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Juneau Independent

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Niven, Kelly top competitive Assembly races

With 95% of expected vote counted as of Friday night, all contests on Juneau's municipal election ballot appear to be decided

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Juneau voters appear to have approved a 1% seasonal sales tax between April 1 and Sept. 30, and elected Joyce Niven to the Assembly in the only closely contested candidate race, according to updated results of the Oct. 6 municipal election released by the city clerk's office Friday night.

The tally of 9,717 ballots representing 34.99% of registered voters "are expected to represent approximately 95% of the total ballot count," according to the clerk's office. Results are scheduled to be certified Oct. 20.

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Assembly District 2 candidate Joyce Niven, left, and Areawide Assembly Member Paul Kelly each have solid leads in their races with most of the vote in Juneau's municipal election counted as of Friday, Oct. 9. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

Juneau sets another cruise tourism record with 1,733,016 passengers

Increase comes during first year of voluntary daily passenger limits, which city tourism manager says are meant to reduce adverse impacts rather than lower visitor totals

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

A new daily limit on cruise passengers didn't keep Juneau from setting a new record high season total for the fourth year in a row.

A total of 1,733,016 passengers arrived on large cruise ships during this year's season that ended Tuesday, according to Alexandra Pierce, tourism

manager for the City and Borough of Juneau, in an email to the Juneau Independent on Wednesday. That's about 2.6% more than the 1,688,738 passengers in 2025, and a continuing upward trend from 1,677,935 in 2024 and 1,638,902 in 2023.

"It's not particularly different from expectations," Pierce wrote, noting
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Candidates' answers about the governor's mansion reveal much

Replies of yes, sometimes and a dodge offered by the three participating candidates, who similarly diverge on other issues ranging from energy to tourism management

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins says he'll live in the Governor's House. Dave Bronson says he will during the legislative session and at other times when more important matters aren't happening
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State cuts cruise ship pollution inspections to once every two years

Reduction began July 1 without public notice from DEC; commissioner says discharge limits and monitoring requirements remain unchanged

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

As of July, the state is inspecting cruise ships for pollution violations every other year, rather than every year under a program that began in 2021, according to Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation officials.

The cutback occurred without a public notification process, DEC Commissioner Randy Bates said in a conference call with the Juneau Independent that included two other department officials. The change officially took effect when the current fiscal year began July 1.

"There's no need for an announcement like that," he said. "It's just a recalibration, which I have that opportunity to do with all of our inspection protocols and staffing exercises."

Bates said the decision was made for both financial and regulatory reasons, noting on the latter point that other industries undergoing pollution inspections such as mining, oil, seafood and timber aren't subject to annual DEC inspections.

"We're using our resources where we can best use them," he said. That means "equitable industry treatments so that one industry like the cruise industry isn't getting over-reviewed on a comparative level with the mining industry."

Two Democratic Juneau state lawmakers who are members of the finance committees in their respective chambers — Rep. Sara Hannan and Sen. Jesse Kiehl — told the Juneau Independent on Monday the change to the inspection schedule came as a surprise since there was no mention of

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Peltola-Sullivan moves to 'Leans Democratic' at rating site, while a new poll shows that her lead is shrinking

Conflicting surveys, predictions and headlines mark U.S. Senate race in Alaska that may decide party control with less than two weeks before voting starts

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Regardless of whether you support Republican U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan or Democratic challenger Mary Peltola, there's been recent developments to provide optimism about that person's chances.

One of two major prediction websites changed its rating of the race Tuesday to "Leans Democratic," the second change after it shifted to "Toss-Up" instead of "Leans Republican" in June. It's the first time in 18 years that Sabato's Crystal Ball, based at the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, has given a favorable rating to a Democrat in a U.S. Senate race in Alaska.

"Of the Democrats' red state Senate targets, Alaska may be the most promising," the forecast website stated in an analysis of the race Tuesday.

The website notes Peltola topped Sullivan by 8% in the Aug. 18 primary and multiple surveys since have shown her with a solid lead. It also notes The New York Times published an article Sept. 23 raising questions about her treatment of staff and other people, but polling by that newspaper shows "this story may not have 'legs.'"

"In both of their polls, about 50% of likely voters had at least a somewhat favorable view of her, while Sullivan's numbers in that category actually sunk from 47% to 42%," the analysis by Sabato's Crystal Ball states. "Alaska voters have also seemed to look past the stormy tempers of some other members that they have reelected over the years."

However, some recent surveys show the race is much closer to the "Toss-



Former U.S. Rep. Mary Peltola, D-Alaska, and current U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska. (Official congressional portraits)

Up" rating that one other major forecast website — The Cook Political Report — still has as of Wednesday.

Results of a poll conducted Oct. 1-3 by Alaska Survey Research released Wednesday show Peltola with a 2% lead over Sullivan after ranked choice votes are tallied. That compares to a 3.8% edge in a survey by the same company about four weeks ago.

But there are caveats to the findings: the survey company's owner, Ivan Moore, has publicly declared Sullivan "needs to be voted OUT." Also, the current survey's margin of error is 3%, making the race a statistical tie.

Moore could not immediately be reached Wednesday morning for comment. In a post at his company's Facebook page on Wednesday he noted "Sullivan has not led an ASR survey dating back to the summer of 2025."

"The race is very polarized and locked in place — and comes down to turnout, in the early voting phase and on Nov. 3," Moore wrote.

Two other Republican candidates in the race, namesake challenger Dan J. Sullivan and Gerald Heikes get 5% and 3%, respectively, in first-choice

votes. But Moore notes that when subsequent choices are implemented in the ranked choice process "their cumulative vote splits fairly evenly between Peltola and Sullivan," meaning the leader in first-choice votes will likely win the election.

Two other recent polls conducted in late September cited by The New York Times at its tracking page show Sen. Sullivan leading Peltola 47%-46%.

Various nationwide polls, as well as Sabato's Crystal Ball and The Cook Political Report, are stating there is an increasing likelihood of Democrats taking control of both the House and Senate during the final two years of President Donald Trump's second term.

The Trump administration is responding by campaigning in numerous states where Republicans have traditionally fared well, including a visit by Vice President JD Vance to Fairbanks on Monday and Trump declaring he will visit Alaska this month.

Early voting in the Nov. 3 midterm elections begins in Alaska on Oct. 19.

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Juneau gives the final cruise ship visitors of 2026 a soggy sendoff

Typical October weather, limited tour options aren't a damper for passengers happy to escape heat waves elsewhere and fulfill dreams of seeing Alaska



Marshelle and Jaydel Wilson walk down the downtown dock in the rain toward the Norwegian Encore, the last cruise ship to visit Juneau this year, on Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

It was 93 degrees when Jaydel and Marshelle Wilson departed their home about 80 miles from Las Vegas to set sail for Juneau, so they didn't mind temperatures in the 40s and rain falling intermittently during the few hours they got to spend in town Tuesday.

Both work as educators and they hoped to travel to Alaska in May, but when that didn't work out they booked a voyage on the Norwegian Encore for its last visit to The Last Frontier in 2026. The ship's departure at about 10 p.m. marks the end of another season of

more than 1.6 million passengers visiting Juneau for the fourth straight year.

"We got a balcony for a smokin' deal," Jaydel Wilson said. "So we'll hit Glacier Bay and Skagway and Ketchikan on it, and so I we feel like it's going to give us a taste of it."

"Our kids want to come," Marshelle Wilson added, so getting insight now may help if that trip happens in the future.

Tour and restaurant options were limited since many have shut down for the season, Jaydel Wilson said.

"We thought about riding to Mendenhall Glacier, but with it raining not want to walk in the rain for a

half hour to get up to it we're just going to kind of walk the wharf and check things out in downtown," he said.

They are planning to take a White Pass & Yukon Route Railway tour when they reach Skagway and hope Glacier Bay will also be another trip highlight.

"I definitely see us coming back," Jaydel Wilson said. "We live in the desert and this is just beautiful for us to see."

Some day-to-day sights of cruise season were still evident on downtown docks and streets on Tuesday, including a line of people enduring a rainy wait outside Tracy's King Crab Shack, people posting for pictures by signs and totem poles, and crossing guards guiding visitors darting between shops.

Some signs of shutdown were also evident, including the gift shop and other operations at the base of the Goldbelt Tram being dark on the final day of the season, officially ending the possibility of the cable car reopening this season after shutting down April 30 due to an accident. The company kept its base station and restrooms open most of the season and officials have stated they expect the cable car to reopen next season.

Getting their picture taken next to a life-size fabricated bear underneath an end-of-season sale banner were Jimmy and Diane Goodwin, a couple from Pensacola, Florida, who said they normally take a cruise around Thanksgiving, but since it's about 100 degrees in their hometown they're happy to take a cool trip.

"We like to go on a cruise this time of year, so if it's chilly you just bring a big jacket," said Jimmy Goodwin,

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SENOFF

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making his first trip to Alaska while his wife is visiting for the third time.

They also said they plan to ride the train when they get to Skagway on Wednesday — and in the meantime got a shiny Juneau experience from one of the tour activities available Tuesday.

"We just panned for gold and found gold," Diane Goodwin said.

Coming to Juneau in October was a spontaneous decision made about a month ago, said Larry and Chris Riat, a couple from Rancho Cucamonga, California, who like others said it was a relief to beat the heat.

"We were bored and decided to do it," Larry Riat said. "It was the last cruise ship of the year, so we just did it."

They said just being in Alaska and seeing the scenery made the trip worthwhile, despite not having a full range of tours and other diversions in port. Also, Chris Riat said, they were able to buy a bunch of sweatshirts to take home since they were being clearanced out at \$5 each.

While most visitors to Juneau on Tuesday are preparing to say farewell to summer weather, if they haven't already, for Linda Wirth, of Perth, Australia, her first visit to the United States offered a break from the summer she's about to face.

"I like this weather better," she said.

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Jimmy and Diane Goodwin get their picture taken next to a fabricated bear outside a downtown Juneau gift shop on Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

State study: Machine operators to see highest job growth, journalists see the biggest job drop by 2034



A helicopter delivers a beam to the site for the proposed New Amalga Gold Project on July 18, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

Growth in petroleum and mining will help boost some related occupations, while information and legal services are in decline, according to Alaska Economic Trends analysis

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

It's a good time to be embarking on a career as a machine operator or engineer in Alaska. Not so much a journalist or broadcaster.

A 10-year analysis of projected state jobs between 2024 and 2034 by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development declares, "the fastest-growing occupations are an eclectic mix" that involve industries such as oil and gas, mining, and healthcare. Occupations expected to see declines include information-related industries, banking and finance, and certain construction-related jobs.

The fastest growth is expected to be mining, according to the findings published this week in the department's

October 2026 issue of Alaska Economic Trends.

"We project mining employment to increase by 23 percent over 10 years, based on sustained growth in potential mine development and existing mines rather than any specific new project," the department notes.

Another high-ranking growth industry is oil and gas employment, expected to increase by 12.2% by 2034 compared to 2024, due in part to new oil field projects coming online. Paul Martz, a labor department economist who authored the Alaska Economic Trends articles, said in an interview Tuesday the job increase does not include uncertain projects within the decade-long timeframe such as a much-discussed natural gas pipeline.

"We typically do have some criteria that we look at," he said. "It's not always the exact same thing because it depends on the projects. But it's what

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JOBS

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you would expect — how far along the permitting is, where the financing is, and those types of things. Typically these large-scale projects don't just spring up out of nowhere and so we're all continuously looking at what's happening."

The studies are conducted on a two-year cycle, so shifts in decade-long outlooks can generally be incorporated as part of that process, Martz said. If a significant shift were to occur during an intervening year "we would definitely write about it."

Alaska's employment situation changed drastically between 2015 and 2020 due to an oil price crash at the beginning of that period and then the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of it, according to Alaska Economic Trends. Total state jobs dropped from 338,579 in 2015 to 303,046 in 2020.

As of 2024, "employment has nearly recovered to that 2015 high, helped by major oil developments," the magazine notes. "However, the upheaval of the last decade fundamentally, and potentially structurally, changed major parts of the economy."

Oil and gas jobs dropped from a peak of 15,309 in 2015 to 7,086 in 2021, so even with the growth predicted by 2034, those jobs are unlikely to return to their previous high, according to the department.

Mining, on the other hand, saw statewide jobs increase from 1,184 in 1990 to 3,893 in 2025, and is expected to rise to 4,654 by 2034, the analysis notes.

Specific occupations related to those resource industries are at the top of the study's growth projections. The category "Crushing, Grinding, and Polishing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders" is expected to see a 23.1% growth in jobs between 2024 and 2034, followed by "Aerospace Engi-

neering and Operations Technologists and Technicians" at 22.5%, "Mining and Geological Engineers, Including Mining Safety Engineers" at 17.8%, and "Petroleum Engineers" at 16.4%.

At the bottom of the jobs chart are "News Analysts, Reporters, and Journalists" with a projected -27.9% loss, followed by "Broadcast Announcers and Radio Disc Jockeys" at 27.7%, "Advertising Sales Agents" at 20.7% and "Producers and Directors" at 18.5%.

"Legal and media occupations have been decreasing for years as services become easier to obtain remotely, and others have moved to freelance or self-employment," the magazine notes.

Among other major industries, health-care employment is projected to grow 11.4% and food manufacturing 8.2%. Government employment is expected to drop 2.7% by 2034, and in particular "federal employment is difficult to predict with the political climate and strategic decisions continuing to shift," according to the department.

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RECORD

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"we usually run a little over our projected lower berth capacity. We were at 104% this year which is a little high."

Ships this year were at 99% of lower-berth capacity in April, 101% in May, 106% in June, 109% in July, 105% in August and 99% in September, according to the October 2026 issue of The Tide Line newsletter published by CBJ's Docks and Harbors Department. Capacity is based on two people per cabin, so rates over 100% are possible due to extra people on pull-out beds, bunks and cradles.

This year was the first Juneau had a

voluntary daily passenger limit in effect of 16,000 people (12,000 people on Saturdays). Pierce said before this year's season it was possible another record high would be set and, in her email Wednesday, noted the intent of the limit was to reduce impacts rather than passengers.

"The goal with passenger limits is to avoid explosive growth and we're looking at relatively flat numbers for 2027 and 2028," she wrote. "We can expect minor, single digit variations in our visitor numbers due to changes in ship deployment, what capacity ships are sailing at, etc. but we are happy that the limits are keeping our numbers under control."

"The passenger limits weren't intended to reduce the overall number of visitors, but to level things out to create a sense of predictability and stability for residents and businesses," Pierce added. "With lower berth capacity between 1.6 and 1.7 million from 2023 to 2028, we believe we have achieved that."

Juneau did not have any days this year where the voluntary passenger limit was exceeded, Pierce noted in a follow-up email.

"These issues are resolved during scheduling, where we see requested bookings in advance and make adjustments based on our limits," she wrote. "For 2026, we had a large ship that was no longer able to call on 8 Tuesdays and ended up at Ward Cove in Ketchikan instead. We did not have any of those issues for 2027 and 28 because we largely have the same ships in the market and the cruise lines are aware of Juneau's scheduling constraints created by the limits."

The daily limit did have some impacts on Juneau's sailing schedule as well as for other Southeast Alaska ports. Royal Caribbean International reduced its sailings to Alaska's capital this year — and is scheduled to do so

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again next year — opting instead for destinations such as Icy Strait Point near Hoonah, which saw a significant increase in passengers this year. That led to speculation early this year that Ketchikan could pass Juneau in passenger arrivals for the first time ever.

It appears that didn't happen, with Ketchikan projecting about 1.67 million passengers this year, said Laurie Booyse, the city's tourism manager, in an interview Wednesday. But that is well above the roughly 1.5 million passengers that city saw last year.

Ketchikan also had more port calls by ships compared to a year ago, but the most significant reason for this year's passenger increase is "there's also much bigger ships," Booyse said.

Juneau's cruise passenger capacity beyond 2027 is a contentious issue due to Goldbelt Inc.'s plans to open a private two-port dock on land it owns on the west coast of Douglas Island for the 2028 season. Juneau has a voluntary five-ship-a-day limit reached with the cruise industry in 2024, but at issue is whether that limit will include the new dock (and thus potentially divert 40% of cruise traffic away from downtown) or if seven ships a day will be the new norm.

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MANSION

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ing elsewhere. Bernadette Wilson says Juneau will have a new registered voter if she wins, but doesn't actually say she'll live in the mansion.

Those responses by three of the four candidates for governor who participated in a candidate forum in Juneau



Laura McDonnell, left, moderates a gubernatorial candidate forum between, from left to right, Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Bernadette Wilson and Dave Bronson at the Baranof Hotel on Wednesday, Oct. 7, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

on Wednesday reflected broader differences between them about the city's role as the state capital and other issues raised during the 90-minute event hosted by the Greater Juneau Chamber of Commerce.

Many of the questions focused on issues raised at other forums, such as the candidates' approach to a long-range fiscal plan and resource development in the state. But an early question asked the candidates "what executive leadership, agency functions, and state investments should be maintained or expanded right here in Juneau...and will your cabinet and commissioners be based in Juneau?"

The question addresses the decades-old issue of "capital creep" — which has seen many state agencies and functions relocate outside Juneau — as well as current Gov. Mike Dunleavy being absent from the governor's mansion for nearly the entirety of his two terms.

Bronson, a Republican former mayor of Anchorage who answered first, said commissioners will need to be based in Juneau if their departments are, "but at the end of the day the thing

we've got to look at is talent."

"And if the talent says 'I live in Anchorage' (or) 'I live in Fairbanks...are you going to lose talent to compel them to live here, and change and uproot their lives that much?'" he said. "I don't think so, because you got to have talent, and you just pay for airline tickets for them to come down when they need to come down and do their job."

As for living in the governor's mansion, Bronson said "I've committed to folks in this room that during session I will live here, and much of the rest of the year I will live here. But I won't be here all year because a lot of government is spread out throughout the state."

Kreiss-Tomkins, a Democratic former state legislator from Sitka, said "I will live in the mansion. I'll make sure that it is a key part of this community."

"More broadly speaking, I want to restore Juneau's position at the seat of government and have as many commissioners as possible living here," he said, adding there was "a degree of camaraderie and a degree of connectivity" under both Democratic and Re-

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publican governors about 20 to 30 years ago that has seen a significant decline.

Wilson, an Anchorage business owner, said "Juneau is going to get a new registered voter and it's going to be a Republican, not a Democrat. I look forward to absolutely calling Juneau home 100%."

She also offered plenty of praise for the governor's mansion and said "I think that there is a lot of opportunity there" — without actually discussing living there herself. She also didn't address whether her commissioners would be based in Juneau, instead referencing cameras installed throughout the Alaska State Capitol and suggesting "turn them on — let's let Alaskans watch what is going on in Juneau."

"The reality is we have the technology, you guys," she said. "We can bring these things to Alaskans. We don't just have to turn it on when there's a committee hearing going on."

The fourth gubernatorial candidate on the ballot, Treg Taylor, a Republican former state attorney general, did not participate in the forum.

A common theme of agreement among the three candidates when discussing other issues during the forum is many aspects of Alaska's state government are problematic at present. But there was a fundamental difference in their proposed fix: Kreiss-Tomkins largely focused on how state

government could do better. Bronson and Wilson frequently suggested government needs to get out of the way.

The first question to candidates — which would be revisited on more specific topics such as energy and transportation throughout the forum — was what they would do "to create a more competitive, business-friendly, and predictable environment in Alaska" during their first two years in office.

Kreiss-Tomkins cited energy as his top priority, with an "all of the above" approach in furthering hydropower, natural gas and other sources, and said he favors a statewide energy bond to pay for infrastructure investments.

"The other priority is just making sure that the state works and works well. And it's incredibly important for industry to have certainty on permitting," he said, adding that is difficult. "when you've got agencies that have hemorrhaged staff because of an inability to attract and retain employees."

Wilson, also putting an emphasis on the permitting process, said she plans to implement a "shot clock" for processing applications so "you're going to be given an immediate, clear, and concise timeline for when you can expect to get your permit." She said she also favors automated renewal of some licenses and rolling back a sick leave law passed by voters in 2024.

"We need to talk about how we get our trade schools and vocational schools back in the high school level so that we can have good a pipeline of our youth coming up, so workers can be

fulfilling these jobs that we're now going to push for," she added.

Bronson said "we do need to get government out of the way and sometimes that means hiring more government workers to get the work (done)," because a shortage of them means an inability to handle the permitting process.

"You can have any mechanism you want to accelerate things, but if you don't have the people in place to actually sit down and do the permits the projects aren't going to happen," he said, adding one of the reasons there's a workforce shortage is state employees aren't paid enough to lure people into applying for those jobs.

At the same time, Bronson also said in response to a subsequent question he favors repealing both the mandatory sick leave law and the minimum wage.

"Small business will figure this out," he said. "The marketplace will figure this out."

Kreiss-Tomkins said he generally supports the paid sick leave law, but is open to discussing exemptions "in particular about seasonal businesses and seasonal industries where there are real challenges."

Wilson, expanding on her previous comment about rolling back the law, said she favors repealing it because "government had no business coming in and mandating that, and crushing small businesses in this state." She also said one of the reasons many

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MANSION

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business owners are struggling is because they can't find employees.

"If (sick leave) is that critical for the employees then leave it up to the business to say, 'You know what? I have to offer this on my own volition because I can't find the employees,'" she said.

Among the specific economic management questions the candidates were asked was "What role should the state play in supporting a strong, competitive visitor economy, while partnering with communities to ensure that growth is sustainable and benefits Alaskans?"

Kreiss-Tomkins, answering first, said "I think the state has a responsibility to help market and sell Alaska to national and international audiences, and that has been on the downslide over the years — and really decades — at this point."

He said the state has also provided money to projects such as a cruise facilities in Hoonah and elsewhere that have proven successful, and also favors a greater focus on marketing winter tourism.

Wilson said "we absolutely need to invest in infrastructure — road, rail and ports" so visitors can get around easily. She also said the state needs to get its budget under control so measures such as increasing taxes on tourists aren't being considered. In addition, without specifically using the word homelessness, she said "we got to clean up this damn mess Alaska has turned into."

"You have at least half of the state's population, if not more, where when you go into those cities you have a drug and psychiatric problem with garbage strewn all over," she said, adding "there is no amount of advertising that can overcome that."

Bronson, following up on those remarks, said "I do not think Alaska is a mess. Certainly, we have challenges."

But while he also said he sees "very nice, well-run, clean cities" when he visits Southeast Alaska during cruise season, he also questioned state government directly funding efforts to boost the industry.

"I think before we start talking about government spending on things we look at what the cruise industry can contribute on their behalf to this," he said. "I don't like it when government always steps up and has to subsidize private enterprise. We're way too invested in the business of what's going on in private enterprise in the state."

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INSPECTION

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that possibility during budget discussions at the Alaska State Capitol during the past session.

"In fact, when I started hearing rumors about existing inspections getting dismantled I looked back to make sure I hadn't missed anything in the budget process," Kiehl stated in an email. "I had not. The budget request was status quo, so this new radical reduction raises serious questions about what the Dunleavy administration plans to do with the money they asked the legislature for."

The change does not mean discharge limits, or monitoring and reporting requirements for cruise lines, have changed, Bates said.

"We have all of this other protocol of reports and reporting and data submissions on a daily or a weekly or a monthly basis," he said. "And that's where we spend so much more time as staff is looking at those, working with the industry on what those reports look like, and if there's excursions let's get those fixed immediately."

The now-biennial inspections are

"minimal in terms of their impact," Bates said.

"They are appropriate and necessary for oversight to confirm what we're seeing and what we're doing, and that the vessel has got the controls in place that we expect them to," he said. "But the work that we do on a daily basis is so much more significant than maybe people understand."

But doubts have been raised by state lawmakers and others about the effectiveness of the state's Commercial Passenger Vessel Environmental Compliance (CPVEC) program implemented in 2021. The program requires vessel owners and operators to complete an annual registration, pay compliance fees, and submit detailed voyage reports, sampling plans and discharge logs.

Also, critics say the current program is less stringent than the Ocean Ranger, which has been effectively dead since 2019 due to Gov. Mike Dunleavy vetoing its operating funding. Monitors with the program filed 1,580 daily reports in 2018, the last year it was active, compared to 76 total inspections on large cruise ships by DEC in 2025.

"The program was extensive, but also expensive," Kiehl stated in his email to the Independent. "There was room to reform it, but Dunleavy wanted only to end it. Thus his vetoes. I worked with the administration in its early years to get the kind of inspections that just got dismantled. They weren't what Alaska voters said to do, but in the face of the veto they were marginally adequate as far as they went. Now it would appear that's too much for this outgoing governor."

DEC recorded 21 instances of cruise ships failing to meet wastewater regulations in 2025, compared to 56 wastewater and 40 oil pollution

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INSPECTION

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violations reported by Ocean Ranger observers in 2018, according to a Chilkat Valley News article published in April. But the article also notes that of 264 reported wastewater violations in 12 years of the Ocean Ranger program, only six resulted in notices of violation from state officials.

Bates said that while Ocean Ranger participants conducted in-person inspections on vessels, it was up to DEC officials to assess the findings.

"The important part there is they didn't have inspection credentials," he said of the Ocean Rangers. "They didn't have enforcement capacity. What they could do is write reports, submit those reports to us, and then we would look at them after the fact, and decide, is there anything to do with these reports and the numbers they show?"

Kiehl acknowledged "one benefit (of the new program) was that the inspectors were DEC employees so they could hypothetically write a citation for a violation on the spot, whereas rangers were contractors who could write a report that had to be followed up. Occasional overnight port-to-ports were also much cheaper because there was no need to buy a cabin for the whole cruise the way we did with the rangers."

The flip side, he wrote, "the DEC inspectors don't have the same breadth of authority to look at every-



People walk along the downtown cruise ship dock on June 1, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

thing onboard that the rangers did."

A \$4 per-passenger berth fee is still collected via the Ocean Ranger program approved by voters in 2006, but funding is being redirected to other uses — including possible electrical hookups at cruise ship docks in Juneau and Ketchikan.

Reviving the original project is still being discussed by some state politicians. Hannan, in a text message to the Independent, stated the program was again part of this year's budget discussions, and former gubernatorial candidate Tom Begich called for restoring it during his abandoned campaign.

Questions about industry's compliance with the state's self-reporting requirements again surfaced this spring due to Carnival Corp. withholding water pollution data from state officials.

Carnival argued DEC has authority over wastewater including sewage and greywater, but not exhaust fil-

tered through what are known as "scrubbers" — and can be discharged into the sea — since that is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Bates, in a letter to the company, challenged that as a basis to withhold data from the state.

In an opinion essay published by the Juneau Independent on Thursday, Bates stated DEC this past season "focused its routine cruise ship wastewater inspections on the discharges regulated under the state's wastewater permit."

"That does not mean scrubber discharges are unregulated, nor does it limit DEC's ability to address water-quality concerns within its jurisdiction," he wrote.

Because the change occurred at the midpoint of the cruise season, inspections of ships before that were still conducted at the higher pace that

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INSPECTION

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guided annual inspections, said Gene McCabe, director of DEC's Division of Water. As a result, he estimates about 80% of cruise ships arriving in Alaska this year were inspected under the program by July 1.

"So any ship we didn't inspect this year, next year absolutely is on the list, right?" he said. "We're going to inspect those first. We are likely, until we normalize, going to have to have a couple of vessels to even out the inspection schedule that we'll have to do again next year, but once we hit the '28 cruise season we should be on that odd-year, even-year schedule by that point."

McCabe said the number of violations from this year's inspections is not yet available since the season is just reaching its end. The last cruise ship in Juneau is scheduled to depart on Tuesday.

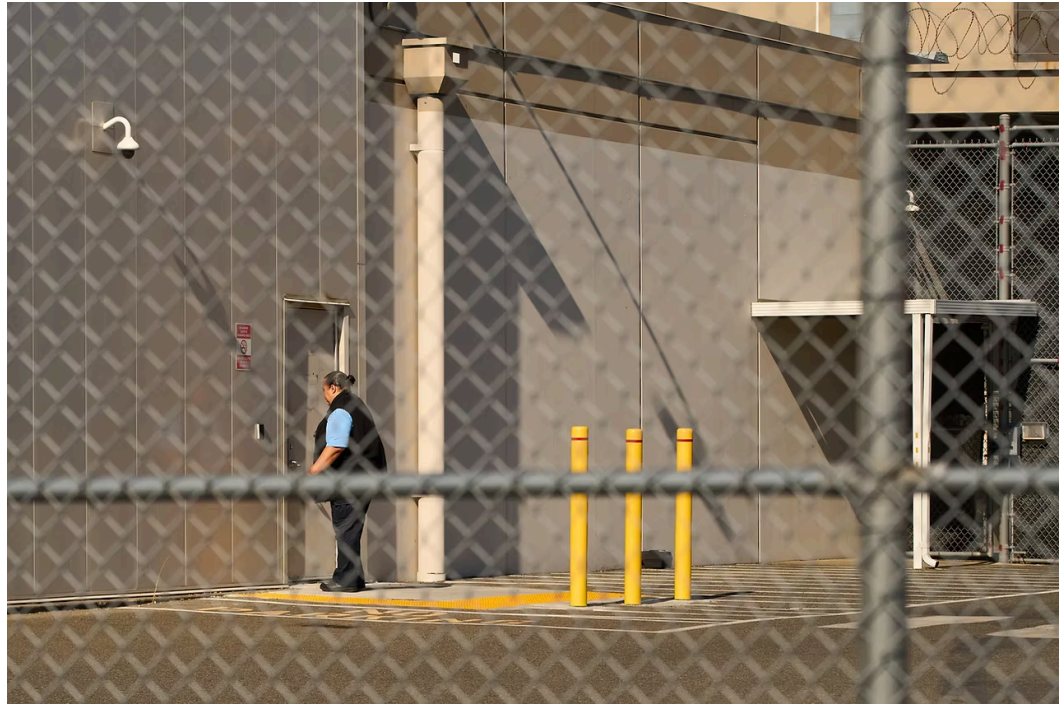
"This time of year is when they start crunching all the data and they're going to start comparing all that," McCabe said.

DEC's cutback in cruise ship inspections is part of a series of environmental protections that have either been proposed or implemented since President Donald Trump began his second term in January 2025, with state officials often citing his day-one executive order to repeal all regulations that inhibit maximum utilization of natural resources. Bates said he doesn't see a connection between that agenda and the department's new inspection policy.

"I was not told. I was not guided. This is just common practice," he said.

• Contact Mark Sabbatini at editor@juneauindependent.com or (907) 957-2306.

Juneau man in ICE custody after being arrested for drunk driving



A GEO Group employee enters a building at the Northwest ICE Processing Center, Wednesday, Aug. 13, 2025, in Tacoma, Wash. (AP Photo / Lindsey Wasson)

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

Mario Alberto Trejo Reynoso, 27, is in federal custody on an immigration violation after being arrested by Juneau police for driving while intoxicated in September.

Juneau Police Department Chief Derek Bos said a report was made of a suspicious vehicle parked in the driveway of a residence on Sept. 27. A police bulletin shows the incident occurred in the area of Stephen Richards Memorial Drive in the Mendenhall Valley.

"The homeowner reported that they did not know the driver, nor recognize the vehicle. They also reported that the driver appeared to be intoxicated, slumping over the steering wheel of the vehicle," Bos wrote in an email Thursday. "JPD officers responded to the residence, locating the vehicle still in the driveway, and contacted the driver and sole occupant, who was

later identified as Reynoso. After the on-scene investigation and later submitting to a breath test that demonstrated his blood alcohol content was over the legal limit, Reynoso was arrested and charged with driving under the influence of alcohol."

He was transferred to Lemon Creek Correctional Center. After being turned over to DOC custody, the correctional center contacted ICE and Reynoso was subsequently placed on a federal detainer.

He was previously cited by Juneau police for driving without a valid license in June and then released, according to court records.

Mexico is his country of origin. He was in the custody of the Alaska Department of Corrections from Sept. 27 to Sunday.

Reynoso moved from Lemon Creek to the Anchorage Correctional Complex on Sept. 30, according to Betsy

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ICE

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Holley, a DOC spokesperson.

As of Thursday, Reynoso is at the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma, Washington, according to the U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement database.

Holley wrote in an email Thursday to the Juneau Independent that one person remains on hold at the Anchorage Correctional Complex: Honorio Barreto from Senegal. Alaska DOC has an agreement with ICE to hold immigration detainees on civil charges.

Reynoso is at least the sixth Juneau resident to be detained since the beginning of 2025. Additionally, a man from Sitka was held at Lemon Creek in February 2026 and then discharged from DOC the same month. Most of the arrests have resulted in transfers to federal custody outside of Alaska.

Once they are in federal custody, the Juneau residents can become difficult to track.

In July, U.S. Border Patrol officials detained a 52-year-old man in Juneau named Jose Manuel Rivera-Rivera. Holley said he didn't declare a country of origin. After his arrest, the Independent received phone calls from his friends, saying they were upset because Rivera-Rivera is not a criminal and he provided for his family.

He was placed on a federal hold and discharged out of DOC's system on Aug. 4, Holley said. During his arrest, local U.S. Border Patrol agents requested assistance from JPD to "de-escalate the incident," Bos said at the time. Rivera-Rivera and Reynoso have no record of criminal charges in the Alaska court system's database or federally.

Some states, such as Florida, have laws requiring local law enforcement

to collaborate with ICE. Alaska is not one of them and instead defines cooperation as voluntary. JPD doesn't have an official partnership with ICE or CBP that allows them to act on behalf of federal officers and is not pursuing an agreement, Bos said.

After Rivera-Rivera's removal from Juneau, the Independent talked with Margaret Stock, an immigration attorney based in Anchorage. She is not his attorney. She said Customs and Border Patrol agents typically make civil arrests for immigration violations.

"The immigration agents in Alaska have been very active, trying to find people to arrest because they're trying to get their quota numbers up," Stock said during an August interview.

Stock said there was an uptick in arrests nationwide in July and Alaska is not immune to these trends. ICE arrested more than 46,000 people in July.

"One of them was the attorney for the state of Alaska," she said. "He had no criminal record. They also started arresting immigrants who arrive at the (Ted Stevens Anchorage International) airport looking for jobs in Alaska, even though they're legal and they're allowed to work."

Stock said she's been watching incidents like this happen where "nobody who got arrested had committed a crime."

A majority of the immigrants arrested in July were people who were accused of violating civil immigration laws, but who had not been charged with or convicted of a crime, a New York Times analysis of federal data shows.

"What I'm seeing sometimes is people are pulled over on a traffic violation, and it could be the passenger in the vehicle that gets arrested, and they haven't done anything wrong at all,"

Stock said. "Maybe the driver allegedly did something, but also they're not even committing traffic violations in some cases. It's just ICE has a database of people they're trying to arrest, and they have surveillance going on now, so they know where their cars are, and they know to pull them over because there's somebody in the car that they think has violated immigration law."

Her account matches reports in national news that instead of highly publicized immigration crackdowns, agents are turning to traffic stops and airport arrests.

In July, the White House pushed ICE to hit a target of 2,000 arrests per day. As of October, the goal was 3,000 per day, according to CNN. Senior Trump officials have repeatedly denied that agents are required to meet arrest quotas, describing the push as a goal, the article states.

An annual refugee picnic, usually held in the fall by local sponsors of the Juneau Refugee Resettlement, did not take place this year due to organizers traveling.

"Also, it might not be a good idea to gather in groups right now," wrote Joyanne Bloom, a local sponsor, in an email.

• *Contact Jasz Garrett at jasz@juneauindependent.com or (907) 723-9356.*

ELECTION

Continued from page 1

A ballot measure raising the property tax cap to 12 mills instead of nine is still narrowly failing, while the renewal of Juneau 3% temporary sales tax for another five years has passed by a dominant margin, according to the results.

ELECTION

Continued from page 12

In the Juneau Board of Education race, incumbents David Noon and Britteny Cioni-Haywood each appear to have secured a second three-year term, finishing well ahead of challenger Christine Johnson.

The 1% seasonal sales tax was placed on the ballot by a citizens' petition in response to successful ballot measures last year that exempted food and utilities from sales tax, and reduced the mill rate cap to nine instead of 12. Voters last year also soundly rejected a more sweeping seasonal sales tax setting a total rate of 3% from October to March, and 7.5% from April to September.

The Assembly made a series of reductions to the current fiscal year budget as a result, including scaling back Juneau-Douglas City Museum operations and closing the Mount Jumbo Gym, but avoided some proposals such as closing city pools and other recreation facilities. The seasonal tax is projected to raise about \$6.8 million annually, split between locals and visitors, with the ballot language stating an intent to "fund indoor and outdoor recreation." However, city leaders are not required to spend the tax revenue for that purpose.

Michael Cole, the lead petitioner of the sales tax initiative, said in an interview Wednesday he was encouraged by early results that showed the measure passing, although he was hoping the mill rate hike would pass as well.

"I guess it's one step at a time and we were really hoping for everything to go through," he said. "But at the same time we'll take our little wins and see what happens."

Pat Race, the lead petitioner on the mill cap initiative, stated in a text message to the Juneau Independent on Friday night that "I'm happy with the re-

sults, we've put more revenue on the table for the city services and facilities we were working to protect and there's a clear message from voters that indoor and outdoor recreation are a priority for Juneau residents."

The District 2 Assembly race was the most competitive on the ballot, with four challengers seeking to fill the seat occupied by departing incumbent Christine Woll. Niven had 32.79% of the vote as of Friday night, ahead of Malachi Thorington at 26.1%, Karla Hart at 23.82% and David Morris at 17.28%.

"I'm thankful for all the voters for voting for me and having confidence in me, and I can't wait to get to work," said Niven, a longtime financial and administrative manager for the Tlingit Haida Regional Housing Authority until she retired last year, in an interview after Friday's results were released.

Niven said she was glad to see the seasonal sales tax and renewal of the 3% tax pass, but "I guess not surprised that the mill rate didn't pass." However, she said the city should have a "definitely workable" financial situation during the coming budget process with the measures that did pass.

Kelly was elected to a second three-year term with 61.79%, ahead of Brad Sapp at 32.47% and James McCants at 5.75%.

"I feel that it validates a lot of the work that I've done so far," Kelly said in an interview Friday night. "When you're on the Assembly you don't always get the chance to take an opinion poll."

In addition to Niven replacing Woll, the Assembly District 1 seat occupied by departing member Alicia Hughes-Skandijs will be filled by Mila Cosgrove, a former deputy city manager for several years, who ran unopposed. Kelly said he isn't sure how that will affect the Assembly's makeup.

"It definitely shifts the age demographic," Kelly said, since Cosgrove

and Niven are older than the members they are replacing. But beyond that "I think Christine and Alicia both brought experience from being on the Assembly. I think Mila Cosgrove is going to bring experience from being the deputy city manager for quite a few years. And then I think Joyce, she's going to bring a lot of experience, I think, with dealing with housing issues from her employment with Tlingit and Haida. I think that'll be a good value to have."

The following are results as of 7:46 p.m. Friday:

Assembly Areawide

Paul Kelly 61.79% (5,412 votes), Brad Sapp 32.47% (2,844 votes), James McCants 5.74% (503 votes)

Assembly District 1

Mila Cosgrove 100% (6,737 votes)

Assembly District 2

Joyce Niven 32.79% (2,873 votes), Malachi Thorington 26.1% (2,287 votes), Karla Hart 23.82% (2,087 votes), David Morris 17.28% (1,514 votes)

Juneau Board of Education

David Noon 40.03% (5,596 votes), Britteny Cioni-Haywood 36.22% (5,063 votes), Christine Johnson 23.74% (3,319 votes)

Proposition A: Renew 3% sales tax

Yes 79.9% (7,580 votes); No 20.1% (1,907 votes)

Proposition B: Raise property tax to 12 mills

Yes 47.21% (4,543 votes); No 52.79% (5,080 votes)

Proposition C: 1% seasonal sales tax

Yes 56.9% (5,503 votes); No 43.1% (4,168 votes)

• *Contact Mark Sabbatini at editor@juneauindependent.com or (907) 957-2306.*

Juneau gets all decked out look at USS Ted Stevens

Big weaponry makes big impression, but ship named after Alaska senator 'is the most technologically advanced and there are things that we just need people not to see,' master-at-arms says



U.S. Navy Master-at-Arms First Class Janessa Stallings explains weapons capabilities aboard the USS Ted Stevens during a public tour in Juneau on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Amy Lloyd's simple — but strenuous — lesson plan for the five U.S. government classes she taught Thursday was taking her students, about 100 in all, aboard the USS Ted Stevens for a tour of the U.S. Navy's new guided-missile destroyer.

"I mean, how often do you have a battleship in town?" she said after completing one of the tours at midday.

A group of students departing the ship with her offered rave reviews for field trip which offered a powerful learning experience.

"We got to go to the upper deck with

all the missiles and everything," said Sonny Mazon, a senior at Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé, adding for him it was "the first time and probably the only time" aboard a military ship.

Riley Schultz, another student on the tour, said the most memorable part was the five-inch/54-caliber Mark 45 lightweight gun on the ship's forecas-tle.

"It shoots like 13 miles or something," she said.

The 510-foot-long USS Ted Stevens was commissioned on Oct. 3 in Whit-tier and is making a five-day stop in Juneau on its way back to its homeport

of Norfolk, Virginia. The ship is named after former longtime U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, a World War II veteran.

Public tours scheduled Thursday and Friday were fully booked by Thursday morning, and the commu-nity also showed support by hosting a downtown block party with live music and other activities Thursday evening.

Lloyd, in an email to the Juneau Independent after her day of tours, stated "I feel so very fortunate that we were able to get so many U.S. govern-ment and civic students on board the USS Ted Stevens because it really is a rare opportunity."

"Many students who do not have family or friends in the military think of elders when they hear about veter-ans, so it was especially cool to have them see so many young, active mili-tary servicemen and servicewomen," she wrote.

Lloyd said the tours also were a learning experience for her.

"My favorite thing that I learned is that several things are named after Alaskan themes such as the rescue boats are 'Denal' and 'Kodiak,'" she wrote. "The two guns in the bridge area are named 'Togo' and 'Balto,' and the mess hall is called the 'Denali Diner.'"

One of the midday tours Thursday was led by U.S. Navy Master-at-Arms First
See Stevens on Page 15

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STEVENS

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Class Janessa Stallings, a 14-year Navy enlistee who told her tour group of about a dozen people she's the only law enforcement officer aboard.

"I'm also the anti-terrorism force protection trainer," she said. "So I teach this ship and the crew how to defend themselves and the ship and each other."

While Stallings was able to show the topside of the ship and discuss details such as its weaponry, rescue boats and types of missions its 325 crew members will take part in, the interior of the ship was off-limits for what she said were security reasons.

"Because we're the newest ship we are the most technologically advanced and there are things that we just need people not to see," she said.

Stallings said she has previously served aboard the USS George H. W. Bush, a Nimitz-class supercarrier more than twice the length of the USS Ted Stevens, but also was a "dirt sailor" who spent much of her time standing watch ashore "so it's pretty cool having the opportunity to come back to a ship."

She said when she returned to duty after maternity leave she was offered the option of an aircraft carrier — which she'd already done — or one of two new ships including the USS Ted Stevens.

In addition to the five-inch deck gun that got plenty of attention for its front-deck prominence, the ship has seven other deck guns since the biggest one isn't practical for close encounters, Stallings said.

"This is not going to be able to handle something that's 300 feet away," she said. "So we'll have smaller weapons to handle a small vessel that got too close. If we've got somebody that's getting that close we're going to be communicating with them continu-



Visitors board the USS Ted Stevens at the Juneau cruise dock for a tour Thursday, Oct. 8, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

ously in every way we can think of until they have decided that they don't want to listen, and then we have to take very decisive action and put them in their place quickly."

The USS Ted Stevens also has two torpedo tubes and a Mark 41 vertical missile launching system which, when viewed from the deck, looks like a couple of rows of closed hatch doors.

"If you've never gotten to see one go off it's pretty extraordinary," Stallings said. "We did some testing this summer, which was pretty awesome to witness. I was right up there on the bridge when we got to shoot it off. See this red circle going all the way around? You do not want to be in that circle, or even on deck, when this thing is going off."

Among the questions visitors asked was what she thinks of the crews' quarters.

"They're smaller than what I expected coming from a carrier," she said. The reason for that is "we had to put a lot of equipment in here, so we pinched corners where we could and we took out a lot of the luxury."

Stallings said the ship has a larger number of female crew members, about 70, compared to 40 or less that is typical for a Navy destroyer.

"What I love about our operations

department is about 30 females are in our operations department and most of them are female bosuns," she said. "So they're out here, these young ladies, working the men out of a job. And I think that's pretty awesome, that one of the harder physical labor jobs we've got a very heavy woman-dominated department here."

Also, the commanding officer of the USS Ted Stevens is Capt. Mary Katey Hayes and there are two junior officers who are women, Stallings said.

The tour ended at a table where three crew members were selling mementos such as travel mugs with the ship's name, although they took a momentary break from that duty to pose for a picture in front of the five-inch deck gun with Jethro Salva, 9, taken by his mother.

"We thought it was a very good opportunity to see what the U.S. Navy is doing, especially since this is the latest ship they're launching," said Christian Salva, who escorted her son on the tour. She said his father was in the Philippine Army and "it's in our family to defend the country, so it always fascinates me to see what armies everywhere are doing."

• *Contact Mark Sabbatini at editor@juneauindependent.com or (907) 957-2306.*

Man with knife who barricades self in building near Capitol surrenders to police after standoff



Emergency responders bring out a man who barricaded himself in a downtown office building on Friday, Oct. 9, 2026. He surrendered to police and is being detained on a mental health hold. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

JPD reports suspect had been walking around armed for hours before entering building; first floor evacuated during incident lasting about two hours, no injuries reported

A man seen carrying a knife for hours who barricaded himself in an office building on 3rd Street near the Alaska State Capitol surrendered after a standoff with police lasting about two hours at midday Friday, according to Juneau Police Department Chief Derek Bos.

The man, whose identity was not immediately available, was brought out of the building at 150 3rd Street on a gurney and is being detained on a mental health hold, Bos said.

"Our crisis negotiation team talked him down," he said. "He surrendered his weapons voluntarily."

Bos initially said the man was in possession of multiple knives, but a subsequent statement by the depart-

ment noted the man had a knife and a screwdriver.

No injuries to people were reported, but the man did threaten officers, Bos said. People on the other two floors of the building, which houses the Office of Public Advocacy, sheltered in place during the incident.

Police closed 3rd Street between Main Street and Seward Street until the standoff ended.

A JPD information release issued Friday afternoon states police were notified at 9:44 a.m. of a disturbance in the 600 block of Willoughby Avenue "involving a man yelling nonsensical statements and holding up a knife."

"Responding officers located the man walking on Willoughby Ave, but he fled on foot," the release notes. "At the time, Officers were also investigating a report that the man was trespassing in the area of Foodland in violation of his conditions of release."

Another report of the man acting erratically near South Franklin Street

and Front Street was received by JPD at 11:08 a.m., according to the department.

"He was reportedly making nonsensical statements and waving his arms, with a knife protruding from a jacket pocket," the statement notes. "Officers attempted to contact him, but he again fled on foot. Because the man had a knife, officers proceeded cautiously and gave him space in an effort to de-escalate the situation."

"While officers requested medical assistance and a mobile crisis response, the man entered the Public Advocacy Center at 150 West Third Street. He immediately went into a side room and locked himself inside, alone. Multiple people were inside the building, but JPD is not aware of anyone who interacted with or was threatened by the man."

The man, after discussions with crisis team officials, eventually came out voluntarily and was detained without further incident, according to the JPD release. He was transported to Bartlett Regional Hospital for medical evaluation due to his condition.

• *Contact Mark Sabbatini at editor@juneauindependent.com or (907) 957-2306.*



Emergency responders bring out a man who barricaded himself in a downtown office building on Friday, Oct. 9, 2026. He surrendered to police and is being detained on a mental health hold. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

Voices

Consequences of CBJ budget cuts to viability of hospice in Juneau

By the Foundation for End of Life Care board of directors

Ben Franklin said nothing is certain but death and taxes. Most of us would rather dwell on taxes.

But as the inevitable draws near, roughly 80% of us prefer to pass away in our homes, without pain and discomfort, surrounded by family and friends. Yet nationally, only about a third of us actually do, and less than a quarter in Juneau. Prominent among the reasons so few of us spend our final days at home are a lack of understanding of the availability and benefits of home health and hospice services.

Hospice aims to ensure we are as comfortable as possible, and to empower our control and dignity, during our final days. Hospice services include pain management authorized and supervised by medical staff, providing medical supplies and equipment, assistance with bathing and daily tasks, and counseling, spiritual, and grief support. Hospice doctors and nurses are on-call 24/7. Medicare and Medicaid cover all these services for the patient, so affordability is thankfully not usually a major concern for those who take advantage of hospice.

Unfortunately, the continued availability of hospice services in Juneau is in jeopardy. Bartlett Regional Hospital is the sole provider of home health and hospice. Continuing to provide hospice services adds to the financial challenges Bartlett already faces. Hospice services cannot break even, because Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement is based primarily on the number of days these services are provided to a patient, but the 24/7 on-call require-

ment means that Bartlett must maintain at least six medical staff dedicated to hospice and home health. Approximately 50 of the 200 people who pass away annually in Juneau use hospice, and most don't start until a week or so before they pass. These are about half the national hospice utilization rates. Consequently, revenue from Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement doesn't cover unavoidable costs.

It has been shown that beginning hospice care early means a better quality of life, and often a longer life than predicted. This is why the Foundation for End of Life Care's primary mission is to advocate for hospice services and educate patients, physicians, and the public about hospice and end-of-life services. The foundation is engaged in multiple efforts to increase public awareness of the value and availability of home health and hospice in Juneau.

Like the rest of the country, Juneau's over-60 population is the only demographic that has increased every year since 2014. It now accounts for a fourth of our population. This trend results from the aging baby-boomer generation, and is unlikely to reverse anytime soon. Demand for hospice services will only increase. Our immediate objectives focus on efforts to increase both the number of people who qualify for hospice, and the average number of days patients use hospice services by 50%. Doing these things takes time and education. However, if achieved, would go a long way towards making hospice fiscally sustainable.

We applaud the Juneau Assembly's continuing commitment to annually appropriate at least \$200,000 to show community support for the hospice shortfall. We are concerned the Assembly's action this summer transferred \$250,000 from the BRH budget to pay for rehabilitation programs. Bartlett board member Max Mertz and

former CBJ Finance Director Bob Bartholomew recently articulated the negative consequences of that decision. That re-appropriation should not be at the expense of hospice, which is part of the spectrum of health care from birth to end of life.

We must also be concerned of potential consequences of decisions made as we work towards a Juneau that is affordable and a better place to live for all. We must ensure that Bartlett's Hospice Program is not unaffordable for our aging population or absent from our community again. Placing individuals in situations where they may be faced with the difficult decision of leaving Juneau and their loved ones at the end of life to obtain hospice elsewhere is unthinkable.

We must maintain Juneau's only home health and hospice program that is vital to Juneau's residents, and the initiatives and decisions that will make that possible.

• *The Foundation for End of Life Care board of directors are Bruce Weyhrauch, Roman Moytka, Julie Staley, Carrie Pusich, Murray Buttner, Jeffrey Short, Bob Urata, Angela Davis, Laura Kelly, Jennifer Hayes*

How Alaska checks cruise ship wastewater

By RANDY BATES

When Alaskans hear that a wastewater treatment facility has exceeded a permit limit, it is reasonable to ask: What happened? Did the system fail? How did regulators know? And what is being done to fix it?

Those are the right questions. Environmental protection is not about assuming that a permitted facility will

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CRUISE

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never have a problem. It is about having a system that identifies problems, requires corrective action, and verifies that those corrections work.

That is how Alaska's wastewater regulatory system is designed to work, whether the facility serves a community on land or is a cruise ship traveling through our waters.

As another cruise season comes to a close in Alaska, it is a good time to ask another straightforward question: How does Alaska make sure cruise ships are meeting our wastewater requirements?

Before each season, DEC staff review Vessel-Specific Sampling Plans to ensure they provide the information necessary to contact, monitor, and appropriately sample each vessel.

Cruise ships authorized to discharge treated sewage and greywater (water from sinks, showers, and laundry) must meet Alaska's wastewater requirements and document their compliance. Independent laboratories collect and analyze compliance samples. Vessel operators submit laboratory results, daily discharge logs, and location reports showing what was discharged, when, and where. DEC reviews those results and the accompanying records throughout the season.

The vessel operators must also notify DEC when monitoring identifies a compliance problem.

Required self-monitoring and reporting are central to wastewater regulation across the country. Operators must measure and report their discharges, while regulators review those results and use inspections to verify compliance. Laboratory testing and required reporting provide a continuing picture of how a wastewater treatment system

is performing between inspections.

Inspections are another important part of the regulatory system. Prior to an onboard inspection, DEC staff have already reviewed the compliance results to date and have noted any areas of concern for discussion. Once DEC inspectors go aboard, they examine wastewater treatment equipment, piping, discharge controls, sampling locations, and maintenance records. They verify that the systems and practices aboard a vessel are consistent with the information provided to the department and that sampling locations accurately represent the wastewater being discharged.

This year, DEC adjusted its routine inspection schedule for large cruise ships to better align with the broader wastewater oversight approach and frequency used for other major wastewater facilities, including publicly owned community treatment plants. DEC now conducts routine onboard inspections at least once every two years. That schedule is a baseline, not a limit on DEC's daily review of cruise ship discharges or its broader oversight. The change does not relax cruise ships' discharge limits or their obligation to document compliance.

Monitoring results, complaints, inspection findings, or other information can prompt DEC to conduct additional inspections or investigations when warranted. When a result exceeds a permit limit or other information raises a compliance concern, DEC can require corrective action and review subsequent monitoring and documentation to determine whether the problem has been resolved.

In other words, a DEC inspector does not have to be standing beside a discharge for the department to know when there may be a problem.

When a problem is identified, DEC

responds without waiting for the next routine inspection.

Another question we have received concerns exhaust gas cleaning systems, commonly called scrubbers. These systems remove pollutants from ship exhaust and can produce wastewater.

Scrubber wastewater and treated sewage and greywater are separate waste streams governed by different permits. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency administers the federal requirements for scrubber wastewater discharges, while DEC administers Alaska's permit for treated sewage and greywater from large cruise ships.

DEC has therefore focused its routine cruise ship wastewater inspections on the discharges regulated under the state's wastewater permit. That does not mean scrubber discharges are unregulated, nor does it limit DEC's ability to address water-quality concerns within its jurisdiction.

Alaskans can see this work for themselves. DEC makes inspection reports, compliance letters, and notices of violation available through its Environmental Data Management System. Our cruise ship public resources page explains how to access those records.

Our responsibility is straightforward: protect Alaska's waters, know what is being discharged into them, identify problems when they occur, and make sure they are corrected. The tools we use to do that will continue to evolve as we learn what works best. But our expectation remains the same for every permitted wastewater discharger: meet Alaska's requirements, be accountable for your discharge, and protect Alaska's waters.

• *Randy Bates is the commissioner of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.*

Sports

Juneau triathletes storm Madison endurance races

High Cadence Triathlon Team 'try' IRONMAN Wisconsin and IRONMAN 70.3 Wisconsin

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

Juneau's High Cadence Triathlon Team tested the lake waters, farmlands and suburban bike paths and city streets of Madison, Wisconsin in a pair of IRONMAN triathlons last month.

Led by HCTT coach Jenna Wiersma, 40, four members of the team — husband Dan Wiersma, 40, Melanie White, 70, Stephanie Sauve, 39, and Megan Hendrickson, 36 — raced the IRONMAN 70.3 Wisconsin on Sept. 12 and coach Wiersma raced the full IRONMAN Wisconsin on Sept. 13.

"I knew I wanted to do a full IRONMAN in 2022 when I watched my husband do IRONMAN Alaska," J. Wiersma said. "I saw him cross the finish line with emotions I had never felt completing any endurance event and thought, I want to feel that way. At that point, I had completed over a dozen marathons and a few ultras and shorter distance triathlons, and started doing 70.3 distance races. I had completed seven 70.3 distance triathlons before signing up for the full IRONMAN and really enjoyed the training, the races themselves, and performed well at them. That motivated me to want to see what doing a full felt like."

Her race would have to wait as coaching four team members came first. Charlie Waters, also an accomplished triathlete, traveled with the team as a crew member.

Known as the "Badger State" or "America's Dairyland," Wisconsin has the only event that hosts the half and full triathlons on back-to-back days and roughly 2,000 triathletes were in each distance. The Juneau triathletes chose to honor the state by wearing Wisconsin-inspired cheese-themed



High Cadence Triathlon Team members, from left to right, Megan Hendrickson, Jenna Wiersma, Melanie White, Stephanie Sauve, Charlie Waters, and Daniel Wiersma pose for a photo during IRONMAN pre-race events in Madison, Wisconsin, Sept. 10, 2026. (Photo courtesy High Cadence Triathlon Team)

flannel custom shorts made by Juneau seamstress Jean Larson-Rein of Stink Rat Stitches. The attire was for recreating before and after.

Daniel Wiersma was competing in his sixth 70.3 distance and first since recovering from a meniscus tear in December 2024. Roughly a year later, he had built up to 45 minutes of run-walk intervals.

He placed 45th in his age group (M 40-44) with a time of five hours 50 minutes and 59 seconds. His personal best is 4:46:49.

"This past year I was focused on endurance biking, mainly on gravel," D. Wiersma said. "I did three races before shifting back to a triathlon focus. I knew it was going to be slow going as I didn't give myself enough time to build my run. While all the biking was great for cardio, running is more impact and different muscles. As the 70.3 got closer, I started having repetitive ham string strains — probably a TT bike fit issue — and seriously considered not doing the run portion at all. I did opt to do the whole thing and

chose a conservative approach: racing the swim, using a road bike to minimize fit issues and then focusing on fun for the run."

The Madison half-IRONMAN course started with a 1.2-mile swim in Lake Monona. The swim route took triathletes along roughly eight blocks of Madison's John Nolen Drive, just off Capitol Centre Park, and past a shoreline of cheering tri fans.

The 56.9-mile bike portion left Madison and went through the suburbs of Fitchburg, Oregon, Brooklyn, Belleville and Verona. The rolling route had four climbs of over 1,000 feet.

The 12.8-mile run was along the Lake Monona waterfront again, with a crossing over to the Lake Menomona side and back. The main attraction was the views of downtown Madison and streets lined with fans in a six-mile out-and-back course that finished at Madison's Capitol.

"At one point I left the course, jumped in a river, then came back onto

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the course at the same spot to keep jogging it,” D. Wiersman said. “My hamstrings held on until just shy of nine miles. After a recovery walk I started jogging easy to the end. The vibes were awesome on the course, and it was great to see Mel, Megan and Steph doing the race. Matching race kits made spotting each other easy. While the race was far from my fastest, it will be one of the more memorable ones because I wasn’t glued to my computer at max effort. I got to talk to volunteers, course officials, and joke with spectators. The race was a celebration of recovery and hard work and friendship in sport.”

Hendrickson and Suave were competing in their first 70.3 distance triathlon.

“My goals were to enjoy the experience and to finish,” Hendrickson said. “It was hot for the run and a lot of people were struggling with the heat, including myself. As I was approaching the finish line, another racer fainted just in front of me. It was such a mix of emotions and a reminder of the challenge of the race. Even during the hard moments, I felt strong, happy and proud of myself.”

One of the hardest moments involved the “helix,” two spiraling concrete

garage ramps designed by Frank Lloyd Wright that are part of the Monona Terrace parking structure and are used as the transition from swim to bike.

“I am a very novice cyclist, so the idea of biking near so many other people was one of the things I was most nervous about going in,” Hendrickson said. “To start the bike portion, you ride down the helix of a parking garage and then the majority of the ride was on rolling country roads. I took more turns during those 56 miles than I had in all of my months training in Juneau. As I was riding back up the helix, I remember thinking that I was returning to the parking garage a better cyclist than I was when I left it.”

The race finishes running up the helix, through the parking garage and then through the finisher shoot.

“I had told myself that I was going to finish strong for the last mile and push a little harder but had forgotten that it would be mostly climbing,” Hendrickson said. “Going up the helix, I was the only racer not walking the climb at that point in the day and was very thankful for training on Juneau hills. We all had matching tri-kits that showed we were from Juneau and other racers cheered on that Alaska can handle the climb.”

Hendrickson finished in 7:46:44, 60th place for her age group (FM 36-

39). She swam 51:24, biked 3:55:11 and ran 2:39:45.

Suave finished in 8:05:56, 65th in her age group (FM 36-39). She swam 1:02:16, biked 4:09:10 and ran 2:37:18.

“There were great parts in all three portions of the race,” Suave said. “The swim was great because it was just such a beautiful morning. I saw a group of birds fly off into the sunrise as I swam, the water glittered. I was nervous so I took it one buoy at a time. I pretended I was hunting them down. I’d pass a buoy, find the next one and say in my head, ‘you’re next b—h.’ The bike was fun and since I was in the back of the pack everyone was super chill because we are not the competitive group. We are the ones simply trying to survive this race. It was a nice and supportive group.”

Suave needed that support during her run.

“It was a double loop so we ended up passing a lot of the same people a couple times,” Suave said. “I ended up passing by my friend Mel more than once. It was so great because each time we saw each other we stopped and hugged in our matching outfits. It put a little pep in my step every time. Mel is amazing. It was so cool to see her still doing triathlons in her 70s. She’s an inspiration for all of us. It was the worst half marathon of my life. I’ve never walked so much for a half. I’d run until I felt like I was going to vomit or pass out then I’d take a little walkie break. I said in my head, I can do hard things. I also said this out loud in the porta potty as I struggled to get my very wet tri-suit back on.”

White finished in 7:42:41, winning a trophy for placing second in her age group (FM 70-74). She swam 44:08, biked 3:35:17 and ran 3:02:23. This was her seventh 70.3 distance.

“I am always surprised at doing well in my age group,” White said. “I am

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High Cadence Triathlon Team 70.3 Wisconsin finishers pose for a photo in Madison after their race, Sept. 12, 2026. From left to right are Melanie White, Daniel Wiersma, Stephanie Sauve, and Megan Hendrickson. White finished in 7:42:41, Sauve in 8:05:56, Wiersman 5:50:59 and Hendrickson 7:46:44. (Photo by High Cadence Triathlon Team)

IRONMAN

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always nervous at the swim start, but once I get in a few strokes I am fine. I do like the swim even when it is congested. Jenna Wiersma had a good plan for me to follow. I did a lot of swimming, starting at the pool until the lake warmed up. I do like swimming in Auke Lake. I have learned that I get nervous, but I can do it even though it is hard. I did OK on the swim and bike. The run not so good. It was hot and I have a hard time in the heat. I have learned to have fun and if you have a good group to train with it makes a big difference."

The IRONMAN Wisconsin is double the 70.3 Wisconsin course. That means triathletes swim 2.4 miles (two laps), bike 112 miles on a slightly different course through the farmlands of Wisconsin and run the marathon distance 26.2 miles via two loops through Madison, Camp Randall Stadium, the UW Lakeshore Nature Reserve and the Capitol. All areas are lined with spectators.

"When I lined up to start the race, and because it was my first full, I turned all data (pace, speed, etc.) off for myself other than my heart rate to make sure I was managing my zone two efforts accordingly," J. Wiersma said. Her swim time was 1:18:43. "I was doing the race for joy of the experience. I told my husband and team, I paid \$1,000, I better have the most fun day of my life. The swim was beautiful and so warm compared to what we get

in Juneau. I swim better in warmer water, so my swim was pretty solid. IRONMAN swims are a little congested, so that can slow you down a little as it was two laps with 2,000 athletes all in the water together. Thankfully, I was towards the front as a stronger swimmer, so it wasn't too congested until my second lap."

The entire course for both distances is filled with spectators and the cheering is needed. The race is considered one of the top three most challenging courses largely due to its technical bike course, which features the transition from the swim, up the spiraling east helix to reach their bikes.

The full distance uses three circular concrete turns — the half used two turns — all filled with thousands of spectators. Bikers exit on the west helix. Good descending and bike handling skills are required. The bike portion finishes with a ride up the west helix and the run portion goes down the east helix.

The 112-mile course features over 6,000 feet of total elevation gain over hilly terrain and unpredictable crosswinds.

"I really enjoyed it because I wasn't tracking any of my data except heart rate, and it was very engaging with a lot of short, punchy climbs and fast descents," J. Wiersma said. Her bike time was 6:58:42. "The bike was the longest part of the day, so I just did a manageable power and took in a ton of nutrition."

The run portion is considered hard due to rolling concrete hills and late-

race fatigue.

"The run was my absolute favorite part," J. Wiersma said. She hit a 4:19:40 marathon. "I paced the bike perfectly in a steady and manageable range and felt great physically on the entire run. I was tired, but noticed I was running past a lot of people, and the crowds on the run course were roaring and insane. It was like one of the big major marathons with people just lined in the streets the entire way. You felt like a celebrity."

Her full IRONMAN finish was 12 hours 57 minutes and 56 seconds. She placed 11th in her age group (FM 40-44) despite a minor bike crash on a climb when another athlete ran into her while passing. Her marathon run time was fifth overall and top five in her age group. She passed 250 athletes during the run.

"I don't think I can actually describe in words what I felt crossing the finish line," J. Wiersma said. "It was unlike any finish line I had ever made it to. I felt exhausted and simultaneously energized and full of all the emotions — gratitude, pride and joy. It felt surreal."

The group all received training plans from J. Wiersma, with the focus on each individual's weaknesses.

"For me it was swimming," Suave said. "I was most nervous about that part, but it ended up my favorite part of the race. We swam in Auke Lake and it was hardly ever above 59 degrees so it was nice to race in such warm water, because when you jump into freezing water your body can go

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GENERAL ELECTION

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF JUNEAU

IRONMAN

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into survival mode and do what's called the mammalian reflex. I just remember what coach Jenna says: 'Your body thinks it's going to die. You just have to get over it.' I tried my best not to take training too seriously so that I wouldn't psych myself out. I'd say things like, oh, just a casual 50-mile ride today. Just a casual half marathon on a Wednesday morning... Most of my training rides were out the road so I saw a lot of bears. This one little guy I saw a couple times and he just sat at the edge of the road curiously watching as I passed. I named him Cinnamon. Running is my favorite so I had shorter runs since I'd done a couple marathons in the past, but not a lot of long swims or bike rides."

Hendrickson started serious training six months before the race, doing a variety of different swims, bike rides and runs each week.

"Jenna wrote a training plan for me every two weeks that guided how to evolve the workouts and skills I was working on developing," Hendrickson said. "Towards the end of training, it was pretty common to do multiple workouts during a training day. I signed up for several local races, including Seacoast Relay, Juneau Half Marathon and Aukeman Triathlon to give me more variety in my training and event experience. Having a group of friends training for the same race was amazing because there was usually someone else also looking for a buddy. For the last two months, I committed myself to doing every workout outside, especially with how inexperienced I was at cycling and open water swimming, which led to some very drenched workouts."

J. Wiersma's training started a year ahead of the race.

"I started with robust strength training specific to triathlon with heavy lift-

ing to build my muscles and give my body as much prevention against injury as possible," she said. "After three months of dedicated strength building, I shifted to endurance building for another three months, and at six months out from the race began serious training blocks that included my final peak weeks of 17-22 hours a week of training. I thought I would dread the training at the end, but I truly loved it and thrived on it, which was not at all what I expected."

The five HCTT members had advice for those considering, but hesitant about doing, a triathlon. D. Wiersma said his advice is to "go do one. And train with friends. I have found that the variety in exercises — versus just one discipline — helps prevent injuries and keeps me engaged. Joining a club — no or low cost — can be a way to connect with other people and find training partners."

Suave said, "Just try it out and not think about it too hard. I tried because I was looking for something new after just running. I was getting hurt all the time because all I wanted to do was run. But I knew if I kept that up I might get hurt enough that I wouldn't get to run at all. So I tried the sprint Aukeman which each year just kept advancing. I started with a sprint, graduated to the Olympic distance and now did a 70.3. And I haven't had a real injury in a very long time since doing triathlons as opposed to just running. So it enabled me to keep doing the sport I love and stay healthy."

She noted it was challenging balancing work, being a mom and training.

"Some days were very long. I could be exercising for up to five hours," she said. "Then I'd have to come home and be with my daughter who I promised to play with after. Honestly, I skipped a couple workouts to be with her instead."

Hendrickson said, "I have had such a positive experience getting into triathlon over the past year, and Juneau

has an exceptionally encouraging, inclusive and welcoming community for it. If people are hesitant, I would encourage them to sign up for one of the Aukeman events next year and experience the cool community first-hand. I bet they'll be hooked!"

They all noted that the Juneau Parks and Recreation / Juneau Pools Dimond Dash in the spring is a good start. The short course swim is in a pool and the event is intended to be done with friends. The Aukeman triathlon partners with the pools and is intended to be a beginner-friendly event.

J. Wiersma became USAT Triathlon and IRONMAN Triathlon certified in 2024. That same year she became HCTT's new coach, being mentored and supported by long-time coach Jamie Bursell, who was retiring. The Wiersmas are on the Aukeman board. Daniel is official race director, but the two co-directed the last Aukeman Triathlon series along with board member Waters.

"I think that if you enjoy any of the individual disciplines, consider what is stopping you from trying one," J. Wiersma said. "If it's cost, you don't have to have fancy gear or do an IRONMAN-branded race. You can choose small, local races and use what gear you have. If it's learning to be better at one of the disciplines, every triathlete has to start somewhere and training for triathlon is really engaging and fun compared to training that is unilateral - just one sport."

Said White, "Aukeman sprint is a fun local race and is well done. What have you got to lose if you don't try? It is all about having fun with friends... Funny thing about this 70.3 in Wisconsin was it was going to be my last, but I signed up for another one. It was a fun group to go with. They don't mind playing with someone 30 years older."

• *Contact Klas Stolpe at sport-s@juneauindependent.com*

Crimson Bears ground Thunderbirds at home 35-14 to start playoff run

JDHS roster earns first postseason win of their high school careers

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

The gridiron lads in the Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé football team that vanquished Bettye Davis East Anchorage High School on Saturday night 35-14 on the Adair-Kennedy field were in middle or elementary school when the Crimson Bears fell in back-to-back state championship games.

"They were like superheroes to me," senior linebacker Jake Chambers said of the 2021, '22 state runner-ups. "Like, my brother played then. It felt like they were idols, you can never even touch that. They were my heroes and I got to watch them play."

Added senior running back Ethan Van Kirk, "It was like seeing superheroes on the field. I remember my eighth grade year I was sitting up in those bleachers right there at the top and I was watching one of those play-off games. It was just amazing. I felt so inspired by those guys. I hope I get to put some of that onto these middle schoolers today."

Now the 2026-27 Crimson Bears are chasing their own dream after winning the first home playoff game since 2022 and first home-night playoff game since 2019.

"A lot went through my mind then when I saw them play," senior quarterback Krew Ridle said. "I was the ball boy for the Crimson Bears that year, all the way up to state. It was a great



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior quarterback Krew Ridle dives towards the goal line in the second quarter as East Anchorage sophomore defensive back Kaiedenn Sanders (2) attempts a saving tackle in their state quarterfinal playoff game on the Adair-Kennedy Memorial Park field, Saturday, Oct. 10, 2026.. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

feeling and I am just so happy to have that feeling that they had when they were playing."

That feeling overwhelmed senior running back and linebacker Jaxin Jim who has played on the Adair-Kennedy field for 12 years.

"Oh man, I never would have believed that," an emotional Jim said before breaking into tears. "They were great. This is great, just great. I am glad we shut down their run. This is the last time I will ever play on this field... 12 years... I... oh man... I was in middle school and I looked up to all of them... they were such a good team... I just... This means a lot. My last time on this field."

Ridle, Chambers, Van Kirk, Jim and the Crimson Bears wasted little time getting started.

After giving up a seven-yard run by East starting junior quarterback Kiona Toa from the Thunderbirds' 26-yard line in the opening series, Crimson Bears junior defensive lineman Jarry Maghinay and sophomore defensive lineman Tayt Whiteley stopped Thunderbirds senior running back Thomas Curry on second-and-three. JDHS sophomore linebacker Carter Day followed with a sack of Toa for a one-yard loss on third-and-four, forcing a punt.

The JDHS offensive and defensive

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IF YOU DON'T HAVE HEART,
YOU'RE IN THE WRONG BUSINESS.

PLAYOFF

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lines would be the difference in the game. One of the main two-way line-men, senior Isaiah Galletes-Fale, opened the largest holes for his teammates and closed some of the biggest on his opponents.

"My mindset was just to get the guy out of my way," Galletes-Fale said. "Make sure that someone else behind me gets the glory of a touchdown, and I get the glory of making sure he gets it. I just feel so emotional right now. There is a lot of stuff that went into this. All four years we have never had a playoff at home, and to win it is really special. All credit goes to everyone behind me and next to me. It is just surreal to me right now."

JDHS started their series from their own 45-yard line and Ridle ran three times for a first down at the East 42. Jim ran for four yards and Ridle broke a 38-yard run through the East line for a 6-0 score with 7:57 remaining in the first quarter. A two-point conversion failed.

"It was just run fast, don't let them catch you," Ridle said. "Get a tone set for this game. It is all momentum and I wanted to set that momentum."

East was stopped on their next possession, working backwards from their own 35-yard line as JDHS junior line-backer Caleb Aube and junior defensive lineman Helaman Aitaoto-Tele'a tackled runners for a loss. East's Toa would leave the game with an injury after trying to unsuccessfully escape from JDHS' Aitaoto-Tele'a.

"It was a great tackle," Aitaoto-Tele'a said. "I did not mean for him to get hurt. This game, I just want to thank my coaches and my family for supporting me. But that tackle, I didn't mean to slam that dude that hard. This win, our team's first, it feels good. I am just so happy."

East backup quarterback, junior Travis Motoa, was pressured into an incomplete pass and the Thunderbirds



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé players celebrate after defeating East Anchorage 35-14 in the state quarterfinal playoff at Adair-Kennedy Memorial Park on Saturday, Oct. 10, 2026. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

were forced to punt again.

JDHS started from the East 40-yard line and Ridle ran three times for a first down. Washington ran once and Ridle broke through for a touchdown but a JDHS penalty negated the score. Ridle ran the next three plays and scored with 2:50 left in the first quarter. Crimson Bears senior kicker Sonny Mazon hit the extra point for a 13-0 lead.

The Crimson Bears defense stepped up again, forcing another three-and-out series and a punt.

This time JDHS' Ridle would run three times from their own 29-yard line and move to the 42-yard line for a first down. Senior Ethan Van Kirk ran once for 10 yards and a first down as the first quarter ended.

Ridle would carry the ball 42 times during the game, racking up 211 yards and three touchdowns, while Van Kirk had 25 rushes for 162 yards and two touchdowns. Ridle's helmet carried a long white stripe above the facemask where paint had chipped off.

"It originally chipped during the Bartlett game last week," Ridle said. "And it got a little worse at the game this week. It was during the first quarter that it got a little worse and I never replaced it. It looks to be paint that came off."

When the second quarter started Ridle ran twice, but a third-and-five run also brought a flag on JDHS for holding, and the Crimson Bears drive

would stall, forcing a punt.

East's Curry was stopped by JDHS' Aitaoto-Tele'a and Jim for no gain at the Thunderbirds' 40-yard line. Motoa connected with senior wide receiver Matthew Jackson for a gain across the 50-yard line and Curry ran the ball to the 44. Motoa connected with sophomore wide receiver Kaiedenn Sanders for 44 yards and a touchdown. Junior Javon Foster kicked the extra point to trail 13-7 and show they had traveled down to Juneau with a desire to upset the higher-seeded Crimson Bears.

JDHS worked a four-play series that included a fumble recovery on fourth-and-three, giving the ball to East on change of possession.

East could only last five plays before punting, backing JDHS to their own 16-yard line and the Crimson Bears fumbled on their first play, losing the possession.

The Thunderbirds worked through a first-play flag and churned out a passing play and two small runs before Motoa connected with junior Syllas Johnson for a six-yard passing touchdown. The extra point by Foster gave East a 14-13 lead with 4:02 left in the first half.

JDHS responded with a 14-play drive from their own 37-yard line, giving Van Kirk the ball seven times and Ridle four more runs including a seven-yard score to take a 19-14 lead with 16 seconds left in the half. A two-point conversion was stopped.

JDHS started the second half on a 14-play drive from their own 35-yard line, but East stopped the Crimson Bears on third-and-goal from the one-yard line and fourth-and-goal on the next play.

East went to the air and managed to move the ball out to the 41-yard line on seven plays, but four were incomplete passes, the fourth coming on fourth-and-one that gave JDHS the ball. The Crimson Bears' Van Kirk and Ridle punched the ball downfield and

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PLAYOFF

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Van Kirk broke a run from the 36-yard line for a score. Mazon added the extra point for a 26-14 lead with 28 seconds left in the third quarter.

“That fourth down play when Ethan ran the long touchdown gave us the two-score cushion,” JDHS coach Rich Sjoroos said. “They had stopped us on the drive before at the one-yard line so everybody was feeling nervous about how things would go. We just couldn’t get on top of them like we wanted to. And that is a credit to them. They came to play and made it hard for us to get big plays. And that is what I told their defensive coach. Of all the coaches I have faced, he is the toughest one to get big plays against. He does a really good job of getting his guys in the right spots. He really makes you earn it.”

East senior Ezekiel Alabado covered an onside kick by JDHS on the 36-yard line, but the Thunderbirds were stopped by the Crimson Bears on the 44-yard line on a fourth-and-two incomplete pass as the fourth quarter started.

“It always comes down to turnovers and penalties and tackling,” East coach Jeff Trotter said. “I think Juneau did it better than we did, and we both had our issues, but Juneau did a great job. They run their offense the way they do and their defense swarmed, and we just didn’t make the plays that we needed to make unfortunately. Playoffs are tough. It is brutal when it ends because it is the finality of it all. Both teams played hard. It was a well-fought game, clean, and I was impressed with the effort.”

JDHS’ Ridle and Van Kirk followed the offensive line down the field on nine plays to the 11-yard line before attempting a field goal on fourth-and-six. The kick was blocked and East gained possession on their own nine-yard line.

The Crimson Bears stormed the

Thunderbirds backfield on the next play and JDHS’ Chambers — with teammates Taualo-Tasi and Jim aiding — tackled East’s Motoa for a two-point safety with 4:34 on the clock giving the Crimson Bears a 28-14 lead and another possession.

“It felt great,” Chambers said. “I had, in my opinion, one of the best offensive tackles on me the whole game and we were just fighting, going at it. Near the end there, getting that safety was electric. I am just hungry. I have a chip on my shoulder, I think we all do. We are all underdogs. I play for my team, I play for my city.”

Jim added, “I was kind of the safety valve. Just in case he threw the ball. Pretty sure it might be a screen to the back side, just the way he rolled out... but the D-line was just there and I saw him go back. I saw him bring the ball down so I came back with them

JDHS would receive the kick and bring the ball to the 31-yard line where Ridle ran three times and Van Kirk once to move the ball to the 23-yard line. Looking at a fourth-and-three, the Crimson Bears ran a reverse through junior Andrew Sanders, picking up a first down at the 15-yard line.

“I was getting a little cold there,” Sanders said. “It was cold out today and I was kind of waiting for Sjoroos to tell me whatever he wanted me to do. Pass, run, anything. He said ‘I need two yards right now and I need you to run it.’ It sounded easy to me and it played out well.”

Sanders loved the game in his youth but didn’t know if he would play like his heroes.

“I didn’t know if I was going to play football before high school,” he said. “I wasn’t sure because my parents didn’t want me to get hurt, because I had played in elementary school and got banged up. Then I got in my freshman year, and Krew kept texting me and convincing me to come. So I finally showed up and, yeah, we are going from here.”

Ridle carried the ball twice from

the 15-yard line to set up a Van Kirk one-yard plunge for a 34-14 lead with 1:41 left in the game. Mazon kicked his third extra point of the game for a 35-14 advantage.

“I just knew I had to hit it hard,” Van Kirk said. “That East line is big, and they are good. All credit to them. And all credit to my offensive line because they were putting in the work today.”

JDHS’ Mazon put an onside kick far enough for teammate Day to recover and the Crimson Bears ran out the clock for their first playoff win since 2022.

“It feels good,” Day said. “It was a team effort. I am really proud of my team. They push me every day. This is the best group I have ever played football with. My tackles are just the teams, they put in their part, I put in my part. It is not just me, it is the whole team. It is not one person. It is people shedding blocks, opening gaps for me to get tackles. All respect to my D-line, my safeties, my defensive backs and my linebackers.”

Day said he watched the Crimson Bears play when he was in elementary school.

“I thought I would play for TM (Thunder Mountain),” Day said. “When they were still separate. My first ever game I watched was JD verse TM here. And man, it was electric. Being able to play for the same atmosphere, man I love it.”

After much jubiling on the field, the JDHS team began to move with their fans into the night.

JDHS advances to play South Anchorage at the Wolverines field on Saturday in a state semifinal. Number two seed South defeated number seven seed Bartlett 7-0.

Other quarterfinal scores included number one seed West Anchorage 49, eight seed Dimond 7; number four seed Colony 22, number five seed Service 14.

• *Contact Klas Stolpe at sports@juneauindependent.com.*