not running for re-election.

Jenkins

Assembly Chairman Dick Traini says Van Etten asked him if he could participate in the voters registration drive and Traini says he told him yes, so long as there absolutely was no political activity or electioneering That sort of thing is prohibited by the School District

Van Etten showed up at East High School — located in his district — on March 2 He and Marroquin were the only ones there to push the registration program The next day, Van Etten, Tremaine and Shamberg all showed up at Service High School — in Tremaine and Shamberg's district.

By all accounts there was no overt politicking to speak of, but is that really the question?

"As we'll be flying over water, I'll demonstrate what to do in the case of a shark attack."

How in the world can their appearance be construed as anything but political? Here we have two uninvited incumbents, who are standing for re-election, showing up at high schools in their districts — and only their districts — to register kids who likely will remember them on election day That's not political? Get real The fact that Van Etten and Shamberg's opponents were not invited makes the Assembly members' appearance blatantly political and more than a little cynical

Van Etten's election opposition, Dan Coffey, Stephen Johnston and Troy Maulden, and Shamberg's challengers, Gary Snell and Tim Bridgman, certainly got short-changed by the uninvited appearance of the two Assembly incumbents Van Etten and Shamberg not only got to register potential voters but got a little free TV face time showing them as upright citizens, to boot

It is nice that the two now are so concerned about kids Maybe it's the upcoming election. Maybe it's because the kids they are concerned about are 18-year-olds who can vote It was not all that long ago, if you remember, that these two were among the leaders on the Assembly in trying every trick in the book to deny, for years, Sunoman Little League kids a few measly acres in the Far North Bicentennial Park for baseball fields

They, instead, wanted the fields spread all over town, perched on hillsides or sloshing in swamps or wedged on parcels the size of a Kleenex. Or how about we teach the kids to ski, instead It was embarrassing to watch them kow-tow to their green masters, including the Alaska Conservation Voters They finally were forced to cry uncle only after 10,000 fed-up city residents signed petitions to force the issue onto the ballot. But even after they relented, Shamberg kept at it, trying to thwart the league

Then there was Van Etten's embarrassing Alaska Public Offices Commission gaffe The agency nailed him for failing to complete conflict-of-interest statements over a three-year period He also did not file complete campaign financial disclosure forms for his 2000 and 2001 Assembly election campaign.

APOC fined him $11,000, although the violations rated more than $122,000 in levies It was something of a record The city ethics panel found Van Etten, indeed, had run afoul of the ethics code, but could not bring itself to recommend even a slap on the wrist.

Shamberg has had more than her share of controversy Her latest go-round involved a poorly crafted tree-clearing ordinance that got talk radio in a dither and made everybody else, even some of her colleagues on the Assembly, more than a little uneasy

With all of that, it should be no surprise that these two would show up uninvited to register kids to vote and get some TV exposure. They are capable of almost anything, as the Sunoman Little League fiasco showed But it is a surprise that they were able to barge into the schools and pull off the registration scam.

The School District, which to its credit tries stringently to police this sort of thing, needs to tighten its rules so neither our schools nor our kids are used as political pawns It needs to be done soon

After all, some politicians, like Doug Van Etten and Janice Shamberg, are shameless

Paul Jenkins is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

THOSE GLUM ABOUT OIL BONANZA SHOULD . . .

Get a life

THOSE FOLKS who seem chagrined about higher-than-expected prices for Alaska's crude oil need to get a life

The budget for this fiscal year, which ends June 30, was written based on North Slope oil priced at $25 28 per barrel But the price has actually held at more than $30 a barrel The state's Department of Revenue raised its forecast last fall to $27 70 per barrel and things are now looking even better than that.

Chuck Logsdon, the state's chief petroleum economist, says prices have averaged $30 06 for the last three quarters and may well hold in that range for the next few months If so, that means the state's budget deficit would be down around $145 million, well below the $400 million that Gov Frank Murkowski planned to draw from the $1 9 billion remaining in the Constitutional Budget Reserve

That reserve is a budget slush fund established with one-time money from settlement of disputes with North Slope producing companies over wellhead prices and transportation costs

Those who were hoping that this year's expected deficit would force a long-term solution of the fiscal gap problem are disappointed Many were keeping their fingers crossed in hopes the money gap would force imposition of an income tax.

WELL, SHUCKS It's too bad the state is getting all that money from high oil prices and ruining their tax plans They'll just have to put on a stiff upper lip and let the state enjoy its good fortune, however long it lasts

Among those who presumably are disappointed is former Gov Jay Hammond, who is determined to lobby legislators for an income tax that would take Permanent Fund dividends away from most working people and allow low-income and unemployed people to keep theirs

The grizzled Republican liberal from Lake Clark seems oblivious to the fact that his scheme would convert the dividend to an income-based program, a financial supplement for poorer people That would constitute a convoluted welfare program disguised by a bureaucracy of tax collectors

The dividend is supposed to be an equal share for each and every Alaskan of resource development within the state If it's to be something else — say a well-masked welfare plan — the public needs to understand that before any vote on the subject

In the meantime, the rest of the state hopefully will enjoy the temporary benefit of extra millions flowing into the state budget from the oil price spike.

Let's hold the income tax debate for another day and work toward economic development that can kill the tax idea altogether

Now sleeping with one eye open

By ELISE PATKOTAK

I'm not sure how many more days I can take of Mr T following me through the kitchen like my shadow while staring up at me through his cataract-filled eyes wondering why I've chosen to torture him at this late stage in our relationship

I don't want to be mean to him If I had my way, his days would be filled with dog biscuits and turkey dogs But, like so many of us, he now is being forced to face the inevitable results of old age

It started with a routine visit to the vet for a dental cleaning in honor of the fact that March is Doggy Dental Care month or some such thing I mean, really, do we have to have someone actually proclaim this — as though having your dog breathe into your face in the morning isn't all the notice you need that it's time for a dental checkup

Unfortunately, Mr T found out he had another problem during that visit, a problem I had always connected to old men Then it struck me that at 14, I could no longer call him my little boy He had become my little old man.

Patkotak

The treatment for his problem involved flushing his bladder — a procedure every bit as disconcerting as it sounds He seems to have come through it fine though I can't say the same for my credit card

Once the immediate problem was dealt with, I was told there would have to be a slight dietary change to keep it from recurring Only it turns out it wasn't such a slight change He can't have protein anymore

Protein will make the little stones grow again How do you tell a 14-year-old dog that he can't have his turkey dog in the morning anymore? Or his shredded chicken in the evening? Or his beloved biscuit after his walk? Or those chewie treats that comfort him when he stays in the car while I'm in the store?

If he were human I could try to reason with him But he's a dog Even I realize that And dogs eat meat And meat is protein And trying to convince him that an apple is as good as bacon is not going to work in my lifetime

The food he gets to eat has a strange yellow hue to it and seems to most resemble cardboard in texture From the look on his face when he gets so hungry that he actually eats it, I get the feeling it probably tastes like cardboard too

I did try peanut butter on a cracker as a treat I know it's peanut protein but I figured he's got to have something to look forward to in life It took him 10 minutes of protracted agony to eat it, sucking it off his teeth and tongue and licking it off his muzzle He was not amused

I've considered buying him tofu hot dogs on the theory that soy is the one thing in the world that no one can say is bad for you. It certainly tastes bad when made into tofu dogs and hamburgers but who knows, to Mr T it may taste of nirvana. It would have to beat the heck out of the yellow cardboard he faces every morning in his dog dish.

But wouldn't you know, when I called the vet I found out that even soy wasn't good for him Take that, you vegans

Food has always played an important part in my life In my family, food meant love It was that simple of an equation. Nothing from life to death to war to unemployment couldn't be made better with food So long as there was pasta and sauce, a little meat to flavor the tomatoes and some warm bread to sop up the drippings, life was bearable

I figure this is why I am having so much trouble dealing with Mr T's new dietary restrictions He can't tell me how they are affecting his quality of life but the look I catch him shooting me periodically tells me it's probably not enhancing it I go to sleep at night and wonder if the teeth he has left are still sharp enough to take a bite out of me while I'm sleeping Not that he'd want to hurt me But I am the only protein available to him right now and if he gets desperate enough

Maybe I'll have him sleep on the couch from now on while I sleep behind a closed bedroom door Or maybe I just have to figure that at 14, he should be allowed some of life's forbidden pleasures every once in a while

Just often enough to keep me from getting nervous when I wake up at night and find him staring at me

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company

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HABITAT TARGET OF . . .

City meddling

IT TURNS OUT the Assembly and Mayor Mark Begich think they know best when it comes to how Habitat for Humanity should go about its business of providing low-income families with an opportunity for home ownership

Habitat for Humanity, it should be noted, has built 50,000 houses in the United States since 1976 — 29 of them in Mountain View — and another 100,000 around the world

No matter The Assembly, at Begich's urging, last week voted to require Habitat to add garages to the homes it builds in Mountain View Those garages would be a condition for receiving $300,000 in Housing and Urban Development community block grant funds channeled through the city

Kim Ross, executive director of Habitat here, told the Assembly that her organization situates homes on lots to allow for garages later, but it does not build them For every four garages, it could build another house, she said Adding a $25,000 garage to a $78,000 house would add $139 to the cost of the monthly mortgage payment, making those houses too expensive for some low-income families

How did the Assembly and Begich get involved?

Habitat submitted its 2004 funding request to the Housing and Neighborhood Development Commission to receive the $300,000 — to be used only for land That's when the Begich administration's notion of adding garages, landscaping and fences popped up After public hearings, debate and listening to Habitat, the panel recommended the Assembly approve the request — sans garages, landscaping and fences

Last week, Habitat's request was slated for a public hearing before the Assembly Nobody testified Habitat, after all, was pleased with the HAND Commission recommendation and had nothing to say

Assemblyman Allan Tesche — who else? — then added an amendment returning the garages, fences and landscaping to the equation. In the process, Begich said he was "very disappointed" Habitat had "lobbied" the HAND Commission to keep the garages out of the process He said home buyers could use $30,000 grants from the Anchor Program to build the garages, but Ross balked, saying Habitat families earn what they get — it is not a charity

Those "grants" are in fact loans, of which 50 percent could be forgiven over 10 years if the house is not sold

To their credit, Assembly members Anna Fairclough, Dan Kendall, Dick Tremaine and Dan Sullivan voted "no"

You have to wonder Why in the world do the mayor and the Assembly think they can do Habitat's job better than it can?

A cynic might think Begich, the Assembly and others are setting the stage to gentrify the area and drive out the very people Habitat is trying to help More likely it is just another example of government poking its nose in where it is not needed

There are enough real problems in this city Leave Habitat for Humanity alone

Inflation-proofing is really optional

By TOM BRENNAN

It's time to mention the unmentionable

Get your mind out of the gutter and follow along I'm not talking about fancy underwear, I'm citing the little-recognized fact that the Legislature voluntarily throws back into the Permanent Fund more than a half-billion dollars a year of fund earnings

A big chunk of that money, an average of $469 million for the last five years, is inflation-proofing The unmentionable reality is that inflation-proofing is entirely discretionary I know, everybody thinks inflation-proofing is sacrosanct, an absolute necessity Well, it's not. It's a darn good idea, but nowhere near the gold-plated, do-it-or-die, indispensable government necessity

If some or all of that money were used to fund state expenses — assuming that those needs were really great enough — the Permanent Fund would not shrink significantly It would just grow at a more leisurely pace Over time, its purchasing power would be lower than if we kept chunking that money back in That wouldn't be good, but it would certainly be better than throwing widows, orphans and laid-off cops and teachers out in the street.

Brennan

And in recent years, at least, the size of the Permanent Fund has been affected more by gyrations in the investment markets than by inflation That could be a fluke, inflation is a legitimate worry, no doubt about it But when state budget cuts start to drag down vital programs like education and public safety, slowing Permanent Fund growth seems a small and appropriate price to pay

A half-billion dollars would go a long way toward closing the fiscal gap And using that portion of fund earnings would be far less hurtful than an income tax At the same time, the state could still keep sending out those

dividend checks, which would be affected only over time In the long run, the free-money checks would be lower than they otherwise might be if the fund grew faster, but the real pain would be barely noticeable

Actually the Legislature doesn't so much redeposit the inflation-proofing money in the fund as it does leave it in the earnings reserve account There it is counted as part of the fund itself But our elected members of the House and Senate are pretty much free at any time to appropriate it for state budget needs

I'm not recommending they do that, just mentioning that they have the option. Though the wailing and gnashing of teeth often suggests that doomsday is approaching, state government has more options than most people understand They are politically sensitive options, no doubt, but we are not about to fall off a cliff

Of course, an even better way to take the heat off the state budget would be to adopt the percent of market value approach to determining the Permanent Fund's earnings But there is a very real possibility that POMV will be beaten to death by people who don't have the faintest inkling what it would mean They interpret any change in the fund to be a raid and an attempt to take away their hard-earned dividends, money they earned by breathing in and out — in Alaska

One thing the mouth-breathers fail to understand is that the POMV approach would automatically protect the fund, provide inflation-proofing and spin off enough earnings to provide larger dividend checks than the one they will be getting this fall under the old formula.

The checks going out in October will be just under $900 If the POMV formula were in effect and half the earnings ticketed for dividends, the checks would be close to $1,100, a difference of $200

That's because 8 percent of the fund's value would be counted as earnings, an amount consistent with its performance through the years Of that, 3 percent would be retained as inflation-proofing and 5 percent would be made available for state spending, both dividends and the budget.

That 5 percent, calculated as it would be on a five-year average, would come to $1 4 billion Right now the total of all dividend checks in October will be $561 million, out of which will come 640,000 checks for $900

If POMV were in effect and half the amount went to dividends, the total dividend pot would be $700 million, allowing for individual checks of just under $1,100 And the fund would not be raided It would be more stable, better protected and in good position to do what the voters have tasked it to do, earn money

Equally as important, it would provide $700 million to fill the fiscal gap And since high oil prices are likely to eliminate much of this year's gap — to the chagrin of those rooting for an income tax — there would probably be millions left over

These matters aren't simple, folks But despite the frantic claims of critics, they are not smoke and mirrors They are just plain fiscal reality

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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crematory

Shortly after the 1964 earthquake, Mr Belak came to Alaska to work in Seward as a

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TAXPAYERS FOR COMMON SENSE . . .

Makes no sense

AN OUTFIT calling itself Taxpayers for Common Sense castigated Sen Lisa Murkowski for winning in the Senate version of the Highway Reauthorization bill $180 million over the next six years for transportation projects aimed at linking villages in rural Alaska

Never heard of the group? It is headed by a former United States Public Interest Group lobbyist who also is a board member of the Green Media Toolshed Its board of directors includes the founder of the League of Conservation Voters

It fumed in a letter to the Washington Post that the money was a waste because "many of these roads will be duplicative because these communities are already connected by an extensive ferry system "

Huh? The senator fired back to the Post

"It was interesting to see that Taxpayers for Common Sense (March 2) singled out my proposal in the Highway Reauthorization bill as a sign of a congressional spending spree

"Right now, as Congress debates 'intelligent transportation systems' and considers upgrades to a sophisticated interstate system already almost 50 years old, Alaska still has more than 200 communities that cannot be reached by even a dirt road, or — despite Taxpayers' assertion — by ferry

"We are one-fifth the size of the Lower 48 states combined, yet — we have fewer road miles than the island of Puerto Rico It's true we have twice the road miles of Rhode Island — the smallest of all states — but we are 540 times larger

"The bottom line is this This is the 21st century, and Alaska is still trying to get our transportation infrastructure into the 20th Alaska's rural mothers — among the nation's poorest — should not be forced further into poverty by paying nearly $5 for a gallon of fresh milk because it can only be delivered by airplane "

THE ALASKA funding would be disbursed through the Denali Commission, which she noted, was patterned after the Appalachian Commission, established in 1964 That commission is to receive $590 million a year extra for road work under the highway bill It has received extra transportation money each year to upgrade roads in an effort to spur development in the region

Why should Congress neglect Alaska's lagging rural regions?

What we have here is another smug, ham-handed Outside bunch with no knowledge of Alaska trying to dictate how we will live and what we should be satisfied with Who knows what their true motives are, but, with the proliferation of such groups nowadays, we can assume it must pay well

Sen. Murkowski is to be commended for trying to move transportation in rural Alaska into the 21st century The sooner the better

Why, one day you might even be able to join the brain trust at Taxpayers for Common Sense in catching a ferry from Kotzebue to Fairbanks

Mel Gibson movie shows his bias

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Every people has its story Every people has the right to its story And every people has a responsibility for its story

Muslims have their story God's revelation to the final prophet Jews have their story the covenant between man and God at Sinai

Christians have their story too the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ Why is this story different from other stories? Because it is not a family affair of coreligionists If it were, few people outside the circle of believers would be concerned about it. This particular story involves other people With the notable exception of a few Romans, these people are Jews And in the story, they come off rather badly

Because of that peculiarity, the crucifixion is not just a story; it is a story with its own story — a history of centuries of relentless, and at times savage, persecution of Jews in Christian lands This history is what moved Vatican II, in a noble act of theological reflection, to decree in 1965 that the Passion of Christ should henceforth be understood with great care so as to unteach the lesson that had been taught for almost two millennia that the Jews were Christ killers

Vatican II did not question the Gospels It did not disavow its own central story It took responsibility for it, and for the baleful history it had spawned Recognizing that all words, even God's words, are necessarily subject to human interpretation, it ordered an understanding of those words that was most conducive to recognizing the humanity and innocence of the Jewish people

The Vatican did that for good reason. The blood libel that this story affixed upon the Jewish people had led to countless Christian massacres of Jews and prepared *Europe for the ultimate massacre* — 6 million Jews systematically murdered in six years — in the heart, alas, of a Christian continent It is no accident Vatican II occurred just two decades after the Holocaust, indeed in its shadow

Which is what makes Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" such a singular act of interreligious aggression He openly rejects the Vatican II teaching and, using every possible technique of cinematic exaggeration, gives us the pre-Vatican II story of the villainous Jews

His Leni Riefenstahl defense — I had other intentions — does not wash Of course he had other intentions evangelical, devotional, commercial When you retell a story in which the role of the Jews is central, and take care to give it the most invidious, pre-Vatican II treatment possible, you can hardly claim, "I didn't mean it "

His other defense is that he is just telling the Gospel story Nonsense There is no single Gospel story of the Passion, there are subtle differences among the four accounts Moreover, every text lends itself to interpretation. There have been dozens of cinematic renditions of this story, from Griffith to Pasolini to Zeffirelli Gibson contradicts his own literalist defense when he speaks of his right to present his artistic vision Artistic vision means personal interpretation

And Gibson's personal interpretation is spectacularly vicious Three of the Gospels have but a one-line reference to *Jesus's scourging The fourth has no reference at all* In Gibson's movie this becomes 10 minutes of the most unremitting sadism in the history of film Why 10? Why not five? Why not two? Why not zero, as in Luke? Gibson chose 10

In none of the Gospels does the high priest Caiaphas stand there with his cruel, impassive fellow priests witnessing the scourging In Gibson's movie they do When it comes to the Jews, Gibson deviates from the Gospels — glorying in his artistic vision — time and again He bends, he stretches, he makes stuff up And these deviations point overwhelmingly in a single direction — to the villainy and culpability of the Jews

The most subtle, and most revolting, of these has to my knowledge not been commented upon In Gibson's movie, Satan appears four times Not one of these appearances occurs in the four Gospels They are pure invention Twice, this sinister, hooded, androgynous embodiment of evil is found where? Moving among the crowd of Jews Gibson's camera follows close up, documentary style, as Satan glides among them, his face popping up among theirs — merging with, indeed, defining the murderous Jewish crowd After all, a perfect match. Satan's own people

Perhaps this should not be surprising, coming from a filmmaker whose public pronouncements on the Holocaust are as chillingly ambiguous and carefully calibrated as that of any sophisticated Holocaust denier Not surprising from a man who says "I don't want to lynch any Jews I mean, it's like it's not what I'm about I love them I pray for them "

Spare us such love

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co

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Senior editor

ALPINE IS ONE . . .

Fine field

THE ALPINE oil field is the Energizer Bunny of Alaska's oil patch

The relatively small field — by North Slope standards — just keeps on going and going; and its production capacity keeps growing and growing

After its discovery in 1996, Alpine was expected to produce 80,000 barrels of crude oil per day Its processing facility was designed and built to accommodate that amount

But when the 429 million-barrel oil field started producing in 2000, Alpine showed surprising strength So its owner-company engineers made some equipment modifications and daily production climbed to 100,000 barrels

Then Alpine showed even more potential, so ConocoPhillips and Anadarko Petroleum Corp announced last week that new facilities will be added to the existing gravel pads and daily output will climb to 140,000 barrels by the middle of next year

Alpine was discovered by ARCO Its successor company, ConocoPhillips, owns 78 percent of the field and Anadarko owns 22 percent.

THOUGH ITS size is not huge by Alaska standards, it is the largest onshore oil field discovered in the United States in more than 10 years Its current output represents 10 percent of all North Slope production The Slope's two largest accumulations are the original Prudhoe Bay Field, which produces 420,000 barrels per day, and Kuparuk River, which puts out 155,000 barrels daily

Alpine is the western-most producing oil field on the North Slope and located near the Colville River, close to the border of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

Though the production increase will not require expansion of Alpine's footprint on the tundra, the owner companies have applied for permits to expand the network and add three satellite pads in NPRA and two others near Alpine itself, all tapping oil accumulations discovered by the Alpine companies

The Bureau of Land Management is in the final stages of collecting comments about the draft environmental impact statement for the expansion project

If approved, the Alpine satellites would produce the first commercial oil in history from the National Petroleum Reserve, which was established in 1923 The reserve has been explored off and on through the years but its long-known potential was never made a reality until now

The full output potential of Alpine and its five satellites is unknown for the moment — at least to the public — but the main Alpine field alone is expected to produce tens of millions of tax and royalty dollars for the state treasury

Not bad for a little field expected to flow just 80,000 barrels per day

Who next will be tying the knot?

By WALTER E WILLIAMS

The Massachusetts high court ruled that people of the same sex have a right to be married San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom and County Clerk Nancy Alfaro, in defiance of California law, have issued over 3,000 officially sanctioned marriage licenses to homosexual couples

What are we to make of this? Same sex marriage advocates argue for a change in the legal definition of marriage so as to include marriage between male couples and female couples

Here's my question Are homosexuals the only Americans permitted to change the definition of marriage, or do people with other sex orientations have that right as well?

Here's why I ask that question. Suppose a woman and a horse appeared before San Francisco County Clerk Nancy Alfaro applying for a marriage license, or it might be a man and a sheep What argument might the County Clerk have for not issuing them a marriage license?

Williams

After all, the woman or man might say, "Our definition of marriage includes animals, plus my horse or my sheep will be eligible for my employee health care benefits and my inheritance at my death."

It would appear that a denial of a marriage license would be sufficient grounds for a discrimination lawsuit. After all, animals have rights as well as humans But there are other possibilities

Some people might feel that the definition of marriage should be expanded so as to include group marriage What argument would the San Francisco County Clerk have against the issuance of a marriage license to three, four or 10 men or the like number of women who wanted to marry?

You might say "Williams, you're raising a red herring Gay activists are only talking about same-sex marriage between one man and another, and one woman and another " That's the call for right now

There is a phenomenon known as the slippery slope, or the camel's nose in the tent strategy, whereby one's complete agenda is not revealed at first lest he not get any of it at all

Examples abound, but one of the most flagrant was the tobacco zealot's agenda whereby they started out demanding non-smoking sections on airplanes — then no smoking altogether, then no smoking in airports, then no smoking in restaurants and so forth, until what we have today

Had the anti-smoking zealots revealed their full agenda upfront, they might not have even been successful in getting no smoking sections on airplanes The argument that same-sex couples can't enjoy benefits that heterosexual couples enjoy is an issue that can be readily resolved

For example, if employers provide $200 worth of medical insurance a month, they can simply add $200 in cash to their employees' paychecks and let them decide how it's spent Other rights same-sex couples claim they're denied can be achieved through contracts

It's my personal preference that people be able to conduct their lives in any manner they please Tolerance doesn't require approval; only non-interference

Tolerance also doesn't require recognition of what one might call himself A man and a man might call themselves married, but I'm not obliged to recognize it as such anymore than my calling myself the King of Siam should require that you recognize me as such

President Bush has asked Congress to enact a constitutional amendment making it national law that marriage is a union between a man and a woman. The perceived need for a constitutional amendment should be an embarrassment for all of us — it's simply more evidence of our moral decline

If it were possible for previous generations of Americans to know about this marriage controversy, they'd probably be embarrassed and shocked, and might ask, "What in the hell has happened to America?"

Walter E Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc , 5777 W Century Blvd , Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003.

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

THE CITY ELECTION IS NOW . . .

Up to you

WHEN YOU go to the polls today, you'll be deciding the fates of candidates running for five Assembly seats and two School Board posts, and city and school bonds totaling more than $240 million

But you'll be deciding much more than that This election will determine the direction of the Assembly and the city for the next few years Will we have new, safer schools, with more efficiencies in their administration? What about better roads? Or libraries? Or recreation area improvements? Will needed renovations be done on city buildings? Will the Assembly continue to devolve into the contentious, dysfunctional panel it has become, or will new faces put it back on the right track?

You'll also be asked to decide whether to tell the Legislature to come up with a long-range fiscal plan and whether Anchorage should find a way to wiggle out of Selective Service draft registration

Proposition 3 deserves your attention and a "yes" vote It's not one of the flashier ballot measures that has cranked up the city It is a chance to do good without costing taxpayers a dime, and, in fact, it would make money for the city The proposition would approve a long-term lease of 335 acres of Ruth Arcand park to the Horse Council That would allow The Rainbow Connection to build a facility for year-round therapy, using horses, for individuals facing serious challenges Only a grinch could vote "no"

WE HAVE told you which candidates we feel will do the best job and we've detailed the bonds we support The Daily News has told you of their picks, too We have all had our say Today, it is all up to you Vote Too many do not, for this reason or that I was busy, they say Or all politicians are the same, they say There is always a reason, an excuse

Turnout in local elections, sad to say, generally is less than stellar In last year's hotly contested mayoral race which had everybody stirred up, only 33 percent of the city's voters bothered to turn out to decide major issues affecting us all Pocketbook issues City leadership Focus and direction If you stayed home, you had nothing to say about any of that, and nothing really to complain about now, either

You have the hard-won right to cast your ballot and the absolute right to abstain, but civic duty and good citizenship would seem to require at least minimal participation in the election process Rights come with responsibilities, after all Your vote is a sacred trust won with the blood, sweat and tears of men and women long past, and to sit on the sidelines now, while others make decisions for you, seems sad.

Rights are like muscles in a lot of ways They need to be exercised to stay strong

Exercise yours today Vote

Security chief played a neat trick

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

The New York Times swooned Newsweek put it on its cover Commentators everywhere expressed sorrowful dismay that President Bush had not done it long ago

Indeed, one has to admire it — the most cynical and brilliantly delivered apology in recent memory Richard Clarke using the nationally televised Sept. 11 commission hearings to address the families of the victims "Your government failed you, those entrusted with protecting you failed you and I failed you."

Many were moved I was not For two reasons First, the climactic confession "I failed you" — the one that packed the emotional punch — was entirely disingenuous Clarke did the mea culpa and then spent the next 2 1/2 hours of testimony — as he did on every talk show known to man and in the 300 pages of his book — demonstrating how everyone else except him had failed And they failed because the stubborn, ignorant, ideologically blinkered, poll-driven knaves and fools he had been heroically fighting against within the government would not listen to him

Message They failed you

Second, by blaming the government for the deaths of their loved ones, Clarke deftly endorsed the grotesque moral inversion by which those who died on Sept 11 are victims of George Bush. This is about as morally obscene as the implication (made by, among others, the irrepressible Howard Dean) that those who died in the Madrid bombings were also victims of George Bush

This is false They were all victims of al Qaeda and al Qaeda alone

Bill Clinton did not apologize for Oklahoma City Ronald Reagan did not apologize for the Beirut bombing FDR did not apologize for Pearl Harbor George W Bush owes no apology If an apology is owed, it is owed to the entire country and not just the families, and it is owed by the murderers who planned and carried out Sept. 11

The most telling remark Clarke made in the entire hearing was one that did not make the cover of Newsweek.

Former Sen Slade Gorton "Assuming that the recommendations that you made on January 25th of 2001 had all been adopted say on January 26th, year 2001, is there the remotest chance that it would have prevented 9/11?"

Clarke "No"

Thus, doing everything demanded by the most hawkish, most prescient, most brilliant, most heroic, most swaggering anti-terrorism chief in American history — i e Clarke, in his own mind — would not have prevented Sept 11 Why, then, should the administration apologize?

What exactly was the failure? What was Bush supposed to do to prevent Sept 11? Invade Afghanistan? Clarke has expressed outrage at Bush's preemptive invasion of Iraq So Bush deserves excoriation for preemptively invading Iraq based on massive, universally accepted intelligence of its weapons, to say nothing of its hostility and virulence, and, simultaneously, Bush deserves excoriation for not preemptively attacking Afghanistan on the basis of what? Increased terrorist chatter in the summer of 2001?

At the hearing, Clarke was particularly brilliant in playing to the gallery, mainly to the families in the gallery By some strange cultural transmutation, the families — or more accurately, a small number of politically active families — have claimed, and been ceded, special status in the war on terrorism

Surely they deserve our sympathy and our care And they have received an extraordinary, indeed unprecedented, outpouring of both from the public and from the government. But some families go much further and claim the moral high ground in judging the war on terrorism and how it is to be waged

On what grounds? Did the Pearl Harbor families enjoy special status in critiquing FDR's decisions in World War II? The Oklahoma City families were denied any special status at all — they never got compensation of the sort the Sept 11 families received

Just last week came the news that the widow of Daniel Pearl was denied a claim for similar government compensation, on the grounds that while Pearl was surely a victim of the war on terrorism — and was, in fact, engaged in it by pursuing the truth about those waging war against us — he happened to die on a date other than Sept 11

Clarke's clever pseudo-apology — we failed, meaning, they failed — played perfectly to the families in the gallery, who applauded and warmly embraced the very man who for 12 years was the U S government official most responsible for preventing a Sept 11 A neat trick.

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
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ALASKA NEEDS A FUND PLAN, NOT A . . .

Giveaway

AT FIRST BLUSH, Rep Jim Holm's proposed constitutional amendment that would hand $20,000 checks from the Permanent Fund to every Alaskan — and end the annual dividends — seems appealing It certainly stirs the popular imagination and leaves the give-me-mine-first crowd just giddy with anticipation.

The Fairbanks Republican's proposal would use what is left of the fund after the payout to underwrite government It is very similar to the Mackie Plan, introduced in 2000 by former legislator Jerry Mackie That would have cut the then-$27 billion fund in half by giving Alaskans $25,000 checks, with the rest being used to fund government.

The appeal of such proposals is that they would inject, instantly, something like $15 billion into the economy, and end years of wrangling about how best to use the fund as part of a fiscal strategy designed to put state finances in the black. They also would seem to assuage the fears of those who mistakenly believe the fund will be "raided" or "stolen" by lawmakers, and that dividend checks will be lost anyway

But there is a downside

North Pole Republican Sen. Gene Therriault, the Senate president, is quoted in the Daily News as saying he sees the giveaway as the "take the money and run" plan. We agree In your mind's eye, you can almost see a line of new vehicles stuffed with paid-off Alaskans streaming for the border in a reverse "Grapes of Wrath"

AFTER THE initial economic boost, what effects would such a payout have on the economy? Would Alaska families receiving several such checks leave the state for regions with reduced living costs? What would that do to the housing market? The schools? The university? Land prices? What about the impact on other businesses? Would the Alaska economy be in shambles in a few short years?

The potential bad far outweighs any possible good that can come from a proposal that guts the state's ever-growing savings account

The Permanent Fund was established by visionary Alaskans in 1976 to fund state government when oil and gas income is depleted Not just for themselves, not just for us, but for unborn generations to come And it can work. We must make it work.

A giveaway plan would be a sorry admission that we do not have the vision or the political will to craft a fiscal strategy that will succeed, despite Alaska being the wealthiest state in the union. It would also say we are willing to sell our future, the state's future, for $20,000 a head

Holm's proposal is getting a quiet reception in Juneau, and the likelihood of it going anywhere is somewhere between slim and none It is interesting, but not in the state's best interest.

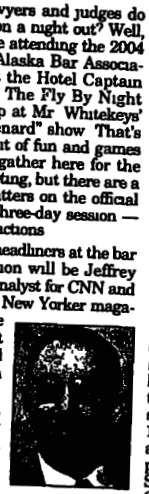
What we need is not a giveaway; what we need is a plan to use the Permanent Fund for its intended purpose

Lawyers will party with Mr. Whitekeys

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

WHAT DO lawyers and judges do for entertainment on a night out? Well, if they happen to be attending the 2004 convention of the Alaska Bar Association April 28-30 at the Hotel Captain Cook, they'll go to The Fly By Night Club to whoop it up at Mr Whitekeys' "Springtime in Spenard" show That's the opening night bit of fun and games for those who will gather here for the bar's 2004 state meeting, but there are a lot more serious matters on the official agenda during the three-day session — and a lot of star attractions

ONE OF THE headliners at the bar association convention will be Jeffrey Toobin, senior legal analyst for CNN and a staff writer for The New Yorker magazine He will be the keynote speaker at the bar's annual awards banquet on Thursday, April 29 He is the author of, among many other pieces of work, "A Vast Conspiracy The Real Story of the Sex Scandal that Nearly Brought Down a President," and "The Run of His Life *The People v O J Simpson.*" Toobin also will be a panelist the next afternoon as delegates listen to a discussion of the Patriot Act in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Also on the panel, designed for a discussion of "Myth, Reality, and the Patriot Act," will be U S Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald of the Northern District of Illinois, Professor Nadine Strossen of New York Law School and the president of the American Civil Liberties Union, and Professor Michael Avery of Suffolk University Law School and the president of the National Lawyers Guild Judge LeRoy F Millette Jr of Manassas City, Va., who presided over the trial of John Muhammad in the Virginia sniper case, will lead a Thursday morning panel discussion on "Courtroom Control, Decorum, and Civility" The convention cost for those who register early is $225 Latecomers will have to pay $15 more.



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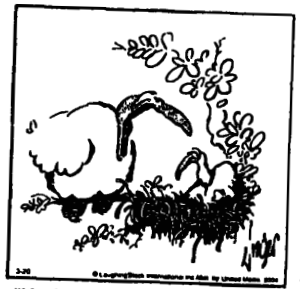

"I had over 200 hours of flying time when I was your age."

PRAYERFUL SELLOUT. There's one thing that those who sponsor the annual Governor's Prayer Breakfast don't have to worry about, and that's a lack of ticket sales There are never any empty seats, and there won't be again when the 19th annual breakfast is held March 13 at the Hotel Captain Cook. Those who pack the hotel ballroom will hear Jon Sourson, the founding pastor of Applegate Christian Fellowship in Jacksonville, Ore, and now a resident of Costa Mesa, Calif The internationally known speaker received high accolades when he was the speaker at the prayer breakfast two years ago His topic this year "One Nation Under God" Tickets are $15, and reservations — if there is still room — can be made by calling 566-1916

SPEAKING OF making reservations, you Seattle baseball fans in the audience need to know that the Mariners played the first exhibition game of the season against San Diego Thursday as spring training got rolling in Arizona The regular season opener at Safeco Field will be Tuesday, April 6, as the Mariners host the Anaheim Angels for a three-game series The Mariners' first road game will be Friday, April 9, at Oakland

ONE OF OUR town's avid baseball fans, Tom Corkran, searched the Internet the other day and discovered that eight players in major league history were born in Alaska. Heading the list is Curt Schilling, who reached stardom and World Series acclaim with the Arizona Diamondbacks and who this season will be pitching for the Boston Red Sox, earning a nifty $10 million for his summer of work. Schilling was born in Anchorage on Nov 14, 1966 — but it's unclear how long he spent here as a boy He graduated from Shadow Mountain High School in Phoenix, and pitched for Yavapai Junior College in Prescott, Ariz, and was a second-round draft pick by the Red Sox in 1986 His major league career began in 1988 with Baltimore, and he played with Houston and Philadelphia before his trade to the Diamondbacks in 2000

TWO OTHER major league pitchers were born in Anchorage Shawn Chacon (Dec 23, 1977) of the Colorado Rockies, where he earned $300,000 last season, and Dave Williams (March 12, 1979), whose contract with the Pittsburgh Pirates paid him $312,500 last season. Don't know about Williams, but Chacon didn't spent much time here, growing up instead in Greeley, Colo The other Alaskans catcher Josh Phelps, who was born here on May 12, 1978, and has played the last four seasons with Toronto, outfielder Scott Loucks, who was born here on Nov 11, 1956, and played four years with the Houston Astros and a final year with Pittsburgh in a career that ended in 1985, infielder Randy Kutcher, who was born here on April 20, 1960, and whose career included two years with the San Francisco Giants, 1986-87, and three with the Boston Red Sox, ending in 1990, infielder Steve Staggs, who was born here on July 1, 1977, and who played for Toronto in 1977 and for Oakland in 1978, and catcher Tom Sullivan, who was born in Nome on June 14, 1925, played one season for the Cincinnati Reds in 1925, and died in Seattle in 1944

SUNDAY PUNDAY: A blonde called Alaska Airlines and asked, "Can you tell me how long it takes to fly from Anchorage to Chicago?" The agent replied, "Just a minute " "Thank you," the blonde said, and hung up

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

A LESSON FROM OREGON ON. . .

Income tax

THE POLITICIANS and leftist newspaper editors who love income taxes and the ordinary folks who dislike them intensely are not confined to Alaska Consider, for example, the situation in Oregon.

A year ago, Oregon legislators — who had escalated the state's general fund spending by whopping leaps — proposed a tax increase designed to bring in $725 million. Acting under provisions of Oregon's referendum rules, voters shot down the increase

Politicians, angry that the people wouldn't follow them in lockstep, responded by slashing government spending in the most obnoxious ways they could find — including releasing prisoners from jail as a cost-saving ploy

Make no mistake. If an income tax is passed — and we sincerely hope one is not — it will come out of the pocketbooks of the families of working men and women.

And legislators came back last August and passed an $800 million tax hike — an income tax surcharge of up to 9 percent, and boosts in state property, business and cigarette levies

A GROUP called Citizens for a Sound Economy quickly went to bat for the people, easily gathering enough signatures to put a repeal measure on the ballot And a week ago Tuesday, voters went to the polls and once again roundly tossed the Legislature's tax increases in the waste basket

Noted the Wall Street Journal in an editorial comment on the matter

"How long will it be before politicians figure out that voters don't want their taxes raised?

"Back in September, they rolled over Alabama Gov Bob Riley's proposed $1 2 billion tax hike In Ohio, groups are trying to overturn a despised sales tax hike, and Nevada voters are threatening to do the same with Gov Kenny Guinn's $833 million tax increase Californians expressed their views on tax-and-spenders when they recalled Gray Davis, and even Seattle voters repealed a coffee tax."

Yet here in Alaska, Democratic legislators, former Gov Jay Hammond, and the Anchorage Daily News are all beside themselves trying to push through an income tax in the 49th State — which just happens to have more than $28 billion in the bank.

Make no mistake If an income tax is passed — and we sincerely hope one is not — it will come out of the pocketbooks of the families of working men and women

It might be an income boost for the state But it will be a pay cut for you. Plain and simple

If we have to choose, make it sales tax

By DONALD N. ANDERSON, Ph D

The one-sided discussion of an income tax at the recent Fairbanks convocation suggested that an income tax is superior to a retail sales tax.

By most economic measures the opposite is true No computer projections or econometric studies are necessary There is a wealth of evidence from other states to demonstrate that growth is suppressed by the income tax. Evidence also demonstrates that an income tax reduces per capita incomes and increases per capita state expense

Excluding Alaska, personal income (inflation adjusted, per capita) since 1970 has increased by 96 percent in eight sales-tax-only states but has increased by only 81 percent in the eight high-income-tax states Since 1948, income in zero-income-tax states grew faster than high-income-tax states by 29 percent.

High-income-tax states, as a group, have seen their per-capita wage decline to 91 percent of the national average Meanwhile, non-income-tax states have increased incomes from well below the national average to the average Nine states that recently implemented an income tax showed slower growth than other states

A pair-wise comparison of states that are demographically similar shows that in each case an income-tax state has less personal income growth than a no-income tax state

Tennessee beats Kentucky,
Texas beats Oklahoma,
Florida beats California,
New Hampshire beats Vermont, and
South Dakota beats North Dakota

The terms "progressive and regressive" are advertising slogans dreamed up by income-tax proponents to demonize other taxes Look at the underlying reality The left has defined regressive to mean taxing people according to what they consume — what they take out of the economy for their own benefit

Progressive means taxing people according to the value of what they produce — what they do for other people I'll take regressive any day That encourages people to work, save, invest, and create wealth — not punish them for this socially beneficial activity

Proponents of an income tax complain that the rich don't pay enough under a sales tax. This is incorrect. The sales tax captures a fixed proportion of expenditure whether you are buying a Yugo or a Lamborghini. Guess who pays more? An income tax collects nothing from the wealthiest segment of our population — retirees — as they spend their savings

The progressive income tax does the most damage to those who are "making it" — starting and growing businesses and producing new jobs With the multiple layers of taxation that already exist, these people are often stifled in their attempts at expansion. The obvious solution is to take their talents and depart to more tax-hospitable climes

An Ohio University economist has calculated that personal income increases 3 6 percent for every 1 percent reduction in state tax burden I suspect the converse is also true

The recent recession has pointed out another weakness of the income tax as a source of state revenue The states dependent on income taxes saw their revenues first go up rapidly (which they spent) and then fall precipitously When one looks at the states in financial trouble the real basket cases are income tax states

Alaskan legislators have done a fine job over the last decade in resisting pressures to expand government to destructive levels Their job would be more difficult with an income tax. The experience of other states shows that the eight highest-income-tax states spent 40 percent more per capita than the eight non-income tax states

Our current legislators seem to be much better at economics than our former governor, Jay Hammond The majority appear to be working toward a government financing package that does the least damage to our economy I would certainly prefer a revenue plan crafted to reliably fund government with minimum expense, time waste, and economic damage

Any new tax will remove money from the private economy and weaken Alaskans' financial standing Evidence from other states shows that the greatest damage will be done if we reinstate the income tax

We should reinstate the income tax only if we want a lower rate of economic growth and lower wages

Donald N Anderson is an Anchorage business manager This column drew on material by Dr Daniel J Mitchell of The Heritage Foundation. It includes comparisons from Mitchell's report discussing the repeal of the Oklahoma income tax entitled "A Competitive Oklahoma for the 21st Century"

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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INCOME TAX WOULD REVIVE AN . . .

Old battle

AS THE taxers fire up their smoke-making machines and polish their mirrors to somehow convince working Alaskans they really do want a pay cut in the form of an income tax, it is good to remember the bitter fight not all that long ago to rid this state of such a levy

The standard line now, and we have used it in these columns, is that the state income tax, which started in the '40s and bit the dust in 1980 after growing and growing and growing, was repealed by the Legislature as Prudhoe Bay oil wealth flooded into the state treasury

That is all true — but it is not the whole story Lawmakers only acted after a petition drive in 1979, led by Fairbanks Libertarian Dick Randolph, put an income tax repeal proposition on the ballot in 1980 More than 21,000 fed-up Alaskans signed petitions

Former Gov Jay Hammond's administration, it should be noted, fought tooth and nail to keep the repeal measure off the ballot

In his book, "Freedom for Alaskans," (and we thank Big lake reader Kerry Cope for pointing out the text) Randolph said that along with the petition drive, he introduced tax-repeal legislation in the hope that lawmakers would dump the "burdensome, unnecessary tax. "

No such luck. Randolph said that to "thwart tax repeal, the governor and the legislature reluctantly passed a discriminatory tax-reduction proposal that fell far short of repeal Even that was too much for Lt Gov Terry Miller, who had only been recently endorsed as the next governor by Jay Hammond "

MILLER, USING his power as lieutenant governor, yanked the tax repeal proposition from the ballot

An "infuriated" Randolph "took Miller to court to reinstate the initiative and started calling for a special session of the legislature to repeal the income tax outright." The high court sided with Randolph and tossed out the scheme that would have retained the income tax, and a special session was called Legislators then repealed the income tax — but only at the point of a petition pen

"The people finally got their way," Randolph said "And what do you know? The Hammond-Miller administration and legislators who fought repeal tried to claim credit for its success "

Nowadays, while we have a $28 billion Permanent Fund with something like $1 4 billion in annual earnings, some argue for an income tax to address the state's fiscal gap Hogwash What we need is the resolve to address how Alaska will use the earnings from its "rainy day" account to fund government. That is, after all, what the Permanent Fund was set up to do

If an income tax somehow were adopted before that issue is settled, it would not be long, we predict, before the second great battle to rid Alaska of an income tax would be under way

There is little doubt how it would turn out.

Naysayers stunt Alaska's vision

By PAUL JENKINS

So, there I was, sitting at a traffic light downtown when this moron tosses a cigarette butt out of his car window' He sees me glaring at him and rolls down his window

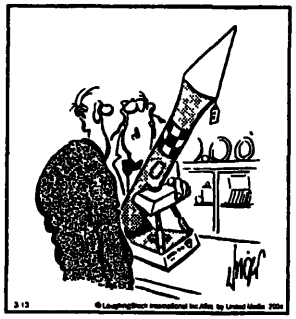
"What are you looking at?" he shouts "Why don't you drop dead?"

"Go tax yourself," I yelled without thinking

"Oh, yeah, dividend cut you, pal," he snarls and drives off As he pulls away, I can see a sticker duct-taped on the rear window of his rusted out Toyota pickup "Me first," it says

Hey, a real Alaskan, I thought

It was not a shining moment, but the brief exchange got me thinking The debate over how to deal with Alaska's pressing fiscal needs is creeping into many aspects of our lives, even our most uncivil discourse



"And for the man who has everything, we have this personal nuclear deterrent."

Like me, you're probably sick to death of it all Do we need an income tax? Can we keep our Permanent Fund dividends? Do we need to change the Permanent Fund to a Percent of Market Value approach? How much, if any, of the $28 billion fund's $1 4 billion in annual earnings should be used to help close Alaska's fiscal gap? Should dividends be enshrined in the state constitution?

Jenkins

Tough questions, but the answers are pretty clear No, we do not need an income tax. We have a huge nest egg that was set up to fund government. Yes, we can, and should, keep our dividends We absolutely should adopt the POMV approach And dividends should not be carved into stone in the constitution. It sends the wrong message — that Alaskans will pay themselves first, before taking care of state needs

It seems logical to me that using the Percent of Market Value approach, withdrawing up to 5 percent annually and using half for dividends and half for government, is the way to go It's neat. It's clean It will not require a massive, expensive bureaucracy to make it work. Most important everybody wins, even the me-firsters

Using state Office of Management and Budget projections, I thought I would compare the POMV 50-50 approach to just letting the status be quo Unfortunately, the budgetary train wreck is expected in fiscal 2007 and that makes such a comparison useless

When the Constitutional Budget Reserve, used over the years to make up budget deficits, goes dry in December 2007, all bets, as former Democratic Gov Steve Cowper once said, are off The Permanent Fund's earnings reserve likely would be the first to go Then, who knows?

There are other, more complicated plans out there — former Gov Jay Hammond comes up with one every 15 minutes or so — but let's just look at the POMV 50-50 projections alone

Under that plan, it is too early to determine how much the individual dividend will be in 2006 because of a host of variables, but the government share likely would be in the neighborhood of $684 million. Estimates are that.

- Dividends in 2007 would be about $1,130, with up to $721 million left for government,
- In 2008, $1,180 dividends, with up to $762 million for government,
- In 2009, $1,220 dividends, with up to $795 million for government,
- In 2010, $1,250 dividends, with up to $825 million for government,
- In 2011, $1,280 dividends, with up to $851 million for government, and,
- In 2012, $1,300 dividends, with up to $877 million for government.

Dividends grow over the years, the government's cut grows The fund is inflation-proofed There is no need for an income tax to bleed the state's most productive citizens and hurt the economy What's not to like?

Not everybody agrees, of course Some Alaskans are just ignorant or have vested interests — politics, legacies, grudges and the like — in portraying the Legislature as a bunch of yahoos that cannot be trusted with anything remotely having to do with the Permanent Fund The idea of lawmakers crafting and putting on the ballot constitutional amendments setting up the POMV approach with a percentage used for dividends and for government gives these folks the vapors

(This is the same Legislature, it should be noted, that has plowed more than $7 2 billion in earnings back into the Permanent Fund corpus over the years — when lawmakers could have spent it almost any way they saw fit.)

With all the half-truths, mischaracterizations, tall tales and outright lies (or antifacts, to avoid offense) floating around, it will be hard to ignore the naysayers, the taxers and those whose stunted vision of Alaska revolves around their dividend check But Alaskans should — and the Legislature must.

This is a time for political and civic courage This year or next, hard questions will demand hard answers, necessity will require thoughtful action.

Those whose voices add little to the debate except the words "no," "can't," and "don't" offer nothing but the promise of onerous taxes and economic chaos We should smile and tell them.

Go tax yourselves

Paul Jenkins is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ALASKA DEMOCRATIC PARTY IS . . .

In a quandry

IF JOHN KERRY becomes the Democratic presidential nominee, Alaska's Democrats will be stuck between a rock and a hard place

Kerry repeatedly has stated that he is opposed to drilling for oil on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

That means the Alaska Democratic Party would have to decide whether to support its national candidate and champion a man who is working against the interests of the vast majority of Alaskans and the economic future of this state

Unless the party leaders here show real gumption and tell the liberal senator from Massachusetts to take a hike, they probably will be stuck with endorsing their national candidate But many Alaskans who normally vote Democratic will be looking for somebody else to vote for, presumably either George Bush or Ralph Nader

Hopefully what happens here will send Kerry and the national Democratic Party a message about Alaskans and what's important to them

Go figure

WHY, DO YOU figure, are Democrats all in a dither about President George Bush's now certified National Guard service during the Vietnam War?

Is this not the same party that a few years back supported Bill Clinton, a Vietnam draft dodger who later showed himself to be a less-than-accomplished liar?

And what about his sidekick Al Gore, who only went to Vietnam for six months as a "journalist" when a regular combat tour at the time was a year? This is the same guy who was trailed by armed bodyguards so that he would not get hurt and could get home in one piece to invent the Internet

Is this not the same party that now finds itself likely to choose a man as its presidential nominee whose anti-war conduct in the 1970s, after his service in Vietnam, was nothing short of questionable, so questionable, in fact, that some charge he offered aid and comfort to the enemy?

And Democrats are worried about Bush's credentials?

The silly season is upon us

Alaska history seems to repeat itself

By LEW M WILLIAMS, JR

Four regular sessions and one special session of the Alaska Legislature spent money but failed to provide revenue to finance their extravagance Members were too beholden to special interests to pass any reasonable tax revenues

Although the same party controlled both houses of the Legislature and the governor's office, that majority party was split Some supported the governor and some opposed him Alaska pleaded poverty although it had lots of money in special funds

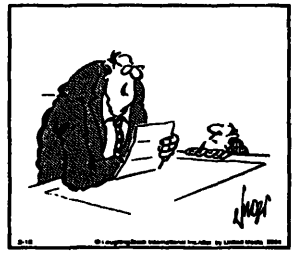
A description of recent legislatures? No It was the legislatures of 1941, '43, '45 and '47, plus a special session in 1946 They provide a lesson for this year's lawmakers come up with a fiscal plan in cooperation with the governor — or else

Williams

The 1947 fiscal crisis started in 1939 when President Franklin Roosevelt, a Democrat, appointed Ernest Gruening as Alaska's governor The governor and secretary of Alaska (lieutenant governor) were presidential appointees and employees of the Interior Department when Alaska was a territory Harold Ickes, described as a cantankerous old token Republican in the Roosevelt Cabinet, was Interior secretary

Gruening headed the division of Territories and Island Possessions in Ickes' department when his political friendship with Roosevelt resulted in his Alaska appointment Ickes and Gruening had clashed over Puerto Rico policy so some said that Ickes kicked Gruening upstairs to get rid of him If so, it proved a Superbowl kick for Alaska

First, Ickes had to fire Gov John Troy, publisher of Juneau's Daily Alaska Empire Troy's ill health was given as the reason for his "resignation" on Aug 29, 1939 But his refusal to support a 3 percent tax increase on gold mining, sought by Ickes, was the real reason for his departure



"This says you have a tendency to grovel."

Troy Democrats viewed Gruening as a carpetbagger He clashed with old-timers over his support of equal rights for Natives, over statehood, over freight rates and over taxes Alaskans and most companies doing business in Alaska paid no territorial taxes — no income tax, no sales tax, no property tax, no license tax Token taxes on salmon, liquor, motor fuel, mining and auto licenses provided 92 5 percent of the territory's revenue

Territorial lawmakers met every other year and enacted a two-year budget There was a war on during the '43 and '45 sessions, so it was up to the '47 session to do something to support programs that they and previous sessions enacted — teachers' and territorial workers' pay raises, veterans' benefits, increased aid to dependent children, a new Department of Health and so forth

Instead, the 1947 lawmakers fought — fought the governor and fought among themselves The House passed an income tax 21-2 (one member missing) The Senate killed it 9-7 It also killed a proposed property tax 10-6, split along governor/anti-governor lines Ketchikan pharmacist Sen Norman (Doc) Walker, a Democrat and a colorful orator, led the anti-governor Walker Bloc It supported the Alaska canned salmon industry, which was the oil industry of its day

When the '47 session ended, it had spent $10 million with an anticipated income of $6 million Secretary of Alaska Lew Williams Sr wrote in his Wrangell Sentinel column that the Legislature "could point with pride to having killed proposed revenue measures, except boosting the price of a good drink"

The territory had pots of money, much like the state today, but couldn't touch it There was a surplus of $9 million in the unemployment compensation fund and smaller amounts dedicated to other programs

The lawmakers thought they had the governor stymied They included in the budget an amount to fund a special session The governor fooled them He didn't call the session Under territorial law, the lawmakers couldn't call themselves into session or touch dedicated funds That led to a ban on dedicated funds when the state constitution was written

Gruening called his Board of Administration together It cancelled all capital projects, including money for Ketchikan harbors, and froze payouts except for pensions and teachers' and state employees' pay

By the 1948 election, Alaskans were fed up Most of the Walker Bloc declined to seek re-election Walker himself ran last in a four-way race for two senate seats Thirteen of 40 lawmakers, almost a third, who served in the '45 and '47 sessions — the anti-governor, anti-statehood bloc — were gone in '49

The 1949 lawmakers enacted seven tax measures including the income tax It cost some of them re-election, but it solved Alaska's first fiscal problem And some — Jim Nolan of Wrangell, Bill Beltz of Nome, John Butrovich of Fairbanks and Bill Egan of Valdez — continued serving Alaskans for many years as real statesmen

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
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A COMPANY EXISTS TO SERVE . . .

Its customers

POLITICIANS WHO decry the flight of some manufacturing and service jobs to overseas locations are forgetting — or ignoring — one of the fundamental rules of business

Companies exist to serve their customers A company's employees obviously are an all-important resource and its shareholders must be kept happy, but any business that exists primarily to provide jobs for its employees or dividends for its shareholders is destined to fail The jobs ultimately will be lost, the employees will be thrown out of work and the shares will be worthless

In recent years, many business operations have been moved overseas, where lower wage rates allow products to be manufactured, sold and serviced at significantly less cost than if the jobs were performed in the United States

That provides customers with lower-priced products, which they demand If they can't get them cheaply enough from one company, they will buy from another If you don't believe what we are saying, save this editorial and read it again the next time you go shopping at a discount store like Wal-Mart, Costco or Fred Meyer

THERE ARE often good reasons to buy American-made products — and in some cases American workers can make better products than their foreign counterparts But that quality difference is vitally important, if manufacturers in this country lose both the quality and price competition — or even if the quality is the same and the foreign product is cheaper — shoppers will almost always go for the cheaper version.

John Kerry has been telling factory workers in the Midwest that he will provide tax breaks to keep companies from moving their operations overseas To a certain extent that can succeed — and taking lower taxes from a factory here instead of zero taxes from a company overseas indeed is preferable.

But many manufacturing jobs just can't be saved. If a worker in India will perform the same job for $5 a day that an American worker must be paid $100 a day or more, the competition is lost and can't be saved with tax breaks And that $5 per day can make the Indian worker the best-paid person in his or her neighborhood, so exploitation is not a real issue

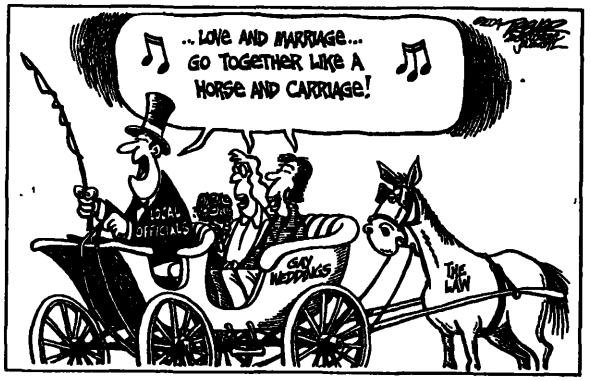
Change is inevitable and many workers must change careers several times in their working lives A few generations ago, that was not true, jobs could easily last a lifetime But the world continues to evolve

There is a place for government in resolving the problem But the federal government would serve the public better by encouraging new economic development and the jobs it brings.

That would include supporting things like exploring for oil and gas on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Such development could easily be made environmentally benign and create hundreds of thousands of new and good-paying jobs for American workers.

Kids well prepared for prison life

By ELISE PATKOTAK



I realize that trying to get any given part of Alaska's elected and appointed leaders to stop tossing the fiscal gap around like a hot potato at a Fourth of July picnic game is probably asking for more than anyone is able to give But I don't think all the blame belongs to the people sitting in Juneau Some of it does, but not all of it

A lot of it belongs to individual Alaskans who keep sending the message to Juneau that they don't want to pay for services but, by gosh, those services they use had better not be cut Cut services someone else uses Because the services someone else uses must be where the bloat is

The problem with running state government based on the theory that you can always cut more services and save more money so long as you don't cut my services, is that the people who get left out of the equation are the ones with the least amount of political clout and the least amount of power They are the ones least able to stand up and articulate what the constant cuts have done to them

Patkotak

The other problem you run into is that instead of funding government services based on what is best for us, for our society as a whole, programs get funded based on who can generate the loudest voice or most threaten a politician's re-election chances

Possibly the most disenfranchised group in society are children without family or parents to advocate for them While you will go to the school board meeting and make sure you are heard if cuts threaten a program your child needs to succeed, there is no one usually available to go represent the child in state custody whose needs will not be met because of budget cuts Theirs is a silent scream that turns no heads and changes no votes

And it's even worse if you are a teenager in state custody because then you don't even have the cute factor working for you — the "Awww" factor that at least helps little children tug at society's heartstrings

Teen-agers are not generally the most attractive group and these are not generally their most attractive years And so their needs come so low in the pecking order that I find myself wondering why we don't just build orphanages to warehouse them till they are 18

It would be better than the hodgepodge of sometimes questionable services we cobble together now in an attempt to meet their needs while keeping our fingers crossed that funding doesn't get cut again and create another hole in the net.

Last year, some budget cuts in the Office of Children's Services were turned over to the individual regions to handle I guess the thinking was that the regions would best know where they could cut with the least amount of pain So the region with which I work most frequently decided it had to cut $5 a day from its augmented rates given to foster parents who take in special needs kids

That's $5 a day — $150 or so a month — cut and gone Many of these foster parents use every cent they get to place these children in any program available that might help them become productive citizens of our state They aren't getting rich off these payments Anyone who has ever tried to feed and clothe a normal teen-ager knows how high that cost can be On top of that, these foster parents are dealing with children who demand more of their time, energy and emotion than any of us can possibly imagine

They took these kids in based on a promise from the state that they would be supported in their efforts Apparently that promise only held true for so long as it was convenient to the state And when it wasn't, the money was cut.

Some of these kids will no longer get the services they need. Some will have to leave their foster homes because the foster parents can no longer afford them They will go to group homes, which will cost the state a lot more than the foster home did. And ultimately, no matter how good the group home is, the kids will emerge from it more comfortable with institutions than families

All of which I guess is good since statistics show that most of these kids will then spend a large part of their adult life in jail And no politician has ever lost an election by building more jails.

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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WHAT ABOUT JUNKETS?

We love'em

ADDRESSING A joint session of the Legislature some days ago, Sen Ted Stevens mentioned on several occasions the importance of having top federal officials from Washington coming to Alaska to see firsthand what this state is all about

Last year, he said, seven members of President Bush's Cabinet made visits here — an unprecedented number in any one given year The benefits are almost countless

His comments were a reminder of a position we have long voiced here Specifically, we love junkets — as all too often these trips by dignitaries are called

In other parts of the country, in other media circles, federal administrators and members of Congress who come to Alaska are often targets of criticism, rude barbs, and off-base quips from comics The trips are branded as holidays paid for at taxpayer expense, fishing trips under the guise of phony official business, and mere puff excursions for no purpose

There are a number of groups posing as watchdogs of government waste who love to criticize what they like to call junketeering

From an Alaska standpoint, this backbiting is shortsighted and foolish Alaska needs government officials to come here These are people who all too often have no concept of the size of this state, of the magnitude of the challenges that face Alaskans, of the immense ways that Alaska differs from other states in the Union

Too often, Alaska has been penalized by a congressional cookie-cutter approach to legislation that tries to make one size fit all

That's the battle being fought on a daily basis by Sen Stevens and his partner in the Senate, Lisa Murkowski, and their compatriot in the House, Rep Don Young

Seeing Alaska up close is invariably an eye-opener for those who have never been here

If it takes more and more junkets to achieve an understanding of Alaska, let's bless those who make them possible

Sen Steven is right on target. As usual

The Gore curse

SINCE AL GORE backed Howard Dean for president and Dean then lost 17 straight state contests and dropped out, does that mean Gore will now stay out of presidential politics?

Probably not, but in the future any Democratic candidate who sees Gore's endorsement coming may want to run the other way

Amendment debate could be good

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Not again We are the only Western country to have legalized abortion by judicial fiat rather than by democratic approval of the people or the legislature Are we going to do it again with gay marriage?

We know what short-circuiting democracy does Thirty years after Roe v Wade, abortion still brings masses of demonstrators into the streets Roe v Wade, Ruth Bader Ginsburg once said, "halted a political process that was moving in a reform direction and thereby, I believe, prolonged divisiveness and deferred stable settlement of the issue"

A similar "reform direction" on homosexuality has been underway for years There is no doubt that increasing tolerance of homosexuality, reappraisal of marriage and common sympathy for fellow citizens would have led inexorably to the spread of civil unions (which I favor) — and, as they became customary and were evaluated in the light of experience, perhaps to broad acceptance of gay marriage as well

Instead, the courts have once again been commandeered to impose a revolution from on high.

At least abortion was dictated by the national committee of wise men, aka the Supreme Court But because of the Full Faith and Credit clause of the Constitution (which makes every state accept "the public Acts, Records, and judicial Proceedings of every other State"), gay marriage can be imposed on the entire country by a bare majority of the state supreme court of but one state This in a country where about 60 percent of the citizenry opposes gay marriage

President Bush supports a constitutional amendment to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. I am troubled by any constitutional amendment that is not about democratic governance But the activists have forced the issue What is the alternative to nationalized gay marriage imposed by the Supreme Court of Massachusetts?

The 1996 Defense of Marriage Act? Nonsense It pretends to allow the states to reject marriage licenses issued in other states But there is not a chance in hell that the Supreme Court will uphold it.

Predictably, Massachusetts Democrats are on the attack. John Kerry charges the president with seeking "a wedge issue to divide the American people" Ted Kennedy amplifies "It's about politics — an attempt to drive a wedge between one group of citizens and the rest of the country, solely for partisan advantage"

Wedge? Marriage has been around for, oh, 5,000 years In every society, in every place, in every time it has been defined as an opposite-sex union Then four robed eminences in Boston decree otherwise With the stroke of a pen, they radically redefine the most ancient of all social institutions And then those not quite prepared to accept this undebated, unlegislated, unvoted, unnegotiated revolution are the ones accused of creating a political wedge!

Who is dividing the country? Was it the Republican National Committee that told the Massachusetts court to make May 17, the midst of a hotly contested election year, the day on which gay marriage is to be imposed for the first time in America?

A front-page Post "analysis" piece asserts that with the constitutional amendment the president is ready "to rekindle the culture wars" Who did the kindling here? It was the mayor of San Francisco, who, in violation of California law and in the middle of the 2004 election campaign, issued the first same-sex marriage licenses in American history

Bush had no desire to get involved in this issue If not for the activism in Boston and San Francisco, it would not be an election issue at all Boston and San Francisco have made the question very stark. We are going to have national gay marriage or we are not. "States' rights" is a phony — and ironic — alternative that will not withstand constitutional muster

I welcome the debate on the constitutional amendment because it will shift the locus of this issue from unelected judges to where it belongs the House and the Senate and the 50 state legislatures.

In the end, however, I would probably vote against the amendment because for me the sanctity of the Constitution trumps everything, even marriage Moreover, I would be loath to see some future democratic consensus in favor of gay marriage (were that to come to pass) blocked by such an amendment.

Nonetheless, that does not render the abusive, ad hominem charges made by the marriage revolutionaries — that it is their opponents who are divisive and partisan — any less hypocritical.

Gay activists and their judges have every right to revolution They have every right to make their case But they deserve to be excoriated when, having thrown their cultural Molotov cocktail and finding that the majority of Americans have the temerity to resist, they cry Culture war!

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co

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LIBRARY LEGISLATION RESTORES PARENTS' . . .

Right to know

HAVE YOU EVER wondered when in history it was decided that librarians' views on privacy somehow trumped parents rights? Were you at that meeting? We missed it

It turns out that libraries across the state do not have to tell parents whether junior is studying how to make explosives, cook up crack, commit suicide or understand the finer principles of devil worship They have, after all, their privacy

One librarian said allowing parents to know such things would allow them "to wield an 'iron glove' " over their children, the local daily reports Good grief

Wasilla Republican Sen Lyda Green is pushing legislation that would give parents the right to view their children's library records in all public libraries They already can look at those records in school libraries

It is a great idea, and unsurprisingly, Green's legislation is speeding through the Legislature on a fast track.

Green says the measure in part was prompted by a call from a mother in the Mat-Su Borough whose 8-year-old son put several books on hold When one became available, the library called and the mother asked what it was, but the library refused to tell her anything about the book because of privacy concerns

SOME LIBRARIANS are not happy with Green's legislation. Michael Catoggia, president of the Alaska Library Association, says Senate Bill 269 is intrusive

Intrusive? What truly is intrusive is librarians deciding that what they want somehow is more important than a parent's absolute need to know. Well, librarians might say, if you want to know about your children's reading habits, just ask them Do they really believe that a child checking out books sure to make mom or dad edgy will just own up when asked? It's enough to make you wonder whether folks who say such things are just naive or have never had children.

The problem with this nation today, compounded by government interference in the family, is that too many parents have abdicated their role as the "iron glove" in their children's lives Too many parents, it seems, could not care less about what their kids are reading — or whether they are reading at all But those who do care, those who understand that information is a powerful tool in helping to guide their kids through the dangerous rocks and shoals of childhood, should not be denied library records.

What the librarians opposed to Sen. Green's measure do not seem to get is that parents, and parents alone, are responsible for their children. Overzealous librarians overstep when they interfere in that relationship

Sen. Green's legislation will go a long way toward restoring parents' rights in this particular area.

She should be commended.

Leave business of miracles to God

By WALTER E. WILLIAMS

In Marcus Cook Connelly's spiritual play, "Green Pastures," God lamented to the Angel Gabriel, "Every time Ah passes a miracle, Ah has to pass fo' or five mo' to ketch up wid it," and adding, "Even bein' God ain't no bed of roses "

That's something our congressmen should think about when they set out to create miracles George Will wrote an insightful article in the Feb 12 Washington Post titled, "Sweet and Sour Subsidies " He might have just as well titled it, "Shooting Ourselves in the Foot."

Chicago has been home to many of America's candy manufacturers, but today they've fallen on hard times In 1970, employment by Chicago's candy manufacturers totaled 15,000, and now it's 8,000 and falling Brach used to employ about 2,300 people, now most of its jobs are in Mexico Ferrara Pan Candy has also moved much of its production to Mexico

Yes, wages are lower in Mexico, but wages aren't the only factor in candy manufacturers' flight from America After all, Life Savers, which for 90 years manufactured in America, has moved to Canada, where wages are comparable to ours

Williams

One of the ignored stories in the clamor and demagoguery over job losses, not only in the candy industry but in others as well, is the devastating impact of congressionally created "miracles" on our industries

American sugar producers fight tooth and nail to keep foreign sugar imports out of our country They've spent $722,000 in campaign contributions to both Democratic and Republican congressmen to enact sugar import tariffs and quotas

As a result of their successful effort to get Congress to do their bidding, our domestic sugar prices are about three times higher than the world market price While that's a miracle for the sugar industry and its employees, unfortunately, the miracle story doesn't end there We all know that for every benefit there's a cost

According to the Sugar Users' Association, an organization that represents companies who use sugar as an input, such as candy manufacturers, the protectionist miracle that Congress has created for the sugar industry has cost anywhere from 7,500 to 10,000 jobs in sugar-using industries due to higher sugar costs

Higher sugar costs make U.S candy manufacturers less competitive in both domestic and world markets Life Savers became more competitive simply by moving to Canada — it saved itself a whopping $10 million dollars a year in sugar costs

You might ask "How come sugar's cheaper in Canada? Are they a free trade country?" The answer is a big fat no It's just that they don't have much, if any, of a sugar industry, and hence there's little pressure on the Canadian Parliament to enact protectionist measures

So what should Congress do? In the real world, when Congress enacts a miracle for one group of Americans, such as sugar producers, it creates a non-miracle for other Americans Should Congress create a miracle for the sugar-using industry to offset the devastating effects of its miracle for sugar producers — like keeping imported candy out of the United States?

I don't know how that might work, but I'm betting they'll run into the same problem God explained so aptly to the Angel Gabriel when He said, "Every time Ah passes a miracle, Ah has to pass fo' or five mo' to ketch up wid it."

Surely, if Congress creates a miracle for candy manufacturers, that miracle is going to create a non-miracle for somebody else — at least those who eat candy or own candy retail stores

Here's my suggestion for Congress. Just remember God's lament "Even bein God ain't no bed of roses," and get out of the miracle business

Walter E. Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc., 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045; (310) 337-7003.

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EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT INCOME TAXES ARE . . .

Very harmful

THE USUAL suspects are hard at work, pushing for an income tax even before the issue of using Permanent Fund earnings to support state government — as the fund's founders envisioned — is resolved

They say the Legislature should adopt "a small income tax," and that such a levy, in conjunction with a "minimal" use of fund earnings and other measures, could fix the state's looming fiscal gap

The problems with that approach are myriad. It assumes a "small income tax," or more accurately, a pay cut for working Alaskans, will remain small History shows it will not

Alaska first imposed an income tax in 1949, while still a territory The levy amounted to 10 percent of an individual's federal tax liability It later grew to a graduated tax of from 3 percent to 14 5 percent of an individual's adjusted gross income, a sizable increase over the years The tax, to the dismay of those who want government to have a direct line to your bank account, was repealed in 1980 as oil wealth washed over the state

Since then, taxers have tried every ploy to have it reinstated It would give Alaskans a closer connection to their government, they say It would affect only the "rich," they say It will be good for the state, they say Hogwash

IF INCOME taxes give you better government, why are most of the states that have one running huge deficits caused by overspending spurred by — what else? — income tax revenue? How do you explain the inefficiencies of government in California, or New York or New Jersey? Where is that closer connection, that better government?

Are such taxes across the country aimed at the "rich" among us? Not on your life State income tax rates in California, without considering deductions, are 9 3 percent for an individual making $38,000, in Arkansas, 7 percent for somebody making as little as $26,700, in Georgia, 6 percent of $7,000 in annual income About half the states with income taxes actually tax individuals whose income is below the federal poverty line

Even former Gov Jay Hammond's scheme to tax only Permanent Fund dividends to help fill Alaska's budget gap would have taken the dividends from those making just over $15,000 in Alaska Hardly the wealthiest of our citizens

Would such a tax be good for Alaska? Absolutely not In study after study, researchers have found that state income taxes hamper job growth and personal income growth, and stifle the economy A state income tax would have the same effects here

Instead of pushing to give working Alaskans a pay cut just to keep the flow of free money coming in the form of dividends, the usual suspects should turn their attention to resolving the real question.

How can the Permanent Fund's earnings best be used to underwrite government?

Light 99 candles for Lorene Harrison

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

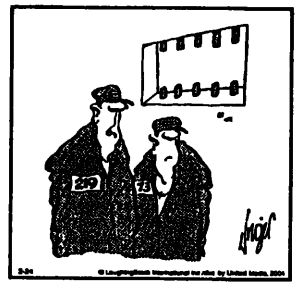
ONE OF Anchorage's great ladies, Lorene Harrison, will celebrate her 99th birthday on March 7 — just a week from today She arrived in town in 1928, and over the years did much to shape the social scene in Anchorage during the last 30 years of Alaska's territorial days and well into the statehood years She was a force in Anchorage's music and cultural circles, and a businesswoman who owned one of the town's most successful shops for women's wear, the Hat Box. She has lived in the Pioneers Home for a number of years, and is pretty much confined to a wheelchair — but she dresses each day, as she has in all her years in Anchorage, in the best of fashions And she loves to receive cards and letters You can send her birthday greetings in care of the Anchorage Pioneers' and Veterans' Home, Room 211, 923 W 11th Avenue, Anchorage 99501

Tobin

A SALUTE, too, to the good folks who annually sponsor The Grande Affaire, a St. Patrick's holiday tradition that benefits the American Diabetes Association. The festive dinner, dancing and auctioneering is scheduled March 13 at the Hilton Hotel It's a $100-a-person gala that will be highlighted by presentation of the 2004 Golden Rose Award to Anchorage physician Dr Jeanne Bonar Call 272-1424 for reservations

CITYSCAPE: Tiffany's restaurant in that little corner shopping mall at Benson and Denali now is offering full-service breakfasts, Monday through Saturday Which means that right here at home we can have breakfast at Tiffany's

We're still a long way from breakup, but plans already are afoot for this year's Chamber of Commerce citywide cleanup week. The effort will kick off on Monday, May 3 Last year, volunteers collected more than 7 million pounds of trash to help the city get ready for summer



"We were finding it very hot in here, Warden "

ZOMBIE FLIGHT: Those who like to ride on airplanes will love the flight Singapore Airlines now offers It's a nonstop trip from Los Angeles to Singapore The inaugural flight a couple of weeks ago took 18 hours and 8 minutes The only thing that might make it survivable is a stand-up lounge in business class, but those traveling in coach have no such luck There is no first-class aboard this particular Airbus jet

REMEMBER WHEN: Former Mayor George Byer, a postman when he was elected as the city's head man, is credited with being the first to advocate Anchorage as the site of the Olympic Winter Games He began beating the drums in the mid-'60s Forty years later, it still hasn't happened Sir John Franklin, in a journal entry on Aug 16, 1826, during his second Arctic voyage, gave the name Prudhoe Bay to the place where 142 years later the state struck it rich in oil Unfortunately, the explorer left no word on why he chose the name, and apparently nobody ever since has been able to trace its source In January 1971, Taku winds blasted Juneau and forced cancellation of a parade that had been scheduled in honor of William A Egan as he welcomed the opening session of the seventh state Legislature Just a few weeks before, Egan had begun his third term as governor, returning to office after sitting out four years

PHOTO CREDITS: Three pictures taken in Alaska won honors in the 14th annual Aviation Week & Space Technology's photo contest Mark Farmer won an honorable mention for a self-portrait of himself at the controls of an F-15E in flight over snow-capped mountains Another honorable mention salute went to J G Handleman of Annapolis, Md , for his photo of a Cessna floatplane mirrored in the water during a landing at Lake Hood And Priscilla Messnew-Patterson of Kodiak received a third-place award for her shot of the sun rising above the cowling of a de Havilland Beaver on floats at the Kodiak Airport.

MAIL CALL: The Canadian postal service has issued a stamp saluting the Yukon Quest sled dog race, run annually over a thousand-mile course between Whitehorse, YT, and Fairbanks The stamp features a photo by Paul Austring of two dog teams racing side-by-side on First Avenue in Whitehorse. The stamp comes in two denominations 65 cents at the U S A. rate and $1 25 for an international rate

BACK IN Washington, D C , it was a big day in the Senate a couple of weeks ago when the Venerable Norman H. Elliott, a well-known retired Anchorage Episcopal priest, delivered the morning invocation in the U S Senate on Lincoln's Birthday In his prayer, he quoted Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and also his remarks when he left Springfield for Washington to become president With Sen Ted Stevens, he led the senators in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance Father Elliott has served in Alaska for more than 50 years Among other things, he still maintains an active ministry here and elsewhere when called to lend a hand And quite apart from his spiritual activities, he is one of our town's great punsters

AH, BUT THERE are problems in Boulder, Colo , where Perry Odak runs a politically correct grocery called Wild Oats Markets The Denver Post hailed him for selling "only salmon that is farm grown off the coast of Ireland so as not to further deplete wild fish populations " Maybe it's all a matter of taste

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

NARROWER STREETS? THANKS BUT . . .

No thanks

DAN BURDEN, a fellow who is described as an expert on what it takes to make a city pedestrian-friendly and its streets safer, came to town this week and said Northern Lights Boulevard should be reduced to three lanes. Some other thoroughfares hither and yon also should be narrowed.

He painted a verbal picture of a pedestrian-friendly community, including the possibility of transforming Midtown, a place with many rough edges, into a pleasant walking village

The street-narrowing suggestion was — you might say — one lane shy of a road Burden did a quick look-see survey and was critical of the walkability and esthetics of the Midtown roadway, among others

Burden told his rapt media interviewers that narrowing Northern Lights from four lanes to three would allow the sidewalks there to be widened, trees planted and benches installed It would prettify the city, allow people to walk safely in the fresh air, and slow traffic so that motorists could ease off the pedal and smell the roses

He also proposed that more stop lights be installed to further slow traffic. Unfortunately, he didn't say that more stop lights and a narrower roadway would make driving on the critical thoroughfare a nightmare It might indeed be better for walking as long as the pedestrians didn't mind the sight of all those frustrated drivers trying to get through.

Unless an alternate route were built, the heavy traffic normally transiting the road would virtually be slowed to a walk, which perhaps is what Burden intended.

WELL, GOOD for Mr Burden But thanks and no thanks Anchorage does need more sidewalks and, perhaps as important, better sidewalk clearing But the city has other priorities that rank even higher

Burden came to Anchorage at the invitation of the Municipality of Anchorage and the Anchorage Citizens Coalition, a nonprofit group focused on development and community issues.

The walking expert normally hangs his hat in High Springs, Fla., a place that — unlike Anchorage —does not have six months of winter, eight or nine feet of snow a season, months at a time when there is more darkness than daylight, and hardly enough money to plow neighborhood streets — much less to have crews out making paths among the trees and shrubbery of sidewalks, which would be buried under slush and ice during breakup

Nobody who conversed with Mr Burden during his visit apparently told him that Anchorage already is street-starved, far short of the arterials it needs to keep traffic moving now — winter or summer He also might have been reminded that not many people go for long walks, or even short ones, when the temperature is 5 or 10 degrees below zero and the wind is blowing 30 miles an hour from the north.

Burden's report should be mined for any viable and affordable suggestions, the obvious losers can and should be ignored

Case for transcontinental railroad

By SEN JOHN J COWDERY

It's an obscure note in history Had any federal funds been left over from construction of the Panama Canal, they were to be assigned to Alaska railroad construction There were no funds left over, but the way I see it, there is a growing linkage between the Panama Canal and a rail connection between Alaska and the North American rail system

The Panama Canal is becoming obsolete A rail connection would bring the latest technology to a long-established transportation corridor that lacks only the infrastructure of a railroad fully able to carry containerized freight. Bringing all this into sharp focus is the current war on terrorism

A recent report from Aegis Defense Services Ltd on security in maritime transport brings starkly to light the wide range of opportunities for terrorists to utilize oceangoing vessels and containerized freight for delivering weapons or terrorists themselves

. . . Our nation desperately needs an alternative to the Panama Canal, and a railroad connecting the Alaska ports of Seward, Whittier and Anchorage with the North American rail system could be part of that alternative.

I've read the report and it's sobering

In addition, foreign ownership of the Panama Canal, which needs billions of dollars in renovation and upgrades in order to handle the newest generation of tankers and cargo vessels, does not add assurance to our nation's economic well-being in a post 9-11 era.

The Aegis report expresses the concern that the next major terrorist attack could come by ship — by LNG tanker, by bulk carrier, container ship or so-called tramp freighter It's not hard to see why this conclusion is drawn. The true owners of many freighters are difficult to determine, piracy is rampant in parts of Southeast Asia, and few shipping containers are individually inspected in American ports

"Coffee is 50 cents for the first half-hour and 30 cents for each additional half-hour."

A freighter carrying ammonium nitrate, the type of fertilizer that was used in the Oklahoma City attack, could be detonated using a simple GPS-triggered device, closing the Panama Canal

In 1947, a freighter carrying ammonium nitrate exploded in Galveston Bay, killing around 600 while destroying the entire port and the nearby town of Texas City An event of similar or even less destructive force would close the Panama Canal for weeks if not months

Besides exerting terror and loss of life, terrorist organizations can cripple entire economies with such an attack. The Aegis report makes the point that a 10-day strike along the West Coast last year caused our nation billions in lost trade and revenue

The Murkowski administration and I are very optimistic about recent developments involving Alaskan natural gas and its transport to market both in-state and outside Alaska.

These two factors underscore the importance of completing the last transcontinental railroad, in other words, connecting the Alaska Railroad with the Canadian National Railroad in British Columbia. The economic values of such a rail connection are numerous, from lowering the cost of building pipelines to opening new opportunities in winter tourism.

I think there is an added component — national security

Given the world's political climate, our nation desperately needs an alternative to the Panama Canal, and a railroad connecting the Alaska ports of Seward, Whittier and Anchorage with the North American rail system could be part of that alternative

A rail connection to the Lower 48 would be far more secure for no other reason that it will run far from areas targeted by terrorists Railroads bring controlled access, and their very nature limits the amount of damage of even a well-planned attack.

There's a second factor in terms of national security — military access A completed rail connection will allow the military a way to efficiently access our state through the heartland of North America.

The Aegis Report identified a dozen sea lane choke points where the highest danger of terrorist attack exists Of the world's dozen or so major shipping lanes, two connect with Alaska. Just two choke points exist in the Western Hemisphere. the Panama Canal and the Strait of Magellan Add an Alaska rail connection, and there are no choke points between Asia's Pacific ports, Alaska, the East Coast and Western Europe

When the first transcontinental railroad was completed, a major portion of its revenue came from trans-shipping freight from Asia to Europe, because it saved time and losses from shipwrecks at the tip of South America.

Today's modern freighters have less to fear from inclement weather, but as much to fear from piracy and terrorism as did their 19th century forebears A railroad from Alaska into British Columbia may be built on old technology, but the political and economic issues it will solve are very much in the 21st century

John Cowdery represents District I in the Alaska State Senate.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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CAUTIOUS SCRUTINY IN ORDER FOR . . .

School reports

IT WOULD be easy to panic in the face of federal statistics released this week that show Alaska's schools are not doing well under provisions of the stringent No Child Left Behind Act It would be easy, but premature

While something like 58 percent of the state's schools were identified as "inadequate," and 60 percent of Anchorage's schools — including the city's six regular high schools — got the same rating, are things as bleak as they seem? Is the data giving an accurate picture?

We don't think so

While the information — collected for the first time this year — is presenting school authorities across the state with the most detailed picture ever of their schools and their various subgroups of students, it clearly is not telling the whole story

For instance, the act — a one-size-fits-all approach aimed at making schools across the nation accountable — demands all students, from the learning disabled to those who have difficulty with English, attain by 2014 the same standards of proficiency in language arts and math Is that realistic — or even possible?

A large percentage of Anchorage's schools found themselves listed as "inadequate" because students with disabilities or those included in other subgroups did not perform up to standard in language arts and math Is that an accurate picture of the schools?

PERHAPS ITS most bothersome provision is one that requires 95 percent test attendance, not just for a particular school, but for each of the school's subgroups — students of various races, economic status, disabilities and levels of English proficiency

More than one school found itself listed as "inadequate" because one or a handful of students did not show up for the test That provision of the law appears to make test attendance more important than any gains a school might have made over the past year

Then there are problems with how to classify biracial students Which box do you check and how will that affect the final numbers? And what about rural Alaska where some of the act's provisions clearly are unworkable?

Parents who might view this week's information with alarm should remember this is the first year that this type of detailed information has been available, and the law — far from perfect — offers schools 31 different ways to fail while too often making little allowance for success The numbers, as in Anchorage's case, sometimes do not mirror reality

While accountability in schools is long overdue, some provisions of this particular law leave much to be desired It is vital that the detailed information on all students' performance be available to educators, but not at the cost of inaccurately and unfairly labeling a school "inadequate"

That kind of thing can have long-term and unforeseen consequences

Get ready for coin-operated wildlife

By ELISE PATKOTAK

It took me 31 years to convince my brother to come to Alaska. I finally did it by pointing out that he could not consider himself a real fisherman unless he fished in Alaska and he couldn't call himself a golfer if he hadn't golfed in Alaska I think his pride finally forced him to rise to the challenge

It rained the entire week he was here It rained on him as he sat on his charter out of Homer; it rained on him as he golfed in Anchorage, it rained on him as we wandered the Saturday market, it rained on him as we took our 26 Glaciers Cruise, it rained on him as he attempted to fix my screen door He was polite enough not to ask why I would ever need it since the sun obviously never shines in Alaska

Meanwhile, Alaskan wildlife apparently is still boycotting me so by the time we drove up the Seward after the fishing debacle in Homer, I almost caused an accident with my excitement at seeing a Dall sheep by the side of the road At last, proof that we did indeed have wildlife in Alaska As for the views along the highway, I was once again reduced to explaining that if the fog weren't there, he would be seeing sweeping vistas And moose Or at least a stray dog

Patkotak

He didn't get to keep any of the fish he caught while in Homer He brought in four halibut that were considered too small to keep And he didn't get to salmon fish because the weather was so bad the charter captain just decided to come home

Luckily I have some friends down in Homer who gave us halibut and salmon to take home so we wouldn't feel bad about our time there Truth to be told, I wasn't feeling bad at all The day my brother spent getting rained on in Kachemak Bay, I spent in the spa at Land's End getting my pores opened and my back massaged

In order to keep the mystique of Alaska alive in my family's mind, I am forced to resort to telling them that they missed the boat when they didn't take the time to visit me in Barrow I regale them with stories of the Bush and the rugged outdoors that began in my backyard in Barrow In actual fact, my back yard ended at a road that led to other houses in the subdivision but if you looked past all that housing, there was the tundra in the distance

Knowing they will never visit Barrow allows me the freedom to embellish just a little on the experience they would have had if they hadn't wimped out at the thought of crossing the Arctic Circle

I describe a yard full of polar bears, walks surrounded by wolves and rabid foxes, a sea alive with leaping whales and vicious walrus I figure if you're going to fantasize an adventure you should go all the way After all, it's not as though there's any danger they will actually challenge you to take them there

As for Anchorage, I'm just about ready to suggest we use animatronics not unlike those in use at Disneyland We'd only need them in the summer when all our relatives and friends from the Lower 48 arrive so it wouldn't cost much In fact, they could be coin operated so that those of us who used them would pay for them They could be set to work with a little timer so that I could feed them quarters on my way to the airport to pick up my guests, but time it to not start till I was returning

Then, just as we approached that curve when Minnesota mysteriously becomes O'Malley, a moose could lumber out of the trees and start nibbling on the grass and a bear could sit by the side of the road with a little hat on waving to us Maybe we could have a fox sniffing a flower while an eagle salutes the flag

We could arrange it so that the whole drive from the airport was filled with wildlife animatronics acting just the way people from the Lower 48 think animals act No wolf killing a moose No eagle snatching a miniature dachshund. Just peaceful happy animals glad to see all the tourists arriving

Until that happens, I am putting a little rack on my miniature schnauzer's head and getting a bright yellow light for my back yard. After all, these people barely believe Alaska is part of America. Hell, half of them aren't sure Alaska is really on earth. So I'm pretty sure I can fool them into thinking the dog and the light are a moose and the sun

That will just have to work until we figure out a way to train the real things to appear on cue

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

OLD PROBLEMS NEED . . .

New attention

THERE IS little good news in a recent comprehensive federal review of how Alaska goes about caring for its most vulnerable children

The Associated Press reports the state is one of 14 that "failed in every category under new and more rigorous tests that measure not only the bureaucratic process but how children and families are actually being served"

Another 14 states and the District of Columbia failed in six of the seven categories None of the 32 states reviewed passed more than two categories

By any standard, an abysmal effort

Alaska counts more than 2,300 children in its child welfare system, and most of them are in foster care or in some type of out-of-home placement, the AP reports

Federal reviewers, who took a close look at 50 child protection cases in Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough during a year-long period, concluded Alaska did few things right It "failed to meet national standards for preventing repeat mistreatment, preventing mistreatment of children in foster care, providing stable foster care, resolving adoption quickly or reuniting the family," the AP reported

THE PROBLEMS are not new One need only look at past Alaska Division of Legislative Audit reports on the Division of Family and Youth Services — now the Office of Children's Services — to conclude state efforts have been bedeviled by problems, including everything from runaway caseloads, to staffing levels, to poor management, to failures to investigate reports of harm All of that is in addition to the periodic horror stories that surface regarding abuse or neglect of children in the state system

It is beyond time for the state to address the problems No more excuses, no more delay We are talking in many cases about children in danger whose welfare must rank at the top of this state's priorities We can either ensure they are protected and adequately cared for when they are young — or we can build prisons to warehouse them later

Department of Health and Social Services officials say they are trying to fix some of the problems found in the review They say they have reorganized, and are counting on a new, $15 million computer system to help caseworkers keep track of their charges Those are all steps in the right direction, but more is needed

The agency submitted an improvement plan to federal authorities in July, the AP reported, and it awaits approval from the U S Department of Health and Human Services States under scrutiny have two years to improve or face losing federal child welfare funds

Whatever the driving force — doing right by our kids or the prospect of losing federal dollars — it is imperative that Alaska quickly improve its lackluster performance when it comes to its most helpless residents

We must tolerate no less

Four-star general heads newest command

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

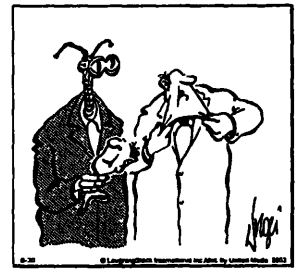
THE HEAD OF the nation's newest joint military command — one specifically created to coordinate the defense of the American homefront — was in Anchorage a few weeks ago, touching base with folks at the Alaskan Command Air Force Gen Ralph E (Ed) Eberhart is the four-star chief of the Northern Command, put in place last October with a mission that embraces all air, land and sea approaches to the continental United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico and the surrounding water extending 500 nautical miles from the coast. It also embraces the Gulf of Mexico, Puerto Rico and the U S Virgin Islands Eberhart's headquarters is at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colo, where he also serves as commander of the North American Aerospace Command

AFTER 6 1/2 YEARS AS a colonel, Gen Eberhart became one of the Air Force's quickest risers Promoted to colonel on Nov 1, 1984, it was not until March 1, 1991, that he earned his first star as a brigadier general He became a major general on July 1, 1993, and moved up to lieutenant general two years later

Tobin

Two years after that, he received his fourth star A 1968 graduate of the Air Force Academy, Eberhard is a command pilot with more than 4,500 hours in the cockpit, flying everything from a T-38 to the F-16 and F-15 fighter jets and the C-21 cargo jet And if you noticed that Hawaii is not under his protective wing, congratulations for paying close attention. The reason Hawaii is the responsibility of the U S Pacific Command Now you know

WHILE ON MILITARY affairs, let's turn back and recall the late Bob Hope's many trips to visit American troops on the front lines from World War II through the Gulf War One Web site filled with fascinating historical ma-



"Quick, put it on. Someone's coming!"

terial — including newspaper clips from the famed comedian's own scrapbooks — displays a copy of Hope's official "Application for Permit to Enter Alaska," filed in September 1942 with the Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, Civil Affairs Division On the application his name was listed as "Lester Townes Hope (Known as Bob Hope)" Whether "Lester" was a clerk's typographical error is not known, because throughout his life Hope said his real first name was "Leslie" No matter The application form gave his permanent address as 10346 Moorpark St, North Hollywood, Calif, with Eltham, England, listed as his place of birth

DIDN'T REMEMBER that such a document was required during the war years, but it obviously was — and no doubt some really old-timers hereabouts can attest to that But did have first-hand experience in later territorial days when the feds made Alaskans pass through Customs in Seattle when traveling to and from the rest of America

IN BOB HOPE'S case, his application to enter Alaska included a mug-shot photo of him wearing a polka-dot bow tie A print of his right thumb was smudged in an appropriate box In an area calling for "Description of Applicant," the answers were "Height, 5' 11 3/4 Weight, 178 Eyes, brown Hair, brown. Complexion, Medium Age, 39" Concerning "Scars and marks," the application noted "Scar on left arm" Said the Army at the bottom of the form "The above-named applicant is hereby authorized to enter the territory of Alaska for the purpose indicated in this application." The attachment presumably said Hope, who died last month at the age of 100, was headed north to entertain troops at Fort Richardson.

AS A FURTHER bit of trivia about this great American entertainer, another undated Web site entry listed the contents of "Mr Hope's Suitcase" during his later trips His luggage included. "Pajamas, robe, slippers, razor, Water-Pik, socks (wool and silk for dress), jogging shoes, dress shoes, sports shoes, handkerchiefs (silk and white), hair brushes (2), Alka Seltzer, Norelco (02) capsules, nail kit, Brut 33, ties, shirts (sports and dress — make sure stays are in collar), undershorts and undershirts, sweaters for golf, golf pants, suits, tux (dress shirt, black bow tie, cuff links, studs)" There was a separate "small black case," containing "Medicine, vitamins, mouth wash, tooth paste, shaving brush, Gilette shaving cream, comb" Such was travel to the war fronts

THAT WAS THEN, and this is now — and if you can wait long enough, a couple of big-time sessions are headed our way According to the Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau, the five-day, 70th annual conference of Ducks Unlimited will be held here in 2007 The expected 1,600 delegates will tax Anchorage's convention facilities to the max. In 1995, the first time the organization met here, 1,500 delegates were on hand More than 600 delegates are expected for the seven-day annual convention of the American Association of Port Authorities in 2008 The September gathering also will be the second time in Anchorage for the association The first was in 1992

SUNDAY PUNDAY: A short guy who claimed to be a fortune teller escaped from prison at Seward The warden called State Troopers and asked them to be on the lookout for a small medium at large

William J. Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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25044122498

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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Senior editor

WHAT MOTIVATES THE . . .

Iraqi killers?

IT IS DIFFICULT for Americans to understand the motivations of the people in Iraq who attacked the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad and killed at least 20 men and women working to help restore the economic and social life of the country

It is beyond the grasp of reasonable people to understand the apparent hatred that Iraqi followers of Saddam Hussein have for American forces that liberated the country from a cruel despot, and as a result keep up deadly attacks on U S troops still in Iraq

A suicide bomber drove an explosive-laden cement truck into the U N building on Tuesday, but the assault clearly was not a one-man show The driver who killed himself in the horrific blast carried out the evil work of others lurking in the night

If these killers would put half as much effort into actually trying to rebuild their country and to provide their own people with a decent life, the situation in Iraq would be vastly different than it is.

Surely these committed followers of Saddam represent a minor fraction of the Iraqi population Yet their murderous actions delay the efforts of the U S and the U N to bring stability, peace and a measure of prosperity to a society that had been devastated and enslaved by the evil reign of Saddam

CLEARLY THERE are deep cultural differences that divide Western thinking from that of those whose heritage is rooted in the ancient sands of Iraq

But the rage to kill that is embedded in the hearts of some of these Iraqi guerrilla killers is as sad as it is deadly

If these killers would put half as much effort into actually trying to rebuild their country and to provide their own people with a decent life, the situation in Iraq would be vastly different than it is

They are empowered, instead, by what apparently is a vast array of arms and ammunition — and a terrible lack of a civilized maturity They have lived in poverty, they have grown into manhood without an education beyond a few years of elementary schooling, and they know no life but one of struggle amid dirt and dust and hopelessness

And they evidently cannot comprehend that foreigners among them are there to offer a helping hand

Their resentment of this reflects a jealousy that threatens the future of their country

And they make it plain that the task of bringing Iraq out from the dark age of Saddam will not be one quickly accomplished

Sadly, many innocent people will die in the process This is one of the legacies of Saddam

What did Greenpeace expect anyway?

By LEW M. WILLIAMS, JR

When a Greenpeace contingent arrived in Ketchikan on their 237-foot yacht, complete with helicopter and speedboats, their reception was cool except among a few local environmentalists

Greenpeace's representative in Alaska, Melanie Duchin of Anchorage, said "As an Alaskan and an American, I'm shocked at the way Ketchikan has reacted to our visit. The city's attempts to silence us are not typical of Alaskans, and they will not prevent us from continuing on with this tour or our efforts to protect the nation's endangered forests "

Why did Ketchikan residents resent the Greenpeace visit?

Early this summer a Montana newspaper reported that more than 100 Greenpeace activists were encamped in Bitterroot National Forest, training for non-violent protests to block timber harvest in national forests

Williams

It reported "This summer, Greenpeace will send one of its notorious activist-piloted boats to Alaska to draw attention to unwanted logging in the Tongass National Forest "

A story out of Washington, D C , in June quoted House Resources Committee Chairman Richard W Pombo (R-Calif) "Dr (Patrick) Moore's remarks today were a breath of fresh air When a founding member of Greenpeace tells you that today's so-called environmental organizations have abandoned science and logic for zero-tolerance extremism, it carries a lot of weight "

In past years there were stories of Greenpeace's protests around the world Greenpeace protesters recently blocked a train carrying U S corn to Mexico, alleging the corn was genetically engineered, thus unsafe

Greenpeace is planning a visit to Liberia, not to aid the thousands of civilians killed, injured or orphaned by 10 years of civil war, but to express concern about "the last remaining tract of the Upper Guinean Rainforest "

"I'll have a coffee and a Danish to go "

Greenpeace claims 70 percent of the heart of Tongass National Forest has been harvested Where it got that figure without setting foot on the ground is a mystery The Forest Service's land management plan shows that 83 percent of Tongass timber will remain unharvested and unroaded old growth at the end of the next 120 years

Greenpeace implies the Tongass is threatened by huge timber companies poised to clearcut the land, and claims the Tongass is the most heavily logged national forest. Both claims are absolutely wrong Also wrong is the statement that Tongass logging was subsidized.

Greenpeace implies that salmon are threatened in the Tongass The Alaska Department of Fish and Game web site shows that salmon catches in Southeast Alaska since 1990 have been at record levels and game populations are good There is even a season for taking wolves

Without scientific experts on its staff, without even getting off their yacht to look at the woods, those people conduct a fear campaign by press release to raise money to support their gadfly lifestyle

In the words of another Greenpeace founder, Paul Watson, upset over the hijacking of the organization by radicals "It doesn't matter what is true, it only matters what people believe to be true Greenpeace became a myth and a myth-generating machine "

Then on July 29, from a press conference in San Francisco, Ketchikan residents learned about the M V Esperanza's "Endangered Forests, Endangered Freedom Tour "

The first stop would be Ketchikan Aug 6 "Alaska's fifth largest city and the center of the entrenched timber industry in Southeast Alaska. In the past, Greenpeace has encountered hostility from the logging community in this region Gravina Island (just west of Ketchikan) could be the first roadless area to fall prey to large-scale industrial logging if the U S Forest Service successfully gutts the Roadless Area Conservation Rule Greenpeace will join forces with local activists, community members and scientific experts throughout the Southeast Alaska region to investigate and expose environmental crimes in this endangered forest."

With Greenpeace's well-publicized background and such rhetoric aimed at Steve Seley's small Pacific Log sawmill on Gravina Island, what welcome did Greenpeace expect in Ketchikan? There are almost as many Greenpeace activists on their yacht as the 20 to 30 people employed at the Ketchikan area's lone timber processor It is unsurprising that the Ketchikan Borough Assembly and the Ketchikan Chamber of Commerce passed resolutions advocating no cooperation with Greenpeace

Why cooperate with an organization that didn't come to Alaska to learn but to preach further economic restrictions based on myths? Alaskans have participated in management of the Tongass over 100 years that is so successful that it attracts visitors, including Greenpeace, and will for more than the next 100 years

Southeast Alaskans thank the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce for its support in opposing the roadless rule but find it exasperating to be lectured by a Southcentral resident on how we should greet those with whom we disagree

As disagreeable as Greenpeace can be, Ketchikan residents didn't dump cold water on the Greenpeace visitors, as happened to some with an unpopular message in Southcentral In fact, Ketchikan's city dock was cleared between cruise ship arrivals to allow the Greenpeace vessel to tie up and take on fresh water, civilly

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

HANDICAPPED PARKING IS FOR THE . . .

Handicapped

THE MORE WE look into this business of people illegally using parking spaces for the handicapped we find additional reasons why existing laws should be rigorously enforced

For example, we are informed that it is not enough for a handicapped person who has been issued a special parking pass to be merely in the vehicle when it is pulled into a restricted spot near the grocery store door

That person actually must exit the vehicle and personally attend to the shopping — or enter the movie theater or the restaurant, as the case may be

The handicap parking space is not to be used by a non-handicapped driver, in other words, while the one who is impaired remains in the vehicle

In short, the handicap permit is a singular, personalized thing It belongs to one person, and one person only It is to be used by that person, and no one else It is not to be used by a non-handicapped person, even if the one to whom the permit was issued is left sitting in the car

Moreover, those who park in handicap spaces without a permit — and there is a lot of that going on around town — are putting their right to drive at risk

According to former state Sen Dave Donley, who sponsored legislation a couple of years ago that tightened loopholes in the law regulating use of the permits, those found illegally parking in handicap spaces will have points deducted from their driving privileges A couple of violations, and goodbye driver's license

OUR RECOMMENDATION that the hanging permits carry photo I D s, we admit, does not have the endorsement of handicapped drivers They say the photos could make them the prey of muggers and thugs — and we bow to their viewpoint

However, the existing permits do carry I D numbers, and enforcement of their illegal use is now easier than it used to be

Unfortunately, the police don't seem to care about enforcement of the added restrictions included in the law sponsored by the former Anchorage Republican lawmaker

But the public should be concerned Every day, all over town, this parking privilege is being abused — illegally so. And it's time for people to speak up when they see this happening

Those parking spaces are for the handicapped They're not for husky he-men and twenty-something moms who think it's cool to use a family members' permit just so they will be nearer the door to Carrs or Fred Meyers or Costco

Kerry could still steal race from Dean

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

In relaunching his presidential campaign last Tuesday, John Kerry did not just recalibrate his campaign He recalibrated his position on the war in Iraq In his announcement speech, he claimed that he had voted just to "threaten" war with Iraq, which is an odd way to characterize voting in favor of a resolution that explicitly authorizes the president to go to war if and when he pleases

Any congressional authorization to go to war is, of course, a threat But an authorization to go to war is far more than that Indeed, so absolute was the grant of authority in the Iraq resolution that the president was not even required to notify Congress until (up to) 48 hours after launching the war — 48 hours after Kerry would have started watching it on TV

Kerry's revisionism on the war is not just cover for a postwar that has not gone well — the reason for Dick Gephardt's recent reversal on Iraq For Kerry, it is a reflection of an ambivalence that he has had right from the beginning He voted to authorize the use of force, but gave speech after speech criticizing and agonizing over the president's "rush to war" — another oddity considering the fact that it is hard to think of a war that had a run-up more drawn out and deliberate

Kerry's ambivalence has not served him well as a candidate He was supposed to be the front-runner He was supposed to be the shoo-in in New Hampshire, back yard to his own Massachusetts But the latest poll shows him a stunning 20 points behind Howard Dean

On paper, Kerry has all the attributes senatorial stature, dynastic marriage, square jaw and a sterling military record that he put on lavish display in his announcement speech What he lacks, however, is passion And passion is a currency of the current Democratic primary campaign

A solid record, a good program and judicious judgment serve you well when there is no incumbent When Reagan retired in 1988 and Clinton in 2000, the Democrats nominated judicious, thoughtful, passionless (Kerry-like) candidates for the open seat

"I'll take another bottle of this aftershave."

But 2004 is a recall election The Democratic primary activists and liberals have rarely been more energized by their antipathy to a sitting Republican president There has not been such disdain, resentment and outright hatred of a president since the high Nixon days

The activists and liberals who dominate the primary process want desperately to beat Bush They, of course, want to beat him at the polls, but more than anything they want the pleasure of beating him with a stick Howard Dean is the stick

On paper, Kerry has all the attributes: senatorial stature, dynastic marriage, square jaw and a sterling military record that he put on lavish display in his announcement speech. What he lacks, however, is passion.

Dean is this campaign's Mr Intensity He has always had the rolled-sleeve, in-your-face, anti-Bush passion That might have gotten him notice, but when he stumbled onto Iraq, it got him fame

More accurately, the issue came to him As war loomed, he recognized its political potency and quite brilliantly exploited it as the unequivocal, unambivalent opponent of the war

The other candidates, remembering how Democrats had found themselves on the wrong side of the Persian Gulf War, were more circumspect And on April 9, when the statue of Saddam Hussein came down and Dean averred that the fall of Hussein was "probably" a good thing, that circumspection appeared wise Dean appeared deeply damaged by his gamble But as American fortunes in Iraq have declined, Dean's fortunes at home have risen

Does that mean that Dean is the presumptive Democratic candidate? No First, the Democratic establishment may not want to be driven over a cliff by a left-running Dean If Dean beats Gephardt in Gephardt's Iowa back yard and then beats Kerry in New Hampshire, the party establishment may make a stand in the South, the place where early outside insurgencies — John McCain in 2000, Gary Hart in 1984 — are traditionally turned back in both parties

Second, Dean's passion is well suited to the early campaign, conducted largely under the national radar With the Democratic liberal activists white hot, Dean's passion plays perfectly in the one-on-one, town-hall-meeting, retail-level campaign so far

Dean's problem is television, famously a cool medium Dean has not done well there, neither in the early South Carolina debate nor in his widely derided "Meet the Press" interview, in which he was seen as testy, and therefore a failure

As the campaign becomes less retail and more national — and therefore more televised — Dean's rise will be challenged Kerry would be right for the part, if his lack of heat and passion does not sink him before he even gets to that point

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. *Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.*

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ALASKA SHOULD NOT FORGET . . .

Pat Podvin

THE APPARENT SUICIDE of Service High School principal Pat Podvin was a tragic blow to his family, friends, students and colleagues

His death at age 40 also was painful to the community as a whole and to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Anchorage, a source of at least a portion of the psychological burden that ultimately proved unbearable to the popular educator.

Podvin came forward a year ago to reveal in a television interview that he had been sexually abused as an 18-year-old by a priest serving in Anchorage parishes from 1960 to 1985

The disclosure came during a growing national scandal over sexual predators in the Catholic priesthood and the rising toll of tragedies among their victims Many of those victims were young men and women who were assaulted while participating in church activities

The church has struggled with the issue and the often inadequate response of its hierarchy, whose members sometimes made the problem worse by transferring the offending priests and hoping they would not assault anyone again.

Some critics unfairly claim that the church had become a haven for sexual offenders Cooler heads acknowledge that the predators are a small number of troubled men who tried to turn away from their problems by taking the church's priestly vow of celibacy and committing themselves to lives of good works, but failed. Their failure brought tremendous pain to the lives of those affected.

PODVIN'S BODY was found on Ash Wednesday, one of the most solemn days of the church calendar, the beginning of Lent and a 40-day observation leading up to Good Friday and Easter, the days commemorating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

Principal Podvin was separated from his wife and had been on medical leave from his job since Christmas He was preparing to return to work and had resumed limited duties. What triggered the final bout of depression that apparently caused him to take his life is impossible to know But the assumption will be made that the assault by a trusted priest and the resulting emotional trauma were factors

The news of Podvin's death initiated a scramble by Anchorage School District administrators to inform and work with the 2,500 students at Service High. The district quickly brought in substitute teachers to fill in for any of his colleagues who might have been too upset to complete their classes on Wednesday

Alaska should not forget Pat Podvin, nor should the Archdiocese of Anchorage Clearly the archdiocese now has vigorously addressed the problem of errant priests here. It reaches out for forgiveness and community support as its clergy and laity move ahead with the enormous amount of good works they perform — including ongoing efforts to improve people's lives that have been a hallmark for the Catholic Church in Anchorage and Alaska for so many years

Goofyisms obscure the real issues

By PAUL JENKINS

The mumbo-jumbo tossed around as fact in the debate over using a portion of Permanent Fund earnings to pay for government would lead you to believe that opponents of the idea studied at the knee of Paul Joseph Goebbels, the great-granddaddy of history's worst whoppers.

Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's Reichsminister for Propaganda and National Enlightenment, said in his diary, "The fundamental principal of all propaganda is the repetition of effective arguments"

Truth is unimportant, he pointed out. Arguments should be simple, unrefined, crude, clear and forceful They should appeal to emotion and instinct and be aimed at the man on the street.

Welcome to Alaska. Those who would throw this state beneath the wheels of a deep recession rather than use Permanent Fund earnings for anything but annual free money in the form of dividends seem to be working from his playbook Their crude message plays to avarice Too many Alaskans, including some legislators who know better, are going along

Jenkins

Here's how it works Lawmakers seeking a reasonable discussion about the Permanent Fund's role in the state's future are really plotting a "raid" on the fund to "steal your dividend," Alaska's modern-day propagandists warn. Those "free-spending," "greedy" politicians in Juneau want to "grab" the "dividend fund," leaving "nothing" for the "people," they fume The fund, the firm-flammers claim, was not set up to fund government, it was established to provide annual dividends, it is the "people's money," a volksdollar kind of thing, if you will.

They spout these goofyisms like a mantra. Remember, the truth is unimportant Lies should be repetitive Goebbels is grinning in hell

For the record, nobody — nobody — can steal the Permanent Fund OK,

"Mrs. Baxter, I don't think things are working out."

maybe the IRS, but nobody else It's protected by the Alaska Constitution. Its corpus cannot be raided, swiped, squandered, pocketed or plundered It cannot be looted, lifted or pilfered, either. Anybody who tells you differently, and expects you to believe them, thinks you are a dullard. It takes a constitutional amendment to do anything with the fund and that requires two-thirds of the Legislature and then a public vote

When the fund was set up in 1976, visionary Alaskans wanted its earnings — nowadays about $1 4 billion annually — to be funneled into the general fund to underwrite government when oil and gas revenues were depleted. You can look it up It was to be a rainy day account, not a dividend account as some now nonsensically assert. That came later

The real argument, then, centers on the fund's earnings — not the fund itself, despite what Goebbels' guys in Alaska would have you believe

The truth is that the Legislature could have used the earnings at any time, but did not. Instead, that same nefarious body of men and women now accused of plotting to "raid" the fund has, over the years, parceled out earnings for dividends and ploughed the rest back into the corpus The lawmakers, guys like former Republican Sen. Rick Halford, largely are responsible for the fund growing to today's $28 billion. But now many lawmakers are reluctant to even breathe the words "dividend" or "earnings" because so much of the public has been misled.

The sad part is that the bumper sticker brain-washing only serves to obscure the real issues There are hard truths this state must face.

The fund's earnings in some fashion must be used to balance government's books. We need money for schools, the university, roads and other infrastructure. The vision of those who believe Alaska should look like it did in 1930 is blurred by their give-me-mine-first self-interest Too much of Alaska already looks like the Third World.

Deciding where the earnings piece will fit in the fiscal puzzle should come before, not after, any talk of an income tax, or any other taxes for that matter How can we begin to create a fiscal strategy without the earnings as the cornerstone? There are not enough of us to pay the taxes that would be necessary otherwise.

We could leave the fund as it is and cap the dividends at $1,000, spending the rest of the earnings, after inflation-proofing, to pay for government We could change the fund into a percent of market value fund, withdraw 5 percent a year and split that money between dividends and government That way everybody wins and, as the fund grows, dividends and the government's shares grow also The options are many and varied, but the best of them need to be addressed.

The Conference of Alaskans was an important first step, despite the propagandists' howls to the contrary Now, it is up to the Legislature, and eventually, to us Should we be in a panic? Probably not High oil prices likely will save us again this year, but a day of reckoning is coming Tough questions must be asked and answered.

Ignore Goebbel's guys They have no answers.

Most of them cannot even grasp the question.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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SOME SAY STATE SHOULD . . .

Cap checks

MANY POLITICAL observers are saying that the Permanent Fund dividend checks should be capped at $1,000 per year

That's not a bad idea, it would be relatively painless if the change were made soon because this fall's checks are expected to be just $890 If the cap were in place now, and earnings were calculated as 5 percent of the fund's market value, as proposed, the checks going out next October would be about $110 higher

Though the amounts would not increase in the future the way they otherwise might, such a cap would be a way to keep payments going at a level the state could afford without imposing an income tax. And it would help wean Alaskans from dependence on the free-money distributions

This year's dividend checks will be substantially smaller than the $1,107 56 paid out last year because Permanent Fund earnings are based on a five-year average and the earnings average was dragged down by weak stock markets in 2002 and 2003 Next year should see some improvement since this year's stock market is proving quite strong

With a $1,000 cap, the dividends would not climb the way they would in the longer term either using the existing Permanent Fund earnings calculations or figuring with the POMV formula

BUT, MOST importantly, the cap would free up enough money for essential government costs to make a significant dent in the looming fiscal gap If the $1,000 limit were in place now, for instance — and the Legislature decided to allocate a portion of fund earnings for state expenses — up to $784 million would be available to help balance the budget

That portion of the earnings not used for dividends would only go toward state expenses if the Legislature decided to take that approach. It has the authority to do so, but has been constrained by public opposition, so only a portion of earnings has been used for the free-money program and the rest has been deposited into the fund's principal

Some people oppose any change in the existing system whether it helps the state budget or not That is understandable, keeping the status quo is certainly an option, though it would make an income tax all but certain

Gov Frank Murkowski and Republican leaders in the Legislature are working to reduce state spending Though some cuts have been made, Alaska still has a state budget of more than $6 billion, including state and federal money That seems more appropriate for a small country than a state with 648,000 population, so more downsizing seems both possible and appropriate

But the state should also look at resolving the Permanent Fund dividend issue A $1,000 cap on dividends is not on any formal agendas at the moment, most discussion about it has been informal and low-key

But it deserves serious consideration

Oil taxes send cash to competition

By TOM BRENNAN

The chances that the Legislature will resolve the state's fiscal gap this year are right up there with the chances that I'll be named an astronaut.

NASA might be looking for a guy in his extremely late 50s who gets his exercise walking a dog and builds upper body strength pulling corks from wine bottles, but I doubt it

Fixing the state's financial problems is a priority with many legislators, I know, but the time may not be right. For one thing, higher oil prices and increasing revenues are taking some of the heat off. Not much, but maybe enough to delay until the public is ready

Right now, polls show that too many Alaskans, faced with losing any part of their Permanent Fund dividend check, would rather give up their first-born child than lose any of the free money At least they would think about it long enough to make the kid very nervous

There are a few proposals on the legislative table aimed at closing the money gap The worst is a measure being pushed by Democrats to increase taxes on the oil industry That is by far the loopiest idea of the bunch and would make a bad problem infinitely worse

Brennan

The problem is the fact that Alaska is already losing the battle for oil company investments Increasing industry taxes now could put us out of the game altogether

The problem is difficult to explain in layman's terms — even for a professional layman — but the short form is that the state and federal government together take more of an oil and gas project's earnings here than governments do in most other places that are competing for those investment dollars I'm talking about places like Azerbaijan, the Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Alberta, Australia, Colombia, Venezuela and Russia

On a new gas pipeline project in Russia, for instance, government will take 60 percent of the discounted cash flow from oil and gas Discounted cash flow is the amount of cash calculated to be generated by the project over its life by deducting amounts for inflation, risk, rising costs and other factors

"I want you to take one of these with water every four years."

You don't need to understand the cash flow concept to understand the problem It's vitally important to investors On an Alaska Highway gas pipeline, for instance, the state/federal share is calculated to be 84 percent, leaving just 16 percent for the investors That's 16 percent here versus 40 percent in Russia So where is the big money going? To Russia and our other competitors, of course

Alaska takes roughly half of the 84 percent and Washington grabs the rest. The size of Alaska's take is what gives the state leverage to entice investors here if it wanted to make deals that benefited both the investors and the state

In fact, the 84-16 percent share is what makes the gas pipeline uneconomic Experts say that if the split were adjusted to 75-25 for the project, which the state could do, the pipeline would become a good prospect for investors and a reality for Alaska

But if Alaska increases oil taxes now, it would be going in exactly the wrong direction. The existing oil and gas fields would continue to produce — at least for a time — and some relatively small investments would still be made, but the state would lose out big-time in the long run.

The chances that the major companies would make substantial investments in looking for new oil and gas reserves here would be about the same as the likelihood that some of the Democratic legislators pushing the tax boost will join me in the astronauts corps

Not all is lost on the fiscal gap, however The House and Senate could make real progress on it by passing a resolution for a constitutional amendment adopting the Percent of Market Value approach to determining Permanent Fund earnings Hopefully they would then use part of those earnings to shore up the state budget and avoid an income tax.

POMV, as it is known, would set the earnings available for distribution, either for state expenses or individual dividend checks, at 5 percent of the full value of the fund. That amount is well within the average annual growth rate and would allow for inflation-proofing as well.

One of the many advantages of that approach is that the Permanent Fund would not have to sell investments just to count them as earnings Good investments should be held and allowed to grow, but the need to keep the earnings account flush encourages unloading them to show a profit Using POMV would pretty much eliminate that temptation.

POMV is endorsed by the Permanent Fund directors and was unanimously recommended by the Conference of Alaskans in Fairbanks Getting it on the fall ballot would require its passing both houses of the Legislature by a two-thirds margin. That would be difficult but not impossible

POMV is opposed by the gadfly activists, but their opposition alone should prove that POMV is a good idea. If those folks don't like something, that's generally a good reason for level-headed people to support it.

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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LEFT BACKPEDALS ON . . .

Ballot issue

IT TURNS OUT that state Attorney General Gregg Renkes is not the only one who thinks that putting the question of how to fill U S Senate seats on the ballot may violate the 17th Amendment of the U S Constitution

The question won a ballot spot after a petition drive sponsored by Anchorage Democratic Reps Harry Crawford and Eric Croft and Fairbanks Democrat David Guttenberg Dubbed "Trust the People," the effort largely was fueled by $30,000 from Outside liberal organizations

Now it appears Croft is having doubts In a memo last week to Crawford and Guttenberg, he said money is a problem in defending the ballot language, but there are other factors

"A key fact is that we could lose the lawsuit ," he said

The fight is over whether the question of how vacant Senate seats are filled can be decided by a ballot proposition. Supporters argue "legislature" is synonymous with "the people "

The second paragraph of the 17th Amendment, which seems clear, states

"When vacancies happen in the representation of any State in the Senate, the executive authority of such State shall issue writs of election to fill such vacancies *Provided*, That the Legislature of any State may empower the executive thereof to make temporary appointments until the people fill the vacancies by election as the legislature may direct."

The Legislature in Alaska has directed that the chief executive make those appointments if there is less than 30 months left in the term

"We may very well have a tough time convincing the court that Legislature has a specialized meaning," Croft wrote "If we lose the court case, the issue will be omitted from the ballot and we will never be able to change the law Put simply, a bill passed by this legislature may be our only real chance to prevent another appointment by Governor Murkowski "

Renkes early on dismissed the ballot language as unconstitutional The left, intent on peddling the petition drive as a grass roots effort, was angered The Anchorage Daily News flayed Renkes, charging he arrived at his "creative legal argument" after a "tendentious legal analysis" that "interpreted the 17th Amendment to mean the opposite of its core purpose, which was to take Senate elections out of the hands of state legislatures "

Petition backers had to go to court to win a spot on the ballot. Renkes appealed, and the case is pending before the state Supreme Court Lawmakers are considering a measure substantially similar to the ballot language If adopted, it would render the proposition, and the lawsuit, moot.

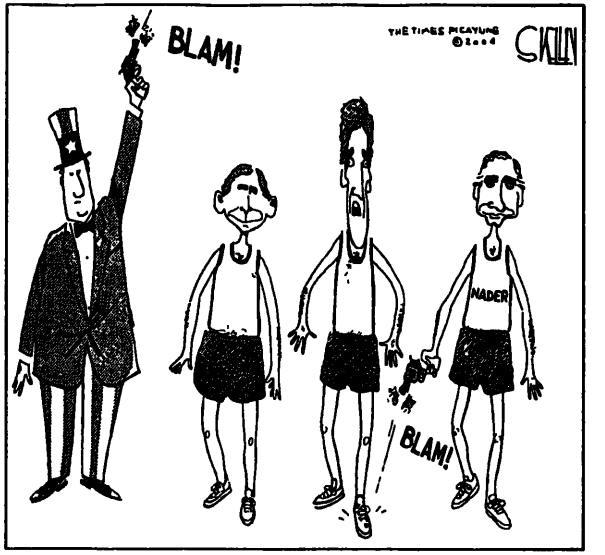
Croft asks in the memo "While it is personally galling, should we consider swallowing our pride and supporting this legislation?

The answer is clear If the idea is to have vacancies filled by election, as the Democrats claim, how can they not?

The Legislature should act. Democrats should support the effort.

What happens if the lights go out?

By REP. CHERYLL HEINZE



Here's a question for you Will the dwindling natural gas supplies and an aging electrical grid result in future widespread power outages in Anchorage and elsewhere?

The subject was front and center before a legislative meeting in Juneau last week.

The House Economic Development Committee was the forum for a debate on whether Kenai Peninsula and Cook Inlet gas, on which Anchorage depends, will be depleted before the aging electrical grid could be upgraded

The problem is real Eric Yould, executive director of the Alaska Power Association, posed this question.

"If we spend millions in the next few years upgrading the aging transmission lines and generators and have no gas to power the generators, then what?"

And this scary forecast came in a letter to the committee from Tony Izzo, president of Enstar Natural Gas Co

"Preliminary results from the Department of Energy show that as early as 2013 declining reserves in the Cook Inlet may not be enough to support home heating and power generation "

And that, he added, could be the case even if the existing liquefied natural gas and fertilizer plants on the peninsula are closed and are no longer using big natural gas supplies

A potential shortage of natural gas is far from the only threat

Joe Griffith, CEO of Chugach Electric, said 22 generators power the entire electric grid that serves this area

"Twenty of these," he said, "were built in the 1960s and have upwards of 200,000 hours on them Just to replace the rotors in one of these generators costs over $2 5 million, to replace each generator would cost as much as $50 million each

"Multiply that by 20 and you see the nature of the challenge "

Not only that, he said, "some of our transmission lines were built in 1958 "

Are there alternative sources of power generation?

Not right away, in so far as committee members can determine

Chugach Electric and Anchorage Municipal Light & Power are doing some investigative work on wind power, but the prospects are unclear

Some suggest hydrogen power could be the salvation. The trouble is, the experts say, hydrogen power costs more to produce than it yields Until better technology comes along, that's no lifesaver, however

Jack Eckstrom, representing Evergreen, told the committee his company's plan to develop coal bed methane in the Matanuska Valley and other places in the state could offer an interim solution in a relatively short time

According to Evergreen, coal bed methane reserves in Alaska might provide one-third to one-half of the 115 billion cubic feet of natural gas needed in the future

That's the amount of natural gas that will be needed in just six to eight years, according to the experts

The truth is that we're running out of time

We don't have the answers we need, but we're going to keep looking

One of the concerns is future financial stability of the various utilities

To that end, we'll be holding additional hearings by the first part of March to examine actions by the Regulatory Commission of Alaska with respect to rates and operating margins

Cheryll Heinze is a Republican member of the state House of Representatives from Anchorage.

The Anchorage Times

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

DEMOCRATS' OIL TAX BOOST WOULD . . .

Hurt Alaska

THE OIL TAX boost being pushed by Democratic legislators would pay for schools, public safety and government funding all right

Perhaps not much in Alaska, mostly in oil provinces like Azerbaijan, the Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Alberta, Australia, Colombia, Venezuela and Russia.

Alaska is losing the competition for investment dollars to those places And if the Democrats have their way, the problem will get worse Alaska is a high-cost state where political and fiscal stability are perceived by many investors as iffy at best — even in comparison to Azerbaijan and Russia.

It's not that the Russian Far East has become politically mature, a place where investments can be made with the assurance that the earnings won't be confiscated later It's more that state and federal governments here take too large a share

Oil and gas companies commit to major investments based on what is called the discounted cash flow They put their money down after calculating the return over the life of a project by deducting factors like risk, inflation and rising costs They aim for a fast payout to protect against risk and inflation in the later years

ALASKA'S TAX structure was built largely in the 1970s and was designed to maximize the state's share of petroleum development. That may have been fine for the huge Prudhoe Bay field. But the system discourages new investment, even to tap the known smaller oil reserves around Prudhoe

The 1970s approach was not greeted with joy by the companies then pouring dollars into Alaska. But this was where the action was and the big companies put their money here because the prospects were huge and comparable options limited.

But now the reverse is true Except for the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — which is off-limits, at least for now — the prospects here are real but far less attractive

The combined state and federal take on oil investments in Alaska is high On the planned Alaska Highway gas pipeline, for instance, 84 percent of the discounted cash flow would go to Juneau and Washington, about half to each. By comparison, Russia will take a total of 60 percent on a gas pipeline now in the works The investors will get 16 percent on their investments here versus 40 percent in Russia. And with the higher allowance, those investing in Russia will get their investments back earlier and earn profits earlier than they will here

The Democrats pushing for higher taxes should think about which government treasuries they are likely to fatten. Their counterparts in competing provinces would be delighted to hear that Alaska was making itself more unattractive to investors

The stakes are huge and Alaska has a lot to lose.

Democrat smear claims are hooey

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

As the Democrats enter the final stages of their primary race, the emerging story is how the Republicans are preparing to go negative in the general election with a campaign of singular viciousness against John Kerry

Kerry's spokesmen have already sounded the alarm, warning darkly that "the right-wing smear machine" is gearing up and declaring amusingly that "it's time for George W Bush to call off his right-wing slime machine"

When exactly was it called on? No matter A CNN anchor dutifully picks up the theme, noting "how ugly this is turning so early on"

Republicans turning ugly?

You are an average citizen following the election campaign so far What have you gleaned from the wall-to-wall cable news coverage of the candidates' debates, rallies and victory/concession speeches?

First, that President Bush has "deceived" (Al Sharpton), "misled" (Kerry, Howard Dean) and, indeed, outright "lied" (Dennis Kucinich) us into a pointless and ruinous war that, as Kerry's chief campaign surrogate, Edward Kennedy, thunders, was "made up in Texas" for pure political advantage Hence, Bush's hands are dripping with the blood of 500 brave soldiers who died for a lying president seeking better poll numbers

Second, that his military service was dishonorable AWOL from the Air National Guard, declares Democratic National Chairman Terry McAuliffe, perhaps even a "deserter," a charge Wesley Clark repeatedly refused to repudiate

And these are just Bush's depredations abroad At home, as John Edwards tells it at every campaign stop, there are little girls from the "other America" crying into the night because their dads, now with the blank stare of hopelessness on their faces, have lost their jobs Why? So that "Ken Lay and the boys" (Dean) and other "Benedict Arnold" friends (Kerry) of this president could make obscene profits from their companies' outsourcing And

that's while Bush was at the same time despoiling the water, polluting the air and, by God, trying to kill the Arctic caribou to please his parasitic oil industry pals and fatten up Halliburton

Vote him out? Given all that, shouldn't the man be drawn and quartered? Rarely has there been a political assault more concentrated, more unrelenting, more unrebutted — all occurring not as political advertising but on free media as campaign "coverage"

Part of this is serendipity After Dean and Richard Gephardt destroyed each other with mutually negative ads in Iowa, the other candidates became terrified of saying anything even mildly negative about their opponents They directed all of their fire not inside the corral, as is usual in a primary battle, but outside — at the president As the intra-Democratic campaign turned kid-glove, the main competition among the candidates consisted of who could be more hyperbolic in delineating the crimes of George W Bush

Part of this, too, is the candidates' exploitation of media conventions The cable channels all covered the Tuesday night victory and concession speeches, which the candidates turned into opportunities to deliver their stump speeches to a national audience Dean's Iowa scream is the counterexample that makes the case The rule is Forget the crowd, face the camera and denounce the president

And now, after six weeks of carpet-bombing Bush, the Democrats are shocked — shocked! — that Republicans might answer back with "negativity"

What, in fact, have the Republicans mustered? A single Internet ad about Kerry, the Senate's king of special-interest money, denouncing special interests And one speech by the Republican National Committee chairman on Kerry's conventional liberal (i e budget-cutting) positions on defense and intelligence

The Republicans have yet to go after Kerry on his most critical vulnerability, his breathtaking penchant for reversing course for political convenience

- Votes against the Persian Gulf War, which he now says he favored.
- Votes for the Iraq war, which he now says he opposed.
- Votes against the $87 billion for troop support and Iraqi reconstruction, while saying that he favors troop support and Iraqi reconstruction
- Votes for the No Child Left Behind Act, which he now attacks incessantly
- Votes for NAFTA, he now rails against the unfairness of free trade
- Votes for the Patriot Act, he now decries the assault on civil liberties

Which is why Kerry prefers to preempt any examination of his record by warning in advance of a coming Republican "smear campaign."

It would be a clever attempt at political insulation were it not so transparent Instead, coming after weeks of unrelenting anti-Bush calumny, it is an impressive display of chutzpah Kerry may or may not win the presidency, but he has already won the 2004 Captain Renault award

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.

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25044122504

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

RETAIL SALES . . .

Who needs 'em?

LET'S ASSUME that somehow, in a most improbable way, the Legislature should adopt Jay Hammond's give-and-take-away plan for the Permanent Fund dividend

You know what it is Give all working men and women in the state their annual dividend, and then take it right back in the form of an income tax capped to the precise amount of the dividend

That would remove more, perhaps much more, than $350 million from the pockets of a lot of people, in Anchorage and elsewhere Consider the impact of that on the local economy

Do you sell automobiles, pickups and snowmobiles? There goes a big chunk of your sales

Do you sell kitchen appliances, television sets, boomboxes and electric razors? Kiss a lot of your business goodbye

How about airplane tickets to Hawaii and tickets on Inside Passage cruises from Seward to Seattle? You'd better lay off a few of your employees

Forget the big-ticket Christmas items you had hoped to sell The money won't be there The impact would be thundering

And all of this from the people who pledged to you that they would never, ever eliminate the dividend Their answer to this is that the dividend still is being paid The downside is that even if you get a dividend, you don't get to keep it

Or spend it The state will do that for you, under the Hammond plan to tax your dividend to the max. And it will only cost an additional $7 million a year for the state to administer this give-and-take scheme

Be happy

Just a day off

LET'S BE honest. How many presidents did you pause to honor and remember last Monday? It was President's Day, you'll recall — a holiday for federal, state and municipal workers, bankers and a whole lot of others

At least we should have given a fraction of a second's thought to George Washington. Or maybe Abe Lincoln

Who are we kidding? Probably nobody gave them a thought, much less a passing memory of the greatness of Harry Truman or Franklin Roosevelt or Dwight Eisenhower or Woodrow Wilson or any number of other memorable presidents

A long time ago, before three-day weekends became America's favorite way to get an extra day off from work, we used to celebrate Lincoln's birthday and Washington's birthday They were big days In schoolrooms across the land, the achievements of these presidents were remembered, studied and praised.

Now we have President's Day, and it's a smokescreen. It has nothing to do with honoring our past or recalling the work of great presidents It's just a "Let's-Take-Another-Day-Off." And that's what we should call it, not President's Day

Consider what all the goodies cost

By WALTER WILLIAMS

The first concept an economics student learns is that for every benefit there's also a cost — or, as my longtime colleague and friend Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman has put it, "There's no free lunch " While the person who receives the benefit might not pay or even be aware of the cost, as sure as night follows day there is a cost paid by someone

One of the effects of competition is that of revealing costs and least-cost methods of production When the government gave AT&T a monopoly over much of the telecommunications industry and the Civil Aeronautics Board sponsored the airline cartel, both telecommunication and air travel were far more expensive than they are today The introduction of competition not only revealed that the services could be provided more cheaply, but brought about massive innovation, as well

International trade is a form of competition, and as such it also reveals costs and least-cost methods of production American workers are the most productive workers in the world

Williams

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2002 the United States led the world in worker productivity US workers averaged $71,600 in output each (in 1999 dollars) The next highest country was Belgium, where each worker averaged $64,100 But worker productivity can be sabotaged

Suppose an American textile worker is paid $100 a day, while his Indian counterpart earns $20 If the American is 10 times as productive as the Indian worker, then the wage costs of using the American worker is lower However, $100 in wages is not the only cost of hiring the American worker

There are numerous federal and state regulations that add to worker costs, such as OSHA requirements, EEOC mandates, Social Security and Medicare, Family Medical Leave and many other workplace regulations Added to worker costs that businesses incur are Americans With Disabilities Act, Clean Air Act, Endangered Species Act and many other regulations

Then there are all sorts of frivolous and not-so-frivolous lawsuits brought against businesses According to an Office of Advocacy of the U S Small Business Administration study, "The Impact of Regulatory Costs on Small Firms," federal regulatory costs on U S businesses were $451 billion in 2000

They cost small businesses (20 or fewer employees) about $7,000 per employee, medium businesses (20 to 499 employees) paid about $4,300, and large businesses (500 employees or more) paid about $4,400

There're no two ways about it. There are benefits from all the costly federal, state, and local regulations imposed on American businesses But we must also acknowledge that our federal, state and local regulatory agencies have no jurisdiction in India, China, Southeast Asia, Mexico and Latin America. That means for many products and services, people who are far less productive, in a physical sense, than we are can beat us in the global marketplace

We all can agree that there's no benefit that's worth any cost If that weren't true, we'd do damn near anything that has a benefit, and that would include mandating a 5 mile-per-hour speed limit Why?

The benefits would be enormous in terms of the tens of thousands of highway fatalities and injuries avoided We don't have a 5 mile-per-hour speed limit because we've decided that its benefit is not worth the enormous cost.

As said earlier, competition reveals costs and least-cost methods of production One need not take a position one way or another on the worthiness of the benefits of regulation to acknowledge that there are costs associated with them But I think that intelligent decision-making requires that we take their costs into account

It's not intelligent to stick our heads in the sand and deceive ourselves by pretending that others are to blame for our lack of competitiveness in some areas

"NEXT TRIP WE SHOULD JUST GET DRESSED AT THE AIRPORT."

Walter E. Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc., 5777 W Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003.

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25044122505

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

OUR DIVIDENDS ARE NOT . . .

Endangered

ALL THE TALK last week about preserving dividend payments from the Permanent Fund was nothing more than hot air blowing through the trees

You heard all the chatter about how the dividend needs to be "enshrined" in the Alaska Constitution In other words, a new section should be added to the constitution saying that there shall and forever be dividends paid to the people of Alaska just because they live here

The dividends already are preserved because no legislator who wants to be re-elected or who wants to seek higher office would ever vote to abolish the dividend.

Former Gov Jay Hammond, who preaches and sermonizes about this at the drop of a hat, says this money flowing from the state oil production belongs to the people It's their God-given share of what's under the North Slope They are the shareholders They need to be assured that now, and until their grandchildren's children grow old, free money will be coming their way — constitutionally

It's an argument not worth the words

The dividends already are preserved because no legislator who wants to be re-elected or who wants to seek higher office would ever vote to abolish the dividend

The state really might go broke some day — but the dividends will go on until somebody finally turns off the lights And it won't take a constitutional amendment to make it so

Oops! Surprise!

IT'S ALL past tense now, thank goodness, but let's not forget a little surprise that popped up at last week's Conference of Alaskans in Fairbanks when a big push was being made to have everybody embrace an income tax.

Somewhere along the course of the debate, a delegate asked a rude question How much will it cost to administer a plan that takes back in income taxes the amount of the Permanent Fund dividend most people receive?

Oops Well, the answer, as it turns out, is about $7 million a year

It was no wild guess It was the considered estimate of one of the state's top financial officials

In other words, a whole new bureaucracy in Juneau.

Thanks very much, former Gov Jay Hammond He's the one who has been preaching the give-and-take-away tax plan.

Fortunately, the conference delegates — on due consideration — gave the idea a cold shoulder

When 'the old home town' means just that

By WILLIAM J. TOBIN

INDIANAPOLIS — The "old home town" means different things to different people To some, it is the place filled with a lifetime of memories, forged from years of being with the same friends, experiencing the same things, sharing in decades of togetherness To others, it's an easy, off-the-cuff phrase used to talk about one or more places that were not much more than a stop or two along the way, where a few years were spent and a few friends made before moving on.

THIS GREAT Indiana city at the crossroads of America, as it likes to identify itself, was once my home town — but only for eight years, and those more than half a century ago Even so, for a newspaperman who lived something of a nomadic life in his younger years, this was a place of college days, the town where a career began, the city where wedding bells rang, and one that, when the occasion arises to return again, still feels something like home

Tobin

FOR ANNE Kessing, however, Indianapolis was much more It truly was her home town, because she had no other And her life speaks to all of us about the real meaning of a home town She was born here and lived here for 76 years — minus a few months long ago, when her husband, Bob, briefly worked in Fort Wayne, a city a hundred miles away in northeastern Indiana And it was here that she died, a few days before Christmas Her lifetime as a resident of Indianapolis was recalled in the tributes to her by those who gathered to pay their final respects

SHE WAS A homemaker who over the years was involved in a variety of clubs and activities But despite not being a public figure in any sense of the term, more than 600 people attended the visitation at the funeral home the Sunday evening before her funeral. And the next morning, more than 750 crowded Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church where seven priests were on the altar to concelebrate her funeral Mass One of her sons and his family came from Sacramento A brother came from Tallahassee Her sister came from Anchorage Nieces and nephews traveled from Kalamazoo and Chicago and Columbus But by every real measure, this was a gathering of long-time Indianapolis friends, saying farewell to one they knew well

"Old George has been with the company 38 years Do I hear $300?"

SHE WAS MOURNED by people who knew her all her life, as she had known them for all of their lives Unlike Anchorage and other cities where the population rapidly changes with the passing years as people come and go, Indianapolis is filled with those whose roots are deep in Hoosier soil And the northside of Indianapolis — where Anne Kessing grew up and lived and died — is much like one big neighborhood Before her marriage 50 years ago, she lived at 42nd and Central Avenue For almost all of her married life, she and her husband lived a few blocks north, at 56th and Delaware

AS A GIRL on Central Avenue, she attended St Joan of Arc Church, next door to her home, and the parish elementary school around the corner As she raised her family on Delaware, she attended Immaculate Heart and sent her children to its school, where her mother taught fourth grade for a few years after the death of her father

CENTRAL AND Delaware are tree-lined streets known well to all of the Kessings' friends For years and years and years, they all moved in the same circle As they gathered at the funeral home to offer condolences to Anne Kessing's husband, children and grandchildren, and as they crowded into Immaculate Heart for her funeral, these friends of years gone by still talked of their days at Joan of Arc grade school, at Ladywood, at Cathedral High School, at St Agnes Academy, at the University of Notre Dame, at nearby Butler University Everybody knows everybody else They remember their friends' birthdays, their childrens' ages, their respective anniversaries No wonder Their lives, with the lives of their parents before them, have been intertwined for more than a century

ALL TOGETHER, they add a deeper meaning to "the old home town." The words simply aren't a passing expression to those whose entire lives have been nourished in the city and suburbs of Indianapolis Some — like Anne Kessing herself — rarely traveled far from home, save for football weekends at South Bend, some summer golfing vacations in Florida, and quick trips to visit relatives here or there around the country When these old friends went off to college, they came back diploma in hand When they went to war, they returned when the fighting stopped. They came back home again to Indiana, drawn to a city that has emerged from its sleepy past and has grown into a modern metropolis — and one which remained the home of their best friends, from grade school and high school and college and beyond

THIS IS WHAT being a Hoosier may be all about Those who are born here and spend all their years here are blessed with a heritage as rich as the Indiana farmland They are, as some used to say, solid folks They know their neighbors and treasure their friends In saying farewell to Anne Kessing, they paid tribute to one of their own.

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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MAYBE SOME NEW WEAPONS . . .

Against bears?

THOSE FOLKS down in California who are worried about mountain lion attacks have concocted some new ways to protect themselves in the wild

We're not certain, however, that some of their suggestions would work against bears in Alaska.

For example, after one bike rider was killed and another seriously injured in separate cougar attacks in southern Orange County a few weeks ago, several biking clubs told their members to carry a stick or an air horn

The noise of the air horns presumably would frighten the mountain lions and send them skittering into the bushes and trees Maybe that would work with bears, too

On the other hand, we doubt that hitting a cougar with a stick would do much good And we're darn sure that a stick isn't likely to deter a bear

One of the more innovative ideas to ward off a mountain lion attack is to put a decal resembling a pair of eyes on the back of bikers' riding helmets

The theory is that cougars attack from the rear, but if they see a pair of eyes looking at them — phony or not — they will not attack.

That's another one that won't work with bears, we'd be willing to bet

ON THE OTHER hand, we do know that pepper spray— in certain circumstances — can work against bears

Because of that, some California wilderness bikers are packing cans of pepper spray alongside their water bottles in their backpacks or around-the-waist carryalls

But Lorna Bernard, an official with the California Department of Fish and Game, doesn't see this as a viable option

"Mountain lions ambush their prey by attacking from behind," she told the Los Angeles Times "If you're taken by surprise, you're not going to have much time to use pepper spray"

Her advice for those jumped by a cougar is "to use anything they have, including their bicycle, to fight the mountain lion off"

Another idea was put forward by Matthew Horns, a Los Angeles watershed management specialist He thinks frightening the cougars will prevent future attacks

He says some hunters have "scared the daylights" out of mountain lions by shooting in their direction without attempting to kill them

"Lions are quite intelligent," he wrote in a column in the Times "When they are afraid of people, we can coexist without conflict."

Now if we could just train our bears in the same way, Alaska would be a safer place

And you wouldn't have to rely on a stick.

Letters to The Times

Give it some thought

I believe I have the solution for our state's financial woes It is time for a change to how we manage the permanent fund Here is the scenario

We awake tomorrow with every man,woman and child owning 100 shares of the Alaska Permanent Fund Corp These would be negotiable shares with an estimated value of $45,000 for 100 shares Minors' shares would not be negotiable until age 18

The entire $27 billion would remain in the fund, however, the fund would no longer be funded from state oil revenues One hundred percent of all future oil revenues would go into state coffers In return, the people of Alaska shall recoup their mineral rights on privately owned land

The corporation would invest/build the natural gas pipeline to Canada as well as a spur through Southcentral to Valdez The transportation fees for the gas would then be one of the sources of income for the corporation, along with its existing portfolio

Several important points are accomplished

1 The state would have full funding with 100 percent of future oil and gas revenues,

2 Minors, upon reaching age 18, would have the money needed to complete their education,

3 The subsurface issue would be resolved as the property owners would decide whether to develop or not,

4 The corporation would continue to spin off dividends to those that choose to retain its stock,

5 Outsiders or newcomers wanting to participate in the corporation would only need to purchase stockholders shares for the value at that time either in blocks of 100 or piecemeal, and,

6 There would no longer be a state dividend, which has encouraged freeloaders

Chuck Pratt
Willow

Hammond supporter

Regarding your Feb 15 editorial, "Hammond Preaches Glory And

damnation" — I have never read such drivel, whining and downright disrespect toward one of the most respected governors this state has ever had I am a life-long Republican and view myself as a fiscal conservative, yet it is becoming harder and harder to associate myself with ultraconservatives

Your scare tactics won't work You don't know that it will take millions to set up a system to administer the tax, any system that is set up will require funding You are right in stating that income tax won't close the fiscal gap Gov Hammond never said it would completely close the gap, he said the two dividend classes were included to satisfy some concerns and that he didn't necessarily support it.

And, finally, it only "punishes" people who earn enough to have to pay income taxes — what's wrong with that? Your disrespect for Gov Hammond was unconscionable and not worthy of anyone who calls themselves an Alaskan

Gary P Bader
Anchorage

Hammond off mark

Congratulations on a brilliant editorial on Feb 15 — you are right on point! I hope that thinking Alaskans will seriously consider your comments and realize that Hammond's proposal would be one of the worst things that could ever happen, next to enshrining the dividends in the Constitution! Thanks for making your remarks available to the public.

Gail Phillips
Anchorage

Channel 2 speaks out

I was surprised to read your broadside of Channel 2 News and pollster Ivan Moore on Saturday, Feb. 7 I figured I must have missed your phone call Your subtle suggestion is that Mr Moore is spinning the numbers, and he's accomplishing this by the use of the word "progressive" instead of "liberal"

First of all, if you are suggesting the Channel 2 News poll is inaccurate, show me your numbers Mr Moore is a respected pollster who was chosen to do statewide tracking polls for Channel 2 News after all Anchorage-based pollsters were invited to participate Dave Dittman, another respected pollster who does much polling for Republicans, tells me he's getting similar statewide numbers as Mr Moore

Poll participants are not asked to describe their political philosophy until well after they have been asked who they intend to vote for The participants responses are not weeded out based upon their answers There is no conceivable way that question taints the poll results.

I have directed Mr Moore to use the word "liberal" instead of "progressive" in future polls It's a good suggestion, although I harbor no illusions that it will dissuade the Voice of the Times from characterizing our poll as political spin. By conducting a statewide tracking poll every month, we hope to allow our viewers to follow this campaign in a way only available in the past to the candidates themselves or wealthy pundits Unlike the Voice of the Times, we don't have a horse in this race

Even though you raised a good point, I'm disappointed you have chosen to use our poll to further a political agenda. A simple phone call would have accomplished the same thing

John Tracy
News Director
Channel 2 News
Anchorage

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KNOWLES CAMPAIGN TAKES . . .

Cheap shot

THE TONY KNOWLES campaign took a cheap shot at Sen Lisa Murkowski the other day and got an assist from the Anchorage Daily News

The Democrats were unhappy because the director of the National Republican Senatorial Committee criticized Knowles for accepting contributions from Democrats who are working against Alaska's interests The Republican said Knowles is tying himself to people who are working hard against opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling

The Knowles campaign countered with a blast at Murkowski because she took $5,000 from a political action committee headed by an Oregon senator who has sometimes voted against ANWR legislation and — get this — because she participated in a Texas fund-raiser with Vice President Dick Cheney

Inclusion of Cheney in the Knowles lament suggests it was made tongue in cheek. But the Daily News missed the irony and played the story straight The "news" was written up by Washington reporter Liz Ruskin and prominently displayed on Wednesday's Alaska Page Its headline said "Lisa Murkowski's standards questioned" and the subhead claimed she was being helped by "Alaska's enemies"

Murkowski supports opening ANWR to drilling Knowles says he does, too The catfight developed because Knowles wants to replace Murkowski and is wooing money from Democrats, many of whom adamantly oppose opening ANWR.

KNOWLES argues that being in the Senate would put him in position to help bring his party around, but most Democrats there are so closely tied to environmental extremist groups that the chances of converting them are slim to none Too bad he didn't demonstrate his ability to charm opponents during recent votes when just two Democratic crossovers could have opened ANWR and changed Alaska's future

This week's complaint from the Knowles group focused on Sen. Gordon Smith, an Oregon Republican who has voted for and against ANWR legislation at various times He apparently has bragged that he blocked drilling in ANWR.

Smith obviously needs some work. The ridiculous note in the Knowles cheap shot was the suggestion that Murkowski should shun Cheney because President Bush supports a gas pipeline but won't go along with a proposal to provide a federal tax break as insurance against low gas prices

Actually the White House position on the tax break was that Alaska is in a good position to provide that incentive itself The guarantee would cost the state nothing since there would be no out-of-pocket expense, only an agreement to reduce the producers' tax burden in lean times

Bush and Cheney are among the best friends Alaska has in Washington. If Sen Murkowski has another chance to hobnob with either one in a fund-raising effort, she should jump at the chance

Even if the Daily News doesn't think so

Van Etten slides to and fro with ease

By PAUL JENKINS

It is difficult to know whether Assemblyman Doug Van Etten has a clue about whether he is coming or going nowadays

The Assembly meeting Tuesday night is a great example While his colleagues frittered away valuable time debating whether to slap on the April 6 ballot a shabby, partisan advisory proposition urging legislators to craft a long-range fiscal plan — whatever that might be — Van Etten apparently got lost

He momentarily stumbled away from his pals on the left and, with Assembly Chairman Dick Traini and Assembly members Anna Fairclough, Dan Kendall, Dan Sullivan and Fay Von Gemmingen, actually argued against the proposal cobbled up by — who else? — Allan Tesche

They argued correctly that the proposition, especially the amendment about solving the fiscal problem in "open session," was a partisan dig aimed at Republican lawmakers It could worsen the city and Legislature's relationship — already strained by Democratic Mayor Mark Begich's role in a recent grandstanding "no confidence" vote by the Alaska Conference of Mayors targeting the Legislature

Jenkins

Fairclough argued Tesche's proposal amounted to a "slap in the face" to lawmakers She pointed out that the city wanted the state to stay out of its business in transportation planning How, she asked, would lawmakers take the city's attempt to butt into their bailiwick?

Kendall characterized Tesche's proposition as "a waste of time, it's a waste of money, it's a waste of paper " Traini said "This is interjecting partisan politics into a body that is non-partisan. We can all see through this"

Then came Van Etten, who equated the proposal to "poking a stick in a hornet's nest" and said he supported Tesche on a philosophical level, but could not vote for the ordinance "It's not going to bring us any good," he said

"You're looking at the next general manager of Louie's Take-Out Pizza"

Tesche fulminated that their comments hit a "new low", that the proposition was "studiously neutral", that he was not just having fun with the proposition.

What he did not say is that the proposition, like the disgraceful action by the mayors' conference, like the Democrats' Outside-funded campaign to put on the ballot how vacant U S Senate seats will be filled, is part of an aggressive push from the left to recapture the Legislature and defeat Sen Lisa Murkowski in November On Tuesday night, our left-leaning Assembly decided it would do its part to help

But something obviously had gone awry Van Etten, locked in a tough reelection battle with Dan Coffey, had abandoned the left, perhaps to save himself But minutes before the vote, even as Fairclough was arguing her case, Mike Abbott, deputy municipal manager, approached Van Etten and whispered in his ear Van Etten, the sixth vote needed to put the proposition on the ballot, left his seat to talk with Begich.

A few minutes later, Assembly members Tesche, Brian Whittle, Melinda Taylor, Janice Shamberg and Dick Tremaine did their duty and voted to put the proposition on the ballot

And — surprise! — so did Van Etten, after his talk with Begich.

It is understandable that Van Etten, a Democratic green activist, would want to shy away from anything controversial at this point. He is lugging with him a sorry history of trying, among other things, to kill the Simonian Little League and failing to follow state election laws With his record, why ask for trouble? But you have to wonder why he switched at the last second

For his part, Begich says he told Van Etten in their brief talk to vote any way he wanted and that Juneau would not have a problem as long as the proposition did not box in the Legislature

Van Etten has a different story He said Begich told him to go shake hands with Curtis Thayer, a political fund raiser who had been waiting for more than three hours to speak about a neighborhood road issue Asked three times if Begich had said anything about his vote or Juneau, Van Etten said, "No"

You have to wonder what really was said If Begich has it right, and did not care how Van Etten voted, why would he summon Van Etten over to tell him to vote any way he wanted? Why not just let the vote proceed? If Van Etten's account is to be believed, you have to ask Why would the mayor summon him just prior to an important vote to tell him to go shake hands with Thayer? Who to believe?

The upshot is that Democrats got what they wanted, another way to denigrate Republicans in Juneau

And Van Etten? He can add this to the already lengthy list of sorry episodes he will have to answer for at the polls He will learn that "Hi, I'm a stooge for the left, and vote how it tells me to," is a lousy campaign slogan.

Even in politics, having a backbone is a good thing

Paul Jenkins is an editor of The Anchorage Times

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

DIVIDEND GUARANTEE WOULD BE . . .

Bad policy

GUARANTEEING a Permanent Fund dividend check through a constitutional amendment is a terrible idea.

Such a constitutional amendment was recommended by last week's Conference of Alaskans and has been picked up and endorsed by some members of the Legislature But most Republican legislators are opposed to the constitutional guarantee and Gov Frank Murkowski seems inclined to leave the decision to the Legislature

The proposed guarantee would mean that spreading the free money would be given a priority over the state's paying for schools, public safety and other essential government expenses

The dividends should probably continue at some level, at least for the time being, but they should be required to compete for funding with Alaska's other priorities That would put pressure on legislators to keep spending down so that dividend checks could be higher

Guaranteeing them in the state constitution — especially if the measure called for a specific amount or a fixed percentage of the fund earnings — would leave legislators with no decision to make on the checks It would also sidestep the pressure to keep spending down if dividends were competing for a share of available funds

HAVING CONSTITUENTS closely watching their spending would be extremely effective in reducing costs and eliminating waste, far more effective than anything else we can think of

Distributing the big checks when the state was flooded with surplus cash from North Slope oil fields made sense Paying them at anything like previous levels when the revenue flow is drastically curtailed and the state is running a deficit makes no sense at all

Doing so would most likely require reimposing a state income tax. That would be — pure and simple — a transfer of wealth from one class of citizens to another

With an income tax, working Alaskans would lose their dividends, and ultimately much more Only those with little or no income would get to keep their state checks The dividend program would become another welfare program

The plight of low-income people who have grown accustomed to receiving the annual checks is a matter of concern and should be kept in mind when the checks are reduced But sweetening that pot by dipping into the pockets of working Alaskans would be worse public policy than phasing the checks out altogether

The dividend program could become an incentive for good government and reduced spending, if used properly It could also be a disaster if a guarantee converts it to a welfare scheme

Who owns the Permanent Fund?

By ROGER CREMO

Needing money, the state eyed the Permanent Fund's earnings However, it wasn't going to be easy to get at them, because everyone knows that the fund belongs to the people

But, since it takes only half of the earnings to pay dividends, the state figured that it might be allowed to use the other half Proceeding tactfully, it asked the people a question "Should a portion of the income of the Permanent Fund be used for essential state services?"

Fifty-five Alaskans met to consider the question When the depth of the state's fiscal problem was disclosed to them, they realized that dividends needed protection So it was decided that the constitution should be amended to dedicate a part of the earnings of the fund to dividends

But it was also decided that the state could use the rest of the earnings — despite a plea by Jay Hammond, a truly great Alaskan, on behalf of the "shareholders" of the "people's fund " Hammond sought a constitutional amendment requiring distribution of all of the fund's earnings to the people

The 55 seemed to be intelligent, concerned and anxious to do what they thought was right Nevertheless, they either were unaware of, or failed to consider, two important facts when they decided to wrap the dividends in the constitution

Over the years, Jay Hammond has conditioned us to believe what he believes — that we own the Permanent Fund Countless times we have said, "The Permanent Fund is our fund, it's a public trust for the people, and the earnings must be spent on dividends, not state services "

Although Hammond could mean that the fund belongs to the people in some abstract sense, Alaskans obviously haven't taken it that way

Even the Alaska Permanent Fund Corp was indoctrinated As Hammond often has done, it points to Section 2 of Article 8 of the constitution, where it is stated "The legislature shall provide for the utilization, development, and conservation of all natural resources belonging

to the State, including land and waters, for the maximum benefit of its people "

Interpreting those words, the APFC wrote in its publication, "An Alaskan's Guide to the Permanent Fund" "The philosophy contained in this constitutional provision also explains why the Permanent Fund belongs to the people of Alaska — all the benefits of Permanent Fund earnings, dividends or not, are rightfully owned by the people of Alaska They are not gifts bestowed by a generous government, they are constitutional rights "

The fact is that the Permanent Fund is owned by the state of Alaska, not by us jointly, in common or otherwise It is made up of oil money and the proceeds of the investment of oil money

The United States conveyed 100 million acres of land, including minerals (which include oil), to the state of Alaska so that it, by selling the oil, would be able to fund government

And, to ensure that the state would always have that ability, the conveyance was made on condition that if the state ever conveyed the land without reserving mineral rights, it would revert to the United States

In 1983, the attorney general of Alaska rendered a written opinion in which he observed that the fund is owned by the state There are court decisions to the same effect

The other fact, either not known or not considered by the 55 is the risk that, with dividends a constitutional requirement, the income of the fund would be subject to taxation by the federal government

We, as individuals, pay income tax on the dividends we receive If the fund had to pay an income tax, it would be in addition to what we pay

In the opinion of one of the state's tax lawyers, constitutionally dedicating the fund's income to dividends would not make it taxable However, another one of the state's tax lawyers advised that if the "dividend program becomes an entitlement that is out of the reach of the government," the fund might be challenged by the IRS

Although the state probably would prevail in a contest with the IRS, at risk are hundreds of millions of dollars a year That risk should have been considered

Roger Cremo lives in Anchorage.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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VISITORS IN TOWN TO EXPERIENCE . . .

Joy in winter

WHEN IT comes to winter, Anchorage has a lot And when it comes to hosting conventions in February, Anchorage likes them to come with long names

Like, for example, the meeting that gets under way here today "The International Association of Mayors of Northern Cities and the Winter Cities 2004 Forum, Tech Tours, Showcase and International Marketplace"

How about that for a title?

For a more brief form of the sessions, let's just call this a gathering of delegates for a meeting of the Winter Cities club — folks from cities located as Anchorage is, near the top of the globe, far in the North and far from the palm trees, heat and humidity of balmier climates

About 300 delegates, including some 30 mayors, are in town for the sessions that will continue through Sunday morning.

Member cities are from Canada, China, Estonia, Greenland, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Norway and Sweden. Anchorage is the only member from the United States

About 300 delegates, including some 30 mayors, are in town for the sessions that will continue through Sunday morning

The Hilton Anchorage Hotel and the Egan Convention Center are sites where formal business sessions will be held, but those on hand also will have the opportunity to see at lot of Anchorage — and some close-up looks at how snow and ice conditions are handled here The program includes a Cultural Night, scheduled Saturday evening in the Performing Arts Center

The conference coincides with Friday night's opening of the Anchorage Fur Rendezvous, a festival that has helped residents here celebrate winter for nearly 70 years

We welcome these visitors We trust they all will enjoy Anchorage's winter chill — or moderate days and nights, as the case may be

Oops.

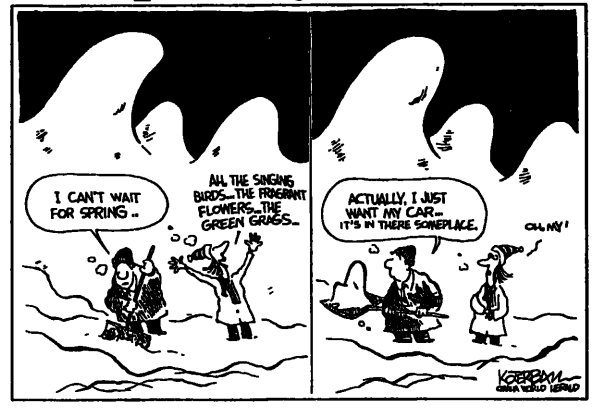
THE SECOND paragraph in Monday's editorial, "Stevens gets it," contained a typographical error It should have read

"Sen Ben Stevens, R-Anchorage, during the last day of the Conference of Alaskans in Fairbanks, told delegates that suggesting the fund's dividends be dedicated in the state constitution would absolutely be the wrong thing to do"

Bad computer Bad, bad computer

Jersey less corrupt? Say it ain't so.

By ELISE PATKOTAK



It felt like a blow to the belly when I first read about it. It felt as though they had ripped something precious and sacred from my life and exposed it to the world in all its ugly nakedness

No, I'm not talking about Janet Jackson's breast I'm talking about the recent ranking of the most corrupt states in the union in which New Jersey managed to rank a paltry, pathetic 16th.

It's not fair you know It's not like New Jersey has that much else to brag about Oh sure, its nickname is the Garden State But even residents tend to snicker when they say that The snickers are usually followed by snide remarks about who — I mean what — might be fertilizing those gardens

I grew up in New Jersey It's a long, thin state that has a gambling mecca at its southern tip, huge industrial wastelands once called cities to the north and in between an area called the Jersey Pine Barrens that contains folks for whom "Deliverance" is a comedy

Patkotak

So to take away from Jersey its one claim to fame — being the most corrupt state in the union — seems terribly unfair and unnecessarily cruel

Growing up in South Jersey, there were a few realities I just took as the way life was The cops would protect both ordinary citizens and those special men from Philadelphia who periodically showed up in black limousines All mayors of Atlantic City went to jail after their term of office expired, but people loved them anyway You never questioned if they would find bodies in the back bay during spring You just took bets on how many

This is because my part of Jersey was the playground — and apparently the dumping ground — of the Philadelphia mob Everyone knew that just as everyone knew that no one heard or saw anything that led to the body slumped over the steering wheel on Pacific Avenue with an inconvenient bullet hole in the head

I think the problem that has arisen is that Jersey has gone off the deep end in trying to clean up its reputation without thinking the whole process through After all, if Jersey is not the most corrupt state in the union — for good Lord's sake, if Jersey can't beat out Alaska — then what does it have to brag about? I mean, it didn't even beat out the Dakotas — not North or South How pathetic is that?

So now what is Jersey left with? A reputation as the smelly, smog-filled state you have to travel through to get to Manhattan?

Yes, Jersey has its beaches Beautiful long stretches of white sand interrupted periodically by medical waste And Jersey does have some farmland in its center that could, under some circumstances, even be called bucolic Of course, you have to pass through cities like Newark and Elizabeth and Camden to get there These cities are the poster children for what corrupt government can do to utterly destroy a city

Recently though, and I can only assume this is why we have slipped in the rankings of most corrupt, Jersey has tried to clean up its mess Why, when gambling arrived in Atlantic City, they even put a commission in that was determined to keep the influence of the mob out of the pure, clean, family-oriented world of scantily clad showgirls and gambling

Manhattan, in an act of pure evil, so overpriced its housing stock that now living in New Jersey while commuting to Manhattan has become an acceptable thing to do New Jersey continues to rehabilitate its reputation while bleaching out all the color and character that once made it the state you could only admit to being from if you were willing to back up your words with your fists

There is no going back and recapturing the crown of corruption for this year All us Jerseyites and ex-Jerseyites will just have to wait till next year Because if there is one thing we know for sure, it's that when it comes to corruption, New Jersey will not sit complacently by and accept 16th place for so long as there is an official anywhere who can be bribed to bump us up higher in the rankings

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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25044122510

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

OIL PRICES MAY BRING . . .

Budget change

WILL THE projected $600 million deficit for the state's next fiscal year become a reality?

Maybe, maybe not Some top legislators looked at oil prices, did their own math and say it could be as little as $90 million, a huge difference and a total that could be made up with available revenue sources

The Alaska Department of Revenue says the draft budget for fiscal year 2005, beginning July 1, is based on North Slope oil priced at $24 65 a barrel, the department's forecast made last fall. Crude oil prices in the current fiscal year were predicted to be $27 70 and have been holding at close to $28 per barrel As it looks now, they could be even higher in the 12 months of the next fiscal year

The department's spring forecast for oil prices won't be out until sometime in late March, but department experts say the odds are looking good that the price will be significantly higher than the prediction used to build the budget as it now stands Last fall's forecast could be left in the dust

There is no guarantee that high crude prices will hold Oil is a commodity and commodity prices can fluctuate significantly And to make matters worse, the price can be greatly influenced by decision-makers in the Middle East, especially those who govern OPEC Their decisions sometimes are based on other considerations than pure economics

BUT ALASKA has a cushion against fluctuating oil prices It's called the Constitutional Budget Reserve, a multi-billion-dollar account established to hold money from settlement of lawsuits against North Slope producers on oil price and taxing issues

If oil prices drop below the level on which a budget is based, the CBR money can be used to make up the difference The CBR is projected to run dry in a few years if it isn't replenished, Gov Frank Murkowski wants it replenished and kept to a minimum of $1 billion

Participants at the recent Conference of Alaskans agreed that the CBR needs to be kept replenished, but they said only that "a prudent balance" should be maintained in the account.

Where the money should come from to pump up the CBR when it drops has not been answered, but one good possibility would be the earnings of the Permanent Fund That would mean the CBR replenishment would compete for dollars with the dividend program

That's not a bad idea. To take the thought a step further, state spending on essential services should also compete for dollars with the dividend program That would put pressure on legislators to keep state spending as low as possible

With such an approach, every dollar not used from available Permanent Fund earnings on government operating expenses and replenishment of the CBR would be paid out in state dividends What better motivation could the state's political leaders have for keeping their spending down?

Will al Qaeda drop a second shoe?

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

The single most puzzling — and arguably most important — question of the day is the one no one raises in public Why have we not been attacked again?

We are coming up on 2 1/2 years since Sept 11, 2001 Think back On Sept. 11, everybody was waiting for the other shoe to drop — within days or weeks, but surely within months When nothing happened, it was said that al Qaeda works on 18-month cycles, with long planning and preparation

Well, it is now almost a year plus 18 months And while there have been terrorist attacks against generally soft targets in other (mostly Islamic) countries, we have not had a single attack, major or minor, in the United States

It is easy to understand why nobody wants to talk about this The administration dares not take credit for what is on its face an amazing phenomenon, but one that can reverse itself in a flash And the opposition hardly wants to highlight a development that might shed favorable light on this administration's post-Sept 11 stewardship

Even commentators are uneasy about bringing it up Any analysis could instantaneously turn into embarrassment

Nonetheless, it seems odd to have a moratorium on so intriguing a question I ask it of almost every intelligence expert I meet. Their speculations fall along two lines

The first is that al Qaeda has been so severely degraded and disrupted that it simply cannot do it It has lost its Afghan base, lost much of its funding and is reduced to going back to where Islamic radicals were years ago launching minor guerrilla operations in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and sending operatives out to hit soft targets such as synagogues in Tunisia and consulates and banks in Istanbul

A variation on this theme is the idea that as al Qaeda's international presence shrinks, terrorism is becoming more regionalized, being taken over by actors such as Jemaah Islamiah (Indonesia), Abu Sayyaf (Philippines) and Ansar al-Islam (Iraq)

That may not be a terribly good development for the world, but it would be an explanation for why the United States has not been attacked If you are an Indonesian terrorist, your objective is to destroy your government and to take it over Hitting the Vegas Strip — no matter how spectacularly — becomes a distraction

But I remain puzzled Let's say that al Qaeda is so badly hurt that it cannot organize another Sept 11 with 19 hijackers, four planes and years of training Yet how much training, how much planning can it take to pack a few trucks with explosives and blow them up in crowded shopping malls? Considering the economic and psychological havoc that would wreak, why haven't they done it?

After all, Timothy McVeigh did not need a huge terror apparatus to kill 168 people in the heartland of America It takes but a primitive level of organization to do that It is hard to believe al Qaeda is not capable of doing the same So why hasn't it?

The other explanation is that it is a matter of pride Having pulled off the greatest terrorist attack in the history of the world, al Qaeda does not want to sully its reputation by resorting to the cheap car bomb

Or, to put it less psychologically and more strategically Part of the appeal of al Qaeda — what it uses to recruit people and funds — is its mystique Superhuman feats, brilliant execution, masterful planning That aura feeds its ideology of historical inevitability, that ultimately it will prevail over Western decadence, because the seemingly high-tech West lacks the diabolical and methodical will that Islamism brings to the war

Could that be it? For the sake of its own mythology, is al Qaeda biding its time until it can pull off the next spectacular?

I don't know I tend to favor the second theory But I have no doubt that reorganizing homeland security, redirecting law enforcement (from locking up bad guys to preventing worse guys from attacking) and increasing vigilance at the borders have had a significant deterrent effect.

Add to that a forward strategy of attacking not only the terrorists but the states that support them Maybe al Qaeda does lack the capacity for even simple terrorism on U S soil If so, it speaks well for an administration that, immediately after Sept 11, designed and carried out a radically new strategy, both offensive and defensive, to fight the war on terror

But no one dares say it It could prove catastrophically wrong tomorrow

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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GIVE-AND-TAKE-AWAY TAX WOULD BE AN . . .

Economic bane

LET'S ASSUME that somehow, in a most improbable way, the Legislature were to adopt a give-and-take-away tax scheme aimed at your the Permanent Fund dividend

Under such a plan, working men and women in the state would receive their annual dividend, and then government, using an income tax, would take it back

Depending on the tax structure, it could be expected such a tax would pluck perhaps $350 million or more from the pockets of people in Anchorage and elsewhere

Consider the impact on the economy

Do you sell automobiles, pickups and snow machines? There goes a big chunk of your sales Do you sell kitchen appliances, television sets, boomboxes and electric razors? Kiss a lot of your business goodbye

How about airplane tickets to Hawaii and tickets on Inside Passage cruises from Seward to Seattle? You'd better lay off a few of your employees

Forget the big-ticket Christmas items you had hoped to sell The money won't be there

If a give-and-take-away tax plan somehow makes it onto the books, the impact on Alaska's economy would be devastating to the business community

The Conference of Alaskans, which met in Fairbanks last week, suggested the Legislature consider an income tax in addition to enshrining the Permanent Fund dividends in the state constitution

Both are bad ideas An income tax in a state with a $28 billion Permanent Fund spinning off $1 4 billion a year in earnings is not the answer Using the earnings as the fund's founders envisioned is the most logical way for the state to make ends meet

Stevens gets it

IT IS REFRESHING to listen to a politician who actually understands the role of government, the state constitution and the Permanent Fund

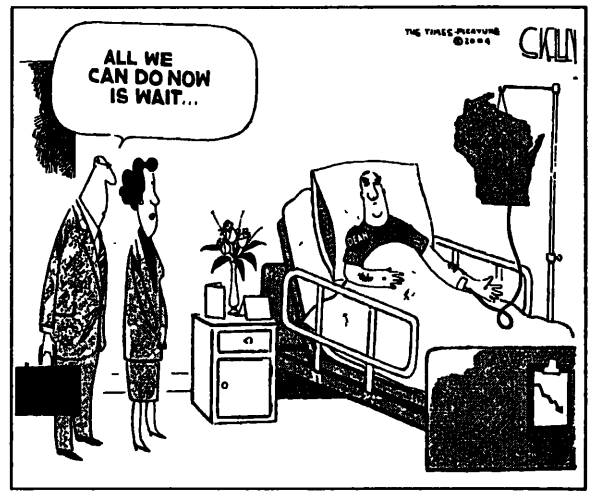
Sen. Ben Stevens, R-Anchorage, during the last day of the Conference of Alaskans in Fairbanks, told delegates that suggesting the fund's dividends by dedicated in the state constitution would absolutely be the wrong thing to do

Stevens said if Alaskans vote to lock the dividends in the state constitution, they would be telling credit agencies, Congress and the rest of the nation that Alaskans intend to pay themselves first, no matter the needs of the state, that we will depend on Congress for our needs

His plea fell on deaf ears Too bad. Perhaps the Legislature will better understand the gravity of his arguments

Government should act as referee

By WALTER E. WILLIAMS



Having been deserted by her husband, my mother worked That meant that my one-year-younger sister and I often lunched by ourselves during our pre-teen years Being bigger and stronger than my sister, quite often there wouldn't be a fair division of the food, especially the desserts

Coming home from work, Mom would be greeted by sob stories about my lunchtime injustices There came a time when Mom got fed up with the sibling hassles — but she didn't admonish us to be more caring, fair, sensitive and considerate of one another She just made a new rule whoever cuts the cake (pie, bread, meat, etc) gives the other person the first selection. With that new rule in place, you can bet that when either my sister or I cut any food that was to be divided between us, the portions probably didn't differ by one microgram

You say, "That's a nice story, Williams, but what's the point?" The point is that the principle underlying Mom's rule is precisely the kind of rules necessary to promote a civilized society In general, the kinds of rules that we want are those that promote justice, whether it's our best friend or our worst enemy who happens to be the decision-maker In the case of Mom's rule, it didn't make any difference whether I hated my sister's guts that day, or she hated mine, or whether my sister was doing the cutting, or whether I was — the cake-cutting outcome was just.

Williams

This year, billions of dollars and billions of hours will be spent campaigning for this or that candidate in our national elections Can we argue that the nation's welfare is served best by picking the "right" person? I think not. The nation's welfare is served best by focusing not on political personalities, but on neutral rules of the game and their even application and enforcement.

Think for a moment about sports — say, basketball Teams play one another One team loses and the other wins, but they and their fans leave the stadium peacefully and most often as friends Why? The game's outcome is seen as fair because there are fixed, known, neutral rules evenly applied by the referees The referee's job is to apply the rules — not determine the game's outcome Imagine the chaos on the court and among the fans if one team had its paid referees to help it win, while its opponent had theirs

In the political arena, the Framers gave us reasonably fair and neutral rules of the game, otherwise known as the United States Constitution If our government acted, as the Framers intended, as a referee and night watchman, how much difference would it make to any of us who occupied the White House or Congress? It would make little, if any It would be just like our basketball game example Any government official who knew and enforced the rules would do But increasingly, who's in office is making a difference, since government has abandoned its referee and night watchman function and gotten into the business of determining winners and losers

In many places around the world, the prospect of, or the result of, national elections leads to all manner of violence and mayhem Why? Because the political arena plays a much larger role than ours in determining winners and losers, and in some cases who wins can literally mean life or death We need only to look at the history of countries in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Where governments decide winners and losers, the most effective coalitions are those based on race, religion, region and ethnicity — the bloodiest coalitions in mankind's history

So which is it Do we want government as referee and night watchman or the decider of winners and losers?

Walter E Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc , 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

HAMMOND PREACHES GLORY . . .

And damnation

LIKE THE old-time preacher armed with thunderbolts of salvation and perdition, Jay Hammond pitched his revival tent in Fairbanks last week and led delegates to the Conference of Alaskans along a sawdust trail to glory or damnation

Hallelujah!

In an amazing display of his inflated style, the man who once was governor, and who obviously still wishes he were, mesmerized delegates who should have known better

Like days of old when sinners sat on wooden benches and sweltered in the heat of summer as a slick-tongued and often self-proclaimed minister pointed one way to heaven and another to hell, many of the delegates clapped their hands and virtually shouted amen, amen, amen

At Fairbanks, Hammond preached the endless virtue of his plan to take Permanent Fund dividends away from working Alaskans and double the dividend for those who have no income And he shamelessly labeled this "The Peoples' Plan"

This came from one who relentlessly pontificates on his view of what Alaska should be — even though what he happens to say today may differ from what he once offered as holy writ In his revival tent, history is something that can be amended to fit the moment

His appearance at the conference drew rave reviews from many of the delegates, and it was good that all joined in a warm personal salute to one who has made a mission out of what he believes the state's Permanent Fund should be

But despite his pretense of walking the high road and posing as the one speaking from the mountaintop, Hammond sadly got carried away in his preaching

TOWARD THE END of his long harangue — which took half again as much time as Gov Frank Murkowski used in his remarks opening the conference — Hammond came up with a tasteless and inappropriate assertion

If Murkowski were to endorse this fantasy Robin Hood plan, Hammond promised — *promised* — Murkowski would be raised in glory and be honored for evermore by Alaskans until Kingdom comes

But if he fails to do that, Hammond thundered in an Armageddon voice, Murkowski "will go down in flames and take his daughter with him '

The threat was as crude as any we've heard in many years of watching Alaska politicians at work

The governor's daughter, U S Sen Lisa Murkowski, was not involved in the conference Her election campaign is not, and should never have been, part of the debate at Fairbanks

Hammond insulted the governor, demeaned Sen Murkowski, and offended any Alaskan who continues to hold out hope for political decency in the public discussion of important issues

He deserves condemnation — not a hallelujah

Chillin' out at Anchorage's new airport

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

THE NEW CONCOURSE at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport is nearing completion, headed for a grand opening sometime in June Among new attractions at the airport will be Anchorage's second Chili's restaurant HMS Host, the airport concessionaire, is advertising for a store manager to be in charge

WHILE WAITING for the new airport facility to open its doors, there's no big wait for the start of our town's biggest mid-winter festival The 2004 Fur Rendezvous kicks off Friday with a big fireworks show, and the fun and games will continue through Sunday, March 7 And this year, for a change, there should be plenty of snow for the World Championship Sled Dog Race on the final three days of the event One of the other highlights For the first time, the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race — the thousand-mile classic that will end on Nome's Front Street some nine days later — will begin during the Rondy This is the 69th year for the Rondy It began in 1935, when it was called the Winter Carnival The name was changed to the Fur Rendezvous in 1937

Tobin

ONE OF THE changes on this year's program is the location of the popular magic show that is staged annually during the Rondy by an all-star cast drawn from Anchorage's professional and amateur wizards In the past few weeks, these magical performers have been building a stage and setting the lights at the new venue, the Museum of Natural History at 201 N Bragaw It's one of the great Rondy attractions that you and the children won't want to miss

AS FOR THE Iditarod, those in command of this year's race have followed the lead of the Super Bowl and are using Roman numerals to identify the 2004 event Which means this year's rush to Nome is Iditarod XXXII The fun begins at 10 a m on Saturday, March 6, on Fourth Avenue at D Street Richard Wilmarth won the first Iditarod in 1973 Robert Sorlie from Norway, the first citizen of a European country to win the race, was last year's champion Martin Buser, a four-time winner who set the mark for the fastest time to Nome in 2002 when the course extended over 1,104 miles, was born in Switzerland. But he's been an Alaskan since 1979

"I would've been here sooner, but our iceberg hit a ship"

WHEN THE IDITAROD mushers set out from Fourth Avenue, along for the first day's ride as far as Eagle River will be lucky bidders who paid big bucks to get a seat in the sleds for the first 11 miles of the race How big were the bucks? The winning bids totaled $138,659

MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE in your datebook, make a note that some of Alaska's great pioneers will be gathering in Fairbanks next month for the Alaska Miners Association's 19th biennial Conference on Alaska Mining And this is not all past history from the Gold Rush days To prove it, the theme of this meeting is "Mining The Road to Alaska's Future" The Westmark Hotel is the conference headquarters Maestro Randall Craig Fleischer and the Anchorage Symphony Orchestra will present "Symphony Under Construction" at two concerts for fourth- and fifth-graders on March 16 and April 13 in the Atwood Concert Hall at the Performing Arts Center Fleischer's wife, comedienne Heidi Joyce, will join in the light-hearted introduction to serious music There will be two performances each day, one at 10 a.m and the other at noon A bit further down the line, STAR's 11th annual spring auction, with a big-top circus theme, will be staged May 1 at the 4th Avenue Theatre Looking toward fall, this year's Gold Pan Awards banquet, one of the big annual events of the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, will be held Sept 18 at the Sheraton Anchorage

IN OUR Department of Amplification, Entertaining Airline Crews Chapter, Pat Stiles checks in with further information Even before the Chamber of Commerce had a program to host foreign airline crews overnighting in town at Christmas, Anchorage Jaycees were providing Yuletide dinners-in-the-home as far back as 1966 It was not until 1970 or so, as mentioned here a few weeks ago, that the Chamber took over the duties She and her Jaycee husband became particular favorites of Lufthansa flight crews "Some became real friends," she reports Alas, the practice ended years ago — about the time the airlines of the world began bypassing Anchorage on the polar flights between Europe and Anchorage

SPEAKING OF aviation matters, let the record show that Alaska Airlines will begin two-a-day service — once in the morning and once in the afternoon, both ways — between Seattle and Chicago on April 26 And how about this One-way fare is $79 Try that between Anchorage and Seattle

FOR THOSE WHO prefer to travel by ship, the new Queen Mary 2 is 1,132 feet long — which means you could line up 41 London double-decker buses stem to stern on its top deck. All told, the 236-foot-high vessel has 17 decks, plenty enough to accommodate 2,620 passengers and five swimming pools The top ticket on the first Atlantic crossing from Southampton to New York City last month for the Cunard Line's flagship was $28,000 a person. Don't look for the QM2 to make Seward or Whittier a port of call any time soon. Like years and years

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times

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CONFERENCE RESULTS WERE . . .

Pretty good

THE CONFERENCE of Alaskans did a pretty good job in the end

Despite a brief lurch toward strongly urging an income tax, the conferees backed off and simply recommended that the Legislature consider an income tax among other revenue sources to balance the state budget

We're hoping that, when and if that happens, the Legislature will consider it briefly but quickly abandon the idea.

The venture into tax territory, which Gov Frank Murkowski asked the conference to avoid, came after an impassioned sermon by former Gov Jay Hammond, who wanted a tax in order to pay dividends to low-income people If he had his way, most working Alaskans would lose at least part — and in most cases all — of their dividends

In the end, the conference pretty much stuck to answering the questions asked of it by Murkowski when he opened the three-day session on Tuesday

The conferees unanimously endorsed using a percent of market value approach to measuring Permanent Fund earnings and limited distributions to 5 percent of that value

THAT RECOMMENDATION alone could make the entire three-day session worthwhile The POMV approach, as it is called, has been recommended by the Permanent Fund trustees and is widely used by major educational and endowment funds

But understanding the POMV issue is not easy and generally requires the kind of close study conducted at the conference Some critics wrongly claim that the approach would constitute dipping into the principal of the fund

Since limiting the distribution to 5 percent would be well within the fund's average annual growth, it would just simplify distribution of dividends and eliminate the requirement that investments be sold to be considered earnings It would also provide inflation-proofing since the average growth is more like 8 percent

If the POMV issue becomes clouded by gadfly activists it could have a difficult time at the polls The unanimous endorsement by the conferees will hopefully provide guidance to the undecided and blow away the gadfly fog

Among the conferees' other recommendations were using a portion of the Permanent Fund earnings for essential state services They also suggested that the free-money program have a higher priority than state services We disagree with that portion of their recommendations but are encouraged that they acknowledged that some state services are essential enough to warrant use of some fund earnings

It wasn't much, but it was at least a lurch in the right direction

Highlights of governor's speech

Below are highlights of a speech by Gov Frank Murkowski on Tuesday at the Conference of Alaskans at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Eliminated for space considerations were historical information and the governor's expressions of appreciation for the time and effort expended by the conferees

Let's look at the story

Our young state is burdened like many with deficit spending

Our economy is heavily skewed in a single sector, Politically paralyzed by indecision about budget and finance, and yet we are endowed with extraordinary wealth

Without our wealth we would be just another state on the rocks of fiscal instability With our wealth we have opportunity others can only imagine

The story for history will not be about our fiscal gap — every state has the same problem The story will be about our solution

No other state has our wealth No other state has our options

The story will be about our climb out of our unique trap Caught with oil and gas in the ground, with timber and fish, with gold, copper, zinc and silver, with $28 billion in the bank and with fiscal deficits and not enough money for the future to plow the roads

We really have an allocation gap — not a fiscal gap

I ask that you keep an open mind as you participate in discussion over the questions I've asked you to cover regarding the purpose and future use of permanent fund income

Don't get bogged down with extraneous conditions such as what you think will "fly" with the Legislature or what you feel is politically expedient

Your assignment is to recommend proper public policy for the long term Do what you think is right

In 1990, when another group of Alaskans participated in the commission on the future of the Permanent Fund, they reached a conclusion that no major changes were in order

After hearing from Alaskans across the state, they concluded that state spending should be cut first At the

time, the state was spending $2 25 billion to operate government This happens to be the same amount we are projecting to spend in the next fiscal year Does it mean spending is still too high?

Let me put it in perspective $2 25 billion in 1990 is equivalent to more than $3 1 billion in today's dollars Government spending has been reduced substantially since 1990, thanks to efforts by the Legislature

Furthermore, our state population has increased by almost 100,000 since 1990 And the Permanent Fund, which had a value of $9 3 billion in 1990, has grown three-fold since then to $28 billion today

In the 1990 review, just as today, some people argued for an income tax instead of considering income from the fund I have not asked this conference to take up the income tax question but your discussion will be broad

My reason is straightforward

1 The optimum solution for the state's long-term economic health is to produce new money from the development of natural resources This new money flows through the state's economy through jobs and good wages for Alaskans and business opportunities for Alaska companies

2 Another way we inject new money into the economy is through disbursement of some of the earnings of the Permanent Fund distributed as dividends An income tax, on the other hand, simply recycles money

Less than 10 percent of revenue that would be generated by an income tax would come from out-of-state workers and be considered new money The rest would come out of the pockets of working Alaskans to be spent by government This doesn't help the economy and real job growth.

Some have suggested that an increased tax on the oil industry is the solution to our fiscal gap, starting with the economic limit factor (ELF) While I would welcome the Legislature to begin hearings on ELF, it is not a substitute for our fiscal gap ELF requires a careful review including How many marginal fields are on line today because of ELF?

If our current ELF policy were so out of touch with return of revenues to the state, why are there not more major companies anxious to open up new fields to take advantage of the ELF incentive?

Why, for instance, did BP discontinue new exploration in Alaska? And finally, would an increase in ELF at this time be seen as inconsistent state policy?

On one hand we are negotiating incentives under the Stranded Gas Act with the producers and MidAmerican, Co On the other hand, the applicants are basing their economics on certainty and predictability of government taxing policy

Keep in mind, Alaska already is ranked as the most expensive onshore basin in the world

It is for these reasons that I have asked you to limit your focus to the four questions before you Your recommendations may serve as the basis for legislation that hopefully will be submitted to the Legislature Then it is my hope that fellow Alaskans will vote on your proposals at the voting polls in November

We are gathered here today on a ledge in our ascent to tomorrow I have asked your advice about a choice for Alaska I have asked you to recommend — to chart a course If the choice were easy it would have already been made

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SAVING MONEY WITH MORE . . .

Bureaucracy?

THERE IS something of a delicious irony in Mayor Mark Begich's plan to spend $2 million setting up a Division of Efficiency

It is mind-boggling to think government can operate efficiently, but actually setting up a division with "efficiency" in its name? It is hard not to laugh

The new bureaucracy, the mayor says, will save the city $6 4 million by rooting out savings and streamlining the city's annual $200 million in purchasing About $400,000 of the $2 million will pay for five new staff members to work away from the daily hubbub in city offices The rest will buy software and technology

We applaud Begich's concern about efficiency, but our questions are these Why not have department heads and others already on the payroll find and implement the efficiencies, saving the city $8 4 million instead of $6 4 million? Is that not why we pay them — to run their departments efficiently? Why must the city set up a new $2 million division to do their work? Is the mayor saying his managers cannot do their jobs? If that is the case, we would support his finding people who can

Begich says he wants the city to join with other government entities to form a larger group with more buying power to save money, and that is a wonderful idea, but building another bureaucratic layer seems to us self-defeating

Perhaps the mayor and his staff could spend more time trying to unravel the city's tax assessment snarl If that system were more efficient it would help to assure taxpayers they were getting a fair deal

That makes more sense than a new bureaucracy

Alaska smokes

ALASKA IS TOPS in many categories, but not all of them are good ones

Among the least desirable statistics is that our state has the second-highest smoking rate in the nation, ranking just behind Kentucky

In all, 29 4 percent of Alaskans smoke cigarettes compared to 32 6 percent of Kentuckians We're followed by West Virginia at 28 4 percent, Tennessee at 27 8 percent and Indiana at 27 7 percent

The healthy end of the smoking spectrum is anchored by the U S Virgin Islands with just 9 5 percent of its people cigarette-addicted, Utah at 12 7 percent, Puerto Rico at 13 2 percent and California 16 4 percent

Though California's statistics make that state look superior to Alaska by comparison, we suspect that is because the study didn't measure what else Californians might be smoking

Jay's new plan would be a disaster

By PAUL JENKINS

Watching former Gov Jay Hammond hijack the Conference of Alaskans in Fairbanks to peddle his plan for the Permanent Fund and a tax on its dividends was to watch an innate politician at his best — and worst.

In a sometimes passionate, grindingly long speech Hammond pushed his vision of how the fund's dividends should be taxed, a sort of robbing Peter and Paul to pay government When cornered by conferees asking about the wornisome, niggling particulars of his Swiss-cheese plan, Hammond would snort "those are mechanical details," or lecture his questioner not to lose focus Watching him was a lesson in playing a crowd

His act — uninvited and not on the agenda — pointed conferees down a path not intended by Gov Frank Murkowski when he envisioned the conference Murkowski, actually hoping that something useful would come of the meeting, wanted those attending to stick closely to four narrow questions about how — or even whether — to use the Permanent Fund earnings in the hope they could reach a consensus They were to stay on point and not even to discuss taxes

Jenkins

Hammond's road show, however, put the kibosh on all that His plan — he also gives parental rights to Clem Tillion and former Senate President Rick Halford for its birth — would adopt the long-debated percent of market value management approach to the fund, taking up to 5 percent of its value each year after inflation-proofing All of that money — $2,380, give or take — would be paid out in dividends Yippee

The bad news? Hammond's plan does not protect your dividend His "dividend tax" would "claw" dividends back from working Alaskans when the amount of money in the Constitutional Budget Reserve dips below $1 billion, as it likely will in the relatively near future The tax, he says, would be capped at the dividend's amount There also is a provision to nail Outsiders for taxes The former governor claims the plan automatically would lift the levy after the CBR reached $1 billion, making it the rarest of things political, a tax that actually would go away Right.

"Are you the guy who advertised he'd found a wallet?"

"So what?" you ask. "The tax would only affect the evil rich." Sucker Turns out, an estimated 216,000 folks — from the tippy top of the tax charts to the very bottom — would donate their dividends to the state treasury People making as little as $15, 867 in taxable income would get to kiss their dividend goodbye Sound rich?

Among its many problems, the plan's tax is seriously regressive It is a flat tax until $15,867 in taxable income is reached, but after that — and liberals get the vapors at this sort of thing — it is seriously regressive because of its cap If you make $16,000, you'll be taxed $2,380, the amount of your dividend If you make $14 zillion, you'll still be taxed $2,380

If Hammond had his way, the tax would be ensconced in the state constitution so that we peasants could not repeal it by initiative, and it would have no cap But political reality, after all, is political reality

As if all of that were not enough, the plan also includes a seemingly unworkable "Dividend A" and "Dividend B" scheme supposedly aimed at heading off undesirables who come to Alaska for the dividends Unfortunately, it would promote establishment of two different classes of Alaskans, those who receive dividends because they were here on a certain date, and those who may or may not get them. One conferee asked Hammond. What about my children born after the cutoff date? Another "mechanical detail," he responded

For Alaskans who want to keep their dividend there is not much to like about Hammond's plan Among the obvious problems

- It would cost millions to set up yet another state bureaucracy to administer the tax,
- It likely would not collect enough to close the fiscal gap,
- It establishes two dividend classes of Alaskans,
- It punishes working Alaskans, even those near the bottom of the tax scales, and,
- There are myriad legal questions

But none of that stopped the conferees, apparently under Hammond's spell, from dallying with the nonsensical idea of taxes, including an income tax — in a state boasting a $27 billion nest egg You have to wonder why the conference members, who decided to ignore Murkowski's directions, did not take a little time and discuss predator control, the state of Alaska's roads or renaming the state bird It would have made just as much sense

The reality is that the Legislature would have a difficult time passing any form of income tax to keep the free money flowing for what is turning out to be the most expensive social welfare entitlement program in history It just makes no sense

But you have to give it to the conferees They listened to the governor

Unfortunately for Alaska, it was the wrong one

Paul Jenkins is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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HAMMOND WRONG ABOUT . . .

Fund intent

ON FEB. 8, former Gov Jay Hammond said in a column published in the Anchorage Daily News "Some who were not even there say the Permanent Fund's original intent was to serve as a 'rainy day account.'

"That was certainly not the intent of Hugh Malone, Oral Freeman, Clem Tillion, Chancy Croft, Clark Gruening, Sam Cotten or myself"

Well, maybe his memory has slipped a bit While he was still governor, Hammond wrote a column published in The Anchorage Times on Oct. 27, 1976 — less than a week before the election establishing the Permanent Fund — and made this specific point.

"Leaving all our resource dollars in the politicians' purview to spend as they see fit for bigger government, instead of socking some away in savings for the future, would be like assuming there is no need to put away some cash for rainy days"

Whether Hammond has forgotten the words he used then to help sell the Permanent Fund or is being disingenuous now, it's important for today's Alaskans to understand the intent of those who voted to set up the fund.

IT WAS UNDERSTOOD by virtually all of the 75,588 Alaskans who voted for the proposal in '76 that the intent of the measure was to sock away money for the future financing of essential government services when Alaska's oil boom ebbed.

Individual dividend checks were approved by the Legislature in 1980 in a program sold to the public as a way to give all Alaskans a direct cash benefit from development of the state's natural resources and motivation to pay attention to governance of the fund

Unfortunately, the dividends have hijacked the Permanent Fund program and somehow become its only purpose No Legislature has ever used any of the money for its original intended use Instead, all of the money has gone into dividend checks or inflation-proofing

Hammond now argues that Alaska should reimpose an income tax in order to keep the dividend money flowing That is nonsensical It would take money out of the pockets of working Alaskans, expand the state bureaucracy and break faith with those who set up the fund in the first place

To make matters worse, Hammond yesterday barged his way onto the agenda at the Conference of Alaskans in an attempt to sell his tax plan. But the conference was called by Gov Frank Murkowski and the conferees were specifically instructed by Murkowski that their job was not to consider taxes but to answer four questions on how Alaska's existing revenue sources should be used.

We hope the conferees will ignore Hammond's dogged and inappropriate attempt to hijack their agenda The conference has been assigned a job by our current governor and its mission is to answer the questions he asked.

Grim fiscal reality

It is well beyond time to act

LISTENING to presenters at the Conference of Alaskans in Fairbanks paint an accurate picture of the fiscal dilemma facing Alaska is a sobering reality-check.

For instance, Cheryl Frasca, state director of the Office of Management and Budget, pointed out that if Alaska continues to spend at the same rate it will face serious consequences as it tries to balance its fiscal 2006 budget.

Frasca's estimates in the "B" budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2005, were based on $22-a-barrel oil If her forecast comes to pass, Alaska will be a very different place

To balance the budget, even with $527 million in spending reductions, some 1,760 positions would be abolished, and several departments — Fish and Game and Natural Resources, for instance — would be combined The Labor Department would be eliminated. Public television and radio broadcasting grants would be ended, and the Office of Public Advocacy also would be chopped.

Worse, many things paid for by the state would shift to local governments Pupil transportation grants, the state Arts Council, matching Head Start grants — all would affected.

Clearly, the time to do more than arguing about the fiscal gap problem is upon us all

CONFERENCE OPENING MARKED BY . . .

Common sense

DESPITE THE headline shout in Wednesday's Anchorage Daily News, the Conference of Alaskans at Fairbanks did not begin "with a plea for a tax."

It began, instead, with a brilliantly constructed speech by Gov Frank Murkowski in which he pulled the rug from under the tax-first-last-and-always crowd. Said the governor

"An income tax simply recycles money" It does not, he pointed out, "produce new money from the development of natural resources" New money, he noted, "flows through the state's economy through jobs and good wages for Alaskans and business opportunities for Alaska companies"

The constant yammering for a new tax comes from the Daily News and Jay Hammond, who last sat as governor nearly a quarter of century ago Since Hammond left office in 1982, sadly, we find from reading his op-ed columns and listening to his speeches and ceaseless media interviews that he spends a bit of his time tweaking history

For example, as pointed out elsewhere on this page, he has of late repeatedly denied that the Permanent Fund was ever — from Day One — referred to as a "rainy day" account, even though he himself, in the days when he was fresh in the governor's office, used that precise term to help sell creation of the vote to voters

Now, with the Daily News as his relentless champion in an effort to convince voters that an income tax is the state's only budget gap salvation, Mr Hammond went uninvited to the Fairbanks meeting and did what he could to soil Gov Murkowski's splendid effort to let a cross-section of Alaskans discuss the future of the Permanent Fund and the state's budget problems

Make no mistake The plan for this conference was a stroke of public policy genius by Murkowski The time was right for it The purpose was right for Alaska And the setting and the number of delegates were spectacularly on target to get something done — without feather-flapping by Hammond and others intent to disrupt the affair

It was on the campus of the University of Alaska in Fairbanks in the winter of 1555-56 that 55 delegates met and drafted the Alaska Constitution They did it without acrimony, without diversions, without political agendas They succeeded

We pray that the results from this new Fairbanks meeting will be the same

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BEST WISHES TO . . .

55 Conferees

THE 55 ALASKANS assembled at the University of Alaska Fairbanks this week are undertaking what could be a historic attempt to put the state's finances on a viable and sustainable track.

Whether it succeeds — and whether its recommendations will be accepted by the Legislature — remain to be seen. But even trying seems worthwhile

The delegates to the Conference of Alaskans have been asked several questions by Gov Frank Murkowski, all relating to the Permanent Fund

The questions include whether the earnings of the Permanent Fund should be calculated as a percent of the fund's market value, as recommended by fund trustees, and whether a portion of earnings should be used to fund government, whether use of the earnings should continue to be decided each year by the Legislature and whether a minimum balance should be maintained in the Constitutional Budget Reserve

We have strong opinions on all these matters but we'll not repeat them here Instead we offer our best wishes and encouragement to the delegates Let's hope their collective wisdom will result in positive changes that will improve the lives and fortunes of Alaska's people

Weird ranking

IT IS HARD to believe, but Alaska is ranked by "Corporate Crime Reporter" as the fourth-most corrupt state in the union, even surpassing New York, Illinois and New Jersey

In a report titled "Public Corruption in the United States," the newsletter aimed at federal and state prosecutors, the legal community and major corporations, ranked the 10 most corrupt states and the 10 least corrupt.

Using a 2002 report from the Justice Department Public Integrity Section which reports only prosecutions of federal, state or local officials who abuse the public trust, the newsletter came up with a formula and looked at cases from 1993 to 2002

If federal prosecutors do not take corrupt officials to court, it skews the numbers, the publication warns, and state prosecution numbers are not considered

Here are the listings for the 10 most corrupt states

1 Mississippi, 2 North Dakota, 3 Louisiana, 4 Alaska, 5 Illinois, 6 Montana, 7 South Dakota, 8 Kentucky; 9 Florida, and, 10th, that perennial favorite, New York.

Least corrupt? Nebraska.

It is nothing less that stunning that Alaska somehow is more corrupt than New Jersey, which ranked 16th.

Go figure

Robert Browning had it all wrong

By ELISE PATKOTAK

Before she died, my mother used to quote the poet Robert Browning's line, "Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be" Then she let loose with what was for her a very unladylike snort of derision. You got the feeling she wasn't buying the sentiment.

When I was young, I'd hear the cynical tone she used when she said that and thought to myself that would never happen to me Why? Well, because as all baby boomers know, we are never going to grow old

And then I woke up one day and the unthinkable occurred As I stood bleary eyed in front of the mirror taking the handful of pills needed to keep me alive from day to day and counting the number of doctor appointments I had that week alone, I heard my mother's voice come out of my mouth. She was quoting Robert Browning And she even snorted at the end

It was one of those moments that, if I had been younger, I would have attributed to an accidental ingestion of something other than shitake mushrooms the night before

Patkotak

I look at my old dog and realize that as each day goes by, I am more and more able to empathize with him as he lies in his bed moaning and groaning softly, in between snoring and barking as he dreams in his sleep

He's pretty deaf, so ringing phones and doorbells no longer disturb his slumber A bullhorn blown into his ear would probably only rate a raised head, bleary eyed response

I didn't realize that I was starting to make some of those same sounds as I slept until I heard my African Gray parrot one day imitating me It was early morning, the alarm has just gone off and I was lying in bed, less than eager to leave its warmth Abdul was in the next room behind his nighttime curtain.

As he always does in the morning while he waits for me to get up and get the day going, he was sitting there talking and laughing to himself And then he started making these sounds I listened intently thinking he had picked up sounds from the cartoons he watches all day

But after a few minutes, I recognized them for what they were Human sounds he'd heard night after night coming from the bedroom next to his I pulled the covers over my head and wondered why I would ever want to get up again

Then there's the little problem of focus that seems to be happening more and more It's a problem seen in youth and, I'm finding out, once again as old age sets in. For instance, when I started to write this column, I wanted to be sure I had the quote right So I went to the Internet to search for it

But I got a little sidetracked when I ended up at a site that had the entire Rubyiat of Omar Khayyam on it I read that which reminded me of a friend I needed to write to but first I had to call someone else for the address well, you get the picture Three hours later, I still hadn't started the column

Mr T gets more easily distracted, too, now that he's 14 He still loves to take our daily walk but he no longer heads straight from point A to point B pulling the old lady behind him Instead, he walks three steps, stops and barks for a minute, walks three more steps, sniffs yesterday's markings, barks for another minute, walks three steps, stops and barks at the moose droppings for a minute, walks another three steps and stops to bark at something only his cataract filled eyes can see It's no wonder he's so exhausted when he gets home

I guess my attitude about growing old would be a bit different if Mr Browning were here to do it with me But then, I'm not sure how I'd keep the romance going once he heard the sounds I make in my sleep Or the ones I make when I get out of a low chair Or the ones I make when I attempt to get down on the floor to yell in my dogs ear because he is totally ignoring my calls to go out before we go to bed

I personally think the quote should read, "Grow old along with me You can't believe what's going to be"

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company

The Anchorage Times

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BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

PERMANENT FUND WAS SET UP FOR A . . .

'Rainy day'

AS THE "Conference of Alaskans" begins meeting today in Fairbanks, those anxious to hand hard-working Alaskans a pay cut by taxing their income have cobbled up an alternative

It is, of course, no more than a smokescreen to prevent use of the Permanent Fund for its intended purpose

They want to take all or part of successful Alaskans' Permanent Fund dividends — a "dividend tax," they call it — while doubling the amount given to non-working residents They claim it will cure everything from the state's fiscal ills to tooth decay

Last week, tax advocates laboring to spin the issue away from using the earnings tried to portray the Permanent Fund as a "people's fund," which clearly it is not Now, they want you to believe voters in 1976 did not establish the fund with the intent that it would eventually underwrite state government.

"Some who were not even there say the Permanent Fund's original intent was to serve as a 'rainy day account,'" former Gov Jay Hammond wrote in the Anchorage Daily News over the weekend "That was certainly not the intent "

Perhaps it was not his intent, but 75,588 Alaskans who voted on Nov 2, 1976, to set up the fund may have thought otherwise

The Alaska State Chamber of Commerce back then wrote the voting pamphlet statement urging voters to adopt Proposition No 2, which established the Permanent Fund. That statement to voters, in its opening sentence, referred to the " rainy day fund "

If that is not specific enough, the statement also contained this "Now is the time to ask ourselves the question. 'When the oil and gas is depleted, where will the funds to feed our giant government come from? The answer is the Permanent Fund'"

SEEMS CLEAR ENOUGH to us, but rather than use the fund's earnings as voters stipulated in the state constitution, Hammond, who laments the repeal of the state income tax in 1980, would adopt a complicated give-and-take-away tax scheme spawning more bureaucracy and punishing the state's most productive citizens Further, it takes another step in turning the Permanent Fund into a monolithic social welfare program — something not on the voters' agenda in 1976

We understand Hammond's concern about preserving the fund in the face of increasing fiscal pressures, and we applaud his desire to somehow more closely link Alaskans to the fund to protect its future But not at the expense of those who make the state work.

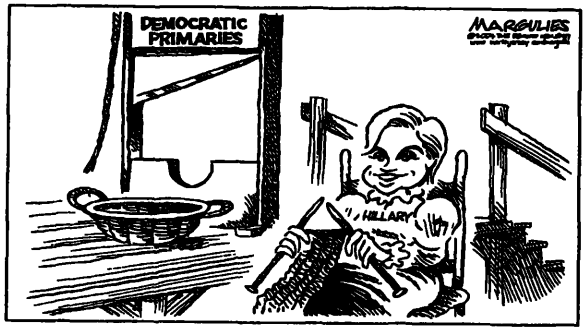
Expenditure of a portion of the Permanent Fund earnings, set out in the state constitution and clearly desired by the 75,588 Alaskans who established the fund, should come long before an income tax, or Hammond's backdoor "dividend tax."

His proposal promises everything under the sun, but only serves to cloud the real issue and the tough questions More important, it overlooks the fund's primary mission. Despite the gyrations, despite the scams and the mischaracterizations and the political sleight of hand, resolution of Alaska's fiscal gap will hinge on this

Do Alaskans want to use the Permanent Fund earnings as intended by voters in 1976 as a rainy day account, or do they want an income tax to keep the free money flowing?

Democracies at war like warriors

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER



With John Kerry as their presumptive candidate, the Democrats may have won the war issue

True, President Bush will make the case that his post-Sept. 11 policies are infinitely tougher And Kerry certainly has given him an opening, saying that the war on terrorism is "primarily an intelligence and law enforcement operation."

This is a hopelessly retrograde invocation of the anti-terrorism policies that brought us Sept. 11 — finding, arresting and putting on trial individual miscreants, as we did the World Trade Center bombers of 1993 — but it does not matter War is more a visceral than an intellectual issue Kerry holds the trump card. He's fought in battle And acted heroically

Kerry is where he is today not because of his message, his new-found populism or his newly relaxed face, but because in the same week Howard Dean angrily told a questioner/heckler, "You've had your say And now I'm going to have mine," John Kerry welcomed onto his stage in Iowa a tearful war buddy for their first reunion since Kerry saved his life 35 years ago in Vietnam.

End of contest

However much Democrats want to deny it — and insist on talking about health care and budgets and tax cuts — this is a war election, our first war election in more than a decade Ironically, they may win because of it.

For 2 1/2 years it looked as if the political beneficiary of Sept. 11, 2001, was George W Bush. But Bush, never a believer in hoarding political capital, spent his post-Sept. 11 and post-Afghanistan popularity on Iraq The big political beneficiary of Sept. 11 turns out to be Kerry

Sept. 11 changed the rules of presidential electoral politics Or, more accurately, it returned us to an earlier set of rules that prevailed in Cold War days Every single president elected during the Cold War had served in some capacity in the military

It is no accident that Bill Clinton, who never served, was the first post-Cold War president It is no accident that Bob Dole, who ran in the second post-Cold War presidential election, got absolutely no political traction out of his background as a genuine war hero During the end-of-history '90s, military service seemed an irrelevance

Sept 11 reminded us that the '90s were an anomaly And upon returning to a world of mortal conflict with people who really want you destroyed, you instinctively want someone not new to the idea of war

There is far more instinct than logic at play here After all, the two greatest wartime presidents in American history were Lincoln, who served at most four months in the Illinois militia, and FDR, who served not at all Moreover, there are a lot of impressive warriors you would not want near the presidency Douglas MacArthur, for one Wesley Clark, for another

Yet that instinct is common for democracies at war Take Israel, at war for the entire 55 years of its existence

Israel has a habit of electing generals and war heroes In the 1999 election, that habit went over the top The two contenders for prime minister were commandos who had participated in the same stunning operation. In 1972, Ehud Barak, Binyamin Netanyahu and 14 colleagues shot their way onto a Sabena airliner hijacked into Tel Aviv, killed two terrorists and freed the passengers No terrorist ever hijacked a plane into Israel again.

In that 1999 election campaign, Barak's advertising used a photograph of his younger self standing on the wing of the jetliner dressed in the mechanic's clothes with which he and the others had disguised themselves Netanyahu likes to joke that Barak got the picture but that "I was the guy who got shot in the arm."

On the other hand, the biggest loser in the history of Israeli politics — he lost four races for prime minister — is Shimon Peres, who was a brilliant aide to David Ben-Gurion and helped create Israel's nuclear deterrent, but never saw combat. And every Israeli knows it.

That doesn't mean that Barak was a better steward of national security than Peres It only means that electorates put a high value on wartime service for would-be wartime leaders

The reason is deeply visceral It is not just that you think a veteran — or, even better, a hero — has a better understanding of war, its strategy and its costs It is that when the bad guys are after you — say, after they kill 3,000 of your countrymen in one day — you like the idea of a national leader who has no compunction about killing

Kerry makes the point with extra emphasis by noting that he hunts And plays hockey Post-Sept. 11, that's the kind of guy even Democrats want wearing the sheriff's badge

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

LET THE LEGISLATURE HANDLE . . .

Ballot issue

WELL, SURPRISE, surprise It turns out that one the sponsors of a ballot initiative calling for special elections to fill vacant U S Senate seats now would rather the Legislature act on the issue, keeping it from going to voters

Rep Harry Crawford, D-Anchorage, the sponsor who had the change of heart, says legislative action would remove uncertainty surrounding legal action pending against the initiative

Anchorage Rep Eric Croft, a Democrat and another of the three sponsors, says in an Associated Press story that he is leery of the legal challenge and would go along with legislative action if he was assured lawmakers would not repeal it the next year But Democratic Rep David Guttenberg of Fairbanks, the initiative's third sponsor, is of another mind

"I am concerned about the lawsuit and the constitutionality, but there were 50,000 signatures," he said "Let them vote, and let the court do what it may I don't trust the political agenda dealing with these ballot issues "

The initiative, says state Attorney General Gregg Renkes, is unconstitutional and a challenge is pending before the Alaska Supreme Court That case would be moot if the Legislature adopted a substantially similar law

House Committee Chairwoman Lesil McGuire, R-Anchorage, has found herself under fire from Democrats and others on the left for offering legislation establishing special elections to fill Senate vacancies and thereby shelving the November vote

IN MOST elections, there would be little fuss over the initiative, but this year it's seen as a calculated move orchestrated by Democrats to remind voters that Gov Frank Murkowski appointed his daughter to replace him in the Senate Democrats would love to see a vote and they put on a political full-court press to win a ballot spot in hopes of helping their eventual Senate candidate

But it was not nearly the grass-roots effort you might believe

The group set up to head the drive was Trust the People Alaska Public Offices Commission records show it received $25,000 from American Family Voices of Washington, D C , headed by former Clinton aide Michael Lux, who earlier was political czar for the liberal interest group People for the American Way

The Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, also of Washington, was launched at the People for the American Way in 1996 Now a free-standing, liberal non-profit, it chipped in another $5,000 Its directors, including Lux, tilt far to the left

The source of all that laundered money probably cannot be traced But its purpose is obvious to keep the initiative on the ballot to help whoever turns out to be the Democrats' standard-bearer

McGuire is to be commended for sponsoring the legislation We hope the Legislature does the right thing, and very soon

The anti-free trader's true enemy

By WALTER WILLIAMS

There's the "Free Trade but Fair Trade" crowd, and the "Level Playing Field" crowd, and the "America First" crowd, all calling for tariffs and other international trade restrictions Their supposed adversary is corporate America, seeking to boost profits by either importing goods made by cheaper foreign labor or relocating plants in foreign lands to directly take advantage of cheaper labor

They claim that this accounts for the loss of U S manufacturing jobs and other economic woes Their argument has considerable emotional appeal, but they've misidentified the true villain in the piece Let's look at it

Suppose U-Needa Shirt Co relocated its production facilities to India in order to take advantage of cheaper labor This is America, the land of the free There is absolutely nothing that prevents a group of Americans as investors and workers from setting up Made in America Shirt Co to sell shirts to the American people This same opportunity exists for just about anything once manufactured in America but now made overseas

Williams

At this juncture, let's take a thinking pause and ask. Is what Williams said in the previous paragraph true or false?

Let's proceed You might ask, "How in the world can Made in America Shirt Co compete with U-Needa Shirt Co , which has much lower labor costs?" That's a different question, but it has nothing to do with the rights of American investors and workers to set up American-based manufacturing facilities But let's answer the question anyway

American consumers are free to purchase from whomever they choose Made in American Shirt Co would survive and prosper if American consumers chose to purchase shirts from it, rather than U-Needa Shirt Co

Let's take another thinking break and ask Is what Williams said in the previous paragraph true or false?

Here's where the crunch comes It's probable that U-Needa Shirt Co , because of its lower costs, will be able to undercut prices charged by Made in America Shirt Co Thus, we encounter that troubling consumer characteristic of preferring lower prices to higher prices

So what to do? Made in America Shirt Co might try to change American consumer preferences so that they're indifferent between high and low prices I predict that's a strategy doomed to failure, except maybe for a few diehard customers

There're no two ways about it The true enemy of Made in America Shirt Co and its workers is not U-Needa Shirt Co but the American consumer and his preference for lower prices coupled with his freedom to purchase from whomever he pleases

What to do? One strategy for Made in America Shirt Co and its workers is to get Washington to enact measures restricting consumer choices But you have to be slick about it. You just can't ask President Bush and Congress to criminalize purchases from U-Needa Shirt Co You must make a pretense of selflessness and speak of national defense concerns like, "What if there were war and we had no shirts for our soldiers?" You must talk of being for "free trade but fair trade" and "level playing fields "

There's another strategy Suppose Made in America Shirt Co could cover all of its cost with a $20 shirt price, while U-Needa Shirt could do so by charging $15? Made in America Shirt might ask Congress to enact an Aid to Dependent American Shirt Manufacturers law, whereby it would receive a $5 per shirt handout — then it could meet U-Needa Shirt Co's price

That might not be politically viable because the handout is too visible Congress might propose, "Rather than giving you a $5 per shirt handout, how about if we impose a $5 per shirt import tax on U-Needa Shirt Co's shirts? Then they'll have to charge $20 That way, you get what you want — a level playing field — we get more tax dollars, and nobody's the wiser "

Walter E Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc , 5777 W Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

MILITARY BASE-SAVING EFFORTS CAN'T BE . . .

Half-baked

WE HAVE OFTEN mentioned here the need to be vigilant against the possibility of Fort Richardson — or any other Alaska military base — being added to list of installations targeted by the Defense Department for closure Occasionally our wornes have been pooh-poohed by some in the community who argue that such a thing never will happen

Well, *let's hope* they're correct. But if not, we need to continually worry — and to have a counterattack in place

That's what a community coalition is doing in Los Angeles, in a major effort to be certain that the Air Force Space and Missile System Center at El Segundo escapes the next round of closures

The campaign involves a lot more than a civic committee forming a cheerleading club Far from it

The county and city of Los Angeles a couple of weeks ago each gave $100,000 to the Los Angeles Air Force Base Regional Alliance, described by the Los Angeles Times as "a conglomeration of South Bay civic and economic groups, politicians and other organizations created to lobby for the El Segundo base's preservation."

Nothing half-baked in this effort. Yet can you imagine the Municipality of Anchorage putting up $100,000 to finance a save-Fort Rich battle?

CLEARLY, Los Angeles is convinced of the value of having the 110-acre El Segundo base spared from the next round of base closures to be announced by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld — maybe as many as 100 of 425 bases nationwide

The base at El Segundo was opened in 1954 and is described by the Times as "one of the Pentagon's prized research and development centers " It's also a base with an annual budget of $10 billion, employing more than 3,000 military and civilian employees, and providing an additional 62,000 jobs in the South Bay area

But if it's so valuable, why would Los Angeles civic leaders be worried that it might be a target on the base closure list Explains the Times

"It's not part of a larger military facility and is due for costly earthquake renovations, and because of the narrowness of its mission. overseeing space hardware contracts "

According to the newspaper, groups in New Mexico and Colorado are lobbying to have the installation closed — hoping to pirate its work and its jobs

The new list of proposed base closures is expected to be issued early next year, and will go to the president for approval.

David Herbst, a spokesman for the alliance, told the Times "you can't wait until the last minute on something like this It's all going to be won or lost early on."

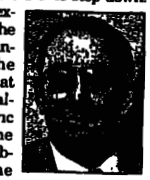
Anchorage, take warning

Full speed ahead toward military salute

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

ONE OF OUR TOWN'S most high-energy guys, a fellow who motors along in overdrive seven days a week, is Tom Morgan If you're in the military, or have anything to do with the men and women in uniform here and in Fairbanks, you either know him or know of him For nearly 13 years he has been head man of the Armed Services YMCA of Alaska, the fireman in the engine room shoveling coal in the boiler to keep the Y's many programs for soldiers, sailors and airmen steaming along at full speed Before he took over the Y post in October 1991, he spent 20 years on active duty in the Navy, retiring as a chief torpedoman's mate after service on such luxury liners as destroyer tenders and destroyer escorts

NOW HE'S ABOUT to step down. His last hurrah as executive director of the Y will be the 27th annual Salute to the Military on Feb 26 at the Sheraton It's always a rousing civic dinner at which the community pays tribute to some of the best-of-the-best from the enlisted ranks of all branches of the armed forces in Alaska The main speaker will be — as usual — a top leader in America's national defense structure This year it's Gen. Peter J Schoomaker, chief of staff for the U S Army, whose 31 years in the military has included assignments with both conventional and special forces A 1969 graduate of the University of Wyoming, Schoomaker became the 35th Army chief of staff last Aug 1 As always, the Salute will be a sellout — but there's still time to shoehorn in a few more guests with a call to the Y at 552-9622



Tobin

TOM MORGAN leaves his current post with another plaque on his wall Six weeks ago, at the Y's annual luncheon honoring friends and supporters in the civilian community, he was presented with the Atwood Award, given each year at the discretion of the commander of the Alaskan Command to an individual who has made significant contributions to the military in the 49th State The award is named after the late Bob Atwood, whose long career as editor and publisher of the Anchorage Times was marked by decades of support to those serving at Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson

"Make sure he pays cash."

A FORMER Fort Rich post commander, retired Lt. Col Pete Mulcahy, already is on the job as Morgan's successor He stepped out of uniform last summer and into the ranks of the Armed Services Y in December Meanwhile, Morgan will take up a new career as chief operating officer for Alaska Quality Publishing, a company headed by Bob Ulin that publishes newspapers and directories for the two military bases here For a final fling in the spotlight, he will be roasted at a March 5 dinner at the Sheraton sponsored by old friends and co-workers, including Barbara Mee, a long-time Armed Services volunteer and herself a former winner of the Atwood Award Proceeds from the $50-a-person affair will benefit the Y

ANOTHER LIEUTENANT colonel who says his heart still is in Alaska, Philip "Carl" Chevallard, will be retiring in mid-October, stepping down after six years as commander and conductor of the United States Air Force Academy Band at Peterson Air Base, Colo Prior to his academy assignment, Chevallard served three years as commander of the Air Force Band of the Pacific at Elmendorf In his off-duty hours here he put together Alaska's first Boy Scout Band and served on the conservatory faculty of the Anchorage Festival of Music. His academy band played for a big audience at the start of the year while marching in the Rose Bowl Parade at Pasadena

WHEN IT COMES to wowing a big crowd, however, it will be hard to top the performance by Elizabeth Gogolowski when she sang the Alaska Flag Song and the National Anthem before a full-house, black-tie audience at the 18th annual Alaska Business Hall of Fame dinner a week ago Friday at the Sheraton The third-grader from Bayshore Elementary School — not much taller than the microphone emcee Jack Frost put in her hands — drew cheers and echoing applause from those on hand in the packed ballroom

OTHER STARS at the Junior Achievement dinner were four young women, three of them in Anchorage public schools and the other a freshman at the University of Alaska Anchorage, who handled introductions during the evening's program All played leading rolls in creating and operating their own Junior Achievement companies during the last school year Front and center — smiling and very, very poised — were Sarah Gunkel, a student at the King Career Center; Juliet Smith, now enrolled at UAA, Shenique Russ, a student at Central Middle School, and Natasha Sample, a Dimond High student.

LET'S ALSO tip the hat to Pauline and George Sharrock. The two longtime Anchorage business and civic leaders — he was mayor at the time of the Good Friday earthquake 40 years ago next month — celebrated their 66th wedding anniversary Jan. 15

SUNDAY PUNDAY: An anthropologist cataloging South American folk remedies was told by a tribal chief that the leaves of a particular fern were a sure cure for constipation When the anthropologist expressed doubts, the chief replied, "Let me tell you, with fronds like these, who needs enemas?"

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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CHANNEL 2 APPEARS VICTIM OF POLITICAL . . .

Word game

SOME OF YOU may have seen Channel 2's evening newscasts featuring reports by pollster Ivan Moore on the status of the contest between U S Senate candidates Republican Lisa Murkowski and Democrat Tony Knowles

All very slick and smooth, with — surprise, surprise — Mr Knowles, the former governor, always shown leading the incumbent senator by more than a few percentage points

One reason may be this

Poll respondents are categorized as "conservatives" and "progressives " Somewhere in between are "moderates " No "liberals" at all The principal polling measure here obviously involves "conservatives" and "progressives "

In this case, "conservative" seems to be a pejorative

On the other hand, the subtle suggestion by Channel 2 News and Ivan Moore is that "progressive" is a really a very good thing

It's fair to assume that Channel 2/Ivan Moore see "liberal" also to be a pejorative, and as such, tut-tut, liberal is a word not to be used

No bias here, of course No liberals, either Just right-wing, red-neck, stubborn conservatives — and you know what they're like, when it comes to media reporting

Our friends at Channel 2 News allow their claim of objectivity to be put in question with this clever pollstering word game

A better man

JOE LIEBERMAN'S exit from the Democratic presidential nomination race removed from the ranks one of the better of the candidates By almost any measure, the Connecticut senator is a gentleman and a politician with class

He was the party's vice presidential nominee four years ago, and added what luster there was to Al Gore's ill-fated run for the White House It's true that along the way he had to sacrifice — obviously with considerable discomfort — some of his own positions on a number of key issues, so he could walk in lock-step with Gore

Too bad

He also was no friend of Alaska when it came to interests of importance here, such as oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

But those were and are disagreements on an issues

On his own unsuccessful campaign this year, his grace and his style didn't fit the ultra-liberal leftism that now grips those Democrats rallying to the 2004 race

Too bad. He might have been the Democrat's best bet for November

Letters to The Times

Let the world see

How monochromatic is our world going to become? I agree completely with Elise Patkotak's column of Jan. 29 concerning the Nashville schools posting of the academic honor roll If we can't post a simple honor roll of academic achievement or some kid's great picture and not have someone feel slighted by it, we are on a very slippery slope

For spite, let's not acknowledge anyone's achievements Let's start with the lawyers who advised this Then the politicians and community leaders Then let's not honor the medical profession (Who wants to know their skills before they operate on you anyway!) Perhaps we should do away with community service awards and certainly any and all sports achievements at every level Pretty soon everyone will look the same and we won't know whom to elect or seek advice from For that matter, we could even make the obituaries a lot shorter

We need to honor our lawyers, doctors, leaders, students and athletes when they achieve above the norm Let's keep those pictures and honor rolls posted for all to see!

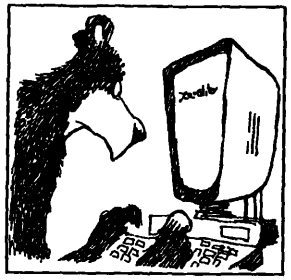
Shirley Forquer
Homer

Level the playing field

I recently bought a Honda VFR motorcycle and tried to insure it with a company I've dealt with for 40 years, only to be told that they don't insure my model in Alaska My excellent personal riding record or time as a customer didn't matter, the model was just on their forbidden list

I easily found coverage with another vendor but it occurred to me that I've been discriminated against for no better reason than what I choose to drive or ride, and in that I'm not alone

The insurance industry has successfully encouraged the passage of laws forcing all drivers/riders to carry insurance or face severe penalties. The same industry has retained the right to refuse to insure individuals and vehicles which don't meet their own often poorly and vaguely explained standards. This double standard is inherently unfair and should be illegal.



If all drivers must, under penalty of law, buy insurance, then the insurance industry should, also under penalty of law, be forced to insure any and all legally licensed vehicles

If you agree that the insurers should have to play by the same rules as the rest of us, I encourage you to write your representative and demand legislation leveling the playing field

Bill Croft
Wasilla

Two sides to every story

Thanks for printing the article about the recent poll of Alaskan's views on wolf hunting The Anchorage Daily News is very biased on this controversial topic and will only print the so-called animal rights version, it's nice to read the other side of the story As we all know there is an over-abundance of these wolves, not just in the hunt areas, but all over the state Biologists are telling us we need to take some out, so, lets get to it The views of some rich Outside animal rights groups should be tossed out the airplane window

ADN has a captive audience, and The Voice of the Times is greatly appreciated by many

Robert G Latto
Anchorage

Disappointed with Begich

Mayor Mark Begich developed a reputation as a "consensus-builder" over the course of his Assembly career However, after the January announcement of "Vote of No Confidence in the Legislature" by the mayors of Alaska, I'm concerned about Mark's role in this ill-timed media event.

I attended the work sessions where the legislative priorities package was discussed between the Assembly and administration, and I also attended the Assembly meeting where these priorities were passed. At no time during these deliberations was the mayor directed by the Assembly to issue such an insult to the entire state legislature. I can name many elected officials who behave in such unprofessional ways But just because other people do it doesn't make it right.

We expect a higher standard from our mayor, particularly since he campaigned on being a different kind of politician. At a time when we need real consensus building with our state lawmakers, the mayor's antics do not serve Anchorage, nor the rest of Alaska, well.

Andree McLeod
Anchorage

Off our trolley?

You call yourselves the conservative voice of Alaskans — well, I'm a conservative, too, and I go with the mayors I also do not have confidence that the Legislature will fix the state's fiscal problems either

How many past sessions has it been that they've continued to ignore the writing on the wall? I have to wonder if their collective intelligence is capable of formulating a workable plan Perhaps we need some new clear-thinking heads to give it a go I think your op-ed is off its trolley and blowing smoke.

Vada Ford
Wasilla

Briefly stated

Paul Jenkins wrote on Jan 16 regarding whether or how to use the Permanent Fund income, "The Legislature, answerable to Alaskans, should make that determination annually and be able to explain its actions "

Absolutely "spot on," Mr Jenkins!

Johnny Rice
Ketchikan

The Anchorage Times

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25044122521

BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

BALLOT INITIATIVE TAINTED WITH . . .

Outside money

POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP, it turns out, is very much in the eye of the beholder, especially among the usual suspects

When the House Judiciary Committee, headed by Anchorage Republican Rep Lesil McGuire, introduced a measure that would require vacant U S Senate seats be filled by election, our friends on the left went bonkers They want the question answered at the polls

Their fear is that if lawmakers adopt a measure with wording substantially similar to the pending ballot initiative aimed at filling vacant seats by election, the November vote would be shelved

Initiative proponents suggest McGuire is trying to get the question off the ballot to avoid damaging Sen Lisa Murkowski's re-election bid, something they very much want to do But they conveniently forget that Democrats — fueled, it turns out, with Outside money from liberal organizations — worked hard to get it on the ballot in the first place They had only one aim — hurting Sen Murkowski

Three House Democrats spearheaded the petition drive and Anchorage's Democratic mayor inappropriately used his office to urge support and raise funds for the effort It does not end there Outside interests joined the fray

Alaska Public Offices Commission records show that the Washington, D C -based American Family Voices pumped $25,000 into the effort There's no hint of where the money came from originally The group is headed by former Clinton aide Michael Lux, who a few years back was political czar for the liberal interest group People for the American Way

The Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, launched by People for the American Way in 1996, and whose directors include Lux, Hollywood's Rob Reiner, union representatives, pro-choice groups and a host of other liberals, kicked in $5,000

WHERE DID the Outside money funneled into the initiative drive originally come from? It boggles the imagination that all those good liberals in Washington stay up at night fretting about how our Senate vacancies are filled

Imagine our surprise We thought Democrats opposed laundered, Outside money being used to influence Alaska votes — or at least that's what they piously claim when the television cameras are on

Despite the purely political, self-serving smoke from the left, the primary and best reason to have the Legislature deal with the vacancy question is that there is a case pending before the state Supreme Court challenging the initiative's constitutionality The state attorney general says the 17th Amendment to the U S Constitution leaves the method of selecting Senate replacements to the Legislature

If ballot initiative proponents truly want Senate vacancies filled by election — and if their motive is not crassly, hypocritically political — why not let legislators go ahead and resolve the issue? Why drag it out?

The answers are crystal clear

Best to just say no to 'Just Say No'

By PAUL JENKINS

Everybody knows how to easily, painlessly and finally close Alaska's vexing fiscal gap Just ask them. From an income tax, to using the Permanent Fund's earnings, to selling off state land, to luring Martians into a Spenard motel and then hustling their space ships on eBay There is no shortage of solutions

"Alaskans, Just Say No" has its own ideas It's an upstart outfit whose leaders are a veritable "Who's Who" of, to put it kindly, activists of every hue in the political spectrum

It claims Alaska suffers from a political problem, not a fiscal gap "There is sufficient money hidden in state coffers to fund the 'fiscal gap' for years without ever having to impose an income tax or touch your Permanent Fund," it asserts on its Web site

Jenkins

The loot is squirreled away in 32 state accounts, says Jim Crawford, a group member who has pored over state balance sheets We pry the dough loose, he says, then dump it into the Constitutional Budget Reserve, and, presto, happy days are here again.

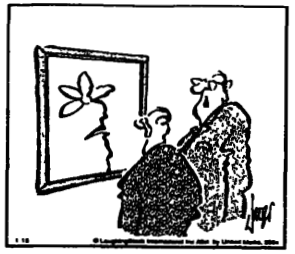
"I think it's only fair to have the excess fund issue a part of the debate," says Crawford, a former Alaska Republican Party chairman.

The two biggest suspected pots of money are in the Alaska Housing Finance Corp, at about $1 5 billion, and the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority, with about $822 million Most of those amounts are investments that would need to be sold, some at a discount, to raise cash

The two could be merged, their funds deposited in the CBR and there would be no down side, Crawford says, and no noticeable difference in their operations

Why have cash-starved lawmakers in the past not plucked AHFC and AIDEA like chickens? They are protected, Crawford says, by home builders, realtors, and bankers of all types

After listening to Crawford's spiel, you're left wondering Have he and his merry men stumbled upon a quick, painless way out of Alaska's spending morass? Have they discovered the storied Fountain of Fiscal Fulfillment?



"This is the last one he painted "

Some think so

Former Senate President Rick Halford, a staunch defender of the Permanent Fund, says the AHFC is "way overcapitalized" and has been for decades for a variety of reasons It could give up some of its money, while leaving a cushion, and operate just fine in his estimation

"You don't have to do it quickly," he says "You just set a schedule and do it "

The governor's Office of Management and Budget does not agree, saying Crawford's proposal is based on the assumption that the agencies provide less benefit to the public "as going concerns than their potential salvage value "

The AHFC pays Alaska a dividend — in services and projects — of about $103 million annually, or $1 2 billion since fiscal year 1991 Its impressive balance sheet allows it to be one of the few such agencies in the nation able to issue general obligation bonds for public projects such as schools, ports and other infrastructure It has financed more than $650 million in such projects, runs 4,000 units of public housing, funds weatherization projects and holds 30,000 mortgages for mostly ordinary Alaskans

AIDEA in fiscal 2005 will pay the state $22 million in dividends Over the years its has paid $169 3 million. It has issued revenue bonds totaling $773 million for 301 projects, some huge, some small, all across Alaska since 1978 It has made some embarrassing investments — the Healy Clean Coal Project and the Alaska Seafood International fish processing plant easily come to mind — but, overall, it has helped businesses and individual Alaskans, and it pays for itself

Both entities generally earn better than average on their investments, by the way

AHFC and AIDEA officials, along with OMB, say Crawford's error is in assuming equity or net worth on a balance sheet — most of which is far from liquid — can be converted to cash easily, quickly and inexpensively

"I don't know where they come up with this stuff," says Michael Buller, chief administrative officer of the AHFC "It would cost a lot to liquidate "

Let's say Buller and the rest are just trying to protect their stash of dough. In fact, let's use Crawford's idea and not worry about losing money selling off the goodies for cash and see what happens

If you took the $1 5 billion from AHFC and the $822 million from AIDEA, you would have $2 4 billion to sock away in the Constitutional Budget Reserve — the fund generally used to make ends meet. At the 4 99 percent most of the fund now earns, it would generate something like $119 7 million annually in interest.

Now, let's assume that we left things alone and continued to take the annual dividends from AHFC and AIDEA. That would add up to $123 million, or $4 3 million more than we would get from a scorched earth approach to their bank accounts and investments

How can stripping them of assets for a cash fix be a good idea? How does it make sense? We end up with less income, fewer jobs and blown opportunities for businesses and individuals, and we haven't even talked about their bond ratings

The proposal is interesting, but it diverts attention from the only realistic ways the gap can be closed — by using the Permanent Fund's earnings or implementing a pay cut for all working Alaskans by taxing their income

The schemes offered so far to avoid the obvious, I'm sorry to report, appear fatuous — except for that Martian space ship deal

Save me one in purple

Paul Jenkins is an editor of The Anchorage Times

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25044122522

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

MUDDYING THE WATER . . .

At Fairbanks

WHILE ANTICIPATING really good things from the Conference of Alaskans scheduled in Fairbanks the weekend after next, we are distressed by comments of two leading Democrats who will be among the participants

Gov Frank Murkowski called for the conference in his State of the State speech to the Legislature last month. The meeting was to draw 55 delegates from all walks of life and from widely varying backgrounds from all over Alaska for one specific purpose

The purpose of this group — not selected by the governor, but instead pulled together by seven bipartisan "convenors" picked by Murkowski to arrange the program — is to discuss the future of the Alaska Permanent Fund and the state's Constitutional Budget Reserve account.

A simple assignment, but meaty enough to occupy all those on hand for a weekend of heavy discussions

But along comes Anchorage Democrats Johnny Ellis, minority leader in the state Senate, and Ethan Berkowitz, minority leader in the House They will be ex-officio, non-voting members of the group — along with their Republican legislative counterparts, Senate Majority Leader Ben Stevens of Anchorage and House Majority Leader John Coghill Jr of North Pole

BUT BEING ex-officio and non-voting observers isn't enough for Berkowitz and Ellis

They right away made clear they don't want to go along with the program They want to muck up the proceedings by having the delegates talk about things such as higher taxes on oil companies, an income tax imposed on working Alaskans, and a statewide sales tax.

Good grief

For one weekend — for just a couple of scheduled days away from the legislative action in Juneau and back in the city where the Alaska Constitution was written by a group of Alaskans who put politics aside in order to make big dreams happen — you'd think these two Democrats, who come across as mean-spirited hatchet men, could at least let the delegates at Fairbanks stick to the agenda

For once, they should put a lid on their divisive habits and personal political agendas, and hold their tongues while others work cooperatively toward a common purpose at the Feb 10-12 conference

It's time for them to realize that many Alaskans are tired to death of the continuing ugly bickering that has become such a part of the legislative scene in Juneau in recent years

In other words, at least in Fairbanks, they should sit down, shut up, and listen.

Extended family is important stuff

By ELISE PATKOTAK

One of my younger cousins has died. She's the first in our generation of cousins to do so I guess that makes us lucky when you consider how many cousins we have and what a wide variety of ages

Sometimes I have to blink and clear my eyes when I see my cousin Louie I keep expecting to see the young man who used to swallow bottle caps to impress his little cousin who had such a crush on him Instead, I see a 72-year-old grandfather who could easily become a great-grandfather in the not-too-distant future

But I hadn't seen Nancy in over 30 years and so, in my mind, she remained as young as my memories of her In those memories she's a vivacious, elfish looking teen-ager with bright sparkling eyes and an ever ready smile

But the '60s were not kind to her She went into them with a special spark that caused everyone to brighten up when she was in the room, but got lost in drugs and alcohol It took a long time for her to come back to us When she did, she made a good home for herself and her new husband and raised her family well But the excesses of her early life caught up with her and she died at 53 of liver failure, diabetic complications and pneumonia

Patkotak

When she died, the cousins' network went into full swing Her sister only had to call one cousin and tell her to spread the word. It spread rapidly While many of us are too far away to make the funeral, in many ways we've already done our mourning in the multiple phone calls that have flown around the country

We relived our best memories in those phone calls and laughed at the children we once were We relived the sad memories and rued the time lost We renewed our bonds as a family united in grief

When I get involved in a case as a guardian ad litem in which a child must be removed from their family, I know that more than just the bonds of that immediate family are being broken Actually, in many cases, the nuclear family is so sick and damaged that you would be hard-pressed to actually define it as a family

ÂÂÂUnfortunately, there is always an extended family that loses a member when this happens When cousins get together to play, one of them is missing By missing out on those days of play, the child who has been removed from his or her home is also missing out on the time that forges the bonds that will last through their lifetime

There is no easy solution to the problems created when you have to remove children from their home And when you add in the loss of their extended family, the price children pay for their parents inability to stay sober, stop fighting and provide them with a stable home is enormous

No matter how hard a foster home or group home might try to keep those extended family ties alive, the natural ebb and flow of family dropping in to visit, showing up for dinner, gathering for the holidays, is lost. In its place is a schedule of visits with predetermined times, pre-approved lengths and pre-negotiated conditions about contact with the parents

I don't know what I'd have done without my cousins in my life Some of us are still best friends Some of us only see each other on holidays But no matter how little or how often the contact happens, when it does, there is a wonderful flow of love and laughter that comes from so many shared memories

When my Aunt Toni makes a certain remark and my cousin Toni rolls her eyes, I know exactly what she means because I was there from the start And the playing field is always level among us no matter who is making what salary or has what position because we all have too much information about each other for anyone to ever have the upper hand.

Kids in state custody often lose that closeness with their cousins, their extended family And nothing in the world can replace it because nothing else is quite like it

Wouldn't it be a much fairer world if the parents who messed up paid the price instead of the kids?

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company

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25044122523

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QUICK ACTION BLUNTS . . .

Terror attack

WITH THE discovery of a white powder thought to be the toxin ricin in three Senate office buildings in Washington, D C , America's security experts' prediction that the nation "quite probably" will be attacked again seems to be coming true

FBI Director Robert S Mueller III and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge have considered such an attack all but inevitable, even as they have worked to pin it down and head it off

There can be absolutely no doubt that we are at war with those who wish to destroy us and our way of life, by any means possible.

Thankfully, because quick action was taken, there appears to have been no injuries from the powder, apparently delivered in the mail

Ricin, one of the most toxic natural substances known, is produced from the beans of castor plants One milligram is thought to be able to kill an adult. Bulgarian journalist Georgi Markov was murdered in 1978 when ricin was stabbed into his leg by the point of an umbrella.

While investigators work to determine what kind of terrorist attack the powder represents, Americans can be relieved that safeguards and procedures put into place because of 2001 anthrax attacks apparently saved lives

There can be absolutely no doubt that we are at war with those who wish to destroy us and our way of life, by any means possible

The more we learn of their weapons and tactics, the more unlikely we will be caught completely by surprise again.

Wishful thinking

SO PUNXSUTAWNEY Phil saw his shadow Tuesday Big deal.

The famous groundhog came out of his burrow, saw the sunshine, and ducked back in, saying there would be six more weeks of winter.

Had it been cloudy, according to this old legend, Phil would have known that spring was at hand — and would have come happily back into the open.

Maybe that works in Pennsylvania, where Phil does his prognosticating

Here in Alaska, we don't need his expertise.

Sunshine or shadow, on any given Feb. 2 of any given year, we know there will be six more weeks of winter — and probably a few more weeks after that, too

Bush made only choice available

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Before the great hunt for scapegoats begins, let's look at what David Kay has actually said about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

First, and most trumpeted, he did not find "large stockpiles of newly produced weapons of mass destruction " He did find, as he reported last October, WMD-related activities, from a very active illegal missile program to research and development ("right up until the end") on weaponizing the deadly poison ricin (the stuff London police found on terrorists last year) He discovered "hundreds of cases" of U N -prohibited and illegally concealed activities

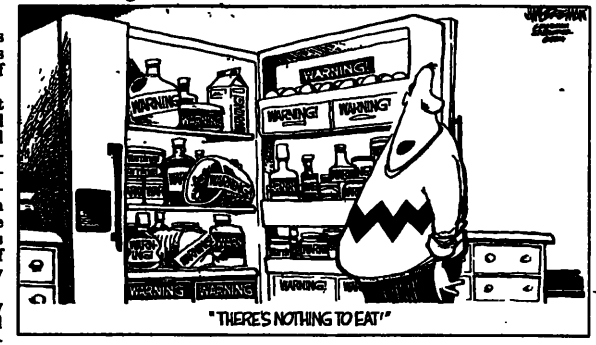
Significant findings, but still a far cry from what the administration had claimed last March Kay has now offered the most novel and convincing explanation for why U S intelligence — and, for that matter, U N inspectors and the intelligence agencies of every country that mattered — misjudged what Iraq possessed

It was a combination of Iraqi bluff, deceit and corruption far more bizarre than heretofore suspected. Kay discovered that an increasingly erratic Saddam Hussein had taken over personal direction of WMD programs But because there was no real oversight, the scientists would go to Hussein, exaggerate or invent their activities, then pocket the funds

Scientists were bluffing Hussein Hussein was bluffing the world The Iraqis were all bluffing each other Special Republican Guard commanders had no WMDs, but they told investigators that they were sure other guard units did. It was this internal disinformation that the whole outside world missed.

Congress needs to find out why, with all our resources, we had not a clue that this was going on. But Kay makes clear that President Bush was relying on what the intelligence agencies were telling him. Kay contradicts the reckless Democratic charges that Bush cooked the books "All the analysts I have talked to said they never felt pressured on WMD," says Kay "Everyone believed that [Iraq] had WMD "

That includes the Clinton administration. Kay told The Post he had found



"THERE'S NOTHING TO EAT!"

evidence that Hussein had quietly destroyed some biological and chemical weapons in the mid-1990s — but never reported it to the United Nations Which was why President Bill Clinton in 1998 declared with great alarm and great confidence that Hussein had huge stockpiles of biological and chemical arms — "and some day, some way, I guarantee you he'll use the arsenal "

The intelligence failure is quite spectacular, but its history is quite prosaic. When the U.N inspectors left in 1998, they assumed that the huge stockpiles of unaccounted-for weapons still existed What other assumption could they make? That Hussein had destroyed them and not reported that to the very agency that could have then vindicated him and gotten sanctions lifted?

Secretary of State Colin Powell correctly makes the case that this very fact — the concealment of both the weapons and their possible destruction — clearly justifies the legality of the Iraq war, since the terms of the 1991 cease-fire placed the positive obligation on Iraq to demonstrate its own disarmament It clearly and repeatedly failed to do that

But beyond the legal question is the security question. People forget that when the Bush administration came into office, Iraq was a very unstable place Thousands of Iraqis were dying as a result of sanctions Containment necessitated the garrisoning of Saudi Arabia with thousands of "infidel" American troops — in the eyes of many Muslims, a desecration (cited by Osama bin Laden as his No 1 reason for his 1996 "Declaration of War" on America) The no-fly zones were slow-motion war, and the embargo was costly and dangerous — the sailors who died on the USS Cole were on embargo duty

Until Bush got serious, threatened war and massed troops in Kuwait, the U N was headed toward loosening and ultimately lifting sanctions, which would have given Hussein carte blanche to regroup and rebuild his WMDs.

Bush reversed that slide with his threat to go to war But that kind of aggressive posture is impossible to maintain indefinitely A regime of inspections, embargo, sanctions, no-fly zones and thousands of combat troops in Kuwait was an unstable equilibrium. The United States could have either retreated and allowed Hussein free rein — or gone to war and removed him Those were the only two ways to go

Under the circumstances, and given what every intelligence agency on the planet agreed was going on in Iraq, the president made the right choice, indeed the only choice.

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2004 The Washington Post Co.

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WILL THE DEMOCRATIC RACE . . .

End today?

THEY CALL this Super Tuesday It may be the day the eventual Democratic presidential nominee will emerge, well before the actual nominating convention in Boston on July 26-29

Going into today's primaries in seven states — Missouri, Arizona, Delaware, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Carolina — Sen John Kerry of Massachusetts was rolling ahead by virtue of his primary victory in New Hampshire and his earlier win in the Iowa caucuses

Trying to blunt his momentum are the six other Democratic contenders — Sens John Edwards of North Carolina and Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, former Vermont Gov Howard Dean, retired Army Gen Wesley Clark, Rep Dennis Kucinich of Ohio, and, the Rev Al Sharpton

Dean, scrambling to recover from losses in Iowa and New Hampshire, fired his campaign manager last week and replaced him with Roy Neel — a Washington insider political pro who served for years as an adviser to former Vice President Al Gore and deputy White House chief of staff under President Bill Clinton.

The campaign will go on after today, but those who falter may have real trouble in Michigan, which votes Feb 7, and later in New Mexico, Arizona and Washington state

Even the big states that come along later, like New York, may make little difference in the long run if Kerry can sweep in today's primaries Such a strong showing could make certain that he will be the Democrat who will challenge President George W Bush in November

A rousing start

THERE IS reason to cheer the lineup that has been put together to meet in Fairbanks Feb 10-12 under the banner of the Conference of Alaskans

Gov Frank Murkowski called for the conference in his State of the State speech, and it was a splendid idea. The purpose of the meeting is four-fold

Should the Permanent Fund be managed under a so-called percent of market value formula, as recommended by its trustees?

• Should a portion of the fund income be used to pay for essential state services?

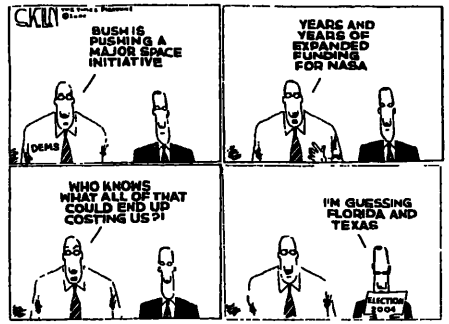
• Should use of its income be determined by law or by an amendment to the state constitution?

• Should the state maintain a minimum balance in the Constitutional Budget Reserve?

These are big issues for all Alaskans as the state struggles to manage its income and spending

Fifty-five Alaskans with solid credentials will gather at the conference under the leadership of Mike Burns, a retired Anchorage banker chosen to serve as chairman.

High hopes abound



Makes no sense

Justice system remains a mystery

LET'S SEE IF we understand how judges and lawyers work.

If you're a lawyer and you lose a high profile case, you ask the court to award you millions of dollars in fees

If you're judge who imposed billions of dollars in penalties against a defendant only to have a higher court rule that the judgment was outrageously high, you come back and impose an even bigger penalty

Clearly, there are things about the judicial system that mere mortals can't comprehend

In the first instance, a cluster of lawyers who lost a big jury trial here asked for $12 million in attorney fees and $4 5 million to cover their expenses What would they have asked had they won?

In the second instance, U S District Judge Russel Holland initially imposed punitive damages of $5 billion (later reduced to $4 billion) against Exxon Mobil in connection with the 1989 Prince William Sound oil spill A federal appeals court called the award too high, and told Holland to come up with a new figure

He did — one that was bigger than before

Now, he says, Exxon owes $4 5 billion, plus $2 25 billion in interest charges — a total of $7 75 billion That's more than $2 billion above what the appellate court already said was too much The interest, we assume, mounted because of the delay caused by the case being dragged out for months to correct Holland's initial ruling

Any of that make sense?

Maybe only if you have a law degree

SUPER BOWL HALF-TIME SHOW . . .

A disgrace

THERE ARE MANY words to describe Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake's half-time performance in Sunday's Super Bowl Sleazy, vulgar, offensive, for instance Or how about repugnant and shameful?

Perhaps the word best describing the MTV-produced spectacle — more at home in a rat-infested, back-alley strip joint in Tijuana than on national television — is sad.

With perhaps a billion people around the world looking on — many of them children, mind you — Jackson and Timberlake sang something called "Rock Your Body" They were so sexually explicit that they should have gotten a motel room As a topper, Timberlake sang, "I'll get you naked by the end of this song," and ripped away the leather covering one of Jackson's breasts, exposing it to the world

It was a pitiful commentary on a morally bereft modern America, and one we should all take to heart.

What is next on TV, where one-upmanship apparently reigns? Until Sunday, the prurient peak was Madonna, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera making out at the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards Perhaps we should expect to see a live sex act in next year's Super Bowl half-time show

CBS claims it had no idea the duo was going to pull the stunt and apologized The National Football League says it was outraged Believe them if you will

If Jackson and Timberlake were hoping to create a stir, a "buzz," to jump-start their careers, they succeeded, we suppose, at the expense of us all — and common decency Our hope is that parents shocked by Sunday's performance will bar from their homes Jackson and Timberlake's trash. If people get angry enough to make such outrages career-enders rather than career-boosters, they would stop immediately

Parents today have their hands full just trying to keep their children on track in a world of money-grubbing adults intent on peddling them sex in any form, at the earliest possible age Kids are robbed of their childhood because too many of us are reluctant to make judgments, to say, hey, that is wrong

Jackson and Timberlake have joined a growing legion of moral weaklings in the music industry who have debased themselves to make a few bucks, but the more worldly among us likely will say today's children have seen worse, that what happened Sunday was no big deal

If they are right, what does that say about us all?

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SCHOOL TESTS GRADES ARE . . .

Not exactly new

CONCERNED THAT we were getting overly exercised about the problem created by exit exams for our high school students, a long-time reader has offered a reminder that the whole business is not completely new

He provided us with a copy of the Oct 28, 1977, issue of The Eagle's Cry, a newspaper published by West High School journalism students

Right there on Page One back there more than 26 years ago was a story carrying this headline

"Students Must Mass Proficiency Tests to Receive Diplomas"

Wait a minute Isn't that the same issue that right now is churning up parents, teachers, students and members of the School Board?

Reported the West High newspaper

"By now most students are aware of the proficiency tests the Anchorage School District requires be passed in order to receive a high school diploma"

Added the West High Eagle back then

"The tests are in basic math, English, and reading skills thought by the school board to be vital to a student venturing out in the world Based on results of the tests (44 percent failed the mathematics section and 24 6 percent failed the English section) many of last year's sophomores are seriously lacking in these skill areas and it seems no one knows where to place the blame"

NOW, OBVIOUSLY, it's déjà vue all over again.

Not surprisingly, the student assessment of the problem in 1977 sounds very much like comments being heard today

"Several West High students gave their opinions on the issue," the school paper reported "Some placed the blame on the curriculum, which they felt was aimed at satisfying the advanced student who had long since forgotten basic skills Others felt they were not properly prepared — their teachers didn't take the tests seriously, so neither did they Lack of learning in the lower grades and the expectations by secondary school teachers that basic skills had already been learned was another area of criticism."

Looking at the situation back then and comparing it to what exists today suggests that not much has been learned in a quarter of a century about addressing the basic problems

Apparently Anchorage was not prepared then, and hasn't been prepared since

Would it be wrong to believe that the fault must lie not with the youngsters in our schools — but rather with those who are charged with seeing to their education, from the early years on up?

What other conclusion can be drawn if we haven't learned over all these years what must be done to ensure that a much larger percentage of students are worthy of a high school diploma?

Is exploitation always a bad thing?

By WALTER E. WILLIAMS

Here's a question. Suppose you see people lining up for hours, and people willing to pay a month's salary in bribes, in order to get a $2-a-day factory job What might you conclude?

Would you guess there are higher-paying jobs around, but the people are too lazy to look for them? Here's my guess No matter how unattractive to us that $2-a-day job is, it might be that person's best-known prospect.

New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof recently wrote "Inviting All Democrats" in the Jan 14 New York Times Online, a story documenting the plight of Cambodia's poor In Phnom Pen, hundreds of Cambodians traipse through trash dumps scavenging for plastic bags, metal cans, bits of food and whatever else they can find to sell

Kristof says "Nhep Chanda averages 75 cents a day for her efforts For her, the idea of being exploited in a garment factory — working only six days a week, inside, instead of in the broiling sun, for up to $2 a day — is a dream."

Williams

Many Democrat and Republican politicians, union leaders and academic elite say that paying somebody $2 a day is exploitation They've called for actions against American companies who exploit Third World workers through low pay, use of child labor and poor working conditions But let's examine this with an eye toward asking whether exploitation is the right word to use

Let's start off with a personal question Suppose you're earning $1,500 a month, and I come along and offer you a job paying $3,000 a month with better working conditions In no way do I coerce you into accepting my job offer

If you accept my job offer, then the only unambiguous conclusion is that you saw my offer as being superior to your next best alternative When a person is offered an alternative, superior to his next best alternative, how much sense does it make to characterize it as exploitation?

If Nhep Chanda, who earns 75 cents a day toiling in nasty trash dumps, is offered a factory job at $2 a day, has she been made better off or worse off? Any reasonable person would conclude that she's better off When one person makes another person an offer that makes that person better off, does it make sense to characterize it as exploitation?

While we're at it, we might ask if anti-free trade demonstrations and other public pressures stop companies from having manufacturing facilities in places like Cambodia, paying $2 a day wages, will people like Nhep Chanda be worse off or better off? In other words, do we help people who have few miserable alternatives by destroying their best one?

Former presidential aspirant Rep Dick Gephardt pledged that if he became president he'd press the World Trade Organization to establish an international minimum wage Union leaders and their useful idiots in the anti-globalism movement have also called for minimum wages and better working conditions for workers of multinational firms in Third World countries

Here's my question to you. Do you believe these people really care about the world's poor like Nhep Chanda? If you do, I have a fountain of youth I'd like to sell you

There might be a few ministers, college students and other uninformed people who sincerely care about the Third World poor But the thrust of the public relations campaign against the multinationals comes from the U S and European union movements and some businesses who see their jobs and profits threatened

They wish to raise the cost of overseas operations in order to forestall company relocation, or as Gephardt said he wants, an international minimum wage high enough so that American workers are not competing with slave, sweat shop and child labor around the world.

Walter E Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc., 5777 W Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003.

The Anchorage Times

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2504412526

BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

MONEY MAGAZINE RATES ANCHORAGE AS A . . .

Hot city

ANCHORAGE'S RATING by CNN Money Magazine as the 13th-best city in the West was a notable achievement. Now we can prove what most of us have always known.

The magazine ranked our city among all other cities in the West with populations of more than 100,000 The rating was based on criteria like weather, family incomes, lack of an income tax, housing costs, leisure, recreational and cultural facilities, health care available, environment, crime, student-teacher ratios and educational institutions

One notable aspect of the ranking was that 11 of the 12 top Western cities were Sunbelt cities in California, Arizona and Texas The only other Snowbelt community was Westminster, Colo , a mile-high suburb of Denver

Anchorage was also the largest of the 13 top "hottest cities," with a listed population of 272,830, which it cited as a 21 percent increase from 1990 The next largest was Plano, Texas, the number one Western city, which has a population of 271,090, an increase of 113 percent from 1990

THE RATING was based on a scientific approach. The magazine started with statistics on 271 U S cities with the highest median household income levels in the nation and above average population growth. That data was then cross-referenced with what the magazine called lifestyle segmentation data supplied by an organization that tracks such things

Anchorage's median household income was given as $59,548, ranking 11th in that category Plano topped the household income ratings with $82,857 per family

Only 87 communities met the magazine's criteria and made the final cut — 31 in the West, 22 in the Central Region and 34 in the East Eighteen Western cities of less than 100,000 population made the list, all of them were in California and Texas

The fact that Anchorage is a great place to live is no surprise to most of those who live here It is quite a surprise to see a national organization like CNN Money Magazine use scientific data and prove that to be the case

It makes sense

THE HOUSE has approved a new name for the state Department of Community & Economic Development. If the Senate goes along, the new moniker will be the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development

In these days when the state is involved in endless arguments about budget gaps and financial reserves, putting a new emphasis on the department's mission to stimulate commercial development makes good sense.

Rep Vic Kohring, a Valley Republican, is the sponsor of the measure The change, he said, will let "the world know that we're open to do business and we welcome investments here," Yes, indeed.

Letters to The Times

Youth ponders gun control

With all the recent shootings in Anchorage, people are saying we need better gun control That's ridiculous! Have you ever read the book "Hatchet?" The main character, Brian, is stranded in the middle of nowhere with nothing but a hatchet, which he uses to hunt and start fires Taking away everyone's firearms would be like the author taking away Brian's hatchet and source of life

We need our firearms They keep us alive like the hatchet kept Brian alive We need them for protection Please call your legislators and tell them to let us keep our firearms

Justin Oler, age 10
Anchorage

Look at your gas bill

Yammering against the development of coal bed methane, the greenies and NIMBYs in MatSu and Homer areas are demanding that the state buy up all subsurface mineral leases They claim to be shocked about private property rights and don't want unwilling property owners to have wells forced on their properties (Evergreen always asks first, pays rent, and does not force wells on unwilling property owners)

What would happen if the state caves in and buys back all outstanding leases? First, every property owner who wants a well on their property is deprived of that choice and lease revenues, and Mat-Su and Anchorage are deprived of a large number of new, high-paying jobs Most importantly, Southcentral Alaska will not get a new source of natural gas to replace Cook Inlet fields that are being rapidly depleted. If you don't think this is a problem, look at your rising Enstar bill.

Keep selling the leases Drill the wells Bring on the jobs and natural gas

Alex Gimarc
Anchorage

Grizzly People

Just to set the record straight Grizzly People is a legitimate nonprofit under the fiscal sponsorship of SEE, Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs Every donation is tax deductible The AP reporter who reported the latest story on Timothy Treadwell (from which your Jan. 10 editorial is drawn) knew that after spending quite a bit of time speaking to me and SEE, yet he chose to cast doubt You can go to saveourplanet.org if there are any questions as to SEE's or Grizzly People's legitimacy

Jewel Palovak
Grizzly People

Man on Mars a long shot

A recent Voice of the Times column lauded President Bush's proposal to put a man on Mars using the space station as an example of good space programming The space station is over budget by a factor of 10 and it is only half completed Currently we have to rely on the Russians to service it, and it is years from completion

At the same time, one of the most successful space endeavors, the Hubble telescope, is now going to be dumped earlier than planned, according to a NASA announcement At some future date I am sure we will establish a moon base and even go to Mars, but vague statements by the president in this case makes one wonder if he even knows which way is up

Peter Jenkins
Eagle River

Yours, mine or ours

The Times' Jan. 20 editorial suggested that the Permanent Fund was possibly a "bad idea" because it pays the people a dividend rather than giving it all to the state government to manage and spend Who do readers think can more wisely spend the Permanent Fund dividend — you and your family or the elected representatives who have thus far spent us into a fiscal emergency?

Our Alaska leaders in 1976 created a unique savings and investment tool. I'd love to meet these responsible founders and shake their hands Let's cap spending in the state, invest in a citizens-owned pipeline, or do both.

Terry Luther
Anchorage

What do we want?

Regarding the Jan. 27 "No Surprise" editorial in which you claim that Dave Dittman's survey shows that most Alaskans approve of shooting wolves from airplanes Didn't Alaskan voters twice decide by ballot to stop the killing? You failed to mention that.

I have been here for 19 years and I wasn't polled on this so I will tell you now that I oppose intervening in the natural balance between wolves and moose Those in the survey who are not concerned about a tourism boycott probably are not making a living with tourism revenues

Robert F Ward
Homer, Al

Editor's note Alaska voters in 1996 outlawed same-day airborne hunting of wolves. The Legislature then reinstated the practice In 2000, voters again barred same-day airborne hunting, but left the door open for predator control.

'Howl-in' went unnoticed

I'm writing this on Jan 1 after just returning from New York City where I observed the "Howl-in" staged by Friends of Animals at Rockefeller Center About four people passed out postcards, there were few takers They left after about an hour and a half.

The public blew them out No one cared. Few gave them a second look.

John Jameson
Anchorage

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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READ ARTICLE 9, SECTION 15, TO LEARN . . .

The truth

WE NOTICE WITH amusement a disingenuous shell game being set up by those whose transparent intent is to block at every turn the use of Permanent Fund earnings to help finance state government

Perpetrators of this latest nonsense are working hard at every opportunity to portray the state's rainy day account as the "people's fund."

Hogwash. It is not.

The Permanent Fund was set up by constitutional amendment in 1976 to fund government — not provide dividends Article 9, Section 15, of the constitution is very clear

"At least twenty five percent of all mineral lease rentals, royalties, royalty sale proceeds, federal mineral revenue sharing payments and bonuses received by the State shall be placed in a permanent fund, the principal of which shall be used only for those income-producing investments specifically designated by law as eligible for permanent fund investments All income from the permanent fund shall be deposited in the general fund unless otherwise provided by law"

Nary a word about a "people's fund," anybody can see that the aim was to put money in the general fund for government operations The dividend came later

NOWADAYS, too many believe the Permanent Fund exists only to pay dividends It is easy to forgive newcomers' ignorance when it comes to the fund, but you have to wonder at other Alaskans who play the same tune, even when they know the truth.

Most of the folks turning a convenient blind eye to the fund's true purpose are income tax advocates who would rather take a slice of every working Alaskan's check than allow fund earnings to be used as envisioned by those who trooped to the polls almost 30 years ago They have wanted an income tax for years and some openly lament repeal of the state income tax more than 20 years ago

One of their more recent offerings would tax the income of only Outsiders Can you imagine what the courts would do with a tax so selective, so discriminatory?

Then, there is the proposal to limit the amount of your state income tax payment to the size of your dividend. How nice That, essentially, is a double whammy for the state's most productive citizens First, they get to pay a tax. Second, they receive no dividend. The less productive would pay no tax — and receive a dividend. Where, you ask, is the fairness? We do not see it, either At best, it smacks of socialism.

As the debate about the fiscal gap heats up, and it will in this election year, Alaskans should keep in mind this obvious truth — the Permanent Fund was set up to fund government.

We should thank those visionary Alaskans instead of corrupting their legacy to us

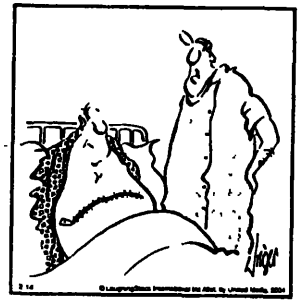
58 years in orchestra's string section

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

THE ANCHORAGE Symphony League's annual Mardi Gras Ball is always a special attraction on our town's social calendar, but this year's affair beginning at 6 30 p m Saturday at the Hotel Captain Cook will have an extraordinary flair As a highlight to the evening, the league will crown a Mardi Gras king and queen — Arthur and Eleanor Braendel, musicians who were founding players when the Anchorage Symphony Orchestra began in 1946 and who still play in the orchestra today They have been making beautiful music together with the symphony for 58 years, he with his cello and she with her viola Tickets for the ball are $75, but time is running out to make a reservation The ball's chairman, Jeanne Davis-Bustad, has put together a Cajun cuisine dinner and a program of Dixieland music by the Snapping Turtles Swing Band, and dance music by the Soul Man Sam Band

Tobin

AT NOON on this Friday at the Anchorage Hilton you'll be able to enjoy a luncheon of pork loin with apple thyme glaze, long grain rice, green beans, warm rolls and a slice of red velvet cake for dessert — and in the process do some good for the city's libraries The occasion "Beyond the Stacks — A Valentine Luncheon for the Library," sponsored by Friends of the Library, the volunteer group that supports the Loussac Library and its satellite operations here and there around town But you need to make reservations by Tuesday The price is $50 a plate, and you can get your name and those of a couple of friends on the list by calling Shannon Jones at 336-1941 or stopping in at the Loussac Gift Shop At a live auction with lunch, you'll be able to bid on the use of a Hummer for a week, a Kenai River fishing trip, some golf dates in Vegas, and more



"If we have to go in there again it will save you a bundle."

THE ANCHORAGE MUSEUM Association is raising the ante for its black-tie Gala, a fancy evening of fine food and wine, dancing and live music, and both a silent and live auction on April 3 in the museum atrium The goal $125,000 to support acquisitions of art, exhibitions and public programs at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art. The hope is to exceed the $100,000 raised at last year's Gala Bernie Ruskin is again chairman of this year's $100-a-person event. Patron sponsorships also are available for $500 — the bulk of which, $400 — will be tax deductible

SOME FUND-RAISING activities come in smaller packages, too Four smaller packages, as a matter of fact, are offered in this year's candy sale by the Alaska Council of Camp Fire USA Up for sale are 19,000 boxes of Almond Caramel Clusters, Creamy Mints, Almond Roca and P'Nuttles — enough to raise $95,000 to help fund programs for Camp Fire boys and girls in Anchorage Young candy sellers will be on duty on weekend afternoons beginning Friday at Carrs, Fred Meyer, New Sagaya Midtown and City Markets, and in the Northway Mall Each box sells for $5 — and the candy truly is delicious Camp Fire's Alaska Council serves more than 5,000 youngsters through programs that include school-age child care, summer camp and community center activities

ELSEWHERE ON the calendar Alaska Junior Theater's 11th annual benefit champagne reception is scheduled at the Discovery Theatre in the Performing Arts Center beginning at 6 30 p m on Feb 13 The $60-a-person evening will include gourmet hors d'oeuvres and desserts, a silent auction and a raffle — topped off by a performance of the FLY Dance Company, which has drawn rave reviews on a nationwide tour Alaska Junior Theater is taking reservations at 272-7546 Reservations also are being taken for the annual black-tie Canada Gala, scheduled March 13 at the Sheraton — sponsored by the Canadian Consulate General, the Alaska World Affairs Council, the Northern Forum, the University of Alaska Anchorage and the World Trade Centre Alaska. Dinner, dancing, entertainment, door prizes and tabletop favors are on tap It's an $80-a-plate affair

TODAY IN HISTORY: It was on Feb 1, 1964, that station-to-station long distance telephone rates became effective within Alaska. That was a big deal back then, eight weeks before the strongest earthquake ever recorded in North America struck Anchorage and all of Southcentral Alaska But be advised, on any long distance calls you made to friends or family Outside you still were charged at person-to-person rates Part of the high cost of living back in the good old days

SUNDAY PUNDAY: After a heavy day's digging at an archeological site in Norway, researchers uncovered a priceless statue of the ancient Norse thunder god — with bulging muscles, imposing stance, and his famous giant hammer The eyes in his fierce-looking face were made of two giant rubies that glittered with a brilliant red The two leading archeologists on the dig each believed he should be the one to have his name listed on the discovery Their raging argument was a source of amusement for all the others involved in the dig When the evening ended, one junior archeologist said to another "Well, that was a fight for Thor eyes"

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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25044122528

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

DESIGN PLANNING BEGINS FOR . . .

Park Strip

DEVELOPING A master plan for the Delaney Park Strip is an idea whose time has come

The Anchorage Assembly recently approved a $140,000 contract with the Tryck Nyman Hayes engineering firm to study and recommend design renovations for the long and thin park, a block wide and 15 acres long

Delaney extends from A to P streets between Ninth and 10th avenues It was originally a firebreak built in1915 at what was then the edge of town. The strip later became an aircraft landing field before Merrill Field was built

It morphed into a park and now has hedges, a rose garden, ball fields and a war veterans memorial Delaney is heavily used by athletes, strollers, dog walkers and anyone else wanting to enjoy a pleasant public area between downtown and the residential area to the south.

On a summer day, park visitors are likely to watch dogs chase frisbees and get free wieners grilled by an Alaska governor or other politicians with elections on their minds and patriotic colors in their clothes

. . . The study will determine how to turn the Park Strip into something along the lines of New York's Central Park with trees, improved landscaping and water features, perhaps small ponds and fountains.

THE PLANNING proposal was advanced by Mayor Mark Begich and would utilize money left from a $5 million bond issue approved by voters in 1997 for parks and recreation.

Previous planned projects at Delaney included $140,000 to upgrade soccer fields, improve hockey rink drainage and add electrical service When questions were raised about the necessity of those items, the Assembly elected to put the money into a master plan instead

Though some critics complain about spending money on Delaney when other budgets — the Loussac Library's, for instance — are being cut, the funds must be used for park projects

Assembly Chairman Dick Traini said the study will determine how to turn the Park Strip into something along the lines of New York's Central Park, with trees, improved landscaping and water features, perhaps small ponds and fountains

The engineers also will suggest what such a project might cost. Given the municipality's tight budget situation, adopting and implementing such a plan might have to be left for a better day But the current lean times are unlikely to last forever Anchorage should have such a plan ready to move on when it can afford one

Delaney Park Strip is one of our community's treasures It should be well-maintained and planned and treated accordingly

Time for political posturing is past

By PAUL JENKINS

Like many of you, I have precious little time to mull the important questions facing our nation, the ones you see on the covers of the nation's supermarket tabloids Does Howard Dean have mad cow disease? Did the Mars lander find a McDonald's wrapper, and is the CIA covering it up? Is Hillary Clinton's brain hers or a space alien's?

I'm stuck questioning stuff closer to home Why, for instance, are there so many who cannot read "Slower Traffic Keep Right" signs, or why are some folks who are overweight, smoke, drink and eat junk food actually opposed to gambling Isn't every day a gamble for them?

Then, there's this If we are dead serious about cops nabbing drunken drivers, why don't we just build Krispy Kreme doughnut shops across from bars? And occasionally I'm baffled by things in the newspaper, like this recent headline "Haines looks into cleaner sewage" Why in the world?

Jenkins

Lately, though, the questions are getting tougher How are we going to fund state government in the future? Are we going to use Permanent Fund earnings? Income taxes? Some form of sales taxes? Do we even need state government in its present form?

The fund, set up by Alaskans in 1976 as a rainy day account to pay for government, has grown to $27 9 billion There's another $1 9 billion squirreled away in the Constitutional Budget Reserve, the account used over the years to bridge budget shortfalls Clearly, as states go, we're flush, but it is time to frame the questions about paying for government and to start looking at possible answers We are not at our fiscal Waterloo, but we can see it from here if we stand on our tiptoes

Gov Frank Murkowski, in his "State of the State" speech, said he was tapping seven appointees to form a "Conference of Alaskans" to meet in Fairbanks They, and other residents chosen from a pool of at least 1,000 applicants, will address key questions about the Permanent Fund

"Can't you take a joke?"

Should a portion of fund earnings be used to underwrite government operations and provide stability? Should dividends be protected by the state Constitution, or decided annually by the Legislature? Should the fund's current form be changed to Percent Of Market Value?

They are to present their resolution to the Legislature, which can put it on the ballot in November for Alaskans to decide As part of his fiscal framework, Murkowski also is asking for a constitutional spending cap

Count me among those who believe that using a portion of the earnings for government and dividends is the only prudent course, but prevailing passions make it unlikely the Legislature will muster the votes necessary to put on the ballot any constitutional proposal from the "Conference"

Yes, lawmakers could end all the nonsense simply by voting each year to use a portion of the fund's earnings to underwrite government — as voters in 1976 envisioned — leaving the rest for dividends But, realistically it would be political suicide Tapping the earnings could cut the dividend's amount, and Alaskans are far too spoiled to stand for that.

You have to wonder when working Alaskans will catch on

Realistically, the choice for the future is limited and obvious Either use a portion of the fund's earnings for government operations and continue getting a dividend, or pay an income tax that will grow and grow, wiping out your dividend The tax idea stinks

A Department of Revenue review is enlightening

If the fund today were converted into a Percent Of Market Value account, and 5 percent were withdrawn and split down the middle for dividends and government operations, each sector would get about $680 million — about the size of the gap expected in fiscal 2006

In that scenario, you could expect your dividend to grow for a few years Then, it would dip about $168 from what it would have been without the change

To match with an income tax that $680 million the state would have gotten from its half of a POMV split would end up costing Alaska families of four, with a median income of $57,000 and two children, up to $2,700 a year The same family making $114,000 a year could pay up to $5,725 Those are sizable pay cuts

What about those pesky Outsiders? They have to pay their share, tax hucksters will say The University of Alaska Institute for Economic Research says only 6 percent of an income tax would come from visiting workers

If you don't want to use the earnings or impose an income tax, there is a third alternative, I suppose We could reduce government to cinders and rubble, creating an economic bust of gigantic proportions Those who remember 1986 may cringe at that approach.

The time for posturing is past It's time for Alaskans to act like adults, tone down the political rhetoric and begin honestly and openly debating the issues. Many of us, from every possible political persuasion likely will have to bend a little Not everyone will be happy, but that is the nature of compromise

As for questions, you might consider asking those opposed to using the fund's earnings this

Can you come up with a better answer that does not punish the state's working families?

Paul Jenkins is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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Senior editor

MAYORS GRAB HEADLINES FOR . . .

What reason?

IT IS ALMOST beyond belief that the Alaska Conference of Mayors would have the chutzpah to grandstand its way into Juneau and declare its has "no confidence" in the Legislature to address the state's fiscal gap

Lawmakers, it should be noted, have been in Juneau for only three short weeks Three weeks

Good grief.

The impolitic mayors, many from communities that do not collect much of anything in the way of taxes to support their services, simply want more money Period You have to wonder whether they conveniently have forgotten that the state itself is in a fiscal snarl

State agencies have been trimmed, programs cut and the state of Alaska finds itself doing more with less each and every year There are not enough troopers, teachers or anything else Where do the mayors think increased state support for their cities would come from?

The answer is simple. Realistically, it either will come from the state government's use of a portion of the Permanent Fund's earnings or an income tax. Sales taxes generally are seen as the province of local governments, and increased oil taxes, aside from being a very bad idea, are unlikely

SO, ARE THE mayors stepping up to the plate and saying they want state government to pick your pockets or snatch part of your dividend? They wisely did not say While quick to demand money, they were more circumspect about pointing to its only source — you

While the mayors were being less than candid, it should be noted that the Conference of Mayors is affiliated with the Alaska Municipal League It has urged either an income tax or using a portion of the $27 9 billion Permanent Fund's earnings to balance state spending

Alaskans should be putting their mayors' feet to the fire, asking which they would prefer, using fund earnings or implementing an income tax. It will take one of those They also should be asked if their cities truly have cut all the fat from their budgets Many will object to taking a pay cut or losing part of their dividends so that a city can display flowers in the spring

This being an important election year, there is ample reason to suspect that politics may be behind the mayors' headline-grabbing tantrum.

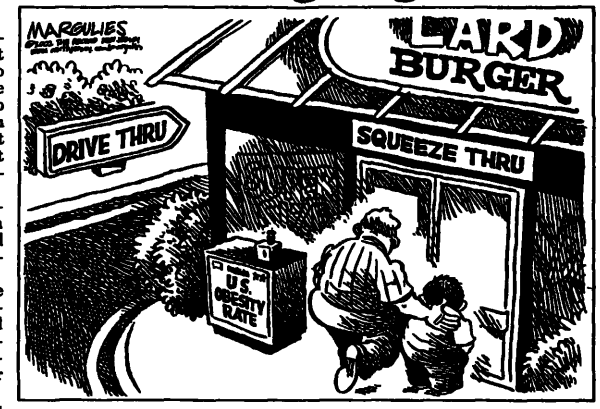
Is this mischief at work? Does it mean anything that the mayor of Alaska's largest city is a Democrat in all senses of the word? Or, how about the mayors from rural Alaska, where Democrats hold sway? Was all of this designed simply to embarrass the Republican-led Legislature?

A prudent person would wonder because the mayors' ill-advised, childish broadside is a poor way to encourage reasoned debate and cooperation on such a serious subject.

But maybe that was not their purpose

Regrettably, this is no laughing matter

By ELISE PATKOTAK



Every once in a while you read something so outrageous in the news that you find yourself rereading it just to make sure you didn't totally miss the point Then you find yourself turning to the front of the paper to make sure you haven't accidentally picked up some sort of satire publication. Then you look at the byline to see if it's by some world-renowned humor columnist

Only after exhausting all these avenues are you forced to admit that in fact, just when you thought life could get no weirder, someone pushed the envelope a little further

And so it was that on Sunday while reading the paper, I came across an article that said the following, "The school honor roll, a time honored system for rewarding A-students, has become an apparent source of embarrassment for some underachievers

"As a result, all Nashville schools have stopped posting honor rolls, and some are also considering a ban on hanging good work in the hallways — all at the advice of school lawyers " (Now you knew lawyers would be involved somewhere, didn't you?)

Patkotak

The article goes on to state that some schools have also put a stop to academic pep rallies, and are considering canceling spelling bees Once I ascertained that this was, in fact, not a spoof but reality, my first question was "Why is this being confined to just academics"?

If not making a publicly announced honor roll destroys a child's self esteem, what must it do to that poor child's ego when he or she doesn't get to play varsity basketball or soccer How badly those poor children must feel when they go to athletic sports rallies and are not the kids all suited up who come running out to the cheers of the rest of the school

If we have to cancel academic rallies, then I think it only fair that we cancel sports rallies And it's only fairer that every child who tries out for a team automatically makes it on the team and gets equal playing time so there is no sense of failure ever felt by any child in their whole childhood.

What's that you say — we can't mess with sports that way? Well, of course What was I thinking? In sports you can honor and reward those with talent but in academics we have to pretend we are all on a level playing field

I will openly admit that I never made a sports team in my academic career That is partly due to the fact that I went to a small, relatively poor Catholic grade school and high school and what money they had was for some inexplicable reason diverted into academics so there were few opportunities at sports

Part of this is due to the fact that I am incapable of steady, continuous motion in any given direction without tripping over my own two feet And part of it is due to the fact that I went to school before the feds made it mandatory to have women's sports programs in schools with men's sports programs.

And so the only place I could excel was academics And I did I was always on the honor roll My papers were hung in the hallways And I was proud of that I didn't begrudge the boys who won trophies on our basketball team because I knew I had a chance at being recognized for what I did well And no one worried about anyone's self-esteem who didn't get an award because 10 minutes after school was out, we were all playing together and no one cared who made honor roll or who didn't.

I think everyone should have an opportunity to feel good about themselves — to develop self-esteem And I think teachers and schools should work hard to find that spark that can be encouraged in every child they encounter

But I don't think taking away the self-esteem of students who do excel is the way to achieve that goal And certainly not taking away from academic achievement, which is, I think, why we send kids to school

At least not while there are still pep rallies in which football players are touted as mini-gods who will fight to honor the school's name while the debate team bringing home national awards barely has enough money for the bus ride from the airport.

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

The Anchorage Times

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2504412250

BILL J. ALLEN
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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

THE NEWS IS GOOD, BUT IT WILL BE A . . .

Long process

IT IS GOOD NEWS that two different groups seeking to build a long-awaited gas pipeline from the North Slope to points south are seeking negotiations with the state to begin setting in place agreements on taxes, royalties and other terms

Despite the exuberance stirred by their applications to the state last week, it is prudent to note that it was only a tentative first step Neither group has committed to actually building the line, and Alaskans likely are many years away from seeing gas dollars flow into the state treasury — if it ever happens

One group, the Big Three oil producers on the North Slope, controls the region's gas Its members have a wealth of hands-on experience in building huge projects in Arctic conditions and around the world, and they have spent millions of dollars over the years to study what it would take to build a gas line They bring to the table valuable assets in planning and building a gas pipeline

The Big Three, in their application under the Stranded Gas Development Act, say that it will take a "combination of factors" to make the project commercially viable, including a positive long-term market for the gas, cost reductions and "predictability of state take provisions "

UNEXPECTEDLY in the picture is a consortium headed by MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co , a pipeline and energy business that is part of Warren Buffet's financial empire It is joined by Pacific Star Energy, a start-up energy company, and Alaska Native corporations What the consortium brings to the table is less certain.

The MidAmerican-led group, which owns no gas, says it wants to build a line from the North Slope to the Canadian border It would need a partner to move the gas south from there The Big Three indicate they would prefer to go from the North Slope to the Midwest

What are Alaskans to make of all this?

After years of debate and anticipation, the applications for negotiations are a welcome first step, and it is good that there are two competing groups at least talking about construction of a line But there are many hurdles to overcome — at the state level, with the Canadian government and in Congress — before either can go forward

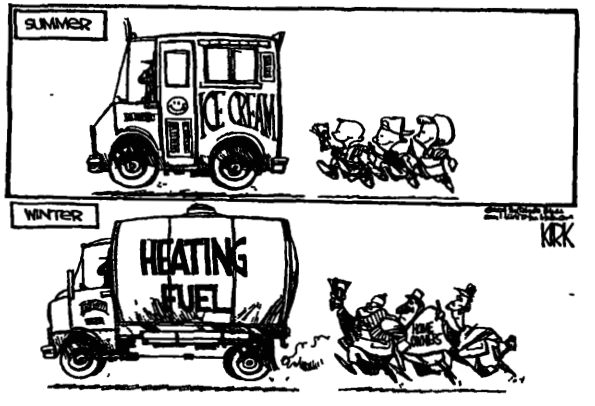
While those are being addressed, Alaska lawmakers should work to ensure that they do nothing that would make the process more difficult than necessary

The best thing Alaska can do is negotiate in good faith with each group to fully protect the state's interests and then wait and see

Unfortunately, it may take a while

When it comes to politics, I'm confused

By TOM BRENNAN



I'm lost when it comes to politics There is a lot I don't understand

For instance, it seems like quite a coincidence that both Sens Hillary Clinton and Ted Kennedy had simultaneous hemorrhoid attacks during President George Bush's State of the Union speech last week.

Hillary cheered up after a bit and smiled for the camera, apparently because somebody told her that her visible discomfort was going out on international television.

Either nobody told Kennedy that or the jowliest man in America just couldn't bring himself to look pleased by anything the president said

And I have no idea how wealthy liberals like John Kerry and Ted Kennedy can pass themselves off as champions for the little guy, them being anything but little

I guess it's just not for me to know such things After all, I'm still trying to figure out if ketchup is a vegetable It certainly seems like one to me, sort of an easily applied tomato Count me among those who refuse to accept tomatoes as fruit.

Brennan

For those with short memories or more momentous things to worry about than school lunches, the question of whether ketchup is a vegetable came up during the Reagan administration.

Ronald Reagan's Agriculture Department was claiming that the little red condiment was indeed nutritious and suitable for schoolhouse use, which did not sit well with the food police

The issue died away for many years and went down in mildly fiery flames during the Clinton administration when salsa was declared a vegetable if served in official school lunches

While we're on the subject of comestibles, let the record reflect that The New York Times has weighed in on the subject of farmed salmon vs wild salmon.

The great gray Times noted that a new study showing that farmed salmon contain more contaminants than their wild cousins is a good argument for preferring the wild ones That could be good news for Alaska's commercial fisherfolk.

The New York newspaper also said the health risk from eating any salmon is small and that the benefits outweigh the risks by a considerable factor " This looks like a case where risk estimation has outrun common sense," the newspaper lamented

Any health threat from farmed salmon apparently comes from feeding pen-raised fish ground-up smaller fish that pick up contaminants while traveling in ocean waters in polluted parts of the world

The Times called for giving the prisoner fish better food and for clear labeling on salmon to show whether it was farmed or wild — and where it came from Though The Times didn't mention it, but as every idiot knows, the good stuff comes from Alaska waters

There really is a big difference between farm-raised salmon and those caught in the wild waters of Alaska and I doubt that it has anything to do with contaminants The wimpy fish from farms just don't taste the same, perhaps because they don't get enough exercise

The first time I was served farmed salmon in our favorite restaurant, I sent it back and told the waiter I thought it was bad He checked and it wasn't, the difference in taste was somehow just related to the fish's life in captivity

Now I always ask whether the salmon was pen-raised or free-range and the waiter will usually declare proudly "It's fresh " By that he means it's wild fish from Alaska waters

But back to my ignorance of matters political I must confess that much of what I know for sure I got from my dog Jack and he got it from watching Geraldo Rivera while I was at work. That may not sound like much of an endorsement, but you don't know my dog

Ever since he was a puppy he has followed politics, starting with the newspapers I put down on the floor for him In later years he has leaned more to following issues of the day on cable television.

That has its disadvantages but at least I don't have to clean up after him

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

PREDATOR CONTROL POLL IS . . .

No surprise

A RECENT survey by Dave Dittman sheds some new light on the question of how Alaskans feel about shooting wolves from airplanes to reduce by 40 the number of predators in the McGrath area

The poll also asked 506 Alaskans whether they are worried about a tourism boycott threatened because of the predator control The poll is accurate to plus or minus 3 5 percent.

Researchers found that a majority of the respondents in virtually every region of the state believe the shooting should be allowed In rural areas, it was 60 percent, in Interior Alaska, 64 percent, Southcentral, 67 percent, Anchorage, 50 percent, and Southeast, 55 percent

Researchers found that a majority of the respondents in virtually every region of the state believe the shooting should be allowed.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those newest to the state were most likely to oppose the shooting Maybe they brought their Outside attitudes with them Something like only 41 percent of the respondents here for four years or less supported the predator control Those here 5-9 years, 51 percent, 10-14 years, 57 percent, and, more than 15 years, 59 percent

Democrats were about evenly split on whether to allow the shooting, 47 percent to 48 percent But Republicans approved 72 percent to 24 percent

FOR THOSE age 18-29, 59 percent approved, 30-44, 49 percent, 45-59, 57 percent, 60 or older, 66 percent Sixty-four percent of the men approved, while 51 percent of the women respondents approved

When asked whether they were concerned about a tourism boycott promised by Outside animal rights groups, respondents were not too concerned

Seventy-four percent of all the respondents, in all regions of the state, said they were not too concerned or not concerned at all Of those here the least amount of time, up to four years, 59 percent said they were not too concerned, or concerned at all, age 30-44, 74 percent, 45-59, 76 percent, and those older than 60, 74 percent Men, at 77 percent, were less concerned than women, 70 percent

In essence, the poll shows Alaskans generally support the predator control, that the longer a resident has lived here, the more he or she will support it, and, most are not all that concerned with boycott threats

All in all, the results are a thumb in the eye for Outside animal rights bullies intent on dictating, through intimidation and threats, public policy in Alaska

Good

The Dean dream may be over

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

I am bereft. I yield to no one — not a single orange-cap-wearing, twentysomething vegan Deaniac — in my disappointment over Howard Dean's Iowa debacle

Sure, he was their hope But he was mine, too Dean as Democratic nominee promised not just happiness but glory a Republican landslide of biblical proportions Big majority in the House And so many coattailed new senators that Bush could have begun repopulating the Supreme Court with 42-year-old conservatives (like Miguel Estrada) who would serve forever

The future looked so bright, and now it is so clouded Why, even the White House could not bring itself to give up the Dean dream The president's State of the Union address contained not one but two zings at Dean, although by the time the speech was delivered, Dean was no longer even a likely Democratic nominee Bush said first that we are safer with Saddam Hussein caught and then added, to sustained applause, that America would never ask others (i e the United Nations) for permission to defend itself

Twenty-four hours after Iowa, these rejoinders were already anachronisms

Who is to blame for this lost dream? Conservatives could start, as they love to, by blaming themselves We knew what a disaster Dean would be as a presidential candidate when Democrats were still lost in the clouds and dreaming When the polls showed him ahead nationally, and in Iowa, and in New Hampshire (by a ridiculous margin of 30 points), we could not shut up

National Review put Dean on its cover with the headline "Please Nominate This Man " Republican strategists, and the occasional insider from the White House, could not conceal their glee at Dean's prospective nomination I, too, am guilty, confessing week after week on TV that he was my candidate

As Dean began to slide, I was hoping against hope that he could just hang on — project sanity — long enough to win Iowa and New Hampshire and wrap up the nomination before the Democrats could come to their senses Alas, the democratic process worked

"Up and left."

Oh, yes, there were other factors History, for one, Dean himself, for another Hussein's capture gave psychological satisfaction, if not completion to the Iraq war Of course, fighting continues against the insurgency But with Hussein in prison, even the anti-war crowd cannot deny that the regime is finished

Iraq remains a political liability for the president The continuing casualties have turned the war on terrorism from a winning political issue into a problematic one Iraq's political effect is to neutralize foreign policy as a strong Bush positive, draining it of salience and shifting the center of gravity of the election contest toward more domestic concerns Nonetheless, as Iowa showed, there is zero payoff, post-Hussein, from raving that you were the firstest and mostest against the war

Dean, of course, compounded his problem by his reaction to Hussein's capture The problem, however, was not even the substance of his reaction but the sourness, the certainty, the smugness with which it was delivered

As the gaffes piled up, it became obvious that Dean's deepest problem was not his positions but his temperament. Anyone who still has any doubts about this must be one of the three people in America who has not seen, and recoiled from, Dean's unhinged rant after the Iowa loss

Interestingly, observers in the hall, watching the interplay of Dean with the frenzy of his volunteers, did not find The Scream particularly disturbing It was television that made it catastrophic

Which confirms my long-held view that Dean's ultimate weakness was that he was the classic anti-McLuhan candidate I suggested back on Sept. 5 that "Dean's passion is well suited to the early campaign the one-on-one, town-hall-meeting, retail-level campaign so far Dean's problem is television, famously a cool medium . As the campaign becomes less retail and more national — and therefore more televised — Dean's rise will be challenged " What I could not have predicted was that he would actually explode on national television

Dean was always passion and anger Passion and anger don't wear well on television They are too hot and, under the pressure of the first defeat in his entire political career, he simply combusted — into a manic eruption that within 24 hours had been memorialized in song

When the late-night comics call you "a hockey dad" (David Letterman) and "the Incredible Hulk" (Conan O'Brien) and "Mr Rogers with rabies" (Jay Leno), you've got trouble The most difficult thing to recover from in politics is ridicule

I'm not laughing, however I'm cryin' The dream is gone

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2004 The Washington Post Co.

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25044122532

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
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STARS SEEM ALIGNED FOR . . .

Rail link

THE TIME may just be right to link the Alaska Railroad to the continental railway system at Fort Nelson, B C , a 1,000-mile extension that could have enormous economic implications for Alaska and Western Canada

One of the previous problems with the long-sought rail link has been lack of enthusiasm from the Canadian government in Ottawa, but our neighboring nation's new Prime Minister Paul Martin seems more positive about the idea.

With a gas pipeline from Alaska's North Slope likely to be built in the relatively near future and members of Alaska's congressional delegation now in key positions in Washington, building the estimated $3 billion project may be within reach

The time is certainly appropriate to take a good hard look at the possibilities and pursue them if we can

Gov Frank Murkowski suggests the railroad could be constructed in the same transportation corridor as the gas pipeline and new fiber optic and electric lines

The Alaska Railroad now ends at Eielson Air Force Base outside Fairbanks The most likely route of the gas pipeline is along the Alaska Highway to the U S Midwest.

THE RAILROAD link is apparently not essential to construction of a gas pipeline, but building them together could provide beneficial economies of scale and mutual support How the railroad construction costs would be split between the United States and Canada is unclear, but the benefits to both are impressive

The railroad extension could open important new economic opportunities in the continent's Northwest region Those include investments in oil and gas development, mining, tourism and other industries

And former North Pole Rep Jeannette James says Sen. Ted Stevens endorses the railroad link and believes it would be useful for support of the Army's new Stryker brigade here

One key aspect to the timing is Congressman Don Young's chairmanship of the U S House Transportation Committee The governor rightly points out that the time to move on such a project is now, while Young is still chairman

Among the project enthusiasts at a recent conference on the subject in Juneau were Yukon Premier Dennis Fentie and two members of the British Columbia Parliament, Minister Greg Halsey-Brandt and Mr Dennis MacKay, a member of the Northern Caucus The conference was sponsored by Sen John J Cowdery, chair of the Alaska Senate Transportation Committee, and Rep Jim Holm, his House counterpart.

The stars may at last be aligned to link the Alaska Railroad to the continental rail system It's time to find out

'Experts' get it wrong on schools

By WALTER E WILLIAMS

What needs to be done to improve black education? Whether it's civil rights organizations, politicians or the education establishment, you'll get answers that cover the gamut from more money for teachers and smaller class sizes to school desegregation and racial preferences in higher education.

Despite these claims, there's no evidence whatsoever that these are absolutely necessary requirements for black academic excellence Let's look at it

I don't believe anyone in his right mind would believe that what the "experts" say is necessary to improve black education were available in, say, 1899 But at Dunbar High School, a black public school in Washington, D C , its students scored higher in citywide tests than any of the city's white schools

In fact, from its founding in 1870 to 1955, most of its graduates went off to college According to Dr Thomas Sowell's study "Patterns of Black Excellence" in the Spring 1976 issue of Public Interest, 40-student classes were the norm, Dunbar never received equal financial support and during its first 40 years of existence it didn't even have a lunch room

Williams

Sowell's study points to other islands of black academic excellence in earlier times, such as Atlanta's Booker T Washington High School, Baltimore's Frederick Douglass High School and a few others Like Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School of today, these schools with far greater resources, modern facilities, smaller class sizes and more highly paid teachers are not even shadows of their former selves in terms of black academic achievement.

What about during the 1940s? Did black schools have all that the "experts" say is necessary for academic excellence? In "Assumptions Versus History in Ethnic Education," in Teachers College Record (1981), Sowell reports on academic achievement in some of New York city's public schools He compares test scores for sixth-graders in Harlem schools with those in the predominantly white Lower East Side for April 1941 and December 1941

In paragraph and word meaning, Harlem students, compared to Lower East Side students, scored equally or higher In 1947 and 1951, Harlem third-graders in paragraph and word meaning and arithmetic reasoning and computation scored about the same — in some cases slightly higher and in others slightly lower — than their Lower East Side counterparts

Today, there are a few predominantly black public schools with fine achievement records, such as New York's Frederick Douglass Academy and private schools such as Marva Collins Preparatory School in Cincinnati, Marcus Garvey School in Los Angeles and Ivy Leaf School in Philadelphia

If you simply walked around a failing school and then walked around one of these achieving schools, what would be some of the most notable characteristics? First, you wouldn't see students entering through metal detectors You wouldn't see loitering in the hallways You wouldn't hear foul language being spoken among the students and to the teachers and staff.

"GOOD NEWS, DEAR! JENNIFER HAS BEEN ACCEPTED INTO THE ACCELERATED HONORS KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM ON THE STRENGTH OF HER PRE-SCHOOL PROFICIENCY TEST SCORES!"

Upon further investigation, you'd learn that parents are supportive of the teachers and involved in their children's schooling — making sure they do homework, get to school on time and behave once there The teachers are competent and demanding None of these ingredients are budget-busters, but if they're not present, no matter how high the budget, education won't occur

The cruelest hoax of it all is the fraud perpetrated on black students and their parents This was forcefully brought home to me over the holidays in a conversation with an in-law who boasted about how his son, a senior, was on his school's honor roll at one of Philadelphia's inner-city high schools

While it was not thrilling, honesty compelled me to inform him that the average black high school graduate has an academic achievement level on par with that of an average white seventh-grader His son's A's and B's would probably translate into C's, D's and F's at most other high schools

Walter E Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc , 5777 W Century Blvd , Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 337-7003.

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25044122533

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ALASKA NEEDS NEW . . .

Budget plan

ROGER CREMO is a thoughtful Anchorage lawyer with a plan under which Alaska could at last live within its means

His plan seems a good one that deserves careful consideration by Alaska's political leaders Alaska's means are significant, indeed, but the existing system puts state finances at risk when oil prices rise and fall, as they always do

The state has gotten by with its system in the past because pipeline throughput and its associated revenues have been so high But with North Slope output now fallen to half its peak, the state has been facing a huge gap between expenditures and revenues

We have been getting along so far by drawing down reserves But the bottom of those reserves is in sight and that prospect is the ongoing state crisis known as the fiscal gap

The short version of the Cremo plan is to convert fluctuating state revenues into a sustainable and predictable flow of cash for state projects Cremo proposes to achieve that by putting all money that state government receives from oil and gas into a single fund, then using the earnings of that fund to pay for essential state services

The approach would involve combining the Permanent Fund and the Constitutional Budget Reserve into that single fund and directing all future oil and gas revenues there as well

CREMO'S PROPOSAL would eliminate the boom and bust fluctuations in state revenues currently caused by the rising and falling price of crude oil, a recurring gap that would just get worse once North Slope gas is flowing to market and those prices fluctuate as well.

One of the many problems with the existing system is that government budgets will always grow to absorb whatever money is available That is unfortunate, if understandable, but the crunch comes when the amount of money drops from one year to the next.

Then, the budget ax must fall and the inevitable cry is heard to impose an income tax or major sales taxes to make up the difference, even though the growing size of the gap would require huge and painful taxes that would be a drag on the economy

This tendency of government budgets to grow and suck up available cash — complicated by the problem of fluctuating cash levels — puts government on a roller coaster ride that jeopardizes the state's economic future

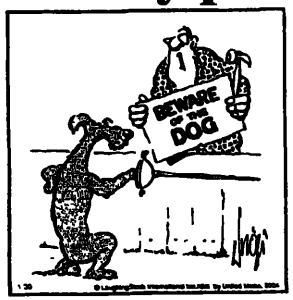
Following the Cremo plan and limiting state spending to the earnings of this new fund would at last put our state on a sensible fiscal course

New economic growth like that proposed by Gov. Frank Murkowski would fatten up the fund and, in turn, allow government to increase spending for essential services at a rate the state could afford.

Time to start heavy party planning

By WILLIAM J TOBIN

FIVE YEARS from now, we hasten to point out, Alaska will celebrate its 50th anniversary as a state It will take all those 60 months to put together the birthday party celebration that should be staged to mark the occasion Party planning is big stuff, and when it involves a statewide event in the biggest state in all the land, well the logistics will be staggering Surely every city, town and village will want to have its own Jan. 3, 2009, whoop-de-do Should they be coordinated? Should the state have a single celebration all its own? One big fireworks party? Birthday balls in every high school gymnasium and National Guard armory? Parades and speeches and banquets and balloons?



"OK, don't start showing off!"

WELL, IT'S really not too early for somebody to start thinking about this The governor's office is the logical place to begin The Legislature will want to get into the act, naturally And mayors and assemblies hither and yon won't be able to resist the temptation to take charge The opportunities abound a logo chosen from competitive entries submitted by graphic designers, a theme crafted from suggestions by school children all over Alaska, slogans and bumper stickers and lapel pins and playing cards, a nationwide tourist promotion inviting people from other states to come up and party with us, television programs, newspaper features, museum displays, books and magazine articles probing the history of the statehood battle and the first half-century of growth and development.

Tobin

THERE CERTAINLY will have to be an honorary chairman or two — somebody who was here back when the statehood victory was achieved. Thousands and thousands of mementos of that historic day will be distributed One of the top sellers among souvenir items of the day Reproductions of the Anchorage Times front page with the headline, "WE'RE IN," which proclaimed the day the statehood bill finally cleared Congress in 1958

MOST OF ALL, it should be a fun time — with five years to get ready for a whopping good party With any luck, the planning will come off without acrimony and ill-will. Possible? We shall see And can Anchorage and all of Alaska extend a welcome mat that will entice others to come up and celebrate with us?

ACTUALLY, THERE are plenty of examples from days gone by of how Alaskan hospitality carries the day Think back to Christmas 34 years ago, and a letter that was received by the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce from two Pan American flight attendants, Donna Beckendorf and Maureen Donahue The letter was dated Dec 30, written on stationary from the Hotel New Otani in Tokyo This is what it said

"DEAR SIRS: As Pan Am's flight from San Francisco landed in Anchorage on the evening of Dec 24, most of the crew on board were thinking about our families and the Christmas of 1970 which we would have to spend away from home Our stay began with a leaflet handed to us as we disembarked in Anchorage, telling us of the city's program, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, in which airline employees away from home were invited into the homes of Anchorage families for part of the holiday We called the phone number and almost immediately Mr C.J Harris had picked us up at our hotel and we were spending Christmas Eve with his family and friends This evening included a visit to Mr and Mrs. Paxton's house and a chance to meet their husky, Yukon. Christmas Day was spent with Mr and Mrs Bordman where we actually got to be a part of a Santa Claus type of Christmas, playing with P.J and Karen and their new toys Mrs Bordman's turkey dinner was great – the traditional 'at home' dinner Christmas afternoon our plane left Anchorage for Tokyo, but many crew members were leaving Anchorage with memories of friendliness, sharing invitations for return visits, and best of all the good feeling that we had had a Christmas after all As two stewardesses who took part in this program, we would like to thank the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce and most of all the people of Anchorage for making this possible"

PLANNING A BIG birthday celebration in January will have to take in account the prospect of some very cold weather — as was the case of the first few weeks of this New Year But this month really hasn't been anything to write home about — unlike January 1975, when Anchorage experienced 10 days of 20-below temperatures. And the late Ed McElligott used to say that was nothing compared with the winter of 1929, when he said there was a 30-day stretch when the temperature never got above 22 degrees below zero, and one day when the mercury dropped to minus 34 degrees

THE WINTER of 1917 was another cold one in Anchorage — with 22 days at zero or below, including a stretch of 14 days during December The same thing happened again in 1947, when there were 23 days in January and February at zero or below

SUNDAY PUNDAY: A couple of weeks ago the clouds over western Washington were moving to the west Normally they head east, inland over the mountains to central Washington and beyond Scientists blamed the switch on mad cloud disease.

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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25044122534

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

ECONOMIST FORECASTS . . .

More jobs

SCOTT GOLDSMITH predicts that 1,900 new jobs will be added to the Anchorage economy this year, up 1 3 percent from 2003

Goldsmith is director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska Anchorage He is also a pretty good predictor of what is likely to happen in the Anchorage marketplace

Apparently the growth will be in the services sector, which includes health, leisure, trade, general business and more Goldsmith unveiled his predictions Monday at the annual economic forecast luncheon of the Anchorage Economic Development Corp

"Consistent with the trend of past years," the AEDC reported, "Anchorage will continue to outperform the U S job market in the coming year"

AEDC is not resting on its past accomplishments The group, a private non-profit organization, has an aggressive plan to get out the word that Anchorage is a good place to live, work and do business

That agenda includes bringing prospective investors here, targeting best-prospect industries, encouraging retention and expansion of businesses already here, and a global public relations and marketing campaign to get the word out to the world

AEDC's story is a good one and the group has had real success in getting it heard

Pogo Mine

THE BIG POGO gold mine near Delta Junction is an important step closer to becoming a thriving enterprise and creating hundreds of high-paying jobs

The U S Army Corps of Engineers recently issued a wetland permit to Teck-Pogo Inc of Fairbanks authorizing it to develop, operate and reclaim the mine on state-owned land 38 miles northeast of Delta Junction and near the Goodpaster River

The mine operators are waiting for one final permit from the Environmental Protection Agency, which is expected in the near future All needed state permits are already in hand

Pogo will create about 700 jobs during its construction phase this year and next, and then provide 360 full-time jobs when the mine goes into production It will create another 600 indirect jobs supporting the miners and their operations, mostly in the Delta and Fairbanks areas

When producing, the mine will have an annual payroll of $25 4 million and its workers will receive average salaries of $66,000 The $250 million cost of developing the Pogo gold deposit is being underwritten by a partnership of Canadian and Japanese companies.In the very near future, Pogo seems likely to become a major new addition to the economy of Interior Alaska

Freezing weather has its rewards

By ELISE PATKOTAK

I couldn't believe that my hot water pipes froze when it was only 13 below zero I'd lived in Barrow for 28 years and never had my pipes freeze, even when it was 40 below My first thought was what wimpy houses we have in Anchorage

Then it was pointed out to me that the little room in my garage that contains my hot water heater and furnace was freezing because I had the door shut and the garage heater set at one degree above frigid It was an expensive lesson to learn

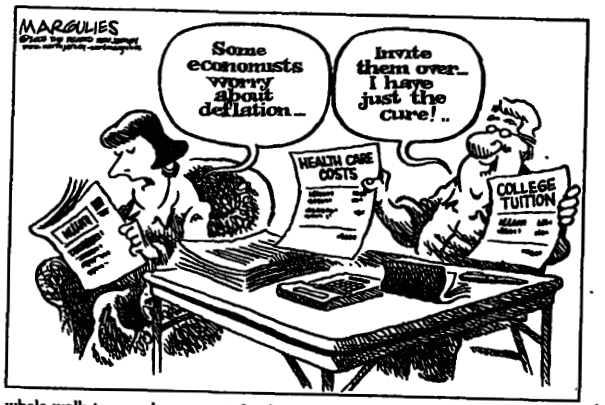
While waiting for someone to come thaw my pipes, I put a call in to my friend in New York City for the sheer perverse pleasure I would derive out of her moaning and groaning about the cold No matter how cold New York City was, I knew that Anchorage could beat its lowest temperature Finally, four winters after I moved here, I was able to be competitive again in the "my winter is more miserable than your winter" contest

Patkotak

When I lived in Barrow, I used to win these contests hands down every year No matter what complaint someone had about their weather, I'd be able to come back with some snappy reply like, "Well, it finally got up to 20 below here and the sun is almost back so I'm out walking the dog again." Slam dunk. Another win for the Arctic winter

When Anchorage was going through it's Seattle phase these past three years, I was blamed by every friend and relative I have on the East Coast for their Arctic-like weather They'd be freezing in the single digits and I'd be looking at green shoots coming up on my lawn They were sure that I had sent them my winter in response to some mad revenge fantasy I was weaving I thought they were simply the biggest wimps in the world

I am one of the few people I see on the streets when the weather gets this cold, which means Mr T and I have the whole walk to ourselves, except for the occasional moose But I've found that even moose are apt to pause and then go the other way when faced with something wrapped in fur walking backwards screaming "Oh My God" in successively higher and louder pitches



Actually, my long Barrow parka with fur around the bottom and a big warm fox ruff, which makes these walks not only bearable but downright enjoyable, has given pause to more than just moose While I strolled the back roads enjoying the scenery a few days ago, I ran into another hardy dog walker Well, she was either a hardy dog walker or her dog had such a case of cabin fever that it was either take him out for a walk or watch him go crazy

At any rate, as they approached me on the road, the dog started growling and barking My first thought was that he was reacting to Mr T — a schnauzer not known for gladly sharing this earth with others of his species But it soon became clear that he was growling and barking at me

His embarrassed owner apologized saying that she'd never seen him react to someone like that before, that usually he was very pleasant and friendly It was about then that we both realized he wasn't growling at me, he was growling at the strange animal with the wild fur around its face that I appeared to be in my parka with the ruff up

Walking in Anchorage when it is so solidly frozen takes some will and determination But you are rewarded by scenes of unsurpassing beauty Trees are frozen crystals, the mountains are impossibly white and then pink when the sun hits them at the right angle Everywhere you look the land has a frozen beauty that must be experienced to be understood

As my New York friend told of her dash from the subway to her office, of working in a climate controlled building where the air conditioner is on when it's 3 degrees outside, of snow turning to dirty black slush almost before it hits the ground, when I hear these things, I smile a smile of pity for her Then I put my coat on and walk out my door into a winter wonderland that she will never be privileged to know

And I am once again glad I am an Alaskan — with or without a dividend check.

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company

The Anchorage Times

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25044122535

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

PROPOSED LIMITS WILL KEEP SPENDING . . .

In check

IT SHOULD COME as no surprise that the very same folks who detest Anchorage's tax cap because it tightly controls government spending would recoil in horror from the notion of a constitutional spending limit for the state Bigger, unchecked government, in their view, is good at any level.

Gov Frank Murkowski, as part of his fiscal plan's framework, has endorsed putting on November's ballot the question of whether the state should adopt a constitutional amendment limiting government spending Such a cap, stringently applied, would assure Alaskans that government growth will not run wild

A spending limit has merit. As Alaskans are forced to decide important questions about using Permanent Fund earnings to help pay for government, or deciding whether to support a state income tax or a sales tax, it is only logical that government's voracious appetite for new money be curbed as part of the equation Alaskans should balk at simply feeding a monster that only gets bigger

The proposal under discussion has three primary facets limiting government growth from one year to the next, narrowing the number of appropriations excluded from the limit to avoid cheating on the definitions of spending; and, creating incentives to save money and put the surplus in the Permanent Fund or the Constitutional Budget Reserve

OPPONENTS TAKE the view that, somehow, instead of a limit, lawmakers should find the wherewithal to hold spending in check. It is difficult to imagine a legislative hopeful telling voters he promises go to Juneau and not get another dime's worth of services for them. He or she would get our vote, but few others, we would guess

The only sure way to restrain government is to control its revenues and spending, not by depending on lawmakers to ignore the myriad pressures they face each day from all of us to spend money for programs and projects, good and bad. Living within a spending limit — just like at your house — forces thoughtful decisions about what is important and what is not, what truly is needed and what is fluff

Anchorage has a tax cap It has one because taxpaying voters tired of ever-growing government reaching further and further into their pockets Yes, there are incessant attempts to fudge, to wiggle around the cap, or to get rid of it, but the property tax limit largely has kept municipal government spending in check over the years

Despite what we are sure will be creative attempts to sidestep any state spending limit, the proposal under consideration in the Legislature would go a long way toward assuring Alaskans that the state will not take a portion of their dividend check or tax them and then go on a spending spree.

What in the world is wrong with that?

A vision for sure, but not a pretty sight

By PAUL JENKINS

I had a vision the other day in my truck. I'm not lying There was a brilliant flash, a sharp *crack!*, then an eerie, pale blue luminescence I was at peace, floating through a no-man's land that looked like Spenard, except the hookers were better looking

At first, I wrote it off to perhaps the pigging-out-on-linguine thing, or maybe the years of dipping chocolate chip cookies in Jack Daniel's had taken its toll, but, hey, somebody was talking to me This was the real deal

It was tough to pin down the voice It sounded like a guy, maybe Robert DeNiro, but raspier and even more New Yorky

"It took you long enough to get here," he says, emerging from wisps of fog, his countenance gray, foreboding, ill-defined

W-W-W-Where? I stammer

"In this vision, this little peek at what Alaska will become if the nitwits have their way," he answers

Jenkins

So, you're kinda like the "Ghost of Christmas Future," or something?

"Are you talkin' to me?" he groans "Are you stupid or what? Do I look like the 'Ghost of Christmas Future?' Christmas this, pal I'm the ghost of 'What Happens If You Act Stupid'"

Oh, I've never heard of that one By the way, that's an impressive DeNiro

"Thanks, now that you're here, come along," he mutters, and with that we float to a statue in what appears to be a Mountain View arts district I know that because all the buildings appear propped up by tax dollars The monument is of a guy in Carhartts, with his right hand out, palm up in the classic Alaska salute His left hand clutches a concrete check He has a Doritos bag pulled down over his head

What's that supposed to be? I asked

"It honors the 'Quintessential Alaskan,'" he rasps "It commemorates people who put themselves first and kept demanding Permanent Fund dividends, no matter what. They fought income taxes, too And they wanted more government Go figure The bag signifies refusing to face reality"

"When was this passport photo taken?"

The check?

"That's the guy's $24 Permanent Fund dividend check," he says, wiping a tear from his wrinkled cheek. "That was the last one they issued before the dividends dried up completely The fund was kind of like the Kenai River People just loved it to death"

We hunker down in front of the statue, me getting hungry, the ghost doing most of the talking

"Alaskans were dumb enough to fight using fund earnings to help pay for government and ensure they pocketed a dividend check, he says They turned their back on the fund's original purpose, as a rainy day account

"Refusing to allow the fund's use as envisioned in 1976 forced deep government cuts, costing hundreds of jobs Then came an income tax Its proponents promised it would connect Alaskans to their government, but what it really did was connect government to each paycheck."

"The tax started small, as taxes always do, and grew, as taxes always do Every year, working Alaskans took pay cut after pay cut The economy stumbled, he says, but there were dividend checks Then, after a few years of a bear stock market, there was that measly $24 dividend because fund earnings were in the tank. There were none in the following years

"That triggered additional layoffs and finger-pointing and excuses Rising taxes and vanishing dividends forced businesses and the state's kids to bolt, he says Alaska became mostly a vast zoo and park, with lousy schools, a busted university and crumbling infrastructure."

What could have been done?

"Are ya kiddin' me, or what?" he asks "All they had to do was use the fund for its intended purpose. That simple. They could have opted for the Percent Of Market Value approach safely used by huge funds everywhere Say they took 5 percent annually and split it down the middle That would have guaranteed a growing dividend as the fund grew and enough money to help run government."

If it's so logical, why didn't it happen?

"Politics," he says, stretching, starting to get up "Fear-mongering, personal agendas, egos, people looking for some kind of legacy Some opposed using the fund's earnings because they wanted an income tax no matter what, and using them would have made that unnecessary Some wanted to run everybody but themselves out of the state And too darned many were just not very smart They wound up with a tax *and* no dividend.

"Present-day Alaskans can avoid the mess by using common sense and showing a little gumption. All it will take is a spending limit and a constitutional amendment or two No big deal."

So the future is not locked in concrete?

As he starts to answer, there's another blinding flash. I'm back in my truck, with a line of cars behind me, honking A guy offering biologically impossible instructions from his car window almost drowns out the faint voice from someplace far, far away that says with a laugh.

"Not for the state, kid, but it is for you if you don't keep your face out of the linguine

Paul Jenkins is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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2504412236

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

STATE OF THE UNION REAFFIRMS . . .

U.S. mission

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH'S final State of the Union speech in his first term in office was a breath of fresh air after weeks of yammering by Democratic candidates' jockeying for position in the Iowa caucus and elsewhere

Until Bush's positive speech, a person could not be blamed for believing the nation, despite a surging economy, was broken and on the ropes

The president Tuesday night quickly went on the attack, offering point-by-point rebuttals of many Democratic criticisms in such areas as health care and taxes He touched on various themes for his re-election campaign while countering charges that he led the nation into war without an international coalition

"This particular criticism is hard to explain to our partners in Britain, Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Italy, Spain, Poland, Denmark, Hungary, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Romania, the Netherlands Norway, El Salvador, and the 17 other countries that committed troops to Iraq," Bush said

From his support of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, to health care tax incentives, to dealing with illegal immigrants, to sex education, drugs and religious-based charities, Bush laid out his aims for the year, an election year when Congress likely will be distracted He also urged Congress to renew key provisions of the controversial Patriot Act about to expire next year

"Our law enforcement needs this vital legislation to protect our citizens," he said

BUSH ALSO called for increased training so workers can stay apace of this nation's ever-changing economy He urged Congress to continue an aggressive, pro-growth economic agenda and praised passage of the No Child Left Behind Act He called for making permanent congressionally approved tax reductions scheduled for this year and 2006

On the other side of the aisle, class-conscious Democrats, who seem to spend much of their time and effort trying to pit Americans against each other, seemed weak in their criticism of the speech About the best they could do is trot out their tired contention that the United States' economy has suffered under Bush — despite the facts showing otherwise

Bush for his part seemed focused, energetic and on his game, delivering a positive message to a nation still very much at war

"America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs," he said "Our aim is a democratic peace — a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman America acts in this cause with friends and allies at our side, yet we understand our special calling This great republic will lead the cause of freedom"

Good job, Mr President

Unsustainable revenue is the problem

The following is a summary of a longer proposal made to Alaska legislators.

By ROGER CREMO

Legislators will be unsuccessful if they attempt to solve the state's fiscal problem with the present system of funding government.

For several years now, the state has been spending more than it takes in. The gap has been bridged with reserves, but they're just about gone However, lawmakers can close the gap now by forcing spending down and bringing revenue up

But that wouldn't solve the problem unless the amount spent is adequate and sustainable And there's the rub Any amount of spending that you decide is adequate wouldn't be sustainable In some years, there wouldn't be enough revenue to be able to match it.

Oil revenue, which is a large component of General Fund revenue, is not sustainable It fluctuates too much, and it's on the decline

Suppose that by cutting spending and imposing a tax you closed the current gap while the price of oil is still in the $30 range A new gap would open when the price of oil dropped to $20 (it has been as low as $10)

To close the new gap, legislators would have to reduce spending to less than what they had decided was adequate when closing the current gap Or they would have to increase a tax that they had imposed at that time

Sure, oil revenue can increase in some years But sustainable spending can't be achieved by accumulating surplus revenue in good years for expenditure in bad years In the good years, legislators wouldn't know how much revenue should be left unspent

Periods of high and low oil prices don't occur on schedule And the depth and duration of price depressions in future years can't be forecasted An oil market down for a substantial period would exhaust an accumulated surplus Indeed, the state's multibillion-dollar accumulated surplus is draining right now — in a market that's up

Or assume that the ultimate soon comes to pass Gas is flowing from the Slope to Chicago, and oil is flowing from ANWR to Valdez With a treasury bulging with oil and gas revenue, spending would increase considerably But oil and gas revenue would be just as unsustainable as it is today The fiscal gaps would be bigger than ever

Unsustainable revenue is the root of the state's problem We're riding on a fiscal roller coaster by trying to fund government with it That's more than difficult — it's crazy A new system for funding government is essential

It wouldn't be the first time that a system for funding government has been scrapped Under its first constitution (the Articles of Confederation) the United States had to obtain money needed for operations by requisitioning it from the states That system didn't work In 1787, one of the reasons for writing the second Constitution was to do away with it

Under a proposed system, money derived from oil and gas would no longer be treated as revenue It would be recognized for what it is — capital Combined with the oil money that has accumulated in the Permanent Fund and the Budget Reserve Fund, it would be invested conservatively to produce, perpetually, revenue that is sustainable

The only function of the proposed system is to replace unsustainable revenue with sustainable revenue You would have the same authority with respect to the revenue produced by investment that you have now with respect to conventional revenue It's not a complicated system, and it's easily installed.

Although the proposed system is designed to provide government with sustainable revenue for all the years to come, it also has an immediate application Under the present system, if there's still a big fiscal gap when reserves run out, you will have to make deep cuts rather immediately In contrast, the lengthy transitional phase of the proposed system provides the opportunity to make any necessary cuts gradually

The constitution requires lawmakers to wear two hats They not only make laws but also propose constitutional amendments If they think that the proposed system would make revenue sustainable, they should put an amendment into the public arena where the people can determine its (their) fate

Roger Cremo is a lawyer practicing in Anchorage.

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25044122537

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Senior editor

ANOTHER PIECE IN . . .

Sad puzzle

THE NEWS that Timothy Treadwell invented much of his background is somehow no surprise

Treadwell and his girlfriend Amie Huguenard were killed and eaten last October by brown bears in Katmai National Park and Preserve Before his death, Treadwell gained an international reputation as the author and filmmaker who got up close and personal with Katmai's ferocious bears

In the process, he convinced entertainment luminaries and millions of ordinary people that the bears are just misunderstood creatures that respond to his affection. Treadwell liked to ease up close to the animals and chant, "I love you," in a high-pitched, sing-song voice He gave them names including Booble, Aunt Melissa, Mr Chocolate, Freckles, Molly and Downy

He told stories about his adventures with the near-huggable wild creatures in appearances on David Letterman's show and The Rosie O'Donnell Show The Discovery Channel and Dateline NBC did pieces on him and he appeared in a Disney Channel segment about bears

Now it turns out that Treadwell was not born in Australia as he claimed but in Long Island, N Y, he didn't grow up a British orphan on the streets of London as he told many people, and his accent was affected

HIS ORGANIZATION, Grizzly People, was not a nonprofit as he claimed but it served to get him donations from Hollywood glitterati like actor Leonardo DiCaprio and supermodel Gisele Bundchen

Treadwell had been warned that his exploits among Katmai's brown bears were dangerous Bear experts and park officials worried that Treadwell's exploits would encourage others to emulate him and take risks that would endanger themselves and the bears They also noted that the bears he claimed to be saving didn't need his protection. Brown bear numbers are large, their habitat and food supply are fully adequate and hunting pressure is low, and despite his claims to the contrary, poaching is rare

Treadwell did much good before he died at age 46, he often visited schools in Southern California and talked to the children. He entertained millions in his media appearances, even if the information he spread was misleading

And Stephen Stringham, a bear biologist and professor at the University of Alaska, said Treadwell kept meticulous diaries of bear genealogy, mating habits and maternal behavior Stringham told an Associated Press reporter that the work will be valuable to researchers

But Treadwell did Alaska and its wildlife a major disservice by spreading the notion that the state is a Disneyesque theme park. This is the same approach taken by animal protection people and many environmentalists who lobby to shut down its industries and lock up its lands The latest information about Timothy Treadwell is another piece in a sad puzzle

My fantasy unveiled on the big screen

By ELISE PATKOTAK

I have already seen the movie "Something's Got To Give" with Diane Keaton and Jack Nicholson twice It's a good movie, but the real draw for me was watching Keanu Reeves fall for a woman 20 years his senior

I don't know how Hollywood did it, but someone from there clearly sneaked into my fantasy life and made a movie based on it. The only difference is that my fantasy ends with me telling Jack Nicholson to get real and I stay with Keanu Reeves

Each time I've seen this movie, the ending has driven me crazy I want to jump out of my seat and yell at Diane Keaton "Are you crazy? Why would you leave Keanu Reeves for Jack Nicholson? Put your glasses on Take a good look. Now rethink that decision."

But no matter how hard I try, she always makes the wrong choice Which just proves to me that most romantic movies are still the product of old men's fantasies

Patkotak

In their movies, not only do old men get the young women, they get the older women too Even when a super stud like Keanu is standing there waiting to be had. That is definitely a man's fantasy, not a woman's

Hollywood is all over itself, breaking its arm patting itself on the back in an orgy of self-congratulations over making a movie in which an older woman plays the sexy leading role The female romantic lead in this case, Diane Keaton, looks like she's probably gone from an Annie Hall size 2 to a mature size 4

The male romantic lead, Jack Nicholson, looks like he hasn't seen the inside of a gym since they marched all the patients there in "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" Even giving him some slack for the fact that the camera adds 10 pounds, Jack is easily a good 40 pounds from fighting form

Can you imagine a romantic comedy in which Harrison Ford plays opposite Tyne Daly and leaves Julia Roberts for her? No? Well, that's the equivalent of Diane Keaton leaving Keanu Reeves for Jack Nicholson.

And that brings me back to my original premise that these movies are fulfilling the romantic fantasies of a bunch of aging, out-of-shape men who have enough money to bring their fantasies to life

The fact that this was written and directed by a woman, Nancy Meyers, who previously gave us Mel Gibson's enlightenment in "What Women Want," makes me wonder if the only way she can get her projects off the ground is by tailoring them to fit some level of male studio head fantasy

There is one part of the movie though that is as close to truth in a woman's experience as you get It's the series of scenes that follows Keaton laying her heart out to Nicholson and Nicholson looking at it like an alien life form. It's the dramatic breakup required for the heart tugging reunion at the end

For the next five minutes or so, the screen is filled with Diane Keaton bursting into tears in various locations I don't know how she did it, but I don't think there is a woman alive who can hear the particular sound of those cries and not find them very familiar There are few of us who have been lucky enough to get through life without making them.

Both times I saw this movie, this series of scenes brought out initial laughter and then quiet from the almost all female audience. It sent us all back to a moment in our life where we laid our heart at the feet of the man we adored and he recoiled in horror and ran the other way

Keaton's character, a playwright, takes her painful situation and turns it into a successful play about the relationship in which she kills off the older man with a heart attack. In so doing, she provides all of us the unspoken revenge we have sought from the men who treated us so badly

If this movie is as successful for Nancy Meyers as "What Women Want" was, then she should be reaching a point of having some clout in the film industry At that point, I'd like to see her produce a movie with an overweight, out-of-shape actress of a "certain age" in the romantic lead and men from 30 to 60 going crazy for her

Now that's a movie I'd pay a lot to watch.

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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BUSH PLAN WOULD IMPROVE . . .

Alien status

WE'RE NOT SURE that President George Bush's move to overhaul the nation's immigration system is the right approach, but it is a bold initiative to resolve an increasingly dangerous problem It deserves a thorough airing and thoughtful consideration.

The most positive aspect of the president's proposal is that it would encourage millions of illegal aliens to come out of hiding and apply for legal status as temporary workers

Most of the 8 million to 14 million illegals in the country would then be eligible for three-year work permits, with the possibility of a renewal When the work permits expire, the holders would be required to leave the country The program would not be tied to the traditional immigration system and would give the workers no advantage over others in applying for green cards

The obvious advantage of the program is that it would go a long way toward ending an underground economy in which immigrants sneak across our borders — or are brought here by smugglers — and exist in the shadows

Their undocumented status creates a situation in which the workers are susceptible to all manner of exploitation. Since they are officially unknown to government, they work without protections such as minimum wage and health and safety legal provisions They also compete with American workers for jobs

ONE OF OUR primary concerns with the system revisions is that they would allow illegal aliens to remain in this country when federal law requires that they be caught and deported

As a practical matter, no administration has been able to manage the problem and the nation's borders have become increasingly porous, with illegals pouring across by the many thousands

In a time of rampant terrorism — and with international terrorists becoming armed with dirty bombs and other weapons of mass destruction — porous borders are an invitation to disaster on a scale never experienced in this country

The White House announcement on the immigration reform plans said the program would improve protection of the American homeland through better control of its borders But it said that protection would come through agreements with countries whose nationals participate in the program

To our thinking, such immigration reform should be accompanied by a swift and thorough crackdown on undocumented aliens who do not come forward, make their presence known and register their presence

America should also use electronic surveillance and whatever human resources are needed to seal up its borders, cut off the illegal traffic and reduce the risk, which at present is huge

We shouldn't wait until a dirty radiation bomb or a chemical or biological agent is unleashed to contaminate and condemn one of our nation's cities

Managing assets outshines new taxes

By LEW M WILLIAMS, JR.

It's no time to panic and enact a state sales tax or a state individual income tax. Cities and boroughs need the sales tax. The individual income tax reduces the take home pay of average Alaskans — teachers, nurses, retail clerks, loggers, fishermen, government workers, reporters. Everyone with a pay check would find a new deduction. A pay cut is not the way to boost the economy The state has sufficient assets, if fully utilized, to stay out of the red, expand its infrastructure and provide jobs long into the future

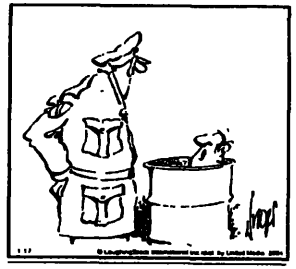
If voters approve a constitutional amendment allowing the Alaska Permanent Fund to pay out 5 percent of it total market value annually, it would provide at least $650 million to cover the fiscal gap in the operating budget and finance increased capital (infrastructure) construction And there would be another $650 million for a dividend of more than $1,000 to each Alaskan, the amount growing each year as the Permanent Fund grows

Williams

The fund's value is up $1 3 billion from Dec. 3, when it was $26 4 billion. Under a percent of market value plan, that would mean another $32 5 million toward the fiscal gap and $54 added to each Alaskans' dividend, leaving quite a bit — $1 235 billion — of that $1 3 billion for increasing the fund Not bad for six weeks

In addition to converting the Permanent Fund to a POMV payout, Anchorage businessman Jim Crawford, in a column for newspapers, identifies 31 other pots of state money that if deposited in the Constitutional Budget Reserve would boost the CBR to more than $5 5 billion Earnings on that would be more than $400 million a year Add $400 million to the $650 million and, as they say, "we are talking real money"

Crawford, former Republican Party chair in Alaska, is a mortgage broker with a background in banking He also served as deputy executive director of the Alaska State Housing Authority



"I'd ask you in, but I've only got one chair"

Add this good news The U S Department of Labor reports that Alaska tied with Florida at 10th among states in creating new jobs in the 12 months ending October 1 The biggest increases among Alaska's 3,800 new jobs were for architects, engineers and accountants

The Legislature can boost the economy by approving Gov Frank Murkowski's capital construction plan, creating more of those high-paying jobs Murkowski introduced his capital construction budget Dec. 15 along with his operating budget. The capital budget totals $1 5 billion, most from federal sources

The state's contribution to the capital program comes from pockets of money in accounts of various state agencies, such as the Alaska Housing Corp , identified by Crawford Instead of putting the money in the CBR, the governor proposes bonding against assets of those agencies to pay for his construction program.

Among the major projects awaiting a federal appropriation are $129 million for what is called "Juneau Access Improvements," $215 million for access to Ketchikan's airport and $6 million to start the Bradfield Road project that will eventually give southern Southeast Alaska access to the continental highway system. The only major projects missing are the Knik Arm crossing, the natural gas pipeline and connecting the Alaska Railroad to the Canadian rail system

The largest part of the $100 million in state funds in the construction program — raised by the bond sales — is $52 million to match $400 million in federal transportation funds

Big federal allocations include $50 million for community and energy grants, $58 5 million for village safe water projects, $26 million for salmon recovery projects, $13 million for health and social services projects, $13 million for National Guard projects, $19 million for the Department of Natural Resources projects, $6 million for the Department of Public Safety projects, and $10 million for Alaska Housing Finance Corporation projects The university is slated to receive $116 million, of which $80 million is for replacing a fisheries research vessel That's a lot of jobs.

Lawmakers should avoid dedicating funds when drawing up an amendment to the constitution to enact the POMV Allocating funds is properly done by law in the Legislature The 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention, 1955-56, thoroughly explored dedicated funds (as should the 55 appointed to examine use of the Permanent Fund) With no dissent, delegates then banned them in Article IX, Section 7

The Legislature might get around that ban by using Alaska's greatest asset — land The Alaska Supreme Court last week ruled for the Legislature when it overturned Gov Tony Knowles' veto of a land grant to the university It asked a lower court to rule on whether such a grant of land is constitutional.

Anticipating a favorable decision, Rep Dan Ogg, a former university regent, proposes endowing education — K through 12 and the university — using 1 percent of the 104 million acres of state land A board to manage the endowment would be composed of three members each from the board of education, the regents and the public

This is no time to panic about state finances but to reorganize management of the state's bountiful assets The alternative is to reduce everyone's paycheck, cut state and local services and downsize a capital construction program that should be building infrastructure to attract more high-paying jobs

Lew Williams Jr is a retired publisher of the Ketchikan Daily News His e-mail is lmwjr@worldnet.att.net

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25044122539

BILL J. ALLEN
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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

LIBERALS WANT . . .

Taxes first

WE FIND IT difficult to believe that some legislators are questioning whether the Permanent Fund should be used for the purpose for which it was established

They want none of its earnings directed to state services and all of it to go for Alaska's free-money program If the liberals had their way, Alaska would impose an income tax to keep the free money flowing from the state's $27 billion bank account That would be a socialist-style transfer of wealth from one class to another and would break faith with those who voted for the fund in 1976 The liberals see themselves as Robin Hoods, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor Except their idea of the rich includes virtually all working people

The fund earnings have for far too long been considered sacrosanct, a financial kitty to be used only for individual dividend checks The dividend program is too important to household budgets across Alaska to end altogether, but the time has come to cap the giveaways and be true to those who established the fund in the first place

Those who voted in 1976 to set up the fund thought they were creating a rainy day account that would take excess oil revenues out of the hands of politicians of the day and set them aside for future needs The free-money dividend program was an afterthought supposedly to give individual Alaskans a stake in resource development and motivation to monitor the fund's governance But that tail has been wagging the dog of state for far too long The earnings have been used for nothing except individual dividend checks

BY ALL MEANS, let's continue the dividends in some form But let's also put the Permanent Fund back on track as a revenue source for state operations The money is needed for its original purpose

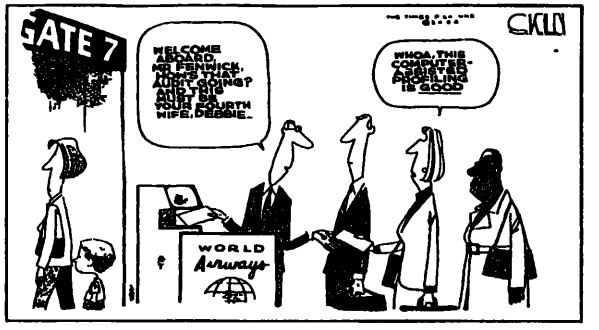
But while we're at it, let's ask the University of Alaska to commission a study on what the long-term impacts of the free-money program have been on the state Alaska needs to know what the dividend giveaway has done to the spirit and values of its citizens, to the extent those can be measured The state should also try to determine how many people have come here for free money Who are they, what are they contributing to the state and what problems do they bring?

Gov Murkowski has summoned a citizen conference at the University of Alaska Fairbanks next month to discuss what should be done with fund earnings We hope the question of whether to use any part of them for public needs will be taken completely off the table at the outset and discussion be focused instead on whether the free-money program should be continued and at what level

If the study suggested here is ever carried out, we may find that the dividend program was a bad idea in the first place. Alaskans may then be asking themselves "What have we done?"

Space travel plan makes good sense

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER



Most Americans had long since stopped paying attention to manned space flight. The shuttle? So what (except during some stunt like the John Glenn flight)? The moon? Been there, done that.

Four years ago, I wrote an article ("On to Mars," the Weekly Standard, Jan 31, 2000) advocating phasing out the space shuttle, abandoning the space station, establishing a moon base and then eventually going on to Mars It was greeted with yawns by those who noticed it at all

Even my friends excused my fondness for the moon as the kind of eccentricity one expects from a guy who has an interest in prime numbers and once drove to New York to see a chess match

Well, things have gotten worse This week, when the president of the United States proposed to phase out the space shuttle, phase down the space station, establish a moon base and then eventually go on to Mars, he was met not with yawns, but with ridicule

"He wants to build like a space station on the moon, and then from the moon, he wants to launch people to Mars," said a positively gleeful David Letterman "You know what this means, ladies and gentlemen? He's been drinking again"

The Washington Post Style section ran a clever spoof that began. "The Bush administration wants to send some of us to the moon unless congressional ridicule becomes too much to bear" And Dennis Kucinich, whose usual specialty is unintended humor, got the laugh of the Jan. 11 Iowa debate when he suggested Bush was going to the moon and Mars to find weapons of mass destruction.

Part of the reason for the unfriendly reception was the way the Bush proposal was rolled out It was pre-spun as a great new goal to unify the nation — a "Kennedy moment" to kick off an election year

This was as clumsy as President Bush 41 saying "Message I care" or Howard Dean discovering Jesus as he heads south. If you are going to do something blatantly political, don't telegraph it.

This presentation was particularly stupid because I believe this plan would have been proposed exactly as is, with or without an election year, with or without the phony Kennedy overlay

In fact, there is not an ounce of political advantage in this proposal An Associated Press poll found that a majority of Americans would rather spend money on domestic needs

As for the Kennedy stuff, the Bush proposal has less to do with a vision of man's destiny than with a totally dysfunctional government agency NASA gave us the glory of Apollo, then spent the next three decades twirling around in space in low Earth orbit studying zero-G nausea.

It's crazy, and it might have gone on forever had it not been for the Columbia tragedy Columbia made painfully clear what some of us have been saying for years It is not only pointless to continue orbiting endlessly around the Earth, it is ridiculously expensive and indefensibly risky

The president's proposal is a reasonable, measured reconfiguration of the manned space program True, he could not go all the way Binding agreements with other countries made it impossible for him to scrap the space station — a financial sinkhole whose only purpose is its own existence But he is for phasing it down and for retiring the shuttle within six years

That frees up huge amounts of NASA money to do what is useful and exciting going to other worlds For this generation, the only alternative to wandering about in low Earth orbit — other than the Luddite alternative of giving up manned flight completely — is to return to the moon And this time, stay there

Establishing the first human habitation on a celestial body would not just allow for extraordinarily interesting science (from geology to astronomy) and be the locus for extraterrestrial manufacture It would be — those without an ounce of romance in their souls are advised to skip the rest of this sentence — the most glorious human adventure since the Age of Exploration five centuries ago

As for Mars, there is nothing Buck Rogers in the president's proposal It will take decades to work out how to get there safely There is no Apollo crash program There is simply an annual 5 percent increase in the NASA budget — which itself is now less than 1 percent of the whole federal budget.

Those who want to divert even these paltry sums to domestic spending would undoubtedly have objected to Magellan's costly plans, too Look. We can stay on Earth We can keep tumbling about in orbiting Tinkertoys Or we can walk the moon again and prepare for Mars I can't imagine an easier choice

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.

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2504412240

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

Martin Luther King Jr. — 'I have a dream . . .'

By MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Fivescore years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness " It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds "

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And, so we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom We cannot walk alone

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?"

We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of unspeakable horrors of police brutality We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "for whites only " We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality You have been the veterans of creative suffering Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed Let us not wallow in the valley of despair

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed "We hold these truths to be self-evident. that all men are created equal "

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character I have a dream today

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification," one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers I have a dream today

I have a dream that one day "every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low; the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together

This is our hope This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day This will be the day, this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, Let freedom ring "

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania! Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado! Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California! But not only that, let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia! Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee! Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi

From every mountainside, let freedom ring

And when this happens, when we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

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The historic speech .

WE CELEBRATE today the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr , one of the 20th century's greatest leaders and an indomitable force for justice

He eloquently and passionately fought for equality and civil rights for black Americans, and was instrumental in bringing down the South's segregation laws He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his tireless efforts

King's "I have a dream" speech, delivered Aug 28, 1963, before 200,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington., D C , remains a beacon of hope on the road to justice

THE KING CENTER

Further Dr King's legacy by making community service a way of life Please visit the King Center's Web site to find a service opportunity in your neighborhood www thekingcenter org

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The Anchorage Times

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25044122541

BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES CLUELESS ON . . .

ANWR issue

IT'S NOT surprising that all eight of the leading Democratic candidates are opposed to drilling for oil on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Each and every one of the Democrats is pandering to the green cults that still have such tremendous power in Congress That is because the greens can easily turn out their minions on environmental causes and are a force to be reckoned with in many elections.

Fortunately, President George W Bush, a large majority in the U S House and a substantial majority in the Senate all support ANWR drilling, which could be important both to the nation's energy future and the economic prospects for Alaska.

The fact is that the prospects for major discoveries of oil and gas are far greater on the coastal plain of ANWR than they are anywhere else in Alaska and the United States.

What many people fail to recognize is just how close the issue came to being resolved to Alaska's favor in the last session of Congress The House gave its backing early and ANWR campaigners at one point had 58 out of the 100 members of the Senate ready to support drilling

Alaska's two senators and the supporting activists were just two votes shy of a filibuster-proof 60 positive votes, so the issue was lost for the time being But 58 votes out of 100 is a very significant accomplishment and suggests that victory is potentially within reach

GIVEN THE possibility that several liberal Senate Democrats might well be replaced by conservative candidates this fall, the situation could well turn for the better by next year, if not in this year's session itself

The most ludicrous response to a survey of candidates on the issue came from Rep Richard Gephardt, D-Mo , who said oil exploration should concentrate on other parts of the North Slope that have yet to be tapped.

That's like the guy searching for a lost mitten two blocks from where he dropped it. Asked why he is looking there, the man answers that the light is better under the street lamp

The fact is that the prospects for major discoveries of oil and gas are far greater on the coastal plain of ANWR than they are anywhere else in Alaska and the United States Looking elsewhere just because the political pressure would be less is nonsensical.

The lesser prospects need to be explored, but they are no substitute for the suspected oil and gas reservoirs in and around the huge subsurface ANWR structure known as the Marsh Creek anticline

Gephardt's comment suggests he is yet another national leader who is a rebel without a clue

The good ol' days were always colder

By WILLIAM J. TOBIN

IT WAS 131 years ago this week that Ulysses S Grant was sworn in to start his second term as the nation's 18th president, an item of special interest considering the frigid weather a couple of weeks ago in Anchorage. Grant's inauguration and the parade that followed took place in the middle of a blizzard, and the weather — according to those who follow such things — was the coldest ever experienced by an incoming president Not only that, the 1873 inaugural ball took place in a hall without any heat. It was so cold that the valves on the musical instruments froze and guests had to wear overcoats and gloves while dancing Sort of like dining out in Anchorage with wind chills of minus 15 degrees

"You can't use your bookie as a reference "

WHILE DIPPING into nostalgia, let the record show that at this time in 1969, Western Airlines was busy making plans for an April launch of regularly scheduled Anchorage-Honolulu flights Those who were around back then will tell you what you already could surmise — Western's flights to Pineapple Land were great while they lasted.

Tobin

WITH THE PASSING of the years, of course, there are all kinds of people here today who never heard of Western Airlines, now a company of happy memory Western arrived on the Anchorage scene after absorbing another great air carrier, Pacific Northern Airlines — only to finally disappear from the skies when it was taken over by Delta. But in those days 35 years ago, Western promoted itself with a lilting TV commercial that happily proclaimed it was the "only way to fly-y-y-y-y "

BACK THEN, by the way, Ted Stevens still was very much a freshman in the U S Senate, having just been appointed weeks before by Gov Walter J Hickel Even so, up in Fairbanks as the year moved ahead, a newspaper columnist was trying to fan a fight within Republican ranks by saying Stevens would be challenged in the 1970 primary by Congressman Howard Pollock Not so, said Pollock, issuing a mild denial, "unless the polls show he doesn't have a chance for re-election " Fat chance It was Pollock, not Stevens, who disappeared from the Capitol Hill scene when Congress opened its 1971 session

ALSO IN HISTORY: Oldtimers hereabouts are more amused than bothered by the ruckus raised by folks calling themselves Friends of the Animals and threatening a tourist boycott of Alaska over the scheduled kill of some wolves in the McGrath area. The truth is that too many wolves threaten the moose population, an important food item for residents in the area Nobody eats wolves, including members of Friends of the Animals But heck, if they're on a toot now, they should have been here in territorial days That's when we had a bounty on wolves — $50 per animal Despite the bounty, wolves somehow escaped extinction from the Alaska scene

THE PASSING PARADE: Barbara Hume, an Anchorage resident for more than 30 years until she and her husband, Ken, moved to Oregon five years ago, died in Portland the day after Christmas She had been in declining health for many months Ken, a banker in his younger days, was president of the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce in 1975 and was the founder and managing partner of the company that operated the three Denny's restaurants here until they were sold a few years ago During their Anchorage years, the Humes lived in Geneva Woods He's receiving condolences at 3706 S W Troy St., Portland, OR 97219

FINAL NOTICE: Today is the last day to get a look at "A T Rex Named Sue" at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art. The job of dismantling the exhibit of the giant replica of the largest, most complete, and best preserved Tyrannosaurus rex ever discovered will begin tomorrow The exhibit opened here on Oct. 4. The original bones are in the Field Museum in Chicago, which purchased Sue at auction in 1997, seven years after the remains of the T rex were unearthed in the Badlands of South Dakota by fossil hunter Sue Hendrickson.

HOTEL NOTES, Small World Dept Back in the years of long ago, Kevin Batters was food and beverage director at the West Palm Beach Airport Hilton. His boss was Ralph Nogal, then the general manager of the West Palm Beach property Nogal later was transferred to Anchorage and took over as general manager of the Hilton, and became something of a legendary leader in the hospitality industry in Alaska before he retired a decade ago Time goes by and the current general manager of the Hilton Anchorage, Kevin Batters, is marking his first year on the job here

SUNDAY PUNDAY: Once upon a time there was a flock of angels with long flowing tresses But lo and behold, due to improper eating habits and advanced age, all their hair fell out. To cover their loss, they purchased gorgeous, extravagant wigs, which were even more golden and more flowing than their original hair One day, however, bad tidings came to the angels They were told their retirement accounts were worthless and that they were now penniless In utmost misery, they fell to their knees and prayed for advice Suddenly, the clouds parted and a thunderous voice was heard. "Hock the Hair Old Angels "

William J Tobin is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

SEN. MURKOWSKI HAS PROVEN . . .

Her worth

WHILE IT IS unusual for freshman senators to make many ripples or amass much of a legislative record, Sen. Lisa Murkowski's list of accomplishments during her first year in office is more than impressive

Generally, Senate newcomers find themselves virtually ignored, with little chance of winning approval for the bills they sponsor Sen. Murkowski is among a mere handful who have managed to buck the trend

She was the prime sponsor of legislation that will complete a land trade to assist the village of Newtok in Southwest Alaska in its move to another location, away from threatening river erosion Her efforts also led to an amendment barring lawsuits against reauthorization of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline, and she was a co-sponsor of a measure to combat unsolicited e-mail known as spam

From voting for a ban on the hideous practice of partial birth abortion, to co-sponsoring legislation to develop a nationwide "Amber alert" system to help find kidnapped children, Murkowski has proved herself a valuable asset to Alaska's congressional delegation.

The senator also played a key role in reform of the Medicare system and won $10 million in funding for badly needed new teacher housing in rural Alaska. A lack of affordable housing, or in some cases any housing at all, makes it difficult to recruit teachers for many remote areas

SHE WON $9 5 million to speed the long-delayed survey of Native land allotments and $14 4 million to help rural school districts develop better programs for teaching reading Add to that her success in persuading the Department of Education that remote, rural Alaska schools needed greater flexibility to address their problems under the No Child Left Behind Act, and you start to get a picture of a Senate freshman who can get the job done

Murkowski has posted an impressive list of other achievements, too She managed to get funding for several Alaska projects, including

- $6 million for the Knik Arm crossing planning;
- $6 5 million for sewer and water improvements in the Mat-Su Borough,
- $1 5 million for paving in Soldotna,
- $5 million for domestic violence shelters in Alaska,
- $2 million to help prosecute rape and sexual assault cases in Anchorage, and,
- $10 million for support to help Native elders stay in their villages

The list just goes on and on. When the senator was appointed by her father, Gov Frank Murkowski, on Dec. 20, 2002, she was met with baseless criticism that she somehow got a break, that she did not deserve the nod.

She has proved in her first year on the job that those critics — who ignored her success as a state legislator — were dead wrong She is well on her way to being a force to be reckoned with in the U S Senate

Good for her Good for Alaska.

Worthwhile resolution to consider

By SEN. RALPH SEEKINS

The New Year has arrived and with it come resolutions Many of us have pledged to reduce holiday weight or debt, or both. But there is another resolution worthy of our consideration Senate Joint Resolution 18

SJR 18 proposes to modify the Alaska Permanent Fund payout method to more closely resemble the approach utilized by most large public endowments nationwide This is commonly known as the percent of market value approach.

In 1976, our Permanent Fund started with a modest deposit of $734,000 Today it is worth more than $27 billion. That's 36,000 times its initial balance Who could have imagined it would be worth so much? Yet, the fund's success is no accident

In fact, Alaskans have found it not only necessary but wise to occasionally update fund management strategies What's more, these strategic adjustments have substantially enhanced the fund's value to the mutual benefit of us all.

For instance, in the 1980s it became clear that the original plan — limiting fund investments to fixed income securities — needed to be altered to allow for greater growth potential It was at this point that we broadened our investment opportunities to include equities This proved to be extraordinarily beneficial as a result of the 1990s bull market.

Now it is once again time to employ a sensible update to our original strategy by implementing a "percent of market value" approach.

There are three central advantages to a POMV plan (1) It provides a predictable annual payout, (2) it assures that the fund will continue to be inflation-proofed, and, (3) it improves the fund's earning potential by eliminating the possibility for political interference

It's worth noting that more than 85 percent of public endowments nationwide employ a POMV technique Why? It's simple This method offers a predictable annual distribution that is sustainable over a long period of time

"We had much nicer diseases when I was a girl."

How is this accomplished? Over the long run, public endowments typically earn an average annual rate of return of about 8 percent. Furthermore, all earnings are deposited directly back into the corpus But the frosting on the POMV cake lies in its stable — yet limited — annual distribution usually restricted to about 5 percent of the endowment's total market value

So, this simple calculation allows public endowments to avoid payout volatility from one year to the next while also automatically reinvesting a minimum of 3 percent for inflation-proofing Contrast this with our current situation whereby Permanent Fund earnings can fluctuate substantially from one year to the next with no guarantee of annual inflation proofing

How will POMV work in our case? The Permanent Fund Board of Trustees will continue to pursue an 8 percent annual average rate of return just as they always have But with POMV all earnings would be reinvested into the fund's principal.

Furthermore, annual payouts would be limited to an amount not to exceed 5 percent of the fund's total market value. Therefore, the fund is protected through an inherent 3 percent inflation-proofing feature while also avoiding payout volatility

Finally, with respect to the third advantage to a POMV plan, I ask this question. Is it possible that the Board of Trustees, all of whom are political appointees, could instruct fund managers to harvest immature fruit for the purpose of ensuring the payment of a dividend? In my opinion the short answer is yes But let me explain.

Currently, dividends are only possible if the Permanent Fund generates realized earnings, meaning assets are sold at a profit by the annual cut-off date of June 30 Over the long run, the fund has performed very well, yet we've been close to having zero earnings each of the last three years Obviously, this would not be a politically desirable situation with respect to the dividend program

As a former member of the Permanent Fund Board of Trustees, it's not difficult for me to imagine a situation where a governor could, for political gain, exert influence on the trustees to assure earnings were available to pay a dividend This could result in the ill-advised premature liquidation of long-term investments

The POMV method completely removes political persuasion from the trustees' decision-making environment Therefore, trustees are allowed the unfettered ability to manage the fund for the long run based on sound investment principles rather than politics

The bottom line is that the POMV method makes good financial sense not just for public endowments nationwide but also for our Permanent Fund It removes volatility from annual payouts while also providing inherent protections against inflation and political manipulation. SJR 18 is a resolution worthy of our support

Senator Ralph Seekins of Fairbanks represents District D in the Alaska Legislature.

The Anchorage Times

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Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

MOON BASE THE NEXT STOP IN . . .

Space travel

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. Bush's proposal to establish a manned base on the moon as a way station for exploring the solar system is an exciting change in direction for the nation's space program.

The new moon base is expected to be used to launch robotic explorers and, eventually, human astronauts for discovery missions on the planet Mars, other worlds in our solar system and the cosmos beyond.

One of the most attractive aspects of the moon/Mars proposal is that it would be carried out — at least initially — largely by redirecting budget money already planned for NASA. Bush would add another $200 million a year for the next five years and allocate a total of $12 billion in NASA funds during that five-year period

Undoubtedly the greatest expenses will occur in the future but since the nation is not in a race, as it was during the Apollo Project's drive to be first on the moon, the new exploration effort can be phased on a more leisurely and affordable schedule

Some will complain that there is no compelling reason to explore space, but exploration of unknown areas has been a basic human mission since man first walked on two legs The drive to explore sent ships across the seas to discover North America, it motivated Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery up the Missouri River and across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Northwest. And it sent Captain James Cook and other explorers into the North Pacific and the waters of Alaska.

THE BENEFITS of the new space effort are yet to be determined, but we can be sure they will be many As President Bush said in his announcement. " along this journey we'll make many technological breakthroughs. We don't know yet what those breakthroughs will be, but we can be certain they'll come, and that our efforts will be repaid many times over

"We may discover resources on the moon or Mars that will boggle the imagination, that will test our limits to dream And the fascination generated by further exploration will inspire our young people to study math and science and engineering, and create a new generation of innovators and pioneers "

Bush's faith that the new space effort will yield hugely valuable new technologies is not misplaced That has been the experience with space expeditions so far and it is unlikely that we won't see similar results again

The International Space Station will not be abandoned, it will be completed by 2010 and become a research facility to develop the technologies needed for the moon base and ventures to Mars and beyond.

The Space Station has been a valuable, perhaps vital, step along the way to more dramatic space missions But by comparison to bases on the moon and travel to Mars, it seems more like high-altitude flying than space travel

The time has come to set our sights higher

Alaska's time of need has arrived

By PAUL JENKINS

To nobody's surprise, the usual suspects are kvetching about Gov Frank Murkowski's plan to have a commission of Alaskans answer critical questions about whether, or how, to use Permanent Fund income to keep the state's fiscal boat off the mudflats

Their beef? Well, it's not much of a fiscal plan, they moan, because the governor did not address the issue of adopting "broad-based" taxes That, by the way, is leftspeak for "income tax." For Alaskans who are productive and have jobs it simply means "pay cut."

Murkowski's habitual detractors also are in a dither because using the fund's earnings for government could mean smaller dividend checks

Despite their carping, you have to ask yourself How could any meaningful fiscal plan be crafted before Alaskans decide whether, or how, to use the state's $27 billion nest egg? It seems a necessary first step that, if skipped, would be like trying to build a boat without first laying the hull, or constructing a building without a foundation. Permanent Fund earnings should be — dare I say, must be — the single largest part of any such plan, the linchpin for everything else.

Jenkins

When Alaskans in 1976 amended the state constitution to set up the fund, using it for government certainly was their aim Article IX, Sec 15, says "All income from the permanent fund shall be deposited in the general fund unless otherwise provided by law " The intent was clear, but they left wiggle room for politicians That has come back to haunt us in the form of dividends that some now see as the fund's sole purpose

With the obvious role of the fund's income so logically the key to establishing any fiscal plan, you have to wonder why anybody would be anxious to hand working Alaskans a pay cut before determining whether one is avoidable? It makes absolutely no sense, except to people who never met a tax they did not like, the same folks who lament living in a state without an income tax rather than celebrating their good fortune

"Nurse, you'd better put these on."

The truth they ignore is that there are not enough of us living in Alaska to take enough pay cuts to keep government afloat Many say slash its size But each year, union contracts come due, the cost of living goes up and expenses climb Two percent Five percent Just like at your house where the cost of gas and electricity goes up and up and up

You can downsize government, but at some point the cuts become draconian, affecting the quality of life We already have too few troopers, too few teachers, too few roads, too few of just about anything and everything For some, that is just fine Many of us find it discomforting

While his detractors from the left would flay him even if he showed up bathed in an ethereal light and sporting a halo, Murkowski is on the right track. Laying the groundwork for a commission of Alaskans to address the incredibly logical first question that must be answered before getting the state's house in order will go a long way toward solving our chronic fiscal woes

"How much and for how long do we allow the fund to grow, and public services to decline, before we Alaskans address using a portion of the Permanent Fund's annual income to support our most important public services?" the governor asked during his State of the State speech, in which he unveiled the commission idea.

The commission is perhaps the best way to address that question The panel is to decide in February whether any use of the fund's income should be limited to 5 percent, whether a portion of it should be used for essential state government, whether the use of the income should be enshrined in the state constitution, and, whether the state should maintain a minimum balance in the Constitutional Budget Reserve

When the commission issues its resolution to the Legislature, there likely will be a ruckus Lawmakers who view as political suicide any blip in the political inertia surrounding the fund, including the likely necessity of their constituents banking a smaller dividend check, will fight for the status quo Unfair, they will say Regressive Tax first They ignore the obvious If we continue on our present course, there may be no dividend checks It nearly happened this year

The other predictable fracas will center on whether there should be an 80-20, or 50-50, or 60-40 split between dividends and government use, if the 5 percent idea is adopted, and whether that should be locked in the state constitution. That would be a lousy idea. The Legislature, answerable to Alaskans, should make that determination annually and be able to explain its actions

There always will be those whose intent and first recourse is to pick the pockets of our most productive citizens' to fund the left's vision of Utopia, who think the Permanent Fund is a social welfare program, or who believe in their greedy little hearts that an annual dividend is their God-given right. They are dead wrong on each and every count.

It is time to ignore them

Paul Jenkins is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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MURKOWSKI GETS BALL ROLLING ON . . .

Fund issues

GOV. FRANK MURKOWSKI took an important first step in his State of the State message by launching a serious discussion about whether, and how, Alaska Permanent Fund earnings should be used to fund government operations

In our view, that debate is years overdue

No reasonable, long-range fiscal policy can be established without deciding what to do with Permanent Fund earnings Period. That money is the largest slice of any fiscal policy pie Without it on the plate, any plan conjured up is doomed to fail in the long run — even if government is cut to a mere shadow of itself and we are buried in an avalanche of taxes.

Murkowski was absolutely correct in wondering, "How much and for how long do we allow the fund to grow, and public services to decline, before we Alaskans address using a portion of the Permanent Fund's annual income to support our most important public services?"

How long, indeed? It's a question we should all be asking

The state now faces an annual fiscal gap amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars That deficit is closed each year by using money from the Constitutional Budget Reserve, which will run dry soon. Each year, Alaskans must get used to the idea of receiving fewer essential services in areas such as public safety, education and care for our most needy citizens Time is ticking away

AT LEAST a portion of the fund's earnings should be used to close the annual gap, to help fund government. That is, after all, why the fund exists It was established in 1976 by visionary Alaskans who wanted to squirrel away some of the state's then-burgeoning oil wealth. Over the years it has grown to become a $27 billion, untouchable sacred cow Nowadays, many Alaskans who receive annual checks from the fund's earnings have come to see the pot of money as the Permanent Dividend Fund, set up to feed their bank accounts, not fund state government

That thinking is short-sighted and someday dooms us to an enormous and onerous tax load that only will get worse with time

Murkowski came up with a good way to get the discussion started by setting up the Conference of Alaskans, modeled after the state's Constitutional Convention. The commission is to meet Feb 10 through Feb 12 at the University of Alaska Fairbanks It is charged with answering key questions about whether and how to use the fund's earnings, and drafting a resolution that will be given to the Legislature in special session within the regular session. Voters are to have their say in November

We expect, with 55 members, including legislative leaders, the commission will give the issue a good, fair and thorough airing

The governor is to be commended for getting the ball rolling

Own way of handling death in Arctic

By ELISE PATKOTAK

There was a death in Barrow recently and my friend Big Jim sent me this description of the community preparing the gravesite

"Well, we dug the grave for Leland today We had plenty of cousins and his brother Sam to help us It was a true Arctic grave dig The auger was there compliments of the city of Barrow, and (the Barrow utility company) provided Jeff Larson to operate it as usual.

"There were about 10 guys standing there clearing the dirt with 25 mph winds taking the chill factor down to minus 40 The snow was whipping along the ground and then streaming over the drifts with the light plant casting the only light The auger left when we did for lunch We returned to find the air compressor awaiting us thanks to SKW

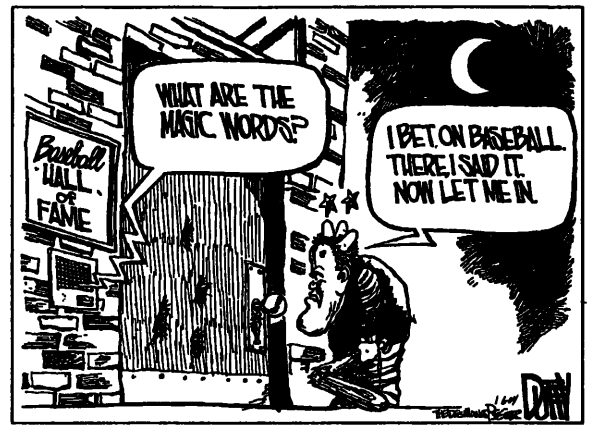
"Five-gallon buckets filled with the tailings were pulled by rope out of the hole and handed down the line to be dumped at the big pile of tailings The hole was quickly cleared of them and then the jackhammer was brought in to sculpt the sides to a 4-by-8-by-6-foot hole

Patkotak

"Sam and I were in the hole for the final grooming It is actually warmer in the hole since you're out of the wind I was quickly sweating from all my clothes and from shoveling and then running the jackhammer Then we did the measuring and laying the final mantle of pure white snow in the bottom to await the eternal guest

"I wonder if we will ever be forced to wait until summer like they do in Fairbanks — storing the bodies until the ground thaws I find it ironic that the folks here have taken so to the art of grave digging, which didn't seem to be an important issue in their traditional culture I have often thought of all the bodies still looking as they did on the day they died spread throughout the graveyards of our city "

All cultures handle death and its attendant rites differently The first time I can remember ever being a part of that rite in my family was when my Uncle Albert died in his mid-40s of a heart attack.



The wake was held in the parlor of the local funeral home, which was the actual home of the funeral director and his family — a practice that always made me glad my dad had a grocery store The neighborhood women would enter the front door, fall on their knees and weep their way to my Nona who sat stoically in a chair in front of the body His wife received condolences second After all, she'd only lost her husband My Nona had lost a son.

When I got to Barrow, my first encounters with the Inupiat way of handling death left me a little shaken and bewildered Taking pictures of the body in the casket was, to my Western mind, bad enough But walking into someone's home and finding that picture framed in their living room took some getting used to

Once, we lost an entire family to a fire Only the mother survived She was admitted to our little hospital and her extended family gathered around her to help her heal. I came on duty a couple days after the fire to hear laughter coming from behind the closed doors of her room. I peeked in and saw a room full of people watching home movies of the dad and children they'd just lost. The level of love, courage and family strength evident in that room was overwhelming

One of the things that impressed me most, though, was that without funeral parlors, the people of Barrow had to take care of their own after death. I remember watching my friend Sam's mom sitting by her husband's bed holding his hand as he died She wouldn't let us touch him to begin to prepare him for the funeral until his hand was completely cold Then she knew that his spirit was totally gone from his body and we could start our ministrations

Although every culture handles death with its own rites and rituals, on the North Slope, the intimacy of those rites provides both closure and a way to process grief that no funeral home in the world can offer

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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2504412245

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WILLIAM J. TOBIN
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ANCHORAGE WOULD BENEFIT FROM . . .

Unions' help

WE CAN ONLY hope that the city's labor unions will pay close attention to Mayor Mark Begich's call for them to forgo wage and cost-of-living increases this year as a key part of his plan to close a $33 million budget gap facing the city

Persuading the unions to go along might be a tough sell because some are being asked to give up wage hikes already negotiated for this year The mayor is asking a lot, but it clearly is the right thing at a time when services are being slashed and residents are being asked to pay more to keep government afloat

Begich says that with the unions' help, and a full palette of efficiencies and revenue-enhancing efforts, his administration should be able to close the budget shortfall exacerbated by declining state revenue-sharing and union contract obligations coming due

The fiscal 2004 general operating budget is $303 5 million Most of that, $261 9 million, is for city programs The rest goes for principal and interest on voter-approved bonds Property taxpayers will ante up about $180 million of the tab The rest comes from the federal and state governments, grants and such things as utility payments to the city

TO MAKE ENDS meet, Begich's budget includes $17 8 million in efficiencies and hoped-for wage concessions from the unions Those concessions amount to something like $2 1 million Then there are $3 8 million in revenues expected to be generated from adding 10 traffic cops to the police department, $5 8 million in new or increased fees, and, $15 million from increased property taxes generated by Anchorage's red-hot construction boom

Begich wants to freeze cost-of-living increases at fiscal 2003 levels, and he has cut 100 jobs and eliminated executive positions in several departments

If — and that's a mighty big "if" by most accounts — it all comes together, the city will have weathered the gap, at least for this year, and things may not be so difficult next year because of Begich's refusal to use one-time money to stem the red ink. Also, unexpected expenses incurred by such things as having to add money to the police and firefighters' retirement fund because of a sagging stock market may not occur again

We applaud the mayor's ambitious and aggressive plan to snap the city's operating budget into line, but the cuts and reductions that will come about because of his spending plan will be felt by everyone in this city

While we suppose it is asking a lot for unions with already-negotiated contracts in their pockets to play ball, we can only hope they come to see the importance of the sacrifice Begich is asking them make this year

Fancy pooch suffers from Januaries

By TOM BRENNAN

My dog has a bad case of the Januaries I keep telling him that winter can't last forever, but he doesn't believe me He just lays there on the carpet, clutching his remote control and growling at Geraldo Rivera.

I never had a dog that got the wimwams in cold weather I've always owned retrievers that were so relentlessly cheerful they were difficult to face before breakfast, especially the morning after the night before

Jack's latest funk started when I made the mistake of telling him that somebody asked me if I really had a dog He was outraged, then turned away, lay down and hit the remote button I told him about the other friend who said he was very insightful — based on his comments as reported in this column — but it didn't help And in the last year he has received speaking engagements and been asked by the gambling crowd for tips on sporting events No help there, either

Brennan

None of that offsets the January effect, despite the fact that the days are already getting longer and the sun is higher in the sky every day Actually, the experts say that is when winter seems the longest, when you realize how far we still have to go until spring

Pretty soon it will be Fur Rendezvous time, I say, and after that comes Iditarod, which is followed by breakup But that gets me nowhere For Jack it's still the carpet, the television and Geraldo Don't get me wrong; he is good company and a fine hunting dog, though he likes upland bird hunting and I'm more of a duck and goose man myself

Jack doesn't like standing in cold water or sitting in a blind, which I can understand I like an occasional cigar to get me through such discomforts and dogs don't have that option, not having opposable thumbs to hold their stogies

"I've never told anyone before, but I was aiming at a crocodile."

Jack would prefer to run through open fields and tundra looking for grouse and ptarmigan I try to accommodate him when I can, but the year isn't long enough to get everything done and we don't get to pursue his favorite game anywhere near often enough, for him or me

He is a Brittany and was born in Seattle When my last Labrador crossed over, my wife decided it was time to downsize and since a Brittany's orange and white colors would go well with our house decor, and since they are smaller than Labs, but great hunting dogs, I got Jack (Named for his grandad Jacques)

At that time, there were no Brittany breeders in Alaska, so the puppy was delivered to my arms at the airport by a breeder-in-training from Eagle River who was returning from Seattle

What neither my wife nor I anticipated was that a smaller dog is 10 times as active as a big Lab and much more emotionally complicated, funks and all Jack is also perturbed about the frequent moose encounters this year in our neighborhood Twice we've stumbled into angry ones while I was day-dreaming and wound up running down the street dragging the dog behind me

He says he was only trying to be friendly and that the moose didn't understand his intentions As I've mentioned, I am getting lots of advice on dealing with moose driven into the city by deep snow

My mother is still after me to carry a duck call because my wife once drove one out of our rose bushes by leaning out the window and giving it a "Blat" in the ear But that only works if you have a window to lean out of, not when you are on the street and the moose is in hot pursuit.

Now my wife wants me to carry a cell phone to call her if the moose corners me The only place I can think of where that might happen is if I climbed up a tree, which seems unlikely That's not something you can do while dragging an overweight dog

Another friend called and mentioned that when he moved here years ago, everybody trained their children to climb under cars if a moose with attitude approached while they waited for the school bus He thought such advice was ridiculous until he ran into a big one in a bad mood, after that his kids were instructed to dive under parked vehicles and avoid the ones that were moving

For the most part, moose aren't dangerous unless you hit one while driving at high speed But using caution while afoot around them is advisable Give them lots of space and you usually won't have any trouble.

My problem is that my attention wanders when I am walking and solving world crises in my head I use a long, retractable leash and Jack can run up to a moose and say "Howdy" before I know the big animal is there That's when the situation gets dicey

You would think I could learn and stay alert. I do but that lasts only about 10 minutes at a stretch.

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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ALASKA BUSH PILOTS HAVE . . .

Missing man

JIM MAGOFFIN'S death in Fairbanks on New Year's Eve marked the end of a life of pioneering aviation in Alaska He was 86

Magoffin was born in Deerwood, Minn , in 1917, and drove up the Alaska Highway in 1946 with his new wife, Dot Jim then owned an old Ford and had a job as a mining engineer with the Fairbanks Exploration Co , operators of a gold mine in Ester

He had been an Army flight instructor during World War II and met Dot at Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Ala Jim's love for flying prompted him to cash in their war bonds and buy a small Taylorcraft, which he initially used for his own fishing and hunting

Magoffin soon started a one-aircraft flying service and found he was making more money flying and guiding people around Interior and Northern Alaska than he was at gold mine engineering His venture into commercial aviation coincided with construction of the Distant Early Warning radar system, to which his Interior Airways provided major logistical support

Even after retirement, Magoffin continued to fly his beloved blue Widgeon amphibian with Dot as his co-pilot. Together they flew between their three homes in Fairbanks, Kodiak and Dot's hometown of Ashland, Ala.

WITH THE flying business booming, Jim quit the gold mine and moved to Fairbanks, where the charter service was headquartered Interior offered regular passenger service to many remote villages and in 1967 began scheduled service between Anchorage and Fairbanks

Interior's cargo business grew to become Alaska International Air, which acquired heavy-lift turboprop Hercules aircraft and was a key aviation contractor for construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline

Even after retirement, Magoffin continued to fly his beloved blue Widgeon amphibian with Dot as his co-pilot Together they flew between their three homes in Fairbanks, Kodiak and Dot's hometown of Ashland, Ala

Jim flew the Widgeon until two years ago, when declining health forced him to give up the controls His last flight with the Widgeon was to the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum at Lake Hood, where it became part of the museum's permanent collection

Per his wishes, no service will be held Too bad, that would have been a fitting occasion for a Bush pilot fly-over in the missing-man formation

Dean view on war absurdly narrow

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

"One of the attacks they don't bring up very often anymore is the Saddam Hussein thing, that it's not safer since Saddam Hussein's been captured — because we now have 23 troops killed and we're having fighter planes escorting passenger jets through American airspace I noticed that line of attack disappeared fairly quickly "

— Howard Dean, Newsweek, Jan. 12 issue

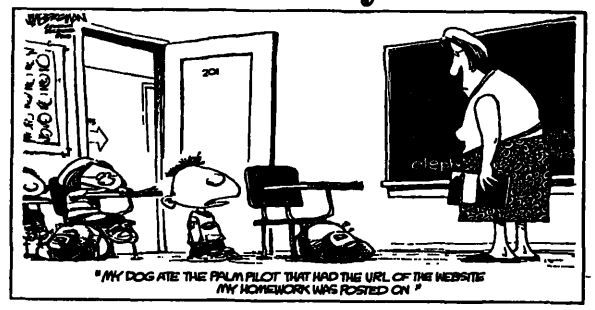
Howard Dean may end up as a footnote in history, but he has already earned a place in the dictionary as the illustration accompanying the word smug

He claims that not only was he right that we are not safer with Saddam Hussein captured, not only has he already been vindicated by history, all 21 days of it, but he has been so obviously vindicated that his opponents, bowing to his superior wisdom, have stopped their attacks on this point

They have not He has been peppered with questions about this statement, most recently during the Jan. 4 Iowa debate How could he not? The idea that we are not safer (a) because we are still losing troops and (b) because al Qaeda has not been extinguished, amounts to an open-court confession of cluelessness on foreign policy

The first is the equivalent of saying that we were not safer after D-Day because we were still losing troops in Europe In war, a strategic turning point makes you safer because it hastens victory, hastens the ultimate elimination of the hostile power, hastens the return home of the troops It does not mean there is an immediate cessation, or even a diminution, of casualties (see Battle of the Bulge)

The other part of the statement — we cannot be safer because we are still threatened by terrorism — is even more telling It rests on the wider notion, shared not just by Dean but by many Democrats, that so long as al Qaeda is active, we are never any safer This rests on the remarkable assumption that we have a single enemy in the world, al Qaeda, and that it and it alone defines "safety "



"MY DOG ATE THE PALM PILOT THAT HAD THE URL OF THE WEBSITE MY HOMEWORK WAS POSTED ON "

It is hard to believe that serious people can have so absurdly narrow a vision of American national security The fact is that we have other enemies in the world

Saddam Hussein was one of them, and he is gone Libya was another, and it has just retired from the field, suing for peace and giving up its weapons of mass destruction (Gaddafi went so far as to go on television to urge Syria, Iran and North Korea to do the same) Iran has also gone softer, agreeing to spot inspections, something it never did before it faced 130,000 American troops about 100 miles from its border

These gains are all a direct result of the Iraq war A spokesman for Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi told the London Daily Telegraph in September that Gaddafi had telephoned Berlusconi and told him "I will do whatever the Americans want, because I saw what happened in Iraq, and I was afraid "

The idea that we are not safer because al Qaeda is not yet stopped is absurd Of course we have terror alerts We will continue to have them until al Qaeda is extinguished, and you do not eliminate in two years a menace that was granted eight years of unmolested growth and metastasis when Dean's party was in power

But look at the region whence al Qaeda came Not only has the Taliban been overthrown, Afghanistan just this week adopted a new constitution agreed to by a loya jirga (grand council) representing every part of this fractured tribal society It is an astonishing development in a country with so little experience in representative government and ravaged by more than a quarter-century of civil war And it came about as a result of American force of arms followed by American diplomacy

Look at Pakistan On Sept. 11, 2001, it was supporting the Taliban, ignoring al Qaeda and assisting other Islamic extremists Force majeure by the Bush administration turned Pakistan The Musharraf government is now a crucial ally in the war on terror

And now, just last week, another astonishing development a summit between India and Pakistan leading to negotiations that, the joint communique said, "will" solve all outstanding issues, including the half-century-old fight over Kashmir Both Pakistani and Indian observers agree that intense behind-the-scenes mediation by the Bush administration was instrumental in bringing about the rapprochement.

From Libya to India, ice is breaking and the region is changing In this part of the world, there is no guarantee of success But if this is not progress — remarkable, unexpected and hugely significant — then nothing is

Charles Krauthammer writes a weekly, nationally syndicated column for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group. © Copyright 2003 The Washington Post Co.

The Anchorage Times

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2504412247

BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

THE ENEMY MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND . . .

The concept

AN INTERNAL fracas at the New York Times, one of the most anti-Second Amendment institutions in the country, erupted because one of its reporters actually decided to carry, of all things, a gun to protect himself in Iraq, where journalists are killed on a fairly regular basis.

The Wall Street Journal reports that the Times' Baghdad bureau chief, Susan Sachs, is in a snit because reporter Dexter Filkins opted to pack heat. She reportedly is fretting that The Times is becoming "too armed."

Something like 13 reporters have been killed in "hostile" acts in Iraq during the past year, something of a record for armed conflicts during the past decade But Filkins' decision to carry a gun, and an incident in April where armed security guards returned fire directed at CNN staff members, sparked the ageless debate over whether reporters should be armed in war zones, the Journal reports

Many argue they should not, that it jeopardizes their status as neutral noncombatants That approach does not always work. Ask the family and friends of Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, slain almost two years ago in Pakistan.

His death underscores the other side of the argument, that preserving their status by remaining unarmed only works with enemies who recognize the concept. In Iraq, it is a dangerous charade

THE JOURNAL notes that many veteran journalists, such as writer David Halberstam, a New York Times reporter in Vietnam, acknowledge Iraq is a different kettle of fish, with insurgents and bandits shooting first and checking credentials later

In other wars, the Journal says, journalists traveled with the troops and returned to safety to report their stories In Iraq, no place is safe, and gunmen do regularly shoot at journalists

In our view, reporters in Iraq should be the ones to make the decision about whether to carry a gun or go unarmed if they are not traveling with American troops Judging from past reports of journalists handed weapons in the heat of battle by troops they were accompanying, some prior training in military weaponry might be a good thing for them, too

What is hard to understand is how folks such as the "Committee to Protect Journalists," safely hunkered down in New York, or the Times' own editors believe they can make the decision for reporters on the ground who can more accurately assess the risk. Those who do not want to carry one should not be forced Those who want to should be allowed.

The old argument that one armed reporter jeopardizes them all is baseless in this conflict.

The only question we have about Filkins' decision to carry a firearm is· Why is he carrying only one?

Urban legends can make fools of us all

By WALTER E. WILLIAMS

Literally hundreds of readers informed me that in last week's column, "Some Things I Wonder About," my reference to a Merv Grazinski of Oklahoma City — who set his 32-foot Winnebago on cruise control, left the driver's seat to brew a cup of coffee, crashed, then sued Winnebago for not having a warning against the dangers of doing so and received a jury award of $1,750,000 plus a new motor home — was an urban legend and as such totally false

My having fallen for this "urban legend" points to more due diligence to fact-checking Without making any excuses whatsoever for my lapse in due diligence, let's look at it.

Thirty, 40 or 50 years ago, no one in their right mind would have believed the Merv Grazinski urban legend possible, but not so today Personal responsibility has taken a back seat in our increasingly immoral and litigious society Consider some actual lawsuits researched at www overlawyered com

The wife of a hockey fan who crashed his car after drinking too much at a Minnesota Wild game has sued the team, saying her husband who was paralyzed in the Feb 8, 2002, auto crash shouldn't have been served so much alcohol.

Williams

According to the July 10, 2002, Akron Beacon Journal, "Two carpet installers who admit they read the label of an adhesive they used, admit they understood the adhesive was flammable and should not be used inside, used it inside anyway, caused an explosion, were burned badly, sued and won $8 million dollars "

According to the April 18, 2003, Indianapolis Star· "A convicted robber is suing the convenience store clerk who shot him as he fled after a holdup Willie Brown, 44, claimed the clerk acted 'maliciously and sadistically' in firing five shots as Brown ran out of Zipps Deli with money from the store's cash register " Brown, who has earlier convictions for robbery and burglary, pleaded guilty to robbery and was sentenced to four years in prison

In Galveston, Texas, a jury awarded $65 million to the parents and estate of a woman who drowned after her car rolled off a boat ramp She couldn't disengage her seat belt The jury found Honda of America Manufacturing Co Inc. and Honda R & D Co Ltd 75 percent responsible for the death of Karen Norman, even though her blood-alcohol level measured at nearly twice the Texas legal limit (17) Fortunately, an appeals court threw out the award, which a trial judge had previously reduced to $43 million.

Then there's the infamous McDonald's case, where Stella Liebeck purchased hot coffee, placed it between her legs, spilling it and scalding herself, and was awarded $2 9 million for her troubles Clearly, she was at fault, but George Mason University Law Professor Richard Bernstein points out that a proximate cause for her injury was the fact she was wearing a cotton sweat suit that absorbed the coffee and held it close to her body However, if she were wearing a Gore-Tex suit, or some other liquid resistant material, she would have suffered no injuries Bernstein asks what's the tort principle that holds McDonald's responsible but not the sweat suit manufacturer?

None of these cases, and many others, differs in principle from the Merv Grazinski urban legend What's common to all of them is the absolution or the attempt at absolution from personal responsibility Are people to be held responsible for their actions?

In the case of tobacco use, it's not the smoker who's responsible for his illness, it's tobacco companies In the case of obesity, it's not the individual, but fast food companies and food manufacturers who are responsible It's the same with criminal violence — the gun manufacturer is partly to blame

What does all this say for the future of our nation?

Walter E Williams is a professor at George Mason University at Fairfax, Va. His column is distributed by Creators Syndicate Inc., 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045; (310) 337-7003.

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25044122548

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

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FOUNTAIN SHOULD BE NAMED FOR . . .

Kay Linton

TOO BAD Kay Linton couldn't be here to see the ice fountain flowing at Loussac Library That was her dream

Kay raised money for the $300,000 piece of art for Alaska's 25th anniversary of statehood in 1984 It was one of few in the world, the impressive 20-foot-high sculpture is composed of artistic steel tubes curved into soaring wings

In winter, the fountain is sheathed in ice and lit with colored lamps In summer it will be a spectacular cascade of water flowing over a dramatic structure

The original fountain was designed by Carl Nesjar, a prominent sculptor who previously had collaborated with Pablo Picasso on outdoor art The Anchorage fountain was completed in 1988 but its structural design was faulty; shortly after its commissioning a pump failed and the plumbing froze and broke

Linton, a committed community activist, was brokenhearted at the frozen sculpture's ignominious fate For the rest of her life, which ended last Jan. 12 when she died at 69, she campaigned to get it rebuilt and functioning

When she was dying, Linton asked her son-in-law, Kris Warren, to get it working again Since Warren is an executive at Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility, she figured he was the man for the job

LAST SPRING, Warren and his wife, Dawn, convened a group of interested people and formed Friends of the Fountain The group recruited contributions and help from a long list of contractors who donated time, equipment and materials worth an estimated $250,000 The work was done this summer and fall, it was completed just before Christmas and the water at last flowed again.

The new pipes are high-density polyethylene, which is flexible and won't break if it freezes solid The lighting system is also more rugged and modern.

Mayor Mark Begich suggested to the Anchorage Assembly last spring that the fountain be named for Kay Linton

That would be a fitting tribute to a woman whose energy gave life to dozens of community activities over many decades

Why not?

THE ALASKA Libertarian Party is gathering signatures to put a question on Anchorage's April 6 election ballot that would create a task force to study the effects of making Anchorage exempt from registering for the military draft.

The Libertarians want to send Washington the message that Anchorage thinks it's time to end registration for the draft, which hasn't been used for 30 years

While we're at it, why not add a ballot measure calling for a task force to study the effects of moving Mount McKinley closer to Anchorage? After all, at its present distance, Denali is hard to see on all but the clearest days

A punny way to start the New Year

By WILLIAM J. TOBIN

(For more years than some might like to remember, it has been the custom to end many of these Sunday columns with a pun or bad joke Scores of readers have shared their favorites, and shamelessly many of these groaners have been passed on to inflict unsuspecting readers with these low-life examples of humor As this new year gets under way, we herewith dig back in the files and resurrect 10 of them for your morning pleasure)

"Come on! Tell him you're sorry for stepping on him at the top of the stairs "

TIPSY FELLOW who considered himself a very logical thinker told his favorite Spenard bartender "One in five people in the world is Chinese There are five people in my family, so one of them must be Chinese Maybe it's my mother or my father — or my older brother, Colin, or my younger brother, Ho-Cha-Chu But I'm pretty sure it's Colin."

Tobin

A FELLOW wearing a ConocoPhillips baseball cap was seated at the counter at the White Spot the other morning enjoying his breakfast "I love scrambled eggs," he announced to his friend in a BP jacket seated next to him. "Not me," said his buddy "As far as I'm concerned, hard-boiled eggs can't be beat "

A COUPLE OF teen-agers craving something sweet drove to the nearest Baskin-Robbins They bought ice cream cones and returned to their car to be comfortable As they settled back to enjoy themselves, two ravens landed on the front hood and began to caw and flutter, and to peck at the windshield The young man finally figured out what they wanted. He finished his ice cream, opened the window, and put his empty cone on the hood The birds immediately settled down to eat. "You're wonderful," said his girlfriend "How did you ever think of that?" "Nothing to it," he replied. "It was just a case of stilling two birds with one cone "

A GUY WALKED into a bar with a newt on his shoulder and ordered a pint and a half of beer He drank the pint and gave the half to the newt, which sipped it thirstily The next day he came in, ordered a shot of whiskey for himself, and half a shot for his newt. Ditto the next day, but with rum The bartender could stand it no longer "I've never seen a pet like that," he said "It's fantastic What do you call it?" The customer replied, "I call it Tiny " "Why so?" asked the barman. The reply was, "Because it's my newt "

A SAILOR TRYING to sneak back to his ship about 3 o'clock in the morning was spotted by a chief petty officer who ordered him to explain his tardiness The lame explanation didn't work. "Take this broom and sweep every link on this anchor chain by morning or it's the brig for you," the chief said The sailor began to sweep, but a tern landed on the broom handle and he couldn't continue He yelled at the bird, but it didn't budge He finally plucked it off the broom and gave it a toss But the bird came right back and again landed on the handle Over and over, the same routine was repeated. A toss, one sweep, and the bird was back. When morning came, the chief also was back. "What have you been doing all night? This chain is no cleaner than when you started!" "Honest, chief," said the sailor, "I tossed a tern all night and couldn't sweep a link."

DANNY O'REILLY proposed to Mary Grace Monahan on St Patrick's Day, which was all well and good. But he gave her a ring with a synthetic diamond Quickly spotting it as a fake, Mary Grace called O'Reilly a cheapskate "It was in honor of St Patrick that I did it," Danny replied "I gave you a sham rock."

A SHRINKING-VIOLET sort of a guy was infatuated with a beautiful young woman, but was so timid he lacked the courage to speak to her In fact, he told his therapist that every time he got near her he felt like nothing more than a tiny pebble "Well," the therapist responded, "if you want to get the girl you'll just have to be a little boulder "

A MAN DRIVING down a country road spotted a farmer in a field of grass He was just standing there, doing nothing The man stopped, got out of his car, walked over to the farmer and said, "Excuse me, mister, but what are you doing?" The farmer replied, "I'm trying to win a Nobel Prize " "How?" asked the man, puzzled "Well, I heard they give the Nobel Prize to people who are out standing in their field "

DID YOU HEAR about the two priests from the monastery who opened a fast-food seafood restaurant? One was the fish friar, the other was the chip monk.

THREE FRIARS were behind on their belfry payments, so they opened a small florist shop to raise some money Since everyone liked to buy flowers from the men of God, a rival florist thought the competition was unfair He asked the good fathers to close down, but they would not He went back a second time and begged the friars to close They ignored him He asked his mother to go and ask the friars to get out of business They ignored her, too So the rival florist hired Hugh MacTaggart, the most vicious thug in town, to "persuade" them to close Hugh beat up the friars and trashed their store, warning that he'd be back if they didn't shut down. Terrified, they did so, thereby proving that Hugh, and only Hugh, can prevent florist friars

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2504412549

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ANOTHER PIECE IN . . .

Sad puzzle

THE NEWS that Timothy Treadwell invented much of his background is somehow no surprise

Treadwell and his girlfriend Amie Huguenard were killed and eaten last October by brown bears in Katmai National Park and Preserve Before his death, Treadwell gained an international reputation as the author and filmmaker who got up close and personal with Katmai's ferocious bears

In the process, he convinced entertainment luminaries and millions of ordinary people that the bears are just misunderstood creatures that respond to his affection. Treadwell liked to ease up close to the animals and chant, "I love you," in a high-pitched, sing-song voice He gave them names including Booble, Aunt Melissa, Mr Chocolate, Freckles, Molly and Downy

He told stories about his adventures with the near-huggable wild creatures in appearances on David Letterman's show and The Rosie O'Donnell Show The Discovery Channel and Dateline NBC did pieces on him and he appeared in a Disney Channel segment about bears

Now it turns out that Treadwell was not born in Australia as he claimed but in Long Island, N Y, he didn't grow up a British orphan on the streets of London as he told many people, and his accent was affected.

HIS ORGANIZATION, Grizzly People, was not a nonprofit as he claimed but it served to get him donations from Hollywood glitterati like actor Leonardo DiCaprio and supermodel Gisele Bundchen.

Treadwell had been warned that his exploits among Katmai's brown bears were dangerous Bear experts and park officials worried that Treadwell's exploits would encourage others to emulate him and take risks that would endanger themselves and the bears They also noted that the bears he claimed to be saving didn't need his protection. Brown bear numbers are large, their habitat and food supply are fully adequate and hunting pressure is low, and despite his claims to the contrary, poaching is rare

Treadwell did much good before he died at age 46, he often visited schools in Southern California and talked to the children. He entertained millions in his media appearances, even if the information he spread was misleading

And Stephen Stringham, a bear biologist and professor at the University of Alaska, said Treadwell kept meticulous diaries of bear genealogy, mating habits and maternal behavior Stringham told an Associated Press reporter that the work will be valuable to researchers

But Treadwell did Alaska and its wildlife a major disservice by spreading the notion that the state is a Disneyesque theme park. This is the same approach taken by animal protection people and many environmentalists who lobby to shut down its industries and lock up its lands. The latest information about Timothy Treadwell is another piece in a sad puzzle

My fantasy unveiled on the big screen

By ELISE PATKOTAK

I have already seen the movie "Something's Got To Give" with Diane Keaton and Jack Nicholson twice It's a good movie, but the real draw for me was watching Keanu Reeves fall for a woman 20 years his senior

I don't know how Hollywood did it, but someone from there clearly sneaked into my fantasy life and made a movie based on it The only difference is that my fantasy ends with me telling Jack Nicholson to get real and I stay with Keanu Reeves

Each time I've seen this movie, the ending has driven me crazy I want to jump out of my seat and yell at Diane Keaton "Are you crazy? Why would you leave Keanu Reeves for Jack Nicholson? Put your glasses on Take a good look. Now rethink that decision."

But no matter how hard I try, she always makes the wrong choice Which just proves to me that most romantic movies are still the product of old men's fantasies

Patkotak

In their movies, not only do old men get the young women, they get the older women too Even when a super stud like Keanu is standing there waiting to be had That is definitely a man's fantasy, not a woman's

Hollywood is all over itself, breaking its arm patting itself on the back in an orgy of self-congratulations over making a movie in which an older woman plays the sexy leading role The female romantic lead in this case, Diane Keaton, looks like she's probably gone from an Annie Hall size 2 to a mature size 4

The male romantic lead, Jack Nicholson, looks like he hasn't seen the inside of a gym since they marched all the patients there in "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest." Even giving him some slack for the fact that the camera adds 10 pounds, Jack is easily a good 40 pounds from fighting form

Can you imagine a romantic comedy in which Harrison Ford plays opposite Tyne Daly and leaves Julia Roberts for her? No? Well, that's the equivalent of Diane Keaton leaving Keanu Reeves for Jack Nicholson.

And that brings me back to my original premise that these movies are fulfilling the romantic fantasies of a bunch of aging, out-of-shape men who have enough money to bring their fantasies to life

The fact that this was written and directed by a woman, Nancy Meyers, who previously gave us Mel Gibson's enlightenment in "What Women Want," makes me wonder if the only way she can get her projects off the ground is by tailoring them to fit some level of male studio head fantasy

There is one part of the movie though that is as close to truth in a woman's experience as you get It's the series of scenes that follows Keaton laying her heart out to Nicholson and Nicholson looking at it like an alien life form It's the dramatic breakup required for the heart tugging reunion at the end

For the next five minutes or so, the screen is filled with Diane Keaton bursting into tears in various locations. I don't know how she did it, but I don't think there is a woman alive who can hear the particular sound of those cries and not find them very familiar There are few of us who have been lucky enough to get through life without making them.

Both times I saw this movie, this series of scenes brought out initial laughter and then quiet from the almost all female audience. It sent us all back to a moment in our life where we laid our heart at the feet of the man we adored and he recoiled in horror and ran the other way

Keaton's character, a playwright, takes her painful situation and turns it into a successful play about the relationship in which she kills off the older man with a heart attack. In so doing, she provides all of us the unspoken revenge we have sought from the men who treated us so badly

If this movie is as successful for Nancy Meyers as "What Women Want" was, then she should be reaching a point of having some clout in the film industry At that point, I'd like to see her produce a movie with an overweight, out-of-shape actress of a "certain age" in the romantic lead and men from 30 to 60 going crazy for her

Now that's a movie I'd pay a lot to watch

Elise Patkotak, an Anchorage free-lance writer and author of Parallel Logic, a humorous look back at her 28 years in Barrow, lives in Anchorage and owns Precious Cargo Ltd, a writing/graphics company.

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25044122550

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DOES HIRING A STATE-PAID LOBBYIST . . .

Make sense?

THERE IS something unsettling about government entities using the public's money to hire lobbyists to wrangle even more of the public's money from government entities To the average person, it looks something like feeding time at the trough

Understandably, the appeal of having a lobbyist to look out for your interests and persuade lawmakers to fund your project must be alluring Many cities and school boards have succumbed to the temptation, some even boasting of more than one

The state may get one more

The Alaska Natural Gas Development Authority is among the latest to be dazzled by the concept It reportedly plans to hire a lobbyist at an as-yet unspecified salary to help it get at least $2 million more from the state Legislature to carry it through June 30

In June, the authority is slated to brief the Legislature on the project so a decision can be reached on whether to proceed with the next phase, which could involve ordering pipe, arranging financing, obtaining permits and negotiating contracts, the Associated Press reported That phase could amount to at least $200 million in expenditures

"We somehow need, from June to about 18 months later, need to figure out how to get and how to spend a couple hundred million dollars," Harold Heinze, the authority's chief executive officer, was quoted as saying

THE AUTHORITY, created by voters, would build, own and operate a $12 billion project that would move North Slope natural gas to Valdez where it would be liquified and shipped elsewhere for sale, the AP reported The Legislature at first granted the authority $150,000 but then added $200,000 more for this fiscal year

Heinze said the gas project would be competing for other state funding, and a lobbyist would help the authority do its work.

He has a good point, but it leaves many wondering why government bodies should be paying someone to get them even more money in the first place

Why cannot those on the authority do what talking is needed?

Government's hiring of lobbyists to pry money out of government is a questionable practice that never should have been allowed in the first place, but now it is an accomplished fact

Too bad It does little to bolster public confidence in government and makes the average person just scratch his head

First political broadside a big dud

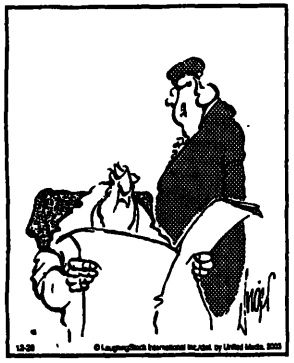
By PAUL JENKINS

It is disappointing when you wait on pins and needles for political campaign fireworks, that welling crescendo of charges, counter-charges, bogus ads, phony claims, half-truths — and all you get is fizzle

It turned out that way for the first rocket fired this year in the race for the U S Senate seat now held by Republican Lisa Murkowski

Former Gov Tony Knowles, a Democrat challenging Murkowski, resorted to one of the lamest routines in politics He opted for the "Be as clean as I am," gambit and urged Murkowski and others in the race to join him in blocking "Outside, third-party," issue ads in the campaign And he particularly took issue with soft-money issue ads, paid for with money from who knows where

It sounds good, but he left out a lot, and predictably, the news media let him



"They dropped the speeding charge, but I've got to pay for the three storefronts and the railway station."

Along with campaign reform in Alaska during 1996 came a ban on corporate campaign donations, but the state Supreme Court in 1999 ruled that something it dubbed "nongroup entities," certain nonprofit corporations, could not be barred.

Jenkins

The Alaska Public Offices Commission had no idea how to regulate the new critters It chose to treat them mostly the same as political action committees — with one notable exception. Nongroup entities could accept money from anywhere and from anyone without disclosing the original sources and they were allowed to hand candidates $1,000 donations PACs, however, had to disclose where their money originated

Allowing nongroup entities to hand out bushels of soft money with no accountability was a disgrace The Legislature in 2001 rightly tried to level the political playing field by making such organizations — there was really only one at the time, the Alaska Conservation Voters — tell the public where their money came from

Lawmakers passed legislation closing the loophole and making the so-called nongroup entities adhere to the same rules as you or me But, oddly, Knowles vetoed the legislation, saying, it "went too far in restricting campaign activities " The Legislature, realizing the unfairness of allowing such organizations liberties not accorded other groups, overrode the governor

The next year, lawmakers moved to put the kibosh on soft-money advertising, the very thing that now seems to so irritate the former governor Given his recent call to eschew Outside, third-party advertising, you'd think he would have jumped at the chance You would be wrong He vetoed that one, too He said it was slapped together too quickly, was not stringent enough and did not provide "progressive regulation "

Lawmakers, yanked back into special session to deal with the Regulatory Commission of Alaska snarl, again overrode Knowles

For the record, Murkowski supported both measures

If you actually thought Knowles was serious in calling for a mutual ban on Outside, third-party ads in this campaign, all of that must make you scratch your head Twice he had the chance to deal with disclosure and soft money, and each time he vetoed the measures You have to wonder whether he would have wielded his veto pen if the group involved was, say, more conservative than the Alaska Conservation Voters, which had been shoveling bags of untraceable cash into Alaska politics

There is more, of course

Soft-money ads — those paid for with dough of unknown origin — already are banned in federal elections within 30 days of the primary and within 60 days of the general If you read between the lines in his call to block Outside, third-party ads, he did not rule out those originating from within Alaska How tough will it be, do you think, for an Outside group to set up shop here as a political action committee and generate "hard-money" ads with funds from identifiable donors? And hard money issue ads — those paid for with contributions that can be traced — are legal in the 30- and 60-day periods prior to an election

Knowles' boast that he would turn off any of the onerous Outside, third-party ads, and that anybody who could not probably shouldn't be in Washington representing Alaska, also rings hollow

Candidates cannot have anything to do with hard- or soft-money ads within 120 days of the election, and they cannot plan such ads before the deadline That's means the cutoff is sometime in April If he were to halt, or start, such an ad in the 120-day time frame — when realistically most of these ads actually would run — he would violate federal election law

Knowles' posturing was political theater, and not necessarily good political theater With the host of serious issues facing Alaska, one can only hope it was just a misfire, that the campaign will focus

Until then, if we want theater, we want one with popcorn, not baloney

Paul Jenkins is an editor of the Anchorage Times.

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2504412251

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LET'S FORGET ABOUT . . .

No-build option

HOPEFULLY, THE engineers working on plans for the Bragaw Street extension are getting valuable insights into which of the four design options would be most acceptable to those who live along the route

And, hopefully, the planning consultants, DOWL Engineers, will consider comments made at various hearings and will then recommend the option that makes the most sense for the community as a whole

Neighbor concerns should be heard and accommodated if possible, but the interests of all the people of the municipality of Anchorage demand that the road be built as expeditiously as possible

A new north-south traffic corridor created by linking up unbuilt sections of Bragaw and extending the road south from 48th Avenue to Abbott Loop Road would provide much-needed relief for the near-gridlock conditions encountered by motorists throughout Anchorage on virtually every workday

The Bragaw extension has been hanging fire for 25 years And during that time driving in Anchorage has gone from a sometimes problematic thing — with heavy traffic pretty much confined to a few roads and rush-hour periods — to blanket traffic jams on many roads and at all times of day

THE DRIVING PROBLEM these days is not just confined to shoppers and office workers Increasingly, emergency vehicles are having difficulty maneuvering through lines of cars Police, fire and medical response vehicles are able to clear their way only by blasting with horns and sirens and all but pushing trapped cars and trucks out of the way

Some of the critics complain that wetlands and slivers of park land would be lost under at least some of the four options But let's keep in mind that 82 percent of the 1,955 square miles of land in the municipality is officially park land and open space Surely, some small parts of this vast pristine habitat can be sacrificed to accommodate the needs of the people who live here

Anchorage has gone way overboard in setting aside land for protection, leaving precious little for commercial, residential or public facility use The Bragaw extension is a perfect example of a much-needed public facility that would improve the lives and quality of life of people with minimal loss of parks or wetlands

The planning consultants are looking at five options altogether, the fifth one being not to build the road extension. We have no opinion on the other four and hope only that common sense will prevail The only one that should be ruled out altogether is the no-build option

The Bragaw extension has been on the back-burner for far too long The need for it grows more urgent each day It's time to get on with the project

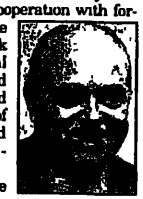
Sitka editor started something

By LEW M. WILLIAMS JR.

The first edition of The Sitka Times, Sept. 19, 1868, editorialized "The Pacific railroad we are in favor of and would like to see it extended to Sitka if possible"

The Times editor, Thomas G Murphy, was the first in a long line of journalists urging Alaska development The Times was the first newspaper established in Alaska after it was purchased from Russia in 1867

Almost 136 years later, connecting Alaska to the continental railway system will be discussed thoroughly Jan 15 in Juneau An all-day event is being organized by Sen John Cowdery and Rep Jim Holm in cooperation with former Rep Jeannette James, Gov Frank Murkowski's special aide on the railroad project Cowdery and Holm are co-chairs of the Senate and House Transportation committees



Williams

The purpose of the conference is to explore connecting the Alaska Railroad from Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks, to BC Rail, which connects into the North American rail system

"There will be legislation this year that will be important to implement this action. Senator Cowdery and others believe we need this connection sooner rather than later because of the freight needs before and after building a gasline," James says

Larry Bagnell, the Yukon member of Parliament in Ottawa, will speak. He has been elevated in Canada's new Martin Administration to Cabinet status Also in attendance will be British Columbia and Alberta government officials, members of the B C Legislative Assembly and B C mayors Yukon Territory will have a large contingent headed by Bagnell and its premier, Dennis Fentie The Alaska Railroad, White Pass Railroad, CN Rail (which is buying BC Rail) and Lower 48 railroads will be represented Murkowski is expected to address the conference

"You can't use your bookie as a reference."

Even before the discovery of gold in Alaska, there was a demand for a railroad to Alaska Sen Roscoe Conkling, R-New York, introduced S 1264 in Congress on Feb 18, 1877, appropriating $100,000 for a route survey for a railroad to be built by the U S government from the continental United States through Canada and Alaska to a port on the Bering Sea Nothing happened except that demand for a railroad increased with the discovery of gold

The success of the White Pass & Yukon Railroad, completed in 1900 from Skagway into Yukon Territory, amplified the demand for an all-Alaska route Engineer M J Heney built the railroad for a British trust It was so successful that Skagway overshadowed other port towns in attracting miners, so much so that one nearby town, Dyea, became a ghost town.

Heney then moved to Cordova to start a railroad The Morgan Guggenheim Alaska Syndicate, which was trying to start a railroad north out of Valdez, bought out Heney, although retaining him to complete his Copper River & Northwestern Railway At one time more than 50 companies planned railroads in Alaska.

The Alaska Syndicate's Copper River railway served only its copper deposits so there was still a demand for an all-Alaska railroad route to Alaska's other main transportation artery, the Yukon River Vying to be the coastal terminus for that were Haines, Seward, Cordova, Katalla and Valdez. A storm in 1907 wiped out Katalla's harbor and its future. It joined Dyea in oblivion. The Haines route would have gone through part of Canada, an unpopular idea. Extending the railroad out of Cordova lost because it meant buying out a big business, the Alaska Syndicate, in the trust-busting era.

Legislation finally passed Congress in 1912 authorizing a government railroad in Alaska. It was almost as popular as passage of the Alaska Statehood Act would be 46 years later It precipitated a parade in Ketchikan, far from any proposed rail terminus

President Woodrow Wilson selected Seward in 1915 for the deep water terminal of a railroad to Nenana. That was partly because of John E Ballaine, a Seattle newspaperman. Ballaine founded Seward in 1903 with a plan to build a railroad to the Interior He drove the first spike in the Alaska Central Railroad in 1904 but ran out of money after completing 20 miles. The railroad was sold to a group financed by the Sovereign Bank of Canada and re-named the Alaska Northern. The new owners spent $6 million extending the line another 51 miles to Turnagain Arm, then went bankrupt.

The federal government bought the Alaska Northern in 1915 as the first leg of the Alaska Railroad Headquarters for the construction was at Ship Creek, which became Anchorage

Alaska bought the Alaska Railroad from the federal government in 1985 and has operated it successfully since Even before the state purchased the Alaska Railroad there had been advocates of extending it through Yukon Territory to British Columbia to give Alaska a railroad link to the Lower 48, among them Murkowski He headed a delegation, including James, that flew to Victoria, B C, last fall to discuss with Canadian officials the railroad extension, the Bradfield Canal Road and other mutual projects The Jan 15 meeting is an extension of those discussions

Editor Murphy might never be roused from eternal rest by a train whistle in Sitka, but he did start something.

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The Anchorage Times

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25044122552

BILL J. ALLEN
Publisher

Voice of the Times

A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
Senior editor

THANKS TO KNOWLES, SENATE RACE OFF TO . . .

Rocky start

THERE FOR A WHILE, we had high hopes that the US Senate race in Alaska this year would focus on the many issues facing this state and not degenerate into yet another in a long line of mindless silly seasons

But, alas, with Democrat Tony Knowles' suggestion that he and Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski block "Outside third-party" soft money issue ads in the race, it looks doubtful.

No matter how you look at what Knowles said, it is not good.

At best, he would be a censor What he suggests is that the peoples' First Amendment rights — already bruised by the U S Supreme Court — be kicked around some more After all, if Friends of Animals wants to do an issue ad obliquely supporting Knowles with soft money, it certainly has that right, up to 30 days before the primary election and 60 days before the general election He would block that

At worst, when the former governor suggests he will somehow stop such soft money ads, and urges Murkowski to do the same, you have to wonder when he will do that — now, when it does not matter, or when such ads likely will run

Candidates are not supposed to have anything to do with soft money "third-party" ads within 120 days of the primary election. They are not supposed to coordinate them They are not supposed to pay for them They are not supposed to be able to turn them on or off, as Knowles would have us all believe They are not supposed to know anything about them

TO GET HEADLINES, Knowles even went so far as to suggest that anybody who could not pull the plug on such soft money ads probably did not belong in Congress representing Alaska. Phrased another way, he said if a person cannot find a way to trample the First Amendment or, starting sometime in April, find a way around the law of the land, he or she does not belong in the Senate

All of it was political pap He committed only to blocking Outside soft money ads, not those generated in this state — a nice loophole And despite his assertion that the Outside groups manipulate Alaskans, he did not eschew benefiting from "hard money" ads from those very same third-party outfits in the 30- to 60-day periods before elections, when soft-money ads are banned

All this is a rocky start on the road to honest political debate in this campaign. You have to wonder if Knowles really believes Alaskans are stupid, or whether this scam — and that's what it was — was just a poorly crafted, poorly orchestrated campaign ploy

Whatever the motive, the former governor, unless he really plans to be a censor or to break election law beginning in April — and we doubt that — should be embarrassed

His suggestion is not the kind of thing that warrants an answer from any candidate seeking the Senate seat But it is the kind of thing that leaves voters asking questions

Save beliefs for religion: Get the facts

By TOM BRENNAN

We recently ran across a remarkable speech given last fall by novelist Michael Crichton to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco

The speech is too long to reprint here, so I'll summarize and try to be faithful to his words If you want to read the whole thing, it's available online And if you need reminding, Crichton is the author of bestsellers like Jurassic Park and The Andromeda Strain

Crichton told the San Francisco group "The greatest challenge facing mankind is the challenge of distinguishing reality from fantasy, truth from propaganda." The focus of the speech was on environmentalism and the misinformation spread so widely and enthusiastically by extremists in the green movement

Crichton, a trained anthropologist, acknowledged that the natural world has been abused and needs good stewardship, but said the role of many environmental groups has been detrimental and destructive

Brennan

"Today, one of the most powerful religions in the Western World is environmentalism," he said "Environmentalism seems to be the religion of choice for urban atheists"

Crichton's speech hit the green zealots hard and said their arguments were based on beliefs rather than facts As a result they have spread misinformation and used their political clout to impose political decisions that have resulted in unnecessary death and suffering in many countries

Among those crimes were getting DDT banned, a move that caused the deaths of tens of millions of people, mostly poor ones and most of them children in Third World nations The pesticide was taken off the market because of environmentalist claims that it was a carcinogen and killed birds

"Well, if you must know — at the office Christmas party, I made an interpersonal mistake"

"I can tell you that DDT is not a carcinogen and did not cause birds to die and should never have been banned," Crichton said. He added that those who banned pesticide knew it was not carcinogenic, but banned it anyway

Crichton called the DDT ban one of the most disgraceful episodes of the last century "We knew better, and we did it anyway," he said, "and we let people around the world die and didn't give a damn."

He cited among false environmentalist claims the warning of doomsday from unfettered population growth But though the greens were shouting such warnings from every rooftop and pulpit they could find, and pushing for birth control and abortion, birth rates have actually fallen naturally

While world population was once ominously predicted to reach 20 billion, those estimates have been reduced in increments to 9 billion and may yet go lower One small reason for the population drop has been the deaths of 10 million to 30 million people killed since the 1970s by environmental initiatives

The false predictions and warnings of greens include

- We are running out of oil and all other natural resources,
- Starvation is on the way (Paul Ehrlich predicted that 60 million Americans would starve to death in the 1980s);
- Half of all the world's species would be extinct by 2000,
- Second-hand smoke is a health hazard (Crichton said second-hand smoke is not a hazard to anyone and the Environmental Protection Agency has always known that),
- Global warming (He said the evidence for warming is far weaker than the alarmists would ever admit, and,
- Forest fires must be suppressed to protect the trees (Actually the well-intentioned firefighting effort has caused a disaster from which the forests may never fully recover)

Crichton said his claims are supported by prestigious journals like Science and Nature And he noted that an environmental movement is very much needed, but the current one — based on environmentalism as a religion — is not effective because of its basis in beliefs rather than facts

He added that, despite popular thinking, the Democrats are not the environmental party and the Republicans are not those opposed The political spectrum is far more complex than that. He noted that Richard Nixon started the EPA and Lyndon Johnson authorized oil drilling in the Santa Barbara Channel

Crichton said the problem isn't spinning facts to make cases or coming to different conclusions based on the same data.

"Not at all," he said "what more and more groups are doing is putting out lies, pure and simple Falsehoods that they know to be false"

These are powerful words and carry a loud ring of truth Crichton's speech needs to reach a wider audience And as he says, the environmental movement needs to be replaced with one based not on passionate belief but on objective and verifiable science

Tom Brennan is an editor of The Anchorage Times.

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A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR ALASKANS

WILLIAM J. TOBIN
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WHY NO BOYCOTT WHERE . . .

Cougars kill?

THE NEXT thing you know, those boycotters back east are going to have to start snarling like a cougar instead of just howling like a wolf

They object to state plans to reduce the wolf population by less than one-half of 1 percent of Alaska's estimated 10,000 wolves to spare the moose population Protesters are organizing to urge people to boycott Alaska by canceling planned vacations to the 49th State

But what are they going to do about the Selkirk Mountains caribou herd in northeastern Washington, the north end of the Idaho Panhandle and southern British Columbia?

In the 2003 census to count the caribou population in the greater Selkirk Mountains north of Spokane, only 41 of the critters were spotted The herd is threatened with extinction, wildlife experts say One reason

Cougars are feasting high on the hog — or, more precisely, high on the caribou The cougar population is soaring while the caribou numbers fall The solution, obviously, is to reduce the cougar population

A cougar hunt? Wildlife managers in the area have already reduced cougar numbers significantly But killing a cougar should be a lot more alarming to those anti-Alaska types than killing a wolf, wouldn't you think?

How come no boycott of Washington, Idaho and British Columbia?

Counter howl-in

NOW THAT the Friends of Animals "howl-ins" are under way to protest Alaska plans to thin wolf populations near McGrath, it's time to think about how the state might respond

The purpose of the aerial wolf hunts is to increase the moose population in the McGrath area by reducing predation So one reader suggested Alaskans in moose suits could shadow the Friends of Animals protestors and give each other high-fives over the prospect of fewer wolves

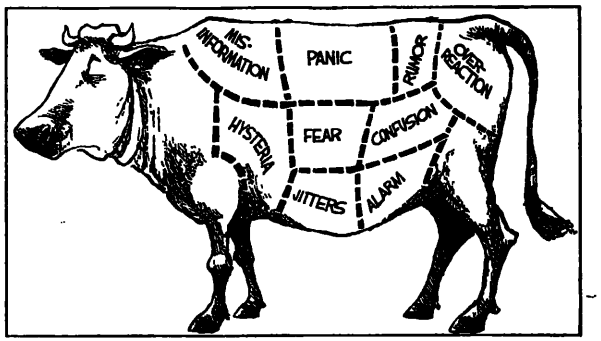
Another reader said Alaska should emulate the young man who picketed the Alaska ferry terminal in Seattle during the protests in 1992 with a sign showing a masked man holding a pistol in a wolf's mouth. His message was "Visit Alaska or the wolf gets it"

Undoubtedly the activities of the animal-rights extremists could impact tourism here this year, though we would be surprised if the impact were significant. But since caving in to their demands is out of the question, why not have fun with them?

If the counter-demonstrations were good-spirited and humorous, they could actually help Alaska's cause and dilute the venom in the opposition's message

United States firm on Israeli cause

By PERRY GREEN



This past year was a significant one for Israel From the war in Iraq, to ongoing efforts to find peace in the Middle East, the events of 2003 highlight the close relationship shared between the United States and Israel

The relationship remains strong despite constant efforts to shake the United States' resolve in that part of the world. In no small amount, this steadfastness comes from Congress, largely because of the support of Alaska's congressional delegation for our ally — and the only true democracy — in the Middle East.

Earlier this year, Sens Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski joined 86 other U S senators in supporting President Bush's June 24, 2002, speech outlining the "road map" to peace between Israel and Palestinians

While the road map has encountered its share of potholes, the administration and Congress remain committed to a peace process where Israel's national security is not compromised while terrorist organizations and those that support terrorism are dismantled

President Bush's bold decision to sideline Yasser Arafat from the peace negotiations was correct. History has repeatedly shown that Arafat cannot be trusted to implement a true peace agreement During negotiations at Shepardstown, W Va , and in discussions with his then-second in command, Mahmoud Abbas, Arafat was faced with making the decision to either achieve peace in the Middle East, or retain his personal power over the Palestinian Authority

Arafat has shown time and again that peace cannot be achieved as long as he is the recognized leader of the Palestinians Congress has since responded by requiring that before any formal recognition can be given Palestine, it must be free from the taint of terrorism These requirements are retained in Congress' foreign operations spending bills and must be upheld With Arafat still around, this will be a hard hurdle to overcome

Congress provided more guidance this year to stop terrorism by passing the Syria Accountability Act, giving President Bush new tools to impose sanctions on Syria until that country ends its support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad, and withdraws its forces from Lebanon.

Syria has been implicated in permitting terrorists to transit through its nation into Iraq, where they attack our troops and instigate chaos in an already chaotic nation Syria is also suspected of permitting members of Saddam Hussein's ruling party to seek sanctuary inside its borders President Bush made every attempt to get Syria to change its ways, including twice sending Secretary of State Colin Powell to Damascus, to no avail

The Syria Accountability Act was long past due and all supporters of Israel applaud Sens Murkowski and Stevens, and Congressman Young for their cosponsorship of this legislation.

I also applaud Sen Murkowski for amending the energy bill to make permanent the United States' commitment to ensuring Israel's energy supply In 1979, the United States and Israel entered into a Memorandum of Agreement where, should Israel be unable to secure its own source of oil independently, the United States would procure the necessary amount to meet Israel's needs

This agreement was set to expire next year Instead, Sen Murkowski championed language that makes this commitment permanent Her support for this cause demonstrates her commitment to ensuring Israel's security during these less than secure times in the Middle East and makes final passage of the energy bill that much more imperative

For those of us who value the strong relationship between the United States and Israel, we should be proud of our representation in Washington For many decades it was Democrats in the White House and Congress who could be counted on to help keep that relationship strong

Recently, however, the Democratic Party in Washington has lost its way when it comes to U.S -Israeli relations Instead, many Democrats appear eager to appease the interests of others in the Middle East, at the expense of Israel.

It is good to know that Republicans have not turned their backs on Israel, rather, their commitment as a party remains stronger than ever as they move to ensure America's true ally in the Middle East remains free, safe and independent.

Staying true to the commitments of their own party, the three members of Alaska's all-Republican delegation are demonstrating their own commitment to Israel's security, and they deserve our thanks and support.

Perry Green is an Anchorage businessman.

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