



BERTA'S BRIEFINGS

REPRESENTATIVE BERTA GARDNER

Serving Geneva Woods, College Village, Green Acres, Tudor, Taku & Campbell Park

JANUARY 31, 2011

Defending Alaska's Children and Promoting Responsible State Spending

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Let me tell you about the work I'm doing as the 2011 Legislative Sessions gets underway. I have introduced several new bills and committees are moving through the standard department overviews to familiarize legislators with department missions and activities.

Close to my heart is an effort to ensure that the children of incarcerated parents get the small amount of parental support available through what is known as the PFD criminal fund. I think many legislators were appalled to learn that the "confiscated" PFDs of those who are incarcerated are used for medical care of prisoners, while their children lose everything. In 2008, Representative Harry Crawford introduced and passed legislation telling the Department of Revenue to provide grants from this fund to the children of incarcerated felons who owe child support. However, by an unrecognized oversight (It happens more often than you might think!) we failed to give the Department the necessary specific authorization to make the grants. My bill, House Bill 53, corrects the problem. I am pushing for speedy passage!



Last week, Representative Gardner met with cadets with the Alaska Military Youth Academy to discuss their daily routines and the positive affect the program has had on them.

I am ready to re-introduce my bill to ban minors from using their cell phones while driving, House Bill 128. There are proposals for an overall ban on cell phone use by drivers but I think it likely that none of

them will pass. (Don't we all just love our cell phones too much?) I'm hoping to persuade the legislature to at least ban them for our youngest drivers, who are in the process of learning good driving habits and who who are already at the greatest risk for serious car accidents.

I have also sponsored legislation, HJR 7, which would turn the Constitutional Budget Reserve into an endowment fund. All monies received from windfall profits on our oil and gas tax will placed into this fund until 2022. Every year, after inflation proofing the principal, 5-6% of the earnings would be made available for state spending. This is not an original idea...it has been around for awhile but it is something which I believe will put the put the brakes on state spending while converting a non-renewable resource (oil and gas) to a renewable resource in the form of a state endowment fund. Currently the state has about \$10 billion in this account. If the endowment plan were in effect today, it would generate around \$500 million in revenue this year. Ultimately this proposal would require a 2/3rd approval and a vote of the people.

As for committee work, as a member of the House Resource Committee, I will take a hard look at oil and gas taxes and the possibilities of gas pipelines and renewable energy projects. In the Community and Regional Affairs Committee and the Economic Development, Trade and Tourism Committee, my priority is to create more Alaskan jobs and to promote our economy. I have also been assigned three finance subcommittees: Revenue, Governor and Legislature. Finance subcommittees look at the budget of the particular department and make changes to the operating budget.

This is not everything that I will be working on this year. I will have more information soon about more of my legislative priorities.

Also, Senator Ellis and I are planning our mid-session constituent meeting. We will soon send an invitation by mail, but I hope you will mark your calendars for February 27th, 2pm at Tudor Elementary School.

I'm Berta and I'm still listening,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Berta". The letter "B" is large and stylized, with a loop at the top. The rest of the name is written in a cursive, flowing style.

P.S. There's a new way to follow the activities of the Legislature, AlaskaLegislature.tv! This service is funded and produced by the Legislature and works to provide total access to all legislative hearings held in the Capitol. All committee rooms in the Capitol have been outfitted to stream live video (with audio) of meetings to the web. Tune in at <http://alaskalegislature.tv> to follow a committee hearing. Streams will be available shortly before the meeting starts and the audio will only be live when the committee is on-the-record.
