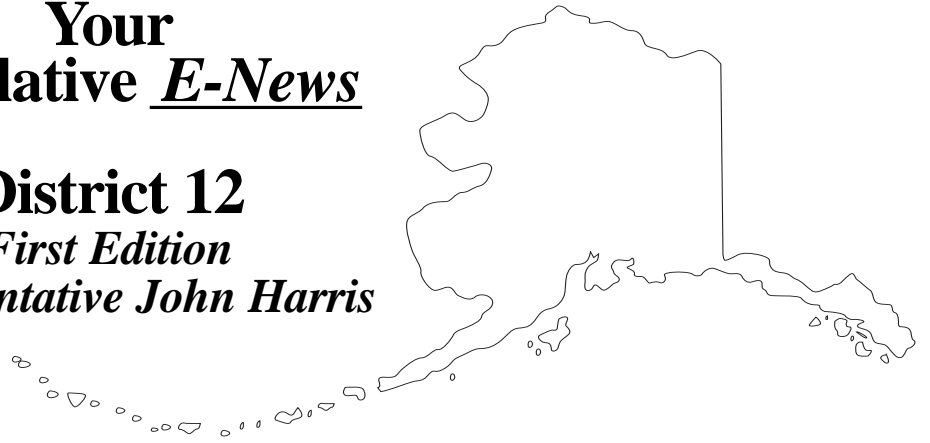




Your Legislative E-News

District 12
First Edition
Representative John Harris



February 2004

Good Morning,

In attempting to save a few state bucks and keep everyone up-to-date with the latest from the Capitol, today marks our first legislative e-newsletter (your help with a snappier title would be appreciated) which we hope to run at least bi-weekly if not more frequently.

Please consider this medium the hub for insight into our work in Juneau, a chance to learn more about our vast district, and a way to talk to me and my staff directly; we're here to help. In addition to responding to you on an individual basis as we're always glad to do, we'll also run a Q&A portion in the newsletter to shed light on some of the more common and/or complex questions that come our way.

In this edition, we've included the latest on our work on the budget, coal bed methane leasing, and the latest news from the Northern and Southern regions of the district.

We're updating our website to include links to the various subjects of interest (check out: www.akrepublicans.org/harris) and will use "E News" to answer common questions, clarify pending legislation, introduce you to my staff, and keep you aware of the latest happenings at the Juneau Zoo.

But, ultimately, this is your newsletter; tell me what you want to see in it.

This year has to be one of the most interesting and tumultuous I've seen. Wrestling with a fiscal gap, resource development changes, natural gas pipeline negotiations, and a host of other things. But we're rising to the challenge and, as always, need your input.

Please stay in touch!

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Coal Bed Methane ... Balancing Resource Development and Property Rights

Good things are happening in the realm of CBM leasing.

Last year, I heard from many of you with legitimate concerns of possible erosion of property rights through the leasing process.

HB 395 was designed to resolve concerns many Alaskans have with coal bed methane development in the areas of property rights, water quality assurance, and local involvement of residents.

Many concerns have been raised recently by residents of the Mat-Su Borough and Homer area through a series of public forums. All sponsors worked diligently, listening to public input from numerous community hearings, while drafting this legislation. It is the responsibility of the State to find a balance, where possible, between the rights of property owners and responsible resource development.

This bill requires that:

- 1) Public comment and other routes of access be considered prior to executing a lease.
- 2) The integrity of the affected water supply is protected. Water testing is required by the lessee.
- 3) Public notice be given prior to the award of a lease, through newspapers and, now, direct mail.
- 4) The owner's surface property be restored in the event of damage.
- 5) Noise from field operation is mitigated.

Finally, language is proposed to close current regulatory loopholes allowing the operators to extract natural gas deeper than the 3,000 foot definition of shallow natural gas. This clarification is necessary to provide Alaskans the guarantee that conventional natural gas resources will not be extracted without going through the competitive bid process

HB 395 was heard once in the Special Committee for Oil & Gas where public testimony was taken and is expected for another hearing in that committee on Tuesday (2/24/04).

Rick VanderKolk, of my staff who is working hard on the matter, will update you with its progress. You can reach him via email at:
Rick_VanderKolk@legis.state.ak.us

In Brief

Happenings Across the District ...

Embarking on the second half of the 23rd legislature I've focused a great deal on the State's budget and intend on keeping you updated on the latest work as the House Finance Subcommittees submit their recommendations this week.

There is, however, a great deal of unique news taking place in our district. Keeping up with the 'climate' in District 12 is a daunting but rewarding task. Staffer Sandy Moore recently returned from a road trip across the vast district and had a chance to speak and listen to a number of communities. Having traveled through the Mat-Su Borough, Sutton, Chickaloon, Glacier View, Lake Louise, Glennallen, Copper Center, and Valdez, the concerns can be as wide-ranging as the district. As she puts it, "Rolling along the highway...learning the different issues and concerns that face this district was as varied as the road itself."

Yet there were common concerns expressed: Future of our PFDs, Education, and potential taxation. E-News will take an in-depth look at these in the coming days and weeks.

Continue to send in your views; we take everything into account.

In other areas, the notion of mandatory boroughs is a tremendous concern to the residents of Delta Junction. They have formed a borough charter group. The focus is acquiring a charter proposal with borough boundaries that best suits their part of our district; the growth in Delta is unprecedented -- with the Ground Based Mid-course Defense at Fort Greely, the economy is on the move. And with more economic potential provided by the Pogo Mine, Delta is our fastest changing town.

Salcha has been plagued over the years by flooding; a new bridge at the Valdez Trail Road will help that problem this year. I was able to secure a grant to help with river bank armoring. That work should take place this spring in conjunction with federal funds. I was also able to provide funding for the Safe Drinking Water project in Salcha, which is nearing completion.

And on to Glennallen. Their senior citizens are working to complete a project to secure land from the state, moving a historical cabin to that sight, and using it for a new senior center. The grant money presented to the Glennallen seniors from GCI is helping with the achievement. Lastly, the Community Library did get their well drilled and will be finishing the installation this Spring.

More News to follow shortly. Again, check out our website for the latest on legislation:
www.akrepublicans.org/harris

Stay in touch!