

Alaska State Legislature Representative Carl Gatto

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A BETTER PLACE *Opinion Editorial*

Juneau wants us to build a new Capitol 2 blocks down the street from the present Capitol on a lot not even 5 acres in size. They also want the good citizens of Alaska to pay for it hopeful and confident that the Capitol building can remain in Juneau where maybe 6% of the population lives. They have developed their design choice and a price tag to go with it. How much will all this cost the good people of Alaska? Juneau wants \$100 million of state money for their (not our) Capitol even though it is out of touch with present architecture, isn't wanted by local people, and will surely cost \$200 million if it costs a penny. Parking will be severely limited so a parking garage should be added to the cost bumping the total even higher. And just in case you don't have enough to worry about they also want a \$265 million road, (true estimate \$400 million) to connect Juneau to Skagway, a road that will serve few people excepting those who enjoy dodging avalanches, and a road that will further draw down our maintenance money restricting even further the other maintenance projects we need.

I have a different idea. It's just a dream but it's definitely a replacement for the current nightmare. Imagine a new Capitol on 30 acres very close to the new overpass at the Parks and Glenn Highways, on a campus setting with grass, trees, and easy parking. A landmark visible to traffic heading north on the Parks Hwy; the property already contains the beautiful Veteran's Wall of Honor as well as the Visitor Center, and you and 70% of the population of Alaska can drive and park there. No airport bookings, no hotel reservations, no waiting for the fog to lift, no lost time from work or other pressing needs, and best of all, the ability to drive there if the weather is cooperative, or pick another day if it isn't.

We can do this efficiently if we get the land we need by trading land we have, (we have lots of land) at the same time avoiding a very costly road to Juneau. All the time the Capitol is located close to our population center our annual operating costs remain lower. Each and every year we no longer pay the cost of packing up the legislature's files and office supplies for a trip from Anchorage to Juneau and just 4 months later repack the whole thing up again for the annual trip back to the starting point in Anchorage. A similar movement is needed to transfer the legislators and all their personal household goods from Anchorage to Juneau in January and back again in May. This event repeats at state expense each and every year. There would be additional state savings in per diem costs to the savings as well as lower construction costs make building it in south central instead of southeast look at least interesting.

To create the beautiful and appealing capitol building we go directly to our incredible local talent. What if our school kids compete to make the conceptual design, just like student Benny Benson did to design our state flag. With \$5000.00 in prize money for the winning drawing and another \$5000.00 for the

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school where the winning student is enrolled, we get the best of both worlds. Perhaps we should make it 3 prizes and then put the 3 designs to a vote of the people. After all, it's supposed to be a building for all the people. The winning design is then bid out to Alaska architectural firms who incorporate our choice into a functional and valuable structure. It could be an honor for a local firm to brag that they produced the drawings for our Capitol so I'm hopeful we can get the work done at a reasonable price. Best of all, we already have the local workforce. Local labor is building the new \$73 million hospital in the M-S Valley under budget and ahead of schedule. Isn't that novel?

This is something whose time has come. Even the mayor of Juneau apparently agrees. It was he and his committee that determined the old Capitol building is no longer satisfactory.

The first step is passage of (HB-48) co-sponsored by Representatives Gatto and Stoltze. It says none of this happens unless we approve it by a vote of the people. Not surprisingly this bill is strongly opposed by Juneau.

The capitol has been in Juneau a hundred years, things in Alaska have changed significantly in these hundred years, and most of us do not want to wait another hundred years to move the Capitol to the people.

Carl Gatto
Representative, D-13

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