

Senator Loren Leman

1997 Legislative Report

Elmendorf AFB • Government Hill • Ptarmigan • Turnagain • Spenard • Bootleggers Cove • South Addition



Dear Neighbor,

It is an honor serving you in the Alaska Legislature. This session was the most productive I've seen in recent history. We moved quickly to fulfill our "Commitment to Alaska" by enacting bills to reduce state spending, promote job creation, deposit more than \$700 million into the Permanent Fund, fight crime, improve education, and protect the family. **We even adjourned early!**

We said "no" to Governor Knowles' demands for more spending. While the Republican-led Majority made the tough calls and reduced spending **\$62.8 million**, the Governor actually proposed to *increase* spending **\$8 million**. **That is irresponsible.** Fortunately, the Legislature went in the right direction: we **reduced** spending, **increased** our savings, and **resisted** an income tax or higher business taxes. We placed a higher priority on long-term security than on short-term indulgence. That is good government!

I hope you'll take a moment to review our accomplishments.

What's Inside?

- ✓ Happy Anniversary to the Air Force!
- ✓ Truth, Lies & the Highway Sign Bill
- ✓ Promises Made, Promises Kept: Update on "Commitment to Alaska"
- ✓ Protecting Alaska's Environment: Action by the Legislature



We're on the Net!

For more information about issues in this newsletter, check out the Legislative Majority's web page:



<http://www.akrepublicans.org>



My staff assists Alaskans with state government: from left to right, Lorali Meier, Univ. of Alaska Intern; Rachael Moreland and Michael Pauley, Legislative Aides; Annette Kreitzer, Senate Labor & Commerce Committee Aide.



1997 Legislative Update: Creating a Smaller, Smarter Government

Bills I authored make state government more responsive to you:

ENHANCING PUBLIC SAFETY Senate Bill 137

Volunteer fire fighters and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) have made great contributions to protect public safety. Unfortunately, they have become unintentional victims of the Alaska Wage and Hour Act. When reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses, the law defines them as "employees," subject to cumbersome tax and reporting requirements.

I introduced SB 137 to exempt these volunteers from the Wage and Hour Act, allowing Alaskans to benefit from their services without government overregulation. SB 137 won unanimous Legislative approval and was signed into law May 8.

IMPROVING EDUCATION OPTIONS Senate Bill 134

Many parents take direct responsibility for education by teaching their children at home. This has proven to be effective. Studies show homeschooled students score better on standardized tests than their public school peers.

Alaska law has never formally recognized homeschooling as a legitimate option. Technically, homeschooling parents are required to meet the criteria of a private or exempt school, or participate in a state supervised correspondence school. These options are not practical for many parents.

I introduced SB 134 which amends the compulsory attendance law to specifically allow parents the option of homeschooling their children. SB 134 passed the Legislature unanimously and was signed into law June 4.



Senate President Mike Miller and I visit Turnagain Elementary, where my daughter Nicole attends school. Improving education is a top priority for the Republican Majority.

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT Senate Bill 41

Alaska is an example to the world of how to balance resource development with environmental protection. We can still do better. Businesses in Alaska must comply with a maze of state and federal environmental regulations. These laws can be more complicated than the Tax Code, making it challenging to be in compliance all the time.

I introduced Senate Bill 41 to create incentives for companies to conduct "environmental self-audits," which are critical reviews of environmental compliance. Just as some companies commission financial audits to verify that monies have been handled properly, an environmental audit reviews business operations, to determine whether all environmental laws and regulations are being properly followed.

SB 41 grants limited immunity and privilege as two incentives to encourage self-auditing: if a company conducts an environmental audit, discovers a problem, promptly reports the noncompliance, and works with government regulators to correct it and prevent its recurrence, administrative and civil penalties will be eliminated or reduced, and the audit report documents will not be used for enforcement purposes against a company. Twenty states have enacted laws similar to SB 41.

I worked constructively with the Administration to craft a consensus bill that had strong, bipartisan support. Regrettably, Governor Knowles vetoed this common-sense legislation. However, the Legislature overrode his veto on May 11 by a vote of 43 to 16. I expect to see good results from this new law when it takes effect in August.



Inspecting salmon holding pens in Prince William Sound. As an environmental engineer and a fisherman, I have a deep interest in protecting Alaska's environment, especially our clean air and water.

Commitment to Alaska: Promises Made, Promises Kept

Shortest Legislative Session Since 1986...

The Republican Majority implemented our “Commitment to Alaska” and then adjourned early, for the shortest session since voters approved a limit on session length. Key promises we made and kept:

Commitment: Protect Integrity of Permanent Fund

✓ *Promise kept -- Deposit more than \$700 million into the principal of the Permanent Fund.*

Commitment: Approve Spending Reduction Plan

✓ *Promise kept -- Approve 2nd phase of 5-year fiscal plan — reduce general fund spending \$62.8 million.*

Commitment: Reform Education

✓ *Promise kept -- Require competency exams for new teachers and high school seniors. Expand opportunities for part-time students and allow for creation of additional boarding schools. Fully fund education budget.*

Commitment: Fight for Safe Neighborhoods

✓ *Promise kept -- Crack down on juvenile crime and provide additional rights to victims of crime. Enact “No Frills Prison Act,” which prohibits luxuries for criminals. Provide funding for additional State Troopers, Village Public Safety Officers, and prosecutors. Fully fund the Criminal Division's budget request.*

PROTECTING PARENTAL RIGHTS Senate Bill 24

Senate Bill 24 will have the effect of requiring a minor seeking an abortion to obtain consent from a parent or judge. Parental permission is required before a child goes on a field trip or receives an aspirin in school. Recently when my 12-year-old daughter had her ears pierced, I first had to give my permission.

Many parents are surprised to learn they have no rights in one area: the decision of their child to have an abortion. In Alaska, a girl age 15 can have an abortion and her parents are not even required to be notified. SB 24 ends this injustice. It passed by wide margins but was vetoed by Governor Knowles, who ignored the 78 percent of Alaskans who favor parental consent. Fortunately, the Legislature voted 40 to 19 to override his veto. Alaska joins 27 other states with enforceable parental involvement laws.



Helping Create a Safer Workplace

In May I spoke with employees of Alyeska Pipeline at the company's health and safety fair and presented a Legislative citation I authored. The citation honors Alyeska for promoting safety education through their “Nobody Gets Hurt Week” program. I also introduced legislation, Senate Bill 205, which offers companies incentives for conducting safety audits, to improve the safety of workers.

Celebrating 50 Years: Happy Anniversary to the U.S. Air Force!

This past winter I was honored to be a guest of the 962nd Airborne Air Control Squadron (AACS) at Elmendorf Air Force Base. The technology and teamwork I observed during our flight in the E-3 Sentry were impressive. This year the U.S. Air Force celebrates its 50th Anniversary -- an appropriate time to remember the sacrifices our military personnel make every day to protect our nation's security.



Truth, Lies & the Highway Sign Bill

The Legislature overrode Governor Knowles' veto and enacted into law Senate Bill 56, the Tourist Oriented Directional Signs (TODS) bill. This legislation was introduced at the request of Alaska's visitor industry, a crucial part of our state's economy.

Incredibly, the Governor and politically motivated critics have willfully distorted the TODS bill as a "billboard bill" -- as if tourism-dependent businesses or anyone else wish to clutter Alaska's landscape with ugly signs. Nonsense! I have never met an Alaskan of any political bent who supports billboards. **Billboards have been illegal in Alaska (AS 19.25.090) and remain so today.**

Senate Bill 56 merely allows for small, uniform informational / directional signs similar to those allowed all over the United States and Canada.



Here is what the bill requires:

- ✓ Signs must be no more than 90 inches long and 18 inches wide. Signs can be smaller.
- ✓ Signs must be metal & uniform color — blue with white lettering.
- ✓ Sign owner must obtain state approval and permit before installation; the owner pays for the sign. The state has veto power over any proposed sign.
- ✓ Violators of the new law are subject to sign confiscation and up to a \$1000 fine for each violation.

These are the facts. If you wish to personally read the bill, please call me. I will be happy to provide you with a copy!

How to Get in Touch with Me...

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*With my wife Carolyn and our three children:
Rachel, 12; Nicole, 6; and Joseph, 15.*