

— REPRESENTATIVE — **DONNA MEARS** ★

Muldoon Memo - 2/20

The legislature is now firmly under way—committees, including budget subcommittees are in full swing, bills are moving across the floor, and I'm getting deep into the details on a number of issues.

On February 3rd, I spoke on the House Floor for the first time, taking an opportunity to emphasize to the body the importance of increasing the Base Student Allocation. Our kids deserve a better education than the one they're getting, and I'm glad to be part of the solution to this crisis. You can watch video of my remarks [at this link](#).



Me, speaking on the Floor on February 10 to introduce visiting ASEA/AFSCME Local 52 members Braxton Bundick, Anchorage Vice President Tyler Watson, and President Dawn Bundick

Committee Rundown

The Resources Committee heard HB 50, the Governor's carbon sequestration bill, on Friday. The bill would establish a permitting process and regulatory regime to oversee the injection of carbon dioxide into geologic reservoirs. It sets out a minimum fee schedule for leases of state land for CO2 injections--\$20/acre leased and \$2.50/ton of carbon injected. I welcome the governor's newfound interest in addressing climate change, but there's a lot to learn before I decide whether this bill is a good deal for Alaskans and the environment. I look forward to a vigorous committee process as we vet this proposal.

Finance subcommittees began last week. Almost all of the 18 finance subcommittees correspond to an executive department (Department of Law, Department of Revenue, etc.) with exceptions like the legislative branch and the University of Alaska. I was assigned to the subcommittees for the Departments of Public Safety, Corrections, and Natural Resources. This past week we heard presentations from each department outlining their expenditures and explaining the governor's proposed changes relative to last year's budget. Over the coming weeks the committees will offer amendments to the governor's proposed budget and accept or reject his changes one at a time.



So glad to have met with the Rep. Peltola last week! Looking forward to working with her for years to come.

Capitol Beat

Peltola Addresses Joint Session—Newly elected U.S. Representative Mary Peltola addressed a joint session of the legislature. In her brief address, Rep. Peltola extolled what she called the “Alaska model” of governance, in which members of both parties work across the aisle to gather support and make progress on their initiatives. It’s a uniquely Alaskan system, and I’m grateful to Alaskan leaders like Rep. Peltola and Senator Murkowski who take the time to raise up that virtue and tamp down partisan rancor.

Willow Project Joint Resolution

Speaking of working across the aisle, I was able to secure favorable changes to a joint resolution on the Willow project this week.

During his address last week, Senator Sullivan asked the body for a unanimous, bicameral resolution endorsing the Willow project. The original draft resolution, in my opinion, failed to address the diversity of energy sources we’ll need to draw from going forward to meet our goals of lower and more stable energy prices. Just more oil and gas won’t get us there.

Working with Rep. Patkotak, who represents the North Slope, I was able to amend the resolution to include that broader context, adding language endorsing “the development and implementation of renewable energy systems” and promoting state investments “in technology and infrastructure to support the use of renewable sources of energy”. I appreciate spirit of collaboration exemplified by Rep. Patkotak and the majority members of the resources committee in accommodating this amendment.

Food Security Week—The week of February 13 was Food Security Week here at the capitol, with a variety of farmers, food pantries, soup kitchens, and service providers coming together in Juneau to advocate for the families they serve.

These faith-based and charitable organizations have been under tremendous strain in recent months as Alaska has failed to process applications for food stamps in a timely manner. The [four-month application backlog](#) that has opened up prevents eligible families from purchasing food through the traditional food distribution system (i.e. grocery stores), forcing folks to use food banks and other resources until their applications are processed. This of course places enormous strain on those food banks’ capacity, and many are simply unable to meet the needs of their communities. It is imperative that the Division of Public Assistance clear this backlog as soon as possible, and I look forward to providing them the resources necessary to do so.

I was happy to organize some of the events this week around this critical issue, including the inaugural meeting of the Food Strategy Task Force and an informational lunchtime lecture for legislators and their staff. I’m also proud this session to serve as co-chair of the legislature’s Food and Farm Caucus.



Lovely to visit with the ladies of Delta Sigma Theta last week.

Things of Note

- The Anchorage Caucus is holding its annual town hall on March 5 at 2pm. Details to come.
- I will be hosting a Coffee Chat at Cafecito Bonito at 9:30am on March 4. I hope you'll come by!
- For the first time since COVID started, Medicaid is going to start removing people from the rolls again starting April 1. If you are on Medicaid, call 800-478-7778 and update your address and contact information so you aren't removed by mistake.
- Apply for the PFD via [this link](#). Please reach out to our office if you run into any issues.
- District 21 Community Council Meetings:
 - [Scenic Foothills](#) – First Thursday of the month, 6:30 pm
 - [Northeast](#) – Third Thursday of the month, 7:00 pm

Stay Connected

You can find me at community council meetings and I'll have more regular Coffee Chats after session ends. You can always in touch with my office--by email at rep.donna.mears@akleg.gov or by phone at 465-3438--and if you're in Juneau please come find me in room 112 of the Capitol. If you're on social media, please follow my [official Facebook page](#).

If you'd like to follow the legislature more closely on your own, I encourage you to go to akleg.gov and dive in. A tutorial for operating the legislature's website is [available here](#). Feel free to call my office if you can't find what you're looking for.



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