

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Senator Gary Stevens

Senator Donny Olson

Senator Peter Micciche



Senator Bert Stedman

Senator Dennis Egan

SENATE COASTAL CAUCUS

Five Alaska State Senators today announced the creation of a Senate Coastal Caucus to bring greater focus to coastal policy issues within the Senate and the Alaska State Legislature. The bipartisan group consists of members representing Alaskans from Dixon Entrance to Cook Inlet and north to the Arctic coast: Gary Stevens, R-Kodiak; Donny Olson, D-Golovin; Bert Stedman, R-Sitka; Dennis Egan, D-Juneau; and Peter Micciche, R-Soldotna.

“Even tourism is different on the coast than hopping from plane to bus to domed railcar,” said Senator Stevens. “Coastal communities are not connected by roads but by the Alaska Marine Highway System. These vessels are the arteries that attach us with the rest of Alaska.” Stevens also said the caucus will focus on the critical role the U.S. Coast Guard plays in our state, noting that, “Its responsibilities have grown with search and rescue, fisheries enforcement, marine transportation, and arctic oil development.”

“Outside the large population centers, coastal communities face serious challenges. It’s not about traffic congestion getting to the mall, it’s more about key survival issues such as getting freight into town and our products to market,” said Senator Olson. “The future of Arctic shipping, fisheries and resource extraction present both the greatest opportunities and some of the most significant challenges for the next 50 years of our state.”

Senator Stedman said, “I look forward to working with coastal Senators on issues important to our constituents, particularly energy. Energy is a key issue on the coast since most homes and businesses rely on expensive diesel fuel for heat. That has to change. We must do everything we can to increase access to more affordable energy to improve the economy and quality of life for coastal Alaskans.”

“Coastal communities need to stick together to help the rest of the state understand our important role, as well as our coastal challenges,” Senator Egan said, “Our voices can sometimes get lost if we don’t band together. As with most Alaskan communities, we’re not going to agree on everything, but the caucus will give us the opportunity to sit down and solve common issues as a coastal team.”

“Alaskans depend on coastal communities for our ports and harbors, transportation of goods, healthy sport and commercial fisheries, recreation and commerce; all primary necessities to our Alaskan way of life. We feel the additional focus is important for needs of coastal communities often not connected to the remainder of the state by the road system,” said Senator Micciche, noting that the State of Alaska has more than half of America’s coastline.

The group plans to meet regularly during the remainder of the 2013 session and occasionally during the interim.