Masek Works Hard for Education

In survey after survey Alaskans have indicated that giving our children a good education is a top priority. This is as it should be. A quality education is essential for success throughout life; and all of us who are parents look forward to our children leading productive lives.

The goal of having a good educational system for Alaskans has been one of my foremost concerns since elected to office. Over the past few years there have been many measures dealing with education. I supported every bill that would have effectively increased educational opportunities for our kids and worked for their passage. Those bills that were questionable in support of education, or were detrimental to quality education, I opposed.

Throughout the four years I have been in the Legislature, we in the House Majority have worked to provide fiscal responsibility and at the same time make sure critical programs like education were adequately funded. This year, that effort paid off with much needed funding being allocated to Mat-Su Schools.

Realizing that time was running out on repairing Talkeetna School and securing adequate classroom space for Mat-Su’s growing population, I left for Juneau with that as my top priority. Within the first week, I discussed the needs of the Mat-Su School District with the Co-Chairs of the House Finance Committee and got their support in securing funds for this project.

Later in the session education became one of the hottest topics of debate with SB 36 causing most of the discussion. Although we all agreed the current formula for funding education was broken, the new formula in SB 36 as it came out of the Senate did not look much better. Through the combined efforts of your delegation from the Mat-Su we managed to amend the bill to provide the State with a fairer system for funding the education of our children.

As it stands now, the Mat-Su Schools can expect to receive an additional half million dollar this year toward classroom operations district wide. As we have more schools come on line, we should eventually see an additional three million per year. Also, the Legislature agreed to put in an additional 250 million dollars for school construction statewide. This should prove very beneficial to growing areas like ours.
Legislature Honors Houston Youth

Honoring

Tanya Gaston

We, the Twentieth Alaska Legislature, join the friends and family of Tanya Gaston to honor her outstanding achievement as the 1998 world archery champion. Tanya earned this recognition through years of hard work and dedication to the sport of archery.

Tanya competed at the International Field Archery Association World Indoor Tournament in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she shot a two-day total of 574 out of a possible 600 to win the young adult female competition. Her feat is all the more remarkable as Ms. Gaston was the only archer in the field not using a scope. In addition, Tanya still uses the traditional finger release rather than the mechanical release favored by most archers today.

Preparation for the young champion began about three years ago when, with the assistance of her father, Ralph Gaston, and Jerry and Barbara Fletcher of Fletcher’s Archery in Wasilla, the young Ms. Gaston took up the sport of archery. Under the coaching and tutelage of her father and the Fletchers, Tanya became a world class archer, winning three state titles before competing at the international event in Tulsa.

Tanya is a polite young woman who is successful in her scholastic endeavors as well as her chosen sport. Her determination to excel is exemplified by her long hours of practice and attention to detail. Tanya’s long term goals include competing in the Olympics some day. With the help and support of her family and friends, there is no doubt that she can attain that goal.

We, the members of the Twentieth Alaska State Legislature, commend Tanya Gaston for her continued excellence in sportsmanship and competition in the field of archery.

Gail Phillips
Speaker of the House

Mike Miller
President of the Senate

Beverly Masek
Prime Sponsor

Congratulations

Tanya!
1998 Road Projects

The Mat-Su Borough is one of the fastest growing areas in the state, and our district is the fastest growing area of the Mat-Su. With this growth comes the inevitable problems associated with ever increasing populations. One such problem is the increasing need to have a transportation infrastructure that can accommodate growing demands for use.

Over the past few years my colleagues and I have been fairly successful in working with the Department of Transportation to make sure our existing roads are capable of meeting the public’s increased demand for reliable transportation. Since I have been in office we have seen major improvements to the Parks Highway, as well as construction on many of the important secondary roads like Hollywood and Vine, Schrock-Pittman, and Church Road.

The construction season is underway again for the summer of 1998, and through my efforts in Juneau we should once again see work proceeding on several area roads. Construction has already begun on some projects like Church Road, and should begin sometime this summer on other projects like the Big Lake/ South Big Lake Road from Fisher’s Y to Burma Road to the Parks Highway.

Another couple of important projects that should be completed this year are the improvements being done to Hollywood and Vine, Edlund Road, Long Lake Road and Church Road.

On the main routes, we should see construction begin on rehabilitation of Knik Road from the Parks Highway to Goose Bay. And last but not least, continued improvements on the Parks Highway are scheduled with planning underway for that portion running from White’s Crossing to Willow.

As always, my office is working hard to make sure we are able to meet our area’s basic transportation needs. If you or anyone you know has a problem with a road needing upgraded or maintained, just let us know and we will work with you and the Department to see about getting some action taken on the problem.

Legislation

I successfully moved several pieces of legislation this past session through both the House and Senate.

[HJR 51] was introduced to support Congressman Don Young’s legislation which would give Alaskan Natives who fought in Viet Nam a chance to obtain their allotments. Since the allotment program took place during the war, many Alaskan Natives who were eligible to receive one were not able to do being away fighting for their country.

[HB 362] also supported our military personnel by providing for lounge space for traveling members of the military in our international airport terminals.

I have always been supportive of trails and public access, and in that spirit introduced [HB 23]. This bill will assist the state in receiving federal trails funds by establishing a better accounting of the number of snowmobiles in use.

I also had a couple of other bills that passed both the House and the Senate, but did not make it into law. [HB 168] would have protected public access for hunting, fishing and trapping, but was vetoed by the Governor. And [HB 361] would have created guidelines for private maintenance of public highways, but it died in the limbo file. I believe I will be able to pass both of these bills again next year.

Masek Wins Admiration, Respect

Recently I had a most pleasant experience. Beverly Masek addressed the Big Lake Chamber of Commerce.

Unlike most politicians, particularly those looking for re-election, Beverly did not spend her time telling us what good things she had done and why we need to vote for her in the coming election. Not at all. She spent the time giving us facts about what “we” accomplished in this legislative session. The information was concise, pertinent and factual and left us with a feeling that some folks do care about more than their political career.

Particularly rewarding was her statement that we are all Alaskans first, no matter what our race, origin or ethnic background. Thank you for that, Beverly, and please try to impart that wisdom on your cohorts in Juneau. I know that she took a lot of heat last session for refusing to side with Native-rights groups, but some of us really appreciate her attempt to be fair to all.

Generally, I hold a low opinion of politicians, but I must say that I admire and respect this lady. We need more like her looking after the store in Juneau.

Keep up the good work, Beverly, and could we do something special for the Irish? Maybe buy back a chunk of the old land and give it to me? Ah well, I didn’t thing so.

Bill O’Hara, President
Big Lake Chamber of Commerce
Thoughts on the Subsistence Issue

This last session of the Twentieth Legislature was an exciting one. There were many important issues on the table that Alaskans need resolved.

Subsistence and the threat of federal management of our fish and wildlife resources remains one of the most divisive issues I have ever faced. I feel most Alaskans agree that those who are dependent upon fish and wildlife for their livelihood should get first shot at harvesting those resources in times of shortage. The question is whether we can do so without unnecessarily compromising our equal protection clause in the state constitution.

Although we struggled with finding a solution during the course of the regular session, a final answer to this problem eluded us. It would have been easy to capitulate to those interests that favor federal control of our fish and wildlife by placing a constitutional amendment on the ballot, but most of us felt that solution was not in the best interest of Alaskans or our valuable fish and wildlife resources.

Recently many of you have seen or heard advertisements from a group calling itself “Alaskans Together”. These ads call for a vote by the people on a constitutional amendment and infer that by doing so we will keep the feds out. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Adopting an amendment to our constitution to conform with the federal law only insures federal management of our resources.

Most of my constituents with whom I’ve spoken feel strongly about their right to vote on this issue, but when informed that their vote would not prevent federal management, they were not as supportive.

I will continue to fight for Alaskan management and will seek a solution that accomplishes that goal.