

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

## News From The House & Senate Majority

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## **Lawmakers Team Up to Maintain Safe Harbors** *Companion Bills Create Harbor Grant Fund*

(Juneau) – Sen. Bert Stedman (R – Sitka) and Rep. Bill Thomas (R – Haines) have introduced legislation in the House and Senate to establish a new Municipal Harbor Facility Grant Fund.

HB 478 and SB 291 create a program to achieve capital improvements for harbor facilities through a one-time 50/50 matching grant to municipalities. The program, administered by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, will fund major maintenance and capital improvements of harbor facilities using a portion of the watercraft fuel tax.

“As a commercial fisherman I know how important harbors are to the towns in my district. These harbors are the center of business for most of the towns in my district and they need repairs because the state ignored them for years. This is a very reasonable way for the state and local governments to get these facilities into better working condition,” said Rep. Thomas.

Harbor facilities were transferred to municipalities but it became clear that the state had not kept up on the maintenance. State funding at the time of the transfer was inadequate to cover the deferred maintenance. As a result, many harbors are in disrepair and are unable to safely and effectively fulfill their purpose in our communities.

The idea for the matching fund program in HB 478 and SB 291 came from the Statewide Harbormasters Association. Its members realized it was going to take about \$100 million dollars to bring Alaska’s harbors back to proper condition and the Association brought forward a commitment to maintain the harbors facilities in the future.

“The importance of harbors in small coastal communities can’t be overstated. Quality harbors make Alaska’s abundant natural resources accessible and that stimulates the state’s economy in a way that benefits all Alaskans. Harbors are our roads to resources,” said Sen. Stedman.

SB 291 has been referred to the Senate Community & Regional Affairs and Finance committees.

HB 478 has been referred to the House Community & Regional Affairs and Finance committees.

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