

House Democratic State of the State Response

Representative Beth Kerttula, House Democratic Leader

January 16, 2013

Thank you for being here tonight, and for listening in from home.

I am the House Democratic Leader, Beth Kerttula, and I am very happy to be here tonight with the Senate Democratic Leader, Senator Johnny Ellis. I will give my remarks first, and Senator Ellis will close. We don't have a lot of time, so for more information I encourage you to go to our websites which are on the podium.

As Alaskans, we cherish certain things: our optimism, our independence, our great natural resources, and our ability as Alaskans to pull together and keep our state strong.

As Alaskan Democrats we stand for economic development that brings jobs, security, and family stability to Alaska. Education that gives our children a future. Affordable energy, so we can all afford to stay in this great state.

I was fortunate to hear our first Governor, Bill Egan, tell the story of statehood, and how we stood up against the rich outside interests to build Alaska. Now we must stand up for our students, for affordable energy, and for Alaska's fair share of our resource wealth.

Investing in Education is the ultimate investment, not the ultimate giveaway as this governor called it last year. Democratic Legislators have led the way with Parents as Teachers to help parents support their children in school and student loan relief for those who put their skills to work in Alaska.

Our goal is to make Alaska's schools competitive. Alaska's schools are improving, but what can we do to make them the best? Imagine what they can do if they could focus on where to improve, not where to cut.

Listen to the teachers, they know. The governor wants to require more from our students and less of the oil companies. If he wants a ninety percent graduation rate, he needs to listen to the teachers and give them the resources they need.

Teachers need the same resources next year as they have this year. They need the ability to build on successful programs. They need to know their jobs are secure.

For the last three years, the support our schools can count on has remained the same, but inflation has gone up each year, forcing cuts in the classroom. We must stop asking our students to bear the burden of inflation. And we have a bill that will ensure our schools can count on the having resources they need from one year to the next. It's long overdue.

It's time for Alaska to make a Lasting Commitment to our Schools. Democrats have always led on education, and we will continue to focus on educating Alaskans for the good jobs of tomorrow.

We live in Alaska. It is essential we find ways to lower the cost of energy. Families MUST be able to heat their homes, and our businesses depend on it. To do this, We must build on our successes. Thousands of Alaskans have taken advantage of the home weatherization program, helping them cut their heating bills by a third and generating jobs across the state. But this governor has consistently undercut the program, holding it back and preventing more Alaskans from saving on energy.

Alaska has tremendous renewable energy potential, from small communities to large scale, but again, the governor has NOT given his full support to moving these projects forward.

Alaska needs a true Energy Plan. We must set goals and develop actual criteria so we can prioritize and coordinate projects. The governor has not lead on energy, so we will. Alaskan Democrats know how important it is to lower energy costs for you and your family.

When I first started the in the Legislature, Senator Ellis and I were both on the Special Committee on the BP-ARCO merger. We worked hard against the nearly complete monopolistic control that merger would have created on the North Slope which would have crippled Alaska's economy. Alaskans stood up then and stopped that merger, and we have gone on to have a strong profits tax now that ensures Alaskans prosper when the oil companies do.

But the Governor's new bill would mean that when the oil industry rakes in record profits, Alaskans will lose troopers and teachers and not be building roads and ferries. This new bill is still a giveaway.

With that, it's my pleasure to turn to Senator Ellis.

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