

Interim Report 8/21/03

by

Senator Gary Stevens

Hello again from Kodiak. Schools all over District R are welcoming students back to the classroom, the fishing fleets are winding down their summer activities, and the Legislative Interim continues at a brisk pace. In coming weeks, Alaska's Senate and House members will be holding committee meetings in preparation for the 2004 session.

Among the upcoming business will be realigning the Senate following the resignation, and subsequent acceptance of a position within the Murkowski Administration of Senator Robin Taylor. Members of the Republican majority are already speculating on how Senator Taylor's committee assignments will be filled, but no decisions will be made until Governor Murkowski appoints a replacement.

The Legislative Salmon Task Force, which I Co-Chair, will meet Sunday, September 14th and Monday, September 15th in Anchorage. The Task Force is comprised of industry members and lawmakers, who are continuing to look at the critical issues facing our salmon industry in hopes of finding workable solutions to making them stronger and sustainable.

During the last Legislative session, several task force bills were passed, but given the state's budget deficit, I expect it will be difficult to convince our fellow lawmakers to pass legislation that negatively affects the state coffers.

Task Force Members are also expressing concern about the state's slow dispersal of the federal government's funds to help salmon fishermen combat the affects of the economic slowdown. This is an issue I will be addressing with the administration.

The Senate Labor and Commerce Committee (L &C), on which I serve, will be holding a joint meeting with the House L & C Committee in Anchorage early this fall. On the agenda is a discussion of electronic gaming issues. This issue proved to be a highly emotional topic during the recent session, and while bills were introduced in both the Senate and House, neither advanced to a floor vote. With Governor Murkowski calling for additional budget cuts of up to \$250 million in the next fiscal year unless new revenue measures are considered, electronic gambling is getting renewed attention. For more information on the upcoming meeting, please contact Senator Con Bunde in Anchorage at 261-0181.

I have already heard from some constituents on this issue, and the community seems evenly divided. As with any subject we face in the Legislature, I appreciate hearing your thoughts and concerns. Don't hesitate to contact me. I can be reached via e-mail at Senator_Gary_Stevens@legis.state.ak.us, or in my Kodiak office at 486-4925.

Homeless Teenagers Teleconference

Thanks to Homer Representative Paul Seaton for organizing a recent legislative teleconference on the issue of homeless teenagers living on the South Kenai Peninsula. The dialogue involved members of the CACH Coalition and Anchorage Branch of Covenant House, as well as others. I am encouraged by what has come out of the meeting, and am interested in seeing the needs assessment that will be conducted. I believe this has been an important step in combating a very real problem. I will be talking with Representative Seaton about ways the Legislature can assist in finding solutions.

Upcoming District R Travel

I will be in the Kachemak Bay area Monday, August 25th through Wednesday, August 26th for various meetings. I am looking forward to sitting down with civic leaders in Port Graham and Nanwalek to discuss the important issues in those communities, such as cuts to the Village Public Safety Officer program, and the Nanwalek airport runway. Both Representative Seaton and myself will be addressing the Homer Chamber of Commerce at its August 26th luncheon.

I am pleased to also be joining the community of Seward's centennial celebration during Founders Days on Friday, August 29th and Saturday, August 30th. I hope to see you there.

I plan to be visiting the District R Lake and Peninsula Borough communities in late September, or early October.

Please contact Jane Alberts in my Homer office at 235-0690, or Doug Letch in my Kodiak office at 486-4925 for more information on my travel plans.

District R Athletes

Congratulations to Kodiak Middle School student Michael Odell, gold medal winner in the boys softball throw during the 2003 North American Final in Hershey Pennsylvania, August 9th. Michael's toss of 238 feet, 1 inch was about 4 feet longer than the next closest competitor.

Also congratulations to Homer's Stacey Borgman for her continued success on the rowing circuit. Stacey recently returned from the Pan Am Games with several medals, before heading to Milan, Italy for the world championships, another stop along the road to the 2004 Olympics.

And congratulations to the Kodiak High School Football team for winning its first-ever varsity game August 8th against Anchorage Christian School! Though the Kodiak school district oversees the football team, it is funded entirely through community efforts,

making it really the island's team. Good luck the rest of the season to all our District R school teams, and please don't ask for a prediction on the September 6th Kodiak-Homer football game!