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Senator Alan Austerman Kodiak

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Fishing, Funding and Fiscal Gap

Austerman's Second Session Accomplishments Build on First Session Efforts

(JUNEAU)—Sen. Alan Austerman (R-Kodiak), was quite clear coming into the second session of the 22nd Legislature that his focus would be on: continuing his efforts to assist Alaska's fishing industry, assure his district was treated fairly in the capital budget process and that steps were taken to close the ever growing fiscal gap in the state. Sen. Austerman made great strides in all three areas.

Continuing his commitment to the state's fishing industry as a whole and the salmon fleet in particular, Sen. Austerman had a number of successes this session geared toward resolving some of the issues that have thrown the industry into nothing shy of a "crisis."

"Alaska's commercial fishing industry is suffering," said Austerman. "If we in government do not assist our fishermen in addressing the issues that threaten them collectively, it could signify the beginning of the end for an industry that has not only been one of Alaska's largest revenue generators, but which is woven into our tradition and branded on the soul of Alaska herself."

Austerman's efforts this session included passage of Senate Concurrent Resolution 28, which establishes a "Joint Legislative Salmon Industry Task Force," to give members of the Legislature and industry leaders an avenue to explore ways in which government policy can help Alaska's largest renewable resource industry survive in a changing environment.

The Kodiak Senator has signed on as co-sponsor to House Joint Resolution 45, which will urge the United States Congress to pass a law requiring the labeling of farmed salmon sold in this country. He has also worked closely with Sen. Ben Stevens (R-Anchorage) in getting Senate Bill 266 through the legislative process. SB 266 would authorize the Department of Community and Economic Development to refinance and when justified extend the terms of loans made by the "Fisheries Enhancement Revolving Loan Fund."

And when the Board of Fish restricted Alaskan Residents fishing rights back in March, it was Sen. Austerman who arranged a public hearing to give Alaskans the chance to be heard on the King salmon restriction issue.

Sen. Austerman's seat on the Senate Finance Committee has once again proven valuable, not only to his constituents, but also in the betterment of the state as a whole.

(MORE)

During debate in the Finance Committee on the operating budget, Sen. Austerman played a pivotal role in restoring many of the cuts made by the House of Representatives, while holding the line on spending to last year's levels. Most notably Austerman fought hard to get an increase in the public safety budget, over last year's level.

As for the capital budget, Sen. Austerman was able to secure funding for scores of projects for both the Kodiak Island district, as well as the Southeast Islands.

"I am pleased to report that the people in the communities I represent will receive roughly \$37 million in state capital funds this year, to facilitate projects so desperately needed in our corner of Alaska," said Austerman. "This includes nearly \$11.5 million to replace 40 units and build a multi-purpose building at the Pacific Terrace Housing Development on Kodiak Island, \$1.7 million dollars to make Hoonah airport safer and more accessible by purchasing snow removal equipment and a supplemental of \$20 million in federal receipts to support Alaska Aerospace Development."

In all Sen. Austerman secured capital funding for more than 50 projects throughout the region including:

- \$100,00 to upgrade heavy equipment in Old Harbor;
- \$1.15 million for widening the Skagway River bridge;
- \$30,000 for the Kodiak Vocational/Technical Center;
- \$300,000 for the Kake public dock repair;
- \$3.65 million for Selief lane reconstruction and
- \$100,000 to make navigational improvements in Haines Harbor, just to name a few.

While never deterred from producing a fiscally responsible operating budget that met the needs of the state and securing funding for projects imperative to Kodiak and the Southeast Islands, Sen. Austerman was committed to taking the steps necessary to fill the looming and ever widening fiscal gap.

"Alaskans must feel secure that any new revenue generation implemented by the government is not just a tax and spend plan designed to grow the size of government," said Austerman. "That is why I stand firmly behind this Republican majority in pushing for fiscal guardrails such as the proposed 'Constitutional Spending Limit' we passed out of the Senate last year. At the same time we must also look at generating new revenues to assure the state can continue to operate without draining the savings accounts that must secure our children's future, which is why I served on and back the Fiscal Policy Caucuses,' Long Range Fiscal Plan."

Sen. Austerman said that while faced with many challenges the efforts of this session as well as the accomplishments of the 22nd Legislature have produced results and initiated dialogue that will continue to make Alaska a great place to live.

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