

# Alaska State Legislature

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## Reflections on 2001

### Plans for 2002 Constitutional Spending Limit Could be Important Step in Closing Fiscal Gap

(JUNEAU) – Before I share my legislative priorities with you for the upcoming session, I would like to take a few moments to reflect on the past year -- the national events as well as the personal tragedies and triumphs from 2001.

The terrorist attacks on Sept. 11 and their aftermath will undoubtedly be etched in our memories forever. Our nation and the lives we lived will never be the same. Yet, in the face of such incredible adversity, Americans proved once again that our freedom, and all that we stand for, would prevail. This is the greatest country in the world, and I am proud to be an American.

On a personal level, 2001 also will be remembered for the passing of my father, Jack Ward, and my wife Margie's successful open-heart surgery. The overwhelming support and prayers that we received have helped my family to get through these difficult times, and I am sincerely grateful to all of you. More than ever, your faith and kindness have reaffirmed my sense of purpose in doing the very best that I can for the people I represent.

It is important that we work toward the most efficient and responsive government possible. We need to make government agencies a part of the process and work together to resolve our fiscal crisis. I believe a spending limit on state government would be a step in the right direction.

[Senate Joint Resolution 23](#), a bill that I co-sponsored, would amend the state Constitution by lowering the existing spending appropriation limit to better reflect Alaska's current revenue picture. Passage of SJR 23 would ensure a limit on the growth of state government and force the state to continue efforts to reasonably reduce nonessential state spending.

The amendment spells out exactly what spending counts toward the appropriation limit, something that is not clear in the existing language. It would make future legislatures prioritize state spending to cover the constitutionally mandated basics such as health, education, safety and transportation.

SJR 23 also contains a mechanism allowing the Legislature to increase the base limit to 75 percent of the increase in population and inflation with a two-thirds vote of each house.

By itself, a constitutional spending limit will not take care of the current fiscal gap. However, it is irresponsible for Gov. Tony Knowles to tell Alaskans that they are going to have to fund government out of their own pockets to cover a \$1 billion deficit while at the same time increasing spending between \$200 and \$300 million. A real spending limit, such as SJR 23 proposes, could be an essential first step to keep the spending within the state's fiscal means.

I consider it an honor to serve you, and your comments and suggestions are always welcome and appreciated. I can be reached by calling the Kenai office at 283-7996 or e-mail me at [Senator\\_Jerry\\_Ward@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Senator_Jerry_Ward@legis.state.ak.us).