



Only in Alaska

Only in Alaska does so much happen in so little time. This is a story-rich place unlike any other. We have it all. A great land the size of a subcontinent. Diverse peoples. Colossal mountains. Two oceans. Three seas. Countless rivers and glaciers. Vast forests. Bears, wolves, moose, eagles, ravens, orcas, salmon, and more. Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, fires, and floods. The northern lights. Long winter nights. Long summer days. Oil, gold, fish, and timber. Unequaled grandeur. Unusual challenges. Boundless potential.

And stories. Larger than life. This past week, let alone the past three months, you could be forgiven if you had a hard time keeping up with all the news. On things like:

- Coronavirus relief and the easing of COVID-19 restraints
- The budget
- The permanent fund dividend
- A multi-billion-dollar gas project

Alaska North Slope crude oil prices are north of \$33. A couple of months ago, we would have been horrified. But today? There's almost a sense of relief – a relief that prices are not below zero. Could they be better? Of course. But after hitting a price of -\$2.68 a barrel last April 20, \$33.76 now looks pretty darn good.

We live in a storied place populated by storied people. Treasures like Walter Harper, the first person to submit Denali, Mary Jane Fate, a trailblazer for education and Alaska Native rights, and those we honor, are grateful for, and remember this Memorial Day Weekend – the men and women in the armed forces who died in service to this country and this great land.

I hope this finds you well, weathering these challenging times, and living your own storied life – this Memorial Day Weekend and beyond.

\$1,000 PFDs go out July 1

The governor announced this week that Alaskans will get \$1,000 permanent fund dividends starting July 1 – three months earlier than usual. Those with direct deposit will get payments first. More than 670,000 people have applied. Of that, about 600,000 will see their dividends starting July 1, with payments continuing into August and even beyond that.

It usually takes the state until mid to late June to verify eligible recipients. This year, the PFD application deadline was extended from March 31 to April 30, due to the coronavirus pandemic. That means it might take the state a little longer to check on who's eligible or not. That's why payments may extend beyond August.

Want to check on the status of your dividend?

Go to the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend Division's online [myPFD Application Search](#).

Don't have access to the Internet or didn't file online?

Call the PFD Division Mondays, Tuesdays, or Fridays, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at the following phone numbers:

- Fairbanks – 451-2820
- Anchorage – 269-0370
- Juneau – 465-2326

The budget

The legislature this week ratified the governor's plan to spend more than \$1.1 billion in federal Coronavirus Aid, Recovery, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds to help individuals, communities, and businesses hurt by the pandemic. This huge chunk of change is part of more than \$1.5 billion Alaska got from the federal government through the CARES Act.

Here's how that money breaks down:

What the legislature approved this week: \$1.1 billion (\$1.145.394.900)

• Communities:	\$568.6 million
• Small businesses:	\$290 million
• Fisheries:	\$100 million
• Rural airports:	\$49 million
• Students & schools:	\$44.9 million
• Student nutrition:	\$41.9 million
• Transit grants:	\$29 million
• University & students:	\$5 million
• Public safety:	\$3.6 million
• Other:	\$3.5 million

Budget authorizations the legislature had already provided: \$419.3 million

• Health-related COVID-19 costs:	\$331.4 million
• Soup kitchens, food banks, shelters, & more:	\$50 million
• Anchorage, Fairbanks international airports:	\$32.1 million
• Elections-related COVID-19 costs:	\$3 million
• Community development block grants:	\$2.8 million

Coronavirus relief

The state is still working on how to distribute some of the \$1.5 billion in federal funds in coronavirus relief. Many of these programs are new; thus, folks are scrambling to get it right.

Keep in mind that it took about six weeks for the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development to hire enough people and figure out the best way to meet the demands of paying out unemployment benefits, including an additional \$600-a-week federal payout and, for the first time, payments to gig workers, independent contractors, and others who don't pay unemployment insurance. Six weeks. And that's for an agency that already knows how to run a familiar program. Imagine how much more work is involved to create something new, especially during these demanding times.

Two of the biggest pieces of coronavirus relief are **\$568.6 million for community assistance** and **\$290 million for small businesses**.

Community assistance

Funding under this program is to help communities offset the costs of the pandemic. To see how the \$586.6 million is divided up for each community, see pages 3 through 7 of [a packet the Dunleavy administration provided the Legislative Budget and Audit Committee](#).

The **Alaska Division of Community and Regional Affairs** started issuing payments on May 22 to municipalities that have signed grant agreements and have provided the state certain documents. The agency has set up a web site, [COVID-19 Resources for Communities](#), to help in this. Go there for more information as well as a [COVID-19 Community Grant Agreement](#) form.

The Alaska Municipal League also has set up [a useful website](#) to help communities figure out how to get relief under this new system.

Small business relief

This is still a work in progress, but information can be found. The **Alaska Division of Economic Development** has set up a web site called the [AK CARES Grant](#). It spells out which small businesses are qualified for grants between \$5,000 and \$100,000. The agency has posted online [an informational sheet and checklist](#). Credit Union 1 will run the program and hopes to start taking applications on **May 26**, according to a May 19, 2020, letter to Senate Finance Committee cochairs from Julie Anderson, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development.

Easing coronavirus restraints

The governor [has lifted many health mandates and restraints](#) put in place since last March. Under his [Reopen Alaska Responsibly Plan](#) that went into effect at 8:00 a.m., Friday, May 22, the following are now allowed to open at 100 percent capacity:

- Houses of worship
- Religious gatherings
- Licensed childcare
- Retail businesses
- Restaurants
- Bars
- Barbershops and hairdressing salons
- Gyms, fitness centers, swimming pools
- Sports events
- Lodges and day camps
- Fishing charters
- Theaters
- Libraries
- Museums
- Bingo halls
- Bowling allies

Restrictions, however, still apply to international and interstate travel until **June 2**. Other mandates that are still in effect apply to:

- Public and private schools
- Certain elective health care services
- Intrastate travel
- Independent commercial fishing vessels
- Visitation to senior centers, prisons, and other institutions

For more about this, go to Alaska's [COVID-19 Health Mandates web site](#).

Even though the governor has eased up on restraints, he asks folks to continue to follow these guidelines:

- **Wash your hands.** Thoroughly. Frequently. For at least 20 seconds at a time.
- **Wash your clean surfaces** that get touched such as doorknobs, phones, light switches, and lamps.
- **Out in public, keep six feet away from people.**
- **Wear masks.**
- **Stay home when sick.**

Alaska gas project

Uncle Sam has okayed the construction and operation of the Alaska Liquefied Natural Gas Project. Authorization by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on May 21 helps clear the way for building a gas treatment plant on the North Slope, an 807-mile-long, 42-inch-diameter pipeline, and a liquefaction plant in Nikiski. This approval is the culmination of years and years of work by the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation that cost roughly \$600 million. The state's share of that was about \$240 million.

More work, of course, must be done before ground-breaking can start. A customer for Alaska gas must be found. Financing must be lined up. More federal permits are needed.

Until then, AGDC is getting an updated figure on the cost of the project, now estimated at \$43 billion, at a meeting sometime in June, according to [a board presentation this past week from corporate president Frank Richards](#). That estimate may be less than thanks to improvements in technology and other things.

Burn ban

Just a reminder, especially for the Memorial Day Weekend: there's a burn ban in effect.

What's more, the state has issued a red-flag warning for Tanana Flats and Deltana. Warm, dry, and windy weather, officials warn, is conducive for a large and dangerous fire. So remember:

- Burn permits have been suspended since May 1
- No burn barrels
- No burning of brush
- No burning of lawns

There already have been 86 wildfires so far this season. All were caused by humans.

Walter Harper

Walter Harper has been gone for more than one hundred years, but he should never be forgotten. Born in 1892 in Tanana to an Athabaskan mother and an Irish father, he was a riverboat pilot, winter trail guide, and interpreter for a missionary. He is most famous for being the first person to stand atop the summit of Denali on June 7, 1913. He also was known, loved, and admired for his character, resilience, self-restraint, and positive attitude.

Walter wanted to be a doctor in Alaska and was on his way to medical school from Skagway on the night of October 23, 1918, aboard the ill-fated *Princess Sophia*. The ship struck Vanderbilt Reef, north of Juneau, during a storm and sunk October 25. Walter was among all 364 people who perished that day. He was only 25.

Earlier this year, the legislature approved [Senate Bill 144](#) to name June 7 as Walter Harper Day in honor of him and his achievement of scaling Denali on that same day in 1913. Governor Dunleavy signed the measure into law on April 29.

Mary Jane Fate

Alaska lost a remarkable woman and trailblazer on Good Friday, April 10, 2020: Mary Jane Fate.

Born in Rampart on September 4, 1933, into the subsistence way of life along the Yukon River, Mary Jane grew up to be an ardent advocate for education and Alaska Native rights.

She was among only a handful of women who successfully lobbied Congress for the 1971 Alaska State Claims Settlement Act. She was the first president of her ANCSA village corporation, Baan o Yeel Kon, and served on that board for 40 years. She helped found the *Tundra Times* newspaper. She and her husband Hugh "Bud" Fate, a dentist and a former member of the Alaska State House, helped start the Fairbanks Native Association. She was the first woman co-chair of the Alaska Federation of Natives, the first Alaska Native woman to serve on the Alaska Judicial Council, the first Native appointed by President George H.W. Bush to the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, and was president and founding member of the North American Indian Women's Association. She cofounded the Breast Cancer Detection Center of Alaska in Fairbanks and, in 1998, received a presidential award for her work to bring mammograms to rural Alaska.

Mary Jane is survived by her husband Bud, their three daughters Janine, Jennifer, and Julie, her sisters Alice and Lilly, twelve grandchildren, fifteen nieces and nephews, and many, many cousins including Alfred Woods and Dorothy Woods Shockley.

Her true passion was helping young people and empowering them through education.

Mary Jane received many honors for her tireless work, including Doyon's Citizen of the Year in 2012 and AFN's Citizen of the Year and Public Service awards in 2012. She was inducted into the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame in 2014. In all her years as a leader and an advocate, she led from her heart and with love for Alaska and Alaskans. She will be dearly missed.

In Closing

There's a good chance the legislature will meet again later this year in special session to assess how coronavirus relief is working and what needs improvement. We have some unfinished work on the capital budget, and we have to come together in joint session to vote up or down on the governor's appointments. I'll keep you posted on all that.

There's a lot more to pass on to you, such as information on [Senate Bill 155](#) to help mom and pop mines. There will be more about that in an upcoming newsletter. I am grateful for the legislature's approving it last March and for the governor's enacting it into law on April 29.

Until then, have a good and safe Memorial Day Weekend.

Click Bishop

Fairbanks, Nenana, Denali Borough, & the Upper Yukon River Region

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