

Bradners' Alaska Legislative Digest

*- The inside of Alaska politics,
policy, the short and the long!*

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September 18, 2008
Digest No. 18/08

As storms of controversy close in:

Why hasn't Alaska yet closed ranks behind Palin?

Gov. Sarah Palin has high popularity among Alaska citizens with poll numbers near 80 percent. Yet, the organizations of the state don't share that support. This is a strange dichotomy, yet not so strange on closer examination. The public does not see Palin in terms of issues, but simply as the "girl next door." They like her, but are not sure why. They just "don't hear" anything bad about her, but aren't angered by people who criticize. Nevertheless, given her popularity, and even if she wasn't so popular, one would expect to see Alaskans unifying behind her nomination. It is notable that this doesn't seem to be happening, although this isn't to say it won't.

In 1968 Alaskans set aside political differences to back Hickel's appointment as Secretary of Interior

Worried about "troopergate" McCain
people weigh in with attorneys!
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In 1968 Alaska governor Walter J. Hickel was appointed secretary of the Interior by President Nixon. Hickel was controversial, bullish. He had no hesitations to take an issue public, popular or not, and often took arbitrary action. Yet, despite enemies and business rivalries in this just born state, Alaskans closed ranks behind Hickel as he went to Washington to face confirmation hearings.

This included prominent Democrats, such as businessmen Barney Gottstein and Larry Carr, and, Alaska Democratic National Committeeman Alex Miller, the latter unusually influential with Democratic Party national officials after running interference in Washington after the Anchorage earthquake and the Fairbanks flood. This supportive closure included union leaders like Dwayne Carlson (AFL-CIO), Teamster leader Jesse Carr, fisheries leaders, the emerging leadership of the fast growing Alaska Land Claims movement, as well as the editorial support of Alaskan newspapers.

Alaskans know Palin lacks experience and plays the "populist"

Gov. Palin's popularity is rooted in her initial charm and her simplicity, not in her philosophy, depth, or work ethic. She feeds on attention and its feedback. Our lady is all politics, as if a campaign has never ended. After 18 months in office it is obvious that to her it is "impression" that matters at expense of issues. What matters is whether the sound bite, and the immediate public impact have political resonance, but she persists in having little depth in even the issue she advocates.

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The Palin doctrine is “me first,” my popularity - details don’t matter!

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Her doctrine is personality and the appearance of vision and leadership, but always avoiding direct responsibility. While very inexperienced when becoming governor, one would have expected her to “crack the books,” sought depth on traditional state issues, both government and otherwise. Afterall, she would need depth just to be adept at the old political two-step when caught short.

Palin’s problem is that she is “incurious”

Our governor hasn’t taken a deep interest in issues. She is not a student of government and its processes. This is what is frightening to Alaskans who manage institutions and businesses. The prestigious London based journal “The economist” perhaps pegged it saying she is bush-level “incurious,” and that the moose in her room is “inexperience.” Over the last two years we have struggled to explain this dichotomy in our reports - popularity but incurious says it!

Our general public in Alaska likes her, but those of us who must watch closely know she indeed seems “incurious,” rarely seeking depth and peripheral vision on issues. We listened to Gov. Palin in her ABC interview with Charlie Gibsons struggling to respond regarding Alakas international interests. Defending that we are not in the international backwater - just “close to Russia.”

Actually we are a very internationally enmeshed state!

Gov. Palin blew the opportunity, perhaps because she is “incurious.” She didn’t know but should have known and described our many roles. For example, there are our fisheries, Japanese investment, our international markets, the hazards of shifting currencies. We are a majority player in the North Pacific Fisheries Commission. We have 63 percent of the coastline of the United States, participate in two huge offshore fisheries economic zones, the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea, the latter which we share with Russia. Then there is the Chukchi Sea and the Arctic Ocean, now in play internationally with global warming. We are a player in the International Whaling Commission, and a leader in the Circumpolar Conference of Arctic peoples.

Our University is a leader in polar geophysical science, marine science, and Arctic regions engineering. We are not just “near Russia,” we bring students from the Russian Far East to our University. Our tourist trade and timber trades are international in character. Our large mines bring international investment, principally from the Far East, Canada, and Europe. A huge portion of world air freight traffics through Anchorage International Airport. The sea trade of the Pacific follows the great circle route along our shores, and we know about the problems of dealing with pollution and accountability from shipping accidents by foreign carriers.

Alsakans saw Vietnam more closely than most, the landing lights of the huge cargo Starlifters on approach across Cook Inlet to Elmendorf Air base never seeming to stop. The Cold war too was more real to us, with our aircraft and those of the Russians playing “scramble” off our coasts. Today we are home to three rapid deployment military bases, and all too frequently must read about those lost and see pictures of greiving families.

“Troopergate” continues, subpoenas are ready, McCain/Palin attorneys now refusing to cooperate

The Alaska Legislative Council, a unicameral House/Senate Council that manages the Legislature has reaffirmed that the body will proceed with an investigation of Gov. Sarah Palin and staff regarding “misuse of power,” and illegal access of employee records. The governor allegedly sought to use her office to discharge an Alaska State trooper previously married to her sister.

Now McCain’s lawyers have openly jumped into the fray, charging “partisanship,” and surprisingly offering new explanations for the Monegan firing never heard before. They now say Palin fired Monegan for resisting Gov. Palin’s budget policies. “Outright insubordination,” is what they claim. This seems a bit of late-in-the-hour explanation, shifts to attack Monegan’s integrity, and doesn’t ring bells in the church tower.

- **What isn’t new is the old political equation of when under fire - “deny, deflect, and detonate.”**

**McCain people pour resources
in to deflect “Troopergate”**

They accused Monegan of being a kind of budget “rogue,” insubordinate, and consorting with the Legislature, i.e. House Finance Cochair Kevin Meyers, R-Anchorage, and of all people Sen. Hollis French D-Anchorage, chair of the Senate Judiciary committee. Both voted with Gov. Palin ever time on ethics reform, oil and gas taxes, AGIA, and the TransCanada gas pipeline agreement.

The Sexual Abuse and Domestic Violence?

They cite this unapproved trip to by then Commissioner Monegan for funding. The trip was to seek a \$5 million three-year grant for a major initiative by the Council of Sexual and Domestic Abuse, and well outlined in the Council’s Annual Report to Governor Palin for 2007. There ought to be a few tracks in the snow on this one.

- For 28 years Alaska has ranked in the top five states for forcible rape. In 2006 Alaska had 76 per 100,000, Nevada second at 56, and the nation averaging 32.
- Alaska lead the nation in 2002, 2003, 2004 in the rate of men murdering women, was second in 2005, and has a rate generally twice the national average.
- 9.2% of students 9-12 report being physically forced to have sexual intercourse.

**Legislative Council meets tomorrow
Sept. 8. - the question is who among
subpoenaed will show?**

Subpoenas for 13 will go out, and others will testify voluntarily!

In a separate development attorneys for Palin and staff, and after earlier saying they would cooperate, now say they will refuse such cooperation. As a result the Council will issue 13 subpoenas for Palin staff, also for Todd Palin, the governor’s husband, but are withholding issuing a subpoena for Governor Palin.

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Troopergate will continue and more flak will be incoming

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There are other names we know of, some significant, not included under the subpoena list. This likely means these people will likely cooperate voluntarily (but under oath, of course). Also deposition may lead to other subpoenas or voluntary cooperation.

Partisanship accusation bound to come and Sen. French walked into it!

Sen. Hollis French, D-Anchorage, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, was selected by the Council as manager of the inquiry because of his background. He is Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, is a former prosecutor, and has high respect, especially in this kind of matter.

Given Gov. Palin's selection as the Republican vice-presidential nominee, the inquiry was bound to bring partisan flak. Indeed, it is known that McCain campaign attorneys pressed a partisanship attack. It was not long in coming. Rep. John Coghill, R-North Pole, unleashed the criticism at French because of remarks he made in an ABC interview, saying he compromised the appearance of objectivity and asked in a letter to that he step down.

ABC interview, a poor choice of words by Sen. French

What happened was Sen. French, in an interview with ABC, referred to the possibility of an "October surprise," a poor choice of words before national media thirsty for the "quotable." In terms of partisan balance, the Legislative Council actually has a Republican majority, as does the House of Representatives and the Senate, the latter organized as a coalition. Sen. French is not conducting the investigation, but is assigned to monitor and manage the investigation being conducted by Stephan Branchflower, a former state prosecutor, retained by the Council.

Closing down the investigation not an option

However, closing down the investigation is not be an option, since this would generate criticism and also national attention. Further, the number of people within earshot of the back-and-forth communications surrounding this issue are "too many." There have been too many phone calls, too many people involved, and too many emails, and from an administration imbued with a sense of invulnerability. Now surfacing are governors office private email accounts, purportedly used to avoid public records law. These could surface a lot of "trash talk," unbecoming to the foot soldiers of Saint Sarah "the pure."

She ate Don Young's lunch for not explaining, despite advice of attorneys

Remember too, Gov. Sarah ate Congressman Young's lunch "not cooperating." She said he had a duty to explain to his public, his attorney's advice aside. She now refuses cooperation, claiming a partisan environment and, like Young, on advice of her attorney. She also aggressively gave support to her Lt. Gov. Sean Parnell to run against Young. Now the enigma - believe it or not Young beat Parnell in Palin's home country - the Mat-Su Valley.

Our oil industry is intensely driven by global dynamics

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Lastly, but not least, there is Alaska oil and gas, a vital product delivered to U.S. consumers, but driven by global economics, market dynamics, investment that is in world-wide play.

Palin has been a nemesis to “big oil,” but she forgets “Alaska is also big oil

Yes, the governor has been a nemesis to “big oil,” but this is not a risky or courageous position these days. However, interestingly, Alaska is itself virtually an oil company with its combined royalty and tax share profits. We fight with the producers over partnership split, but beyond this point what is good for oil companies is generally good for Alaska and vice-versa. Lawmakers long range “stewardship,” and this is an important distinction, as board of directors of Alaska Oil Inc. requires this board (*our legislators*) to exercise judgements beyond that of the dynamics of immediate electoral politics. Exercising this prudence can be very difficult for the elected, since they must negotiate around short-term politics that may be reactive, as they are now.

With high prices and high profits the oil companies are not very popular these days. The broad national public has contributed to this climate as they fill their cars and hear about huge oil company profits. Alaska is no longer an isolated political enclave, we are now within the scope of media driven national politics, As the nation reacts, so follows Alaska. However, for us this national climate has been eviscerated by what is now a two-year diet of investigations, indictments, trials, and sentencings. No one right now wants to stand too close to “big oil.” *This is a dangerous decisional environment for exercising stewardship, Alaska’s long term interests.*

Palin approach: To often “deaf-ear and blind-eye” - no dissent allowed!

In past reports we have expressed concern that Palin preemptively limited gas pipeline options from the git go. She refused to talk with the oil producers, despite the fact state and producers interests must ultimately merge. Her view of a gas pipeline resulted from 2006 election politics, wanting to take a position different from her rivals. Her independent pipeline, and “let them compete for it,” had public resonance. She rode this horse out of elections with a “deaf-ear and blind-eye approach. No other viewpoints permitted. This seems hardly a stewardship approach.

Palin lacked institutional friends because she did not talk “with them”

Nevertheless, other’s joined her in blind-eye and deaf-eared policy - even Alaska Democrats (*almost to a person, one dissenter*). They hoped to force Republican colleagues to defend “big oil,” then gut shooting them for doing so! Governor Palin also approached other interests the same way, generally not offering “invitation.” This included the general business community, and groups such as native organizations, environmental groups, and health groups, etc. Even when making common cause on legislation she did not use this opportunity to “make friends,” i.e. Democrats on oil and gas taxes and pipeline issues, and in managing the capital budget.

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Palin doesn't much talk to anyone, so she lacks "friends" to bring a unified front

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Interestingly, Gov. Palin doesn't have a lot of friends among the institutions and constituencies just described. These organizations have "public voice and presence" in the broader community, and one would expect it would be these functionaries that would step forward and generate a sense of unit behind our governor now turned vice-presidential candidate,

Republican she is but generally has been estranged from the party

Palin doesn't have a lot of friends within the Legislature or even in her own Republican party. She makes public pronouncements at their expense, as a group, and personally, too. These often seem things she doesn't have to say, or could say a little differently. She doesn't bother. Nor does she forewarn lawmakers of negative decisions impacting them and their constituencies. As a result they read about it in the newspaper, or worse yet, from some reporter calling.

Keep in mind, the governor's office and legislative chambers are one floor apart, and while she is often seen in the legislative hallways, rarely are legislators able to gain audience in her office, in an environment suitable for more length and detailed discussion. Being blunt, Palin is not an initiator or one who likes to brainstorm an issue, understand and sort out the upside, downside, and discover options. *Perhaps the right word when it come to policy is "incurious."*

She wants the choice rhetoric true or not!

For example, she didn't caution the McCain speech writers of vulnerability on her "bridges to no where" stand. She wanted that "one liner," and what she said in the past be damned She essentially "blindsided" the writers Worse yet, she may now believe her bridges statement now. Palin has always skated on mistakes, received that public "bye," a seeming Joan of Arc with teflon armor.

Despite her rhetoric she misses understanding policy accomplishment!

On the flip side, we are fascinated that Gov. Palin seems frequently lacks understanding of what she has actually done! In political words, this means taking credit for things that "happened on her watch." For example: In her acceptance speech she talked at length about children with "exceptional needs," like her just born son Trigg. She very pointedly declared that these children now had a "friend in the system."

The irony is, she missed her biggest claim for "exceptional children." Under her watch, Alaska lawmakers in 2008 enacted a giant increase in school funding for "exceptional children, probably both the highest percentage increase, as well as total for the nation. Under the bill state school support for these kids will increase over four years from five times the basic unit to 13 times the basic unit (*an increase from \$25,000 to \$100,000 per child*). The trench work was done by a House/Senate School Task Force, but she immediately tried to hijack the work as her own, supported it, and signed the bill. *But she apparently didn't understand the dimension of what the bill did!*

Sidebar from “Stroller’s Weekly” web site

always worth reading - <http://www.strollersweekly.com>

About ABCs Charlie Gibson’s interview our Gov. Sarah Palin!

Talking with Charlie . . . we Alaskans knew what she was talking about but “Charlie”, being a “cheechako”, just didn’t get it. The Stroller would, for “Charlie’s” edification, like to take this opportunity to interpret, expand and revise some of Governor Sarah’s remarks.

EAR MARKS:

Ear marks are what’s left showing on your ears after you take off your EAR MUFFS. What “Charlie” obviously didn’t know is that our Governor Sarah is a “fashionista”, the Coco Chanel of the great north. She would never, and I mean NEVER, be caught dead in ear muffs. Not only do they leave marks on your ears but they interfere with a hunter’s ability to properly sight her rifle on the moose. The entire state looks to her to set the trend for the latest in moose camp attire. No self respecting moose would allow itself to be harvested by anyone wearing less than Eddie Bauer. It just isn’t done.

Additionally, “Charlie” kept harping on and on about the money for the “bridge to nowhere”. Fact of the matter is, she did pull the final plug on the Gravina Island/Ketchikan bridge, but kept the money for other transportation infrastructure needs in The Great State of Alaska like THE OTHER BRIDGE TO NOWHERE.

“CHARLIE”, THERE ARE TWO BRIDGES, the second, named at United States Senator “Uncle Ted” Steven’s behest, after our current “Congressman for all Alaska”, Don Young. This bridge is supposed to span the Knik Arm and connect Anchorage with that major Alaskan metropolis, WASILLA.

THE BUSH DOCTRINE:

“Charlie”, believe the Stroller when he tells you “Bush Doctrine” means something very different in The Great State of Alaska than it does in the “lower 48”. Up here we refer to rural Alaska as “The Bush”, and our “Bush Doctrine” refers to our economic and educational policies for the villages and small metropolises outside our major urban population centers (O.K. major urban population center is a relative term as it applies to Alaska).

Charlie - It is totally understandable Governor Sarah was confused by your terminology.

Who was to know you were talking about reserving America’s right to throw the first punch at the third grader taunting us from afar?

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Stroller tutoring ABCs Charlie Gibson on Alaska vocabulary

GLOBAL WARMING:

Alaskans have known for a while now what the Stroller always suspected, global warming isn't just a natural climate cycle but is contributed to by human activity and certain large bovine creatures found in that little state down south where the current presidential POTUS has a ranch.

We know for instance what the rest of the country is just finding out: The Arctic Ice Cap isn't just melting because of the "green house effect" but also because The Great State of Alaska has **THE HOTTEST GOVERNOR IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.**

The Stroller was proud of Governor Sarah for finally admitting to the rest of the world what we suspected all along, it's her fault the ice cap is melting.

Want to stop the ice from melting and save the polar bears?, elect her Vice President and move her steam heated igloo to Washington.

The Stroller

Stroller weekly <http://www.strollersweekly.com/>

- Publishers unknown but possessed by the ghost of E.J. (Stroller) White

Lawsuit to dismiss "troopergate" - don't hold your breath!

Five Republican lawmakers have filed suit in Alaska Superior Court represented by McCain recruited attorneys, the Texas-base Liberty Legal Institute, and are seeking to halt the legislative investigation we now call "troopergate." The rhetoric is that this is McCarthyism. Two of the plaintiffs are members of the Senate coalition minority, Sen. Fred Dyson and Tom Wagoner, along with former Dyson legislative staffer Wes Keller, appointed by Gov. Palin to a seat vacated by indicted Rep. Vic Kohring. The other two are Rep. Mike Kelly, R-Fairbanks, and Rep. Bob Lynn, R-Anchorage. In Many respects it is noteworthy that more Republicans were not pressed into joining the suit.

But don't hold your breath on this action, Alaska has very politically insulated courts, with nomination and evaluation by a poll of all bar members, and with only two names forwarded to the governor. The Alaska courts may prove loath to reach across separation-of-powers lines. Further, Alaska "does not" have an independent Attorney General, rather one appointed and serving at the pleasure of the governor. The present attorney general, Talis Colberg, is from Palin's home area of the Mat-Su Valley, a personal friend of the governor, but came with limited government experience.

The executive branch does not have the internal audit function, with this being assigned to the Legislature's Legislative Audit Agency. Our constitution created a strong executive function with virtually all officials serving at the governor's pleasure, except for a few quasi-judicial positions that can only be dismissed for cause. The point here is that it is the Legislature that has the responsibility to carry out independent investigation and audit of the executive branch. This is very unlike other states.

- In fact, we would have expected Colberg to have recused himself by this time, as did a former attorney general many years ago when under legislative investigation.