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Juneau Independent

The True Local Newspaper of Alaska's Capital City November 15, 2026

Peltola nears 50%, has 10,412-ballot lead over Sullivan with fewer than 12,000 to be counted

AP has not yet called Alaska's US Senate race; Kreiss-Tomkins wins governor's race, Begich well ahead in US House race, ranked choice repeal fails

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Democratic challenger Mary Peltola appears to be nearing a mathematical lock on first-choice ballots in the U.S. Senate race, as she leads incumbent Republican Dan S. Sullivan by 10,412 votes with fewer than 12,000 remaining to be counted, according to results released Friday night.

However, she is still just shy of a majority with 49.84% of ballots tallied to Sullivan's 46.09%, according to results released by the Alaska Division of Elections at about 7:15 p.m. The Asso-

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Alaska Democratic Senate candidate Mary Peltola speaks at an election night event Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2026, in Anchorage, Alaska. (AP Photo/Lindsey Wasson)

Korean War veteran and Lingít culture bearer Ray Wilson passes away at 93

Dance group leader remembers him during Southeast Alaska Native Veterans Day ceremony, says his knowledge will live on in future generations

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

A wreath traditionally laid by Lingít elder Dr. Aanyáanáx Ray Wilson was placed instead by Marcelo Quinto at the annual Southeast Alaska Native Veterans Day ceremony on Wednesday. Wilson passed away on Monday.

"He was a part of this tradition for many years," said Southeast Alaska

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Ray Wilson, a Korean War veteran, and U.S. Army Col. Erica Iverson place a wreath at the newly renovated Southeast Alaska Native Veterans Memorial Park on Nov. 11, 2025. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

Storis departs Juneau on Tuesday after Arctic mission focused on national security

Coast Guard evaluating housing solutions to allow homeporting in Alaska's capital as ship heads to Seattle for another winter of upgrades

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

The U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker Storis left Juneau early on Tuesday due to incoming weather after arriving Saturday. It will spend its winter in Seattle, its temporary homeport.

The ship's brief stop in Alaska's capital city came after a 134-day deployment to the Arctic Ocean and Alaska Theater of

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FAA lifts nationwide grounding of flights

Alaska Airlines and Alaska Seaplanes kept flying in-state Friday afternoon, but some Lower 48 flights cancelled; Homeland Security head says terrorism not the cause

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

A ground stop of most U.S. flights was lifted after nearly five hours by the Federal Aviation Administration. Trump administration officials say the problem occurred due to technology upgrades overloading the existing, antiquated equipment.

"Our fix gives us a pretty good indication that it was a legacy network problem that went down," U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy told reporters.

The stoppage affected thousands of flights and "it's going to be slow" getting air traffic back to normal, he said.

The ground stop at all U.S. airports was ordered shortly before noon on Friday by the FAA due to "extraordinary circumstances" and "reasons of safety." However, officials subsequently said flights within Alaska are exempt from the restriction.

"It still seems very subjective, but they're letting anything within the state fly (under Instrument Flight Rules)," Juneau International Airport Manager Andres Delgado said at about 2 p.m.

Alaska Airlines, in a statement, noted its flights within Alaska and inter-island flights in Hawaii were not affected by the grounding.

"Flights from the West Coast to Hawai'i can continue, and international flights from Honolulu have also been cleared for departure," the statement added.

Some grounded flights, including a flight from Seattle to Juneau originally scheduled to depart at about 2 p.m. took off at 3:40 p.m., Delgado said.

Andy Kline, marketing manager for Alaska Seaplanes, said the halt isn't affect-

*See **FAA** on Page 14*

Tributes for the service by veterans in and out of uniform mark annual Nov. 11 gatherings in Juneau



Bill Arnold rings a replica of the Liberty Bell in front of the Alaska State Capitol during a Veterans for Peace commemoration of Armistice Day on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

Some locals attend Veterans Day events, others an Armistice Day observance at the Capitol; spirit of support is similar at all

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Bill Arnold's salute to fellow veterans this year included voting for them as write-in candidates in last week's election before joining them at an Armistice Day gathering in front of the Alaska State Capitol on Wednesday.

The U.S. Air Force veteran showed some of them a ballot crib indicating Juneau residents John Dunker and KJ Metcalf as his first-choice picks for U.S. Senate and House, respectively, along with other names to fill other slots in top races.

"Absolutely I'd vote them in," he said in an interview before the observance hosted by the Juneau chapter of Veterans for Peace started at 11 a.m., marking the hour of the signing of an armistice on Nov. 11, 1919, that ended World War I.

The Armistice Day gathering is one of three traditional events in Juneau paying tribute to veterans and active-duty service members, all beginning at or about 11 a.m. The others were a Veterans Day gathering at Centennial Hall co-hosted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars Taku Post #5559 and American Legion Post #25, and a commemoration by Southeast Alaska Native Veterans at the Tlingit and Haida Community Council Building.

About 20 people gathered in rainy and windy conditions at the Capitol for the Armistice Day observance. Organizers say Armistice Day honors the spirit of a holiday known by that name until it was changed to Veterans Day in 1954 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Craig Wilson, president of the local chapter of Veterans for Peace, mentioned last week's election during brief remarks to those gathered outside the Capitol shortly before 11 a.m.

"People want peace," he said. "The recent elections showed that. The people that started the Iran war, that abducted Venezuela's president, that blew up boats in the Caribbean without cause — the recent election results repudiated them."

At exactly 11 a.m. the participants, standing in a long line, began one-by-one ringing a replica of the Liberty Bell in front of the Capitol using a well-worn wooden mallet.

After the ringing ended, Arnold said he comes to the Armistice Day gathering every year because "I feel more affinity with Veterans With Peace." His Senate pick, Dunker, is a co-founder of the local chapter and Metcalf is an advocate for the organization.

An emphasis on service in many forms was emphasized during a keynote speech at the Veterans Day observance at Centennial Hall by Twayne Hickman, a U.S. Marine Corps combat veteran and professor of military strategy at the Ted Stephens Center for Arctic Security Studies.

"We talk about being on active duty, but 'in the service' had meaning and it still has meaning," he said. "The spirit of service doesn't end just when the uniform comes off. So in addition to 'in the service' we've also been in service to each other and in service with each other, which is a little bit different than in a service."

"We've all taken oaths to support and defend the Constitution, but often what you'll hear is the driving factor was not the Constitution whom we were serving, but it was those on our left and right. The willingness to sacrifice, accept responsibility and put others first."

Hickman, in an interview after the event, said the invitation to come to Juneau to speak for Veterans Day was a first. He said the theme for his remarks was inspired in part by a birthday tribute for the Marine Corps — founded on Nov. 10, 1775 — hosted by the Navy League at the Juneau Yacht Club on Tuesday night.

Clint Scott has participated in the

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VETERANS

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VFW and American Legion Post event for about 15 years since moving to Juneau, but this year was his first time helping organize the gathering. He is a U.S. Navy veteran from 1996 to 2002, deployed to multiple regions abroad.

When asked what he's thinking about — and what other people should be thinking about when it comes to current-day matters involving military veterans — Scott cited services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, especially healthcare, which have been strong for many years until recently suffering a decline.

"They've lost a lot of staff and services have changed," he said, while noting "the people there are still great."

VFW Post Quartermaster Dan McCrummen, who presided over the event, said in closing remarks he spent 26 years on active duty and has now been retired for 26 years "so it's been a long, long road." But like Hickman, he said the desire to keep serving after doing so for one's country is a persistent one.

"I walked away — I mean, I was done with serving," McCrummen said. "I was looking for a job, moving on with my life, and it took me some time for that 'I' to come around and say, I enjoyed serving and I want to continue serving."

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Confident that Sen. Sullivan will win? Betting sites will pay a fortune if he does

Two sites rate Peltola a 99% favorite to win after Tuesday night's results, meaning a $100 bet on the incumbent could result in a payoff of more than $9,000 if he wins



Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, speaks at an election night event Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2026, in Anchorage. (AP Photo/Mark Thiessen)

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Text Plenty of people still believe Republican U.S. Sen. Dan S. Sullivan will defeat Democratic challenger Mary Peltola despite her growing, but still slim, lead as of Tuesday night, if they're being truthful in their social media posts and other declarations. If they're right there's a fortune to be made at political betting websites.

Peltola is listed as a 99% favorite at Polymarket and 98.8% favorite at Kalshi as of 8 a.m. Wednesday. At PredictIt she is a 93% favorite to win a majority of first-choice ballots, eliminating the need for a ranked choice runoff.

At those odds, a $100 bet Peltola will lose would result in a $9,140 payout at Polymarket and $7,794.16 at Kalshi, according to their respective websites. Payouts are less than actual odds due to trading fees.

Tuesday night's results show Peltola with 48.79% of ballots tallied and Sullivan with 47.05% with an estimated 16% remaining to be counted — not enough of a lead for the Associated Press and other media outlets to project a winner of the race. However,

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Juneau Independent

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BETTING

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Peltola's lead has increased from 0.3% a week ago to 1.7% as of Tuesday and the remaining ballots are expected to continue to be favorable to her.

A statement by Sullivan campaign spokesperson Nate Adams on Wednesday declared "With tens of thousands of ballots still to be counted, there's a long way to go before every Alaskan's voice is heard. We thank the Division of Elections for their hard work and look forward to a complete and accurate count."

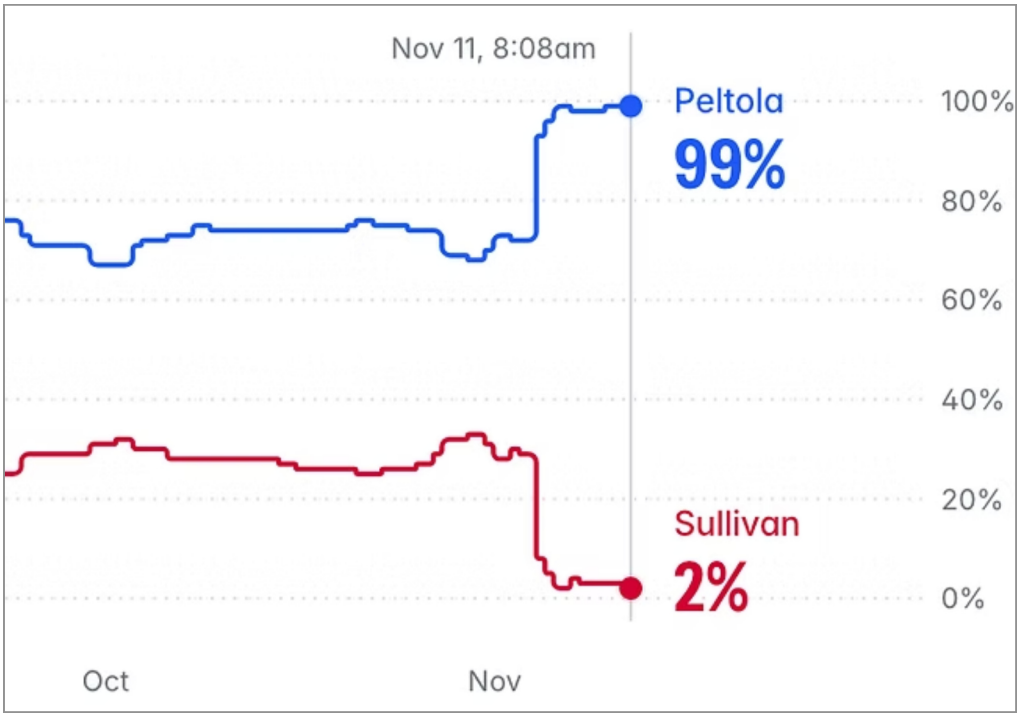
One favorable statistic so far for Sullivan is an analysis by the Alaska Beacon shows him gaining 3,066 votes and Peltola 2,160, a net gain of 906 for him, in a ranked choice runoff of ballots tallied so far. However, that isn't enough to overcome Peltola's lead and it excludes 9,909 ballots from rural Alaska precincts where ranked candidate data isn't yet available.

Other possible wild cards are a lawsuit ordered by President Donald Trump seeking to halt certification of the election if Peltola narrowly wins, based on allegations her campaign recruited Petersburg resident Dan J. Sullivan to confuse votes; criminal investigations of the same allegations by federal and state officials; and Republicans in Congress who have suggested Peltola may not be seated if she wins.

A CBS News analysis published Tuesday found "the candidates who Kalshi markets favored won 95% of congressional or gubernatorial midterm races."

However, such markets are also receiving criticism and scrutiny in some quarters. ABC reported earlier this year Kalshi suspended accounts belonging to three congressional candidates who allegedly bet on their own races and Politico on Sunday reported that Democrats poised to retake control of both chambers of Congress are considering tighter regulation of political betting markets.

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



A screenshot shows betting odds at Polymarket for Alaska's U.S. Senate race as of early Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2026.

STORIS

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Operations. The current 86-member Coast Guard crew is not expected to grow much larger, Capt. Corey Kerns told media on Tuesday, with him estimating a maximum of 90 people. The Storis has 117 beds, but the ship will also deploy with temporary crew members, so the number of beds doesn't equal the number of people.

With shoreside support, that means there are about 120 Coast Guard personnel expected to need housing, plus their families, according to official estimates. The incoming crew size was initially estimated at 190 when the ship was acquired in 2024.

The ship's homeport doesn't change its mission or priorities, Kerns, commanding officer of Storis, told media aboard the ship on Tuesday morning.

"I think just in general, the Coast Guard is growing, we're getting a lot of ships, and we've got to build the infrastructure out in a lot of places at the same time. And I think we're going to struggle with it. We're not going to get it perfect, so these things probably won't happen like right when we need them," he said.

For example, the icebreakers Polar Star and Healy are in Seattle right now, and because Base Seattle is under construction, the Storis will have to head to another pier without power and run on generators until the Polar Star heads south.

"But that's to upgrade Seattle for the future for more icebreakers, more ships coming. They're doing that work now, and now we have to do that in Juneau, Kodiak," Kerns said.

Last week, City Manager Katie Koester announced the Storis won't be homeported in Juneau unless sufficient housing for crew exists. Efforts to address that need are continuing, a Coast Guard spokesperson told the Juneau Independent on Tuesday.

"The Coast Guard is aware of Juneau's

*See **Storis** on Page 6*

STORIS

Continued from page 5

current housing supply and the potential impacts of assigning additional members to the area," said Pam Manns, a Public Affairs Officer with the Arctic District. "The Coast Guard is actively evaluating solutions to accommodate incoming personnel and dependents, partnering with the community to identify feasible housing solutions and development opportunities, and gauging private sector interest in supporting projected housing needs."

She said multiple developers expressed interest and a detailed request for proposals would be released in the near future as funds are received to support Coast Guard family housing needs, as well as supporting additional phases of facilities and infrastructure improvements.

Engineering planning was completed and an environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act is ongoing. The Coast Guard has an interagency agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and transferred funds for initial construction activities.

NOAA is the contracting authority and will award and execute the contract with Coast Guard oversight. Phase 1 includes construction of a new pier and recapitalization of the existing wharf to support future homeporting of Coast Guard Cutter Storis.

The design-build contract for pier construction is expected to be awarded by the end of December, with work expected to be completed in 2030, according to Manns.

Future phases are planned to support maintenance facilities and housing for incoming families.

'Bridge the gap to the future'

The Storis is unique in being previously known as the commercial vessel Aiviq, which was used for oil exploration. Kerns said because of this, they still need support from the civilian crew to operate the ship and might for years to come.



The icebreaker Storis operates in the Arctic Ocean on July 28, 2026. (U.S. Coast Guard courtesy photo)

"They're still a vital part of our crew for addressing both equipment casualties and teaching us," Kerns said.

Last year, Cmdr. Phillip Baxa managed a multi-million-dollar contract to hire Edison Chouest Offshore civilians to help the Coast Guard crew become acquainted with their newest icebreaker. The contract was originally set to end on Nov. 14, 2025, with an anticipation that it would be extended another six months.

Ten members of the civilian crew Edison Chouest Offshore are still aboard, with Kerns pushing for their contract to be extended up to another five years. This is the first time the Coast Guard has used a hybrid crew of civilian and Coast Guard personnel.

The civilian crew will not need housing in Juneau, Kerns said.

"The hard part for the fast acquisition and having the ship was not having the fully planned out training to get the Coast Guard crew up to speed," he said. "And so over the last year we've done a lot, and the uniform folks are very competent in operating and running Storis. So we did shrink the Edison Chouest footprint, but we're also about to have our first big turnover summer. And so then a lot of us who spent the last year getting trained and everything is going to leave this summer."

He said eventually, the Coast Guard needs to push out training to give their members the same exposure to the systems the civilian crew is familiar with.

"Until that happens they're our embedded onboard trainers that are always here and then when stuff goes a little wrong — when the control systems have problems — they're much more adept at like, 'Oh, this is how we fix this, or this is how we can reset this,'" Kerns said, adding operating procedures and instructions are being documented.

He said the crew learned alongside the Edison Chouest shipmates that they

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STORIS

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were able to improve the ship's ice-breaking capabilities earlier this year before returning to Alaska by maximizing power output from the engines.

"You could definitely tell the difference," Kerns said. "We actually probably broke more heavier, stronger ice more consistently than when we did the ice testing run in April."

During their recent trip to the Arctic, they faced a different logistical challenge.

"We did a port visit to Nome just to test out what we could and couldn't do up there. And certainly the ship is too big to tie up in the port of Nome, so we were anchored off," he said. "So that presented some challenges. We were able to get fuel and parts and everything, but as soon as the wind kicks up there, you're not protected, and so we had a couple rough days sitting off the pier there."

He said the Port of Nome being built into a deep-water port would benefit the ship's operations.

The majority of the Storis deployment took place above the Arctic Circle and focused on monitoring foreign research vessel activity in the extended continental shelf, group sails working as part of Operation Tundra Merlin, a recurring Arctic homeland-defense operation, and law enforcement.

The Storis's law enforcement team boarded its first vessel to enforce maritime laws and regulations, which Kerns called a big step.

"Understanding that's probably the future of what the icebreaking fleet is going to be. We have to be multi-mission," he said. "We have these capabilities that we bring to the table for our civilian leadership to be able to do law enforcement in the high north maybe someday if you need it. It's not there right now, but as traffic and activity grows up there it will be."



U.S. Coast Guard cutter Storis crewmembers conduct a gunnery exercise to maintain qualification and prepare for this summer's deployment while patrolling the Gulf of Alaska on May 8, 2026. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Michael Underwood)



U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Corey Kerns, commanding officer of the icebreaker Storis, stands outside while arriving in Juneau on Saturday, Nov. 7, 2026. (Photo courtesy of Ashly Murphy / Arctic District Public Affairs)

Kerns said the Storis led the way this year in addressing how the Coast Guard responds to a changing security environment and demonstrating national security posture. He said it is a difficult adjustment for some crew members.

"We have to do what our nation needs at the time," he said. "It's not like this is a super pressing need. It's happening gradually. So the change is happening and we're just seeing it in real time, like this is now a mission set for us."

While the icebreaker Healy is built and designed for scientific research, Kerns said the Storis surveys other vessels accessing the Arctic within the United States' exclusive economic zone.

Kerns said, "The concern is like, 'What is the research for? What gain are they going for? And you have to

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STORIS

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have icebreaker capability to work in that area, to even monitor what they're doing, so that's basically what Storis is for. We can get into the ice and we can see what they're doing."

Kerns said a focus for the future is to continue missionizing the Storis by adding more military communications gear over the spring in Seattle, but the recent journey proved the ship can deploy with science gear, drones and deployable Conex boxes.

He added the Storis still cannot land a helicopter on its flight deck yet, which limits search and rescue capabilities. He spoke with Rear Adm. Bob Little while in Juneau about this challenge.

"It's just going to have to be a different approach to how we do flight quarters and that's like the hard thing because we have to determine what's OK, because it's not going to be routine. So then, how do we make a new thing safe?" Kerns explained, saying the makeup of the originally civilian ship changes how the helicopter would land and how aviation training is conducted.

"We're just talking about different ways to address it through the command structure of the headquarters to get the right understanding of the



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Storis participates in a combined sail during Operation Tundra Merlin in the Bering Sea on July 21, 2026. Its helicopter pad, seen from above, is not in use due to its location. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Cameron Snell)

right mindset, which is we bought a civilian ship, we've made it operational all these other ways. There's a path to yes for that stuff too."

On the other hand, the ship's unique background gives it an unexpected asset.

"We did an underway refuel. We demonstrated how we could refuel another Coast Guard cutter, which could become an answer to future far north logistics problems," he said. "You have this large ship that holds a lot of fuel, and when the ASCs (Arctic Security Cutter) come, they're going to be smaller and not have the range."

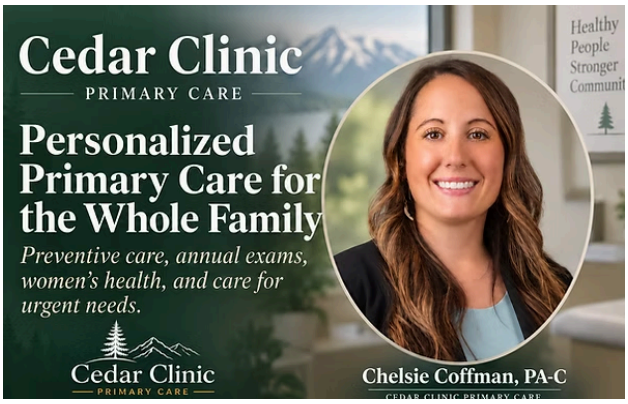
Kerns said the ship will undergo maintenance in Seattle, including engine overhauls, painting and engineering upgrades, like implementing a new special system for holding Connex boxes.

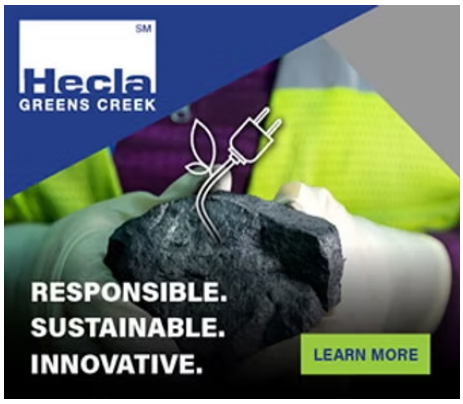
"We'll go home, hug the families, spend some quality time at home. But then it gets right into 'How do you get the ship ready for the next summer?'" Kerns said.

As progress is made on building 11 new icebreakers promised to the Coast Guard, the Storis could eventually transition to a support ship, he said.

"We're supposed to bridge the gap to the future. So how long does she operate into that future? I don't know, but as those things come out I think you'll start to see the value in that," he said.

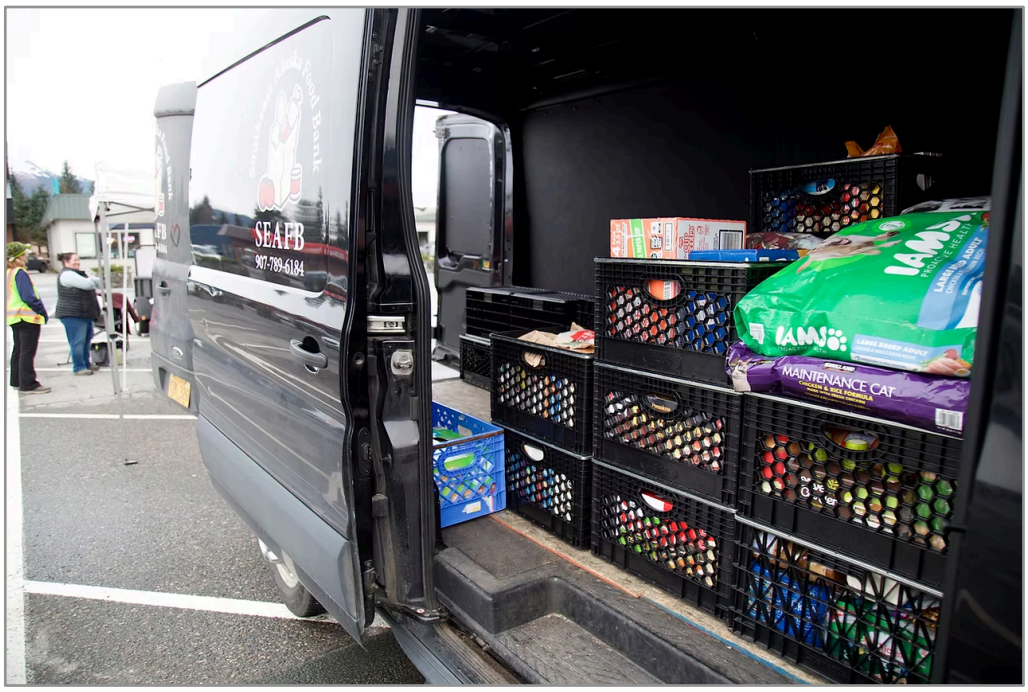
- *Contact Jasz Garrett at jasz@juneauindependent.com or 907-723-9356.*







Food donations a bit lean as community Thanksgiving meal preparations heat up



A Southeast Alaska Food Bank van partially loaded during an annual food drive organized by the Juneau Central Labor Council at Super Bear IGA supermarket on Saturday, Nov. 7, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

St. Vincent de Paul collecting food for holiday meal baskets until Nov. 17; annual labor council food drive also reports contributions dropped compared to last year

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

High food prices are making it harder for people in need to buy groceries, and may be a factor in why Juneau organizations are seeing a dropoff in donations during their annual Thanksgiving season events.

An annual food drive last Saturday by the Juneau Central Labor Council on behalf of several local organizations saw a decline compard ot the record donations a year ago, Shannan Adamson, said as the event was nearing its end in the Super Bear IGA parking lot.

"I think the economy probably plays into it a little bit," she said, adding relatively nice weather may have been a factor since people may have been doing things other than shopping with their weekend.

Last year the food drive collected about 6,000 pounds of items, up from about 5,000 the year before, Adamson said. Beneficiaries include the Southeast Alaska Food Bank, Glory Hall, St. Vincent de Paul Juneau, The Salvation Army, Love INC and Juneau Animal Rescue.

Also collecting food through Nov. 17 for its annual Thanksgiving food basket distribution is St. Vincent de Paul. Donations are being accepted by several local churches partnering with Love INC. and can also be dropped off at St. Vincent de Paul's administrative offices at 8617 Teal St. — and perishable items must be brought to that address so they can be properly stored.

Chris Gianotti, a volunteer organizing this year's Thanksgiving baskets, told the Juneau Independent on Friday that donations for the food baskets are lower this year, but signups by people for baskets are also down – at least for now.

"Yesterday's count was about 250 families looking a meal," he said. "That's a little light compared to last year. I think it's timing — it's a moving target. We'll get requests up until the day before Thanksgiving and we try to fill them."

The baskets are scheduled to be assembled Thursday by youth volunteers from Raven Homeschool and a Catholic high school student group, Gianotti said. Delivery is scheduled a week from Saturday (Nov. 22), with 40 two-person teams signed up so far.

More information for people wanting to request a basket, donate or volunteer to help is at St. Vincent de Paul's website.

Another Thanksgiving season food distribution is scheduled this Saturday by the Tlingit and Haida Community Council, which will be offering turkey breasts and sockeye fillets to tribal citizens beginning at 10 a.m. in the back parking lot at Thunder Mountain Middle School. The distribution will continue until supplies run out.

On Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 26), The Salvation Army Juneau Corps will host its annual free community dinner from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Juneau Yacht Club.

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WILSON

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Native Veterans Cmdr. Ozzie Sheakley, noting the wreath-laying is done by the eldest veteran present.

He said he checked on Wilson ev-

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WILSON

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ery month. No matter how Wilson was feeling, he always showed up to the Veterans Day ceremony, Sheakley said. He said he will be missed.

Wilson, 93, was a Kiks.ádi clan leader of the Raven moiety Gagaan Hít (Sun House) and a culture bearer. He was born in Hoonah and passed away in Juneau with his family present. A celebration of life is scheduled by the family for Sunday afternoon at the Juneau Tlingit and Haida Community Council building located near the hospital.

The event description encourages attendees to bring sides, drinks or desserts to the potluck reception.

"Dr. Wilson dedicated his life to preserving, strengthening and sharing Lingít language, culture and traditions. Despite experiencing discrimination and the challenges faced by generations of Alaska Native people, he remained steadfast in his commitment to ensuring our cultural knowledge and ways of life would endure," a Facebook post Tuesday by the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska states.

Wilson was a strong supporter of the Lingít language being revitalized through music. He devoted more than 25 years to the Lda Kut Naax Sati Yatx'i (All Nations' Children) dance group and the Yaaw Tei Yi (Herring Rock) dance group.



Aanyáanáx Ray Wilson gives a speech after receiving his honorary doctorate at the University of Alaska Southeast on May 3, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

The Yaaw Tei Yi dance leader Andy Ebona said Wednesday he decided not to move forward with a planned Veterans Day performance in honor of Wilson's memory.

"Today because he passed, and because our group was founded by the Kiks.ádi, we don't sing happy songs because of his passing for up to 40 days and sometimes up to a year," Ebona explained. "That's culturally what we have to do — all of the clan members — out of respect for him and his participation with us."

Ebona said the dance group has performed at the Veterans Day ceremony for many years and is also asked by the Southeast Alaska Native Veterans to perform on Memorial Day.

"We really appreciate it because obviously I'm a veteran, and we have several members in our dance group that are veterans, and so the invitations here are pretty important for us," he said. Ebona is a U.S. Navy veteran and served just over four years at Naval Air Station Lemoore in California during the Vietnam War as an aircraft engine mechanic.

He said the dance group is primarily the Kiks.ádi clan, but they also sing and dance Lingít songs from other clans.

"Whenever we sing a song from another clan, we have to thank them for allowing us to use their song," Ebona said. "So it's a way of teaching respect for other clans that we sing

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WILSON

Continued from page 10

their songs and we thank them for it. That's part of the cultural teachings that people like Ray have taught us."

He said Wilson taught young people traditional dance, songs and cultural protocols, often by bringing cultural knowledge into schools.

Ebona said both he and Wilson began involvement with the dance group when it was created in 2000. Since then Yaaw Tei Yi has performed at every Celebration in Juneau, across the state, the country and overseas. Wilson's last dance performances with Yaaw Tei Yi were on Memorial Day and Celebration this year, Ebona said.

"I think that the primary responsibility of our group was to be able to pass on the culture and the dances and the language to young people," Ebona said. "So we have a lot of younger people that participate with us and a few elders, including myself. And so we think it's important for us to be able to teach young people so that we can carry on the culture into the future."

He added Wilson was heavily involved in helping the dance group leaders of Lda Kut Naax Sati Yatx'i to teach young children how to take over their role in the future.

Ebona said one of his favorite memories with Wilson was a trip they took to Washington, D.C., when they performed for former President Barack Obama's inauguration.

"We did a performance at one of their banquets. There was some other dance groups that were there from other tribes, and they had an elder get up and he was dancing and showing off. And Ray looked at that, and he got up, and he went up on stage and he did his portion," Ebona recalled. "He danced really great and everybody cheered him. We really enjoyed that when he did that, because he demonstrated that Tlingit people are still carrying on their culture as well."



L'eiwtú Éesh Herman Davis and Aanyáanáx Ray Wilson receive assistance to dance on the stage at Centennial Hall during the Grand Entrance for Celebration 2026 on June 3, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)



Shee Atiká presents Aanyáanáx Ray Wilson with a Charlie Joseph Sr. (Kaal.ātk') Award at the Southeast Alaska Native Veterans Memorial Park on June 3, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

His cultural work expanded beyond Southeast in other ways.

Wilson worked with the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and the American Museum of Natural History to restore a sacred Kiks.ádi sculpin hat.

He was also instrumental in efforts to repatriate the Raven helmet of K'alyáan, the Kiks.ádi warrior who led his people in the Battle of Sitka in 1804, according to Tlingit and Haida's Facebook post.

"As a U.S. Army veteran himself, his dedication to bringing home the

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WILSON

Continued from page 11

helmet of a warrior who defended his people and homeland more than two centuries earlier carried special significance. Through these efforts, he honored the sacrifices of his ancestors and the responsibility to preserve their legacy for future generations," the post states.

In May, Wilson received an honorary doctorate from the University of Alaska Southeast for his role as a culture bearer in community and education.

"We started calling him doctor," Sheakley said with a smile.

He was also presented with a Charlie Joseph Sr. (Kaal.ātk') Award by Shee Atiká during a Veterans Totem Pole unveiling ceremony in June, which recognized his preservation of traditional knowledge and sharing cultural values.

"Throughout his life, Dr. Wilson led with humility, generosity, humor and an unwavering love for his people. His greatest legacy lives in the generations of young people he mentored, the cultural knowledge he helped preserve and the countless lives he touched," Tlingit and Haida wrote.

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City officials Filipino residents advocate for protection of historic Manila Square

Alternatives for reconstruction are still being evaluated by Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, leaving impacts unclear



The statue of Dr. José P. Rizal, the national hero of the Philippines, is seen at Manila Square in downtown Juneau on Thursday, Nov. 12, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

A plea to protect historic landmarks in the heart of downtown Juneau's tourist district is prompting local officials to rethink their support for a state construction project meant to improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety.

The fate of Manila Square unexpectedly surfaced at a public hearing last week when a Filipino Community Hall member implored the Visitor Industry Task Force to protect the roundabout across from the Red Dog Saloon. The site features a historical marker honoring Filipino contributions in Juneau erected by the city in 2002.

The task force, in its draft recommendations to reduce congestion downtown, advises the city to support a state-planned restructuring of the roundabout, but some members said that recommendation may now be altered.

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MANILA SQUARE

Continued from page 12

Construction by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities on the state-funded project is scheduled to start next year.

The task force's draft recommendation says the Assembly should advocate to keep flowers. In her testimony, Rebecca Carrillo said the place holds cultural significance.

"The recommendation could result in the removal of Manila Square and the loss of José Rizal, who is the Philippines' national hero," she said on Nov. 5. "Together these landmarks honor Filipino history and culture, and pass Filipino heritage onto future generations. Filipinos have lived in Alaska for over 100 years."

Kirby Day, vice chair of the task force, said members were unaware the construction project could impact Manila Square and promised to follow up on Carrillo's concern.

Chair Ella Adkison told the Juneau Independent on Wednesday that city staff connected Filipino Community Hall members with DOT so they can communicate directly. She added the wording in the city's recommendation is being revised.

"It's DOT's project, but I plan to make it clear that the city will advocate hard to protect it if necessary," Adkison said.

The project is listed under DOT's Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for 2027-30 and is part of rehabilitating downtown Juneau streets as part of the National Highway System.

"The project team is evaluating possible alternatives to address vehicle movement and pedestrian movement challenges here," wrote Justin Shelby, a DOT spokesperson, in an email Tuesday. "Some of the alternatives being evaluated, if selected for the final design, would impact Manila Square."

The STIP budgets about $17.5 million for what it calls a Franklin Street and Thane Road DOT rehabilitation project. Activities include structural section improvements, pavement, drainage repairs, sidewalk improvements and Americans with Disabilities Act improvements.

The Visitor Industry Task Force is scheduled to meet Thursday night to discuss its 42 draft recommendations. The 10-member Visitor Industry Task Force, created by the mayor, advises the Juneau Assembly on tourism topics and began Jan. 15. A final recommendation report will be reviewed Dec. 17 and then sent to the Juneau Assembly for consideration.

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

ELECTION

Continued from page 1

ciated Press estimates 96% of ballots cast have been counted, but has not yet projected a winner in the race.

The deadline to tally ballots legally received is Wednesday. Elections officials will conduct ranked choice runoffs that day for candidate races where no person has a majority of first-choice votes. In Alaska's statewide races Democrat Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins has been declared the winner, with two of his three Republican opponents conceding, and a ballot measure to repeal ranked choice voting has failed.

Peltola's campaign issued a statement Friday night declaring there is "no mathematical path for Sullivan to win this race" — a questionable claim since the race hasn't been called — and accurately noting ballots tallied since Election Day have favored the Democratic challenger and appear likely to do so with the remaining ballots.

Nate Adams, a spokesperson for Sullivan, told The New York Times on Friday night that "we're still waiting for every ballot to be counted. And we'll see what happens from there."

A lawsuit ordered by President Donald Trump, plus federal and state criminal investigations ordered by him and Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy, are ongoing due to accusations Peltola's campaign recruited retired Petersburg teacher Dan J. Sullivan and other spoiler candidates in an attempt to confuse voters.

Peltola's 3.75% lead over the incumbent as of Friday night far exceeds the 1.64% of ballots cast for the Petersburg resident, potentially making the lawsuit moot since it seeks to halt certification if she wins by fewer votes than he receives.

Projections based on election division data show the ranked choice process will result in a Peltola win if she doesn't get a majority of first-choice ballots.

In Alaska's other congressional race, Republican U.S. Rep. Nick Begich III has 47.83%, independent challenger Bill Hill 41.73%, Democratic federal prison inmate Eric Hafner 7.67% and Libertarian Jim McDermott 2.62%. Candidate ranking data available so far from the elections division shows Begich likely to win a ranked choice runoff.

A ballot measure repealing Alaska's ranked choice voting, open primaries and some campaign finance disclosure rules has been defeated, with 53.52% of ballots as of Friday opposed and 46.48% in favor.

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FAA

Continued from page 2

ing his company's flights between Southeast communities.

"Our air traffic control tower here in Juneau has told us that since we're flying only within Alaska that we can continue flying, so we're still flying," he said.

Capital City Fire/Rescue Chief Tom Hatley told the Juneau Independent that medevac flights within Alaska are still allowed, but not from Alaska to the Lower 48.

An initial FAA announcement declared "All departing traffic should remain ground stopped until further notice," but inbound domestic flights were still being allowed to land.

A subject message by the FAA shortly after 1 p.m. notes "There has been a temporary telecommunications outage — out of an abundance of caution all flights have been halted. Every flight has been accounted for and international flights will be handled on a case by case basis."

The stop is not due to a terrorist attack, U.S. Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin, told reporters. However, he also said it will take an extended period of time to fix the issues grounding flights.

"This isn't going to just be resolved and turned around within the hour," he said. "This is this is going to take some time. But once again, everybody is safe. Flights are accounted for, and there should be no fear to the public at all."



Juneau International Airport on Oct. 16, 2025. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

The last nationwide ground stop was in January 2023 when a pilot notification system went down, according to CNN. The last time prior to that was after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

CNBC reported the issues for Friday's ground stop "were related to communications and radar issues, according to an internal message from Alaska Airlines" seen by the network.

Other news media reports noted the US air traffic control system has been suffering equipment and communications failures due to aging infrastructure, as well as employee shortages. The FAA has been implementing a new AI model into its system, but it was not known Friday afternoon if that is related to the problem.

The tracking site FlightRadar24 noted more than 1,000 aircraft were bound for U.S. airports amid the nationwide ground stop, according to The New York Times. The flight tracking app Flighty reports more than 30,000 departures and arrivals were scheduled for the remainder of the day when the stop occurred.

By late Friday afternoon a few flights were taking off Friday evening from international aviation hubs on the East and West coasts, according to the Associated Press.

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Voices

Alaska needs homes — and an honest accountingof what makes them affordable

By EDWARD D. MARTIN Jr.

Shauna Hegna and Mike Huston make a welcome call for action in their Juneau Independent opinion article, "Alaska needs more homes. Leadership can restart our homebuilding engine." As an Alaska contractor, I agree that leadership should help move workable housing projects into construction.

My question is what families will be able to afford when those homes are finished.

A housing strategy should begin with the people expected to live in the homes. What income does a buyer need? What rent can a working family pay? What will heating, utilities, insurance, maintenance and property taxes add each month? A house can be financed and built while remaining beyond the reach of the people a program was intended to serve.

The authors describe using a relatively small pool of money to close the remaining financing gaps on projects with much larger commitments already in place. That can be a sensible way to finish stalled work. Before expanding that approach, Alaska should publish the full cost of each project, every public contribution, the number of completed and occupied homes, and the resulting prices or rents.

Those records should also explain how long any promised affordability lasts. If taxpayers help finance a home today, what protects that public benefit when the property changes hands tomorrow?

Construction begins long before the first nail. Land must be suitable and accessible. Drainage must work. Foundations must fit the ground. Water, wastewater, power and access must be addressed. Releasing a parcel without understanding those costs can leave a buyer with an expensive problem instead of a place to build.

Put public land to work, certainly. Publish its limitations, infrastructure needs and disposal terms. Give small builders, owner-builders and individual families a fair opportunity to participate. The ability to prepare a sophisticated grant application should not become the price of admission to every public housing opportunity.

I also support reviewing permit delays and conflicting requirements. Ask builders which steps add avoidable expense and ask local officials which safeguards prevent costly failures. Establish clear requirements, predictable decisions and a practical process for resolving disagreements. Keep the protections that make a home safe and durable.

Factory-built housing deserves the same practical examination. Compare the full delivered and installed cost, including transportation, foundations, utility connections and maintenance. The useful measure is how a building performs in its particular Alaska location over time.

The authors' corporate and banking experience can contribute to this discussion. Public decisions should also include independent builders, tradespeople, prospective homeowners and tenants. Publish relevant financial interests, funding criteria, award decisions and fees so people can assess the arrangements for themselves.

I would ask the next governor to begin with a public inventory of projects ready to proceed, the specific obstacle holding up each one, and the least costly practical way to resolve it. Some may need financing. Others may need a utility extension, a land decision or an answer from an agency. Match the remedy to the obstacle.

Then report results regularly: homes completed, homes occupied, public dollars spent, and actual housing costs for residents. Explain setbacks as plainly as successes.

Alaska needs a housing effort that respects both the family seeking a home and the taxpayer helping make it possible. Cooperation among government, lenders, tribes, nonprofits and builders can serve that purpose when responsibilities and results are open to examination.

I welcome the authors' invitation to act. Let us make affordability, fair access and public accountability the foundation of the work.

• *Edward D. Martin Jr. is an Alaska resident since 1965 and a general contractor with KEE Construction LLC.*

The math waiting for us

By ANGELA RODELL

Alaska is about to get a new governor, a reshaped Legislature and something few incoming administrations ever get: a windfall.

North Slope crude averaged $122 a barrel in October, one of the highest monthly averages on record. Since the fiscal year began July 1, prices have averaged about $98, far above the $75 the state assumed this spring. New production from fields like Pikka is coming online. And the Permanent Fund ended June at $91.9 billion.

That is good news. It is also a trap.

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MATH

Continued from page 15

Remember where we were just eleven months ago. Last December, the state's forecast had oil at $62 a barrel, with petroleum supplying less than a quarter of the revenue available for services and dividends. The budget proposed at the time carried a deficit of more than $1.8 billion. Oil alone couldn't close that gap unless prices averaged nearly $100 for an entire year.

Nothing fundamental about our fiscal structure has changed since. What changed is a war in the Middle East.

The pressure on Juneau's incoming leadership will now run in the opposite direction. After years of flat budgets and unmet needs, there will be a strong temptation to grow spending and make those increases permanent, perhaps supported by a new statewide tax. I understand the impulse. New revenue may well have a place in a durable fiscal plan. But sequence matters. A tax imposed to support a budget built on $100 oil doesn't fix our fiscal structure; it makes that structure bigger. Asking Alaskans to pay more while our population shrinks and state revenues are flush is a difficult case to make, and an even harder one to sustain.

Here is what I'd ask of those who take office in December, and of the bipartisan majorities forming in the House and Senate:

Treat the windfall as one-time money. Refill savings first. Every dollar we put back in reserve now is a dollar we won't have to fight over when prices fall.

Don't build the base budget on $100 oil. New programs and bigger checks are easy to start and painful to stop. A temporary revenue spike should not become the foundation for permanent spending commitments.

Fix what we already own. Fiscal instability carries a cost we rarely count. When budgets get tight, maintenance is often the first thing cut, and the bill only grows. The state's deferred maintenance backlog now stands at roughly $2.3 billion, more than $1.5 billion of it at the University of Alaska. School districts have also told lawmakers their buildings are in crisis. Lawmakers have been told it takes about $180 million a year just to keep the backlog from growing. A windfall year is the time to make a real dent. Consistent investment in maintenance is also how we avoid digging the same hole when prices fall again.

Protect the Permanent Fund draw. Our largest source of general-purpose revenue is now the Permanent Fund's earnings, not oil. Its value depends on discipline: drawing the same sustainable percentage each year, rather than reaching for more because the moment feels flush. The fund is our long-term financial foundation. Protecting it must remain a priority regardless of the political pressures of any given year.

Use the cushion to settle the fiscal plan. Spending limits, the dividend formula and revenue all have to be on the table together, not one at a time and not one at the expense of the others. Those decisions are far easier to make when you aren't staring at a fiscal cliff. We may never have a calmer moment to make them.

Invest what's left in growth, not overhead. One-time money is best spent on one-time investments that make Alaska a place people want to build: infrastructure, faster permitting, housing that pencils, and a workforce we train here at home. Any budget is easier to balance when there are more Alaskans working to carry it.

Because the deepest problem in our fiscal math isn't the price of oil. It's people.

Whatever fiscal plan we settle on has to be supported by the people who live and work here. In Southeast, there are fewer of them every year. Compared with 2010, our region has about 1,700 more jobs but 5,600 fewer working-age residents to fill them, and state projections show that decline continuing for decades. No dividend formula or tax structure can balance the books for a state that is shrinking. Growth isn't an afterthought to a fiscal plan. It's the foundation.

That's why this matters so much here. Juneau's economy rises and falls with the state budget. Every time we lurch from one fiscal crisis to the next, state jobs go unfilled, families hesitate to move here, and builders hesitate to build. Stability tells people it's safe to put down roots. A durable fiscal plan, paired with a genuine commitment to economic and population growth, is the best economic development tool Juneau could ask for.

Those coming in to lead our state will start with a rare gift, a year when the numbers are on their side. The test of leadership isn't how the money gets spent in a good year. It's whether we use it to build a state that is still growing when the next bad year comes.

• *Angela Rodell is a former CEO of the Alaska Permanent Fund Corp. and commissioner of the Alaska Department of Revenue who is currently a business consultant and member of Juneau International Airport's board of directors. Her column appears the second Tuesday of every month.*

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY TO US OR THE COMMUNITY?



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Sports

Crimson Bears girls win state swimming team title

Liddle, Foy win individual titles as JDHS topples Eagle River for championship



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé sophomore Annabelle Woodruff leaves the starting block as senior Amy Liddle touches the wall ahead of Eagle River senior Natalie Hostetter in the girls 400-yard freestyle relay, the final event of the 2026 ASAA Swim and Dive State Championships, at Anchorage's Bartlett High School pool, Saturday, Nov. 7, 2026. JDHS won the event to clinch the team title. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

There were a number of lofty wins during Saturday's ASAA Swim and Dive State Championships in Anchorage's Bartlett High School pool, but Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa. at Kalé took home one of the biggest as the Crimson Bears' entire roster contributed to winning the girls' team title, earning 108.5 points to Eagle River High School's 98.

"I am feeling incredibly proud of this team," JDHS assistant coach Dakota Hubert said. "They worked so hard the last 13 weeks, and seeing their work pay off this weekend is so special. I have loved every minute of getting to coach these athletes this season. They truly amaze me every meet. Every swimmer contributed to this achievement, whether it was through encouraging teammates at practices, scoring points at meets, swimming personal bests, cheering teammates on or bringing energy to the team."

Eagle River started the day with some big wins. Wolves sophomore Audrey Townley, senior Lelaina Trembath, sophomore Anna Heaphy and freshman Khalyse Rollins hit 1:50.33 in the 200-yard medley relay, topping second-place Service High School's team of freshman Tricia Wu, senior Anna Brooks, senior Natalie Hostetter and sophomore Nora Fawcett with 1:50.82 and JDHS' sophomore Katya Foy, senior Kennedy Miller, senior Amy Liddle and senior Kaelyn Szefler in third with 1:51.04.

Eagle River's Trembath next won the 200-yard freestyle in 1:55.14 and senior teammate Caitlyn Rumph was fourth. JDHS sophomore Cora Soboleff picked up points for sixth.

Service's Brooks outtouched JDHS' Liddle in the girls 200-yard individual medley, 2:10.78 to 2:10.81, with ERHS' Heaphy third and JDHS senior Avery Smith fourth.

Colony junior Jersey Lane won the girls 50-yard free over ERHS' Rollins, 24.88 to 25.33. JDHS senior Bailey Fisher grabbed points for sixth.

Neither JDHS nor ERHS had divers in the finals, and the Crimson Bears began their point surge in the second half of the day.

The JDHS girls earned major points with Liddle winning the 100-yard butterfly in 58.74 — ERHS sophomore Anna Heaphy was second in 58.87 — and sophomore Katya Foy winning the 100-yard freestyle in 54.25 in a field with no Wolves and senior teammates Szefler and Fisher sixth and seventh.

"It came as such a surprise to me," Foy said of her win. "I was so happy about it. After I was, like, really tired, but I couldn't have done it without my team and my family and my coaches. I am super proud of how we all did and how I did and, I don't know, this meet was such a huge success and I am super happy."

Foy tried to keep track of her opponents during the swim.

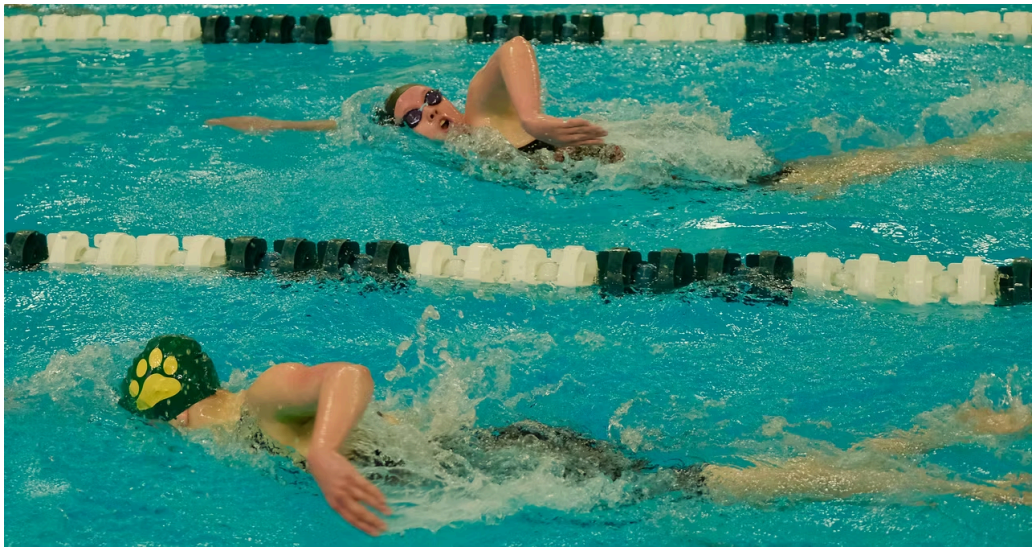
"One of my goggles did fall and fill up with water," she said. "So I was just going for the wall. So I wasn't sure where they were."

This race has been on Foy's mind for some time and she thought advice from brother P.J. Foy (2023 Thunder Mountain graduate, current University of North Carolina swimmer), who still holds the state meet record in the 100 fly (48.27) and 100 breast (54.67), won six state titles and was selected the outstanding competitor in 2023 along with JDHS senior Emma Fellman.

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SWIM

Continued from page 17



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé sophomore Cora Soboleff, top, swims with Service sophomore Nora Fawcett in the girls 500-freestyle final during the 2026 ASAA Swim and Dive State Championships, at Anchorage's Bartlett High School pool, Saturday, Nov. 7, 2026. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

"I have been talking with my brother, he always tells me to visualize," Foy said. "So for the past month, like, I have been visualizing this race. And I was visualizing my walk-up song as well, it was really exciting. My walk-up song was 'Pocket Full of Sunshine,' I always do that one. It is the only one I have ever done."

Foy noted the water-filled goggles were not part of the visualization.

"No, that came as a surprise to me," she said. "But I am getting better goggles. I am really excited. My brother was texting me after, telling me 'good job.' I will call him."

Kenai junior Emma Castimore won the girls 500-yard freestyle in 5:25.96, but JDHS sophomore Cora Soboleff went all out to place fourth in 5:32.74, ahead of ERHS senior Caitlyn Rumph in fifth.

"The 500 is always a challenging race, but as soon as you find a rhythm to a song you can just go stroke by stroke until you see the counter turn red," Soboleff said. "The song I had in my head was 'Mistletoe' by Justin Bieber to just bring happiness as I did the best that I could today. To be completely honest my strategy was to try my best, and my coach Dakota reminded me beforehand to try and go all out for the last 100 of the 500 and leave it in the pool. Whenever I am swimming the 500, I am always worried to go out too fast leading me to burn out, so I was focused on that. I am glad I was able to gain from this state experience to improve in the future. Winning the team title is incredible! I truly was shocked hearing our team worked through each race to earn the state title. This year's state was a cool team to be part of. State will always have a deep meaning to it as it is an end to a chapter with our seniors from the jokes Maddox brings to the team to the inspiration Amy brings to us all."

Service's Brooks won her second individual event hitting 1:04.51 in the girls 100-yard breaststroke, toppling Trembath in 1:05.72, but also topping JDHS' Miller in 1:08.71. JDHS senior Riley Soboleff scored in seventh place.

Brooks was awarded the girls' outstanding competitor in the state meet for her two individual wins and relay contributions, helping Service earn third place in the overall team standings with 75 points.

"It feels really awesome," Brooks said. "My freshman year I never would have thought that I would someday get this. I really just wanted to focus on myself, not let anything get in my head and just, like, put my head down and do the best I could do. For my school this definitely means a lot. Service girls haven't done this well at state in 15 years so I think it is definitely really special."

Brooks noted her career is not over and hopes to swim collegiately.

"I am going to get back in the pool and try my best in every other race that I can," she said. "And hopefully work on the little details that I could have done better today."

ERHS' Rollins, junior Teodora Curcin, Rumph and Trembath outtouched JDHS sophomore Annabelle Woodruff, sophomore Maddie Manlulu, Miller and Fisher 1:42.27 to 1:42.28 in the girls 200-yard freestyle.

And in another non-Eagle River race, Sitka Wolves senior Taryn Fleming won the girls 100-yard back in 59.54 over West Valley junior Addylyn Gore-Hall in 59.66, with JDHS' Foy grabbling third in 1:02.30.

"It was pretty fun," Fleming said. "I don't know, it is the backstroke. I was just having fun. When I came here I want to have fun, not put stress on it, senior year no stress was the goal. I saw West Valley on my last flip and was like, 'ah, got to go.' I don't know, it was just fun. I feel like not many people in our town follow swim that closely, it is more basketball. I feel like people think swimming is a lot easier than it is, even though we can't breathe. We had some new swimmers this year and they were like, oh my god, swimming is actually not that easy. And I was like, we know. We have been doing it for years. But, yeah, it was fun."

The final event of the day was key. JDHS needed to get first or second in the girls 400-yard freestyle to win the overall title. If they placed third in the

*See **Swim** on Page 19*

SWIM

Continued from page 18

event the title would have rested in Eagle River's trophy case.

"My favorite part of the meet was when we got to the last relay for both the girls and boys," JDHS coach Hubert said. "The majority of the team was done competing, so they all came together to cheer. The camaraderie, excitement and team spirit were unmatched. And we ended with a bang with the girls 400 free relay win, and the boys moving up four places to take 2nd. This weekend was one that I will cherish forever."

Crimson Bears Liddle, Woodruff, Szefler and Foy put in a textbook relay win of 3:41.27, with Service's Hostetter, sophomore Alethia Schoppert, Fawcett and Brooks second in 3:42.40, and ERHS's Heaphy, Rumph, junior Lizzie Russian and Townley third in 3:45.22.

"Going first you just have to sprint that first 50 and try and get a head of everybody else," Liddle said. "And I think I gave it my all that first 50 and then the second one I was just trying not to die. It ended up well in the end though."

Liddle was aware of the other racers around her.

"Yeah, I could see Eagle River next to me and that definitely kept me going," she said. "I would say I probably did die a little bit, but I really focused on my wall that last 25. Just keeping my head down, trying not to breathe every stroke."

Woodruff was next off the blocks.

"I usually just try to get as far ahead as I can in front of everyone else," Woodruff said. "Or else I just try to stay with the pack. Me and this girl from Eagle River were neck and neck the whole time. It is very stressful but it worked out."

Szefler had the third leg.

"I am just trying to keep the lead going," Szelfer said. "And trying to push further so I can give the last leg a good push to the end. I was exhausted by the end of it. I felt kind of stuck, but I was surprised when I saw where I was. I just felt accomplished."

Foy had the anchor leg.

"Well Amy did a really good job of getting us out in front," Foy said. "Annabelle and Kaelyn really kept the lead. I think for the anchor my main goal is to keep the lead, get out in front, and touch the wall first to be successful. I did not see the girl in lane two (Service's Brooks). She was in my blindsight so I didn't know she was there, but I out-touched her. I am giving it my all the whole time. The main goal I think for our team is to get best times. It is just us against us, but yes, if there are people I am working out for then I will try and get in front of them as well."

The girls meet was competitive from start to finish, with ERHS and JDHS trading places throughout and ultimately being decided in the final swim.

"Going into that relay, we knew that if our girls finished second, Eagle River would win the team title," JDHS head coach Amber Kelly said. "The girls knew exactly what was at stake, and they went into that race determined to give it everything they had. Watching them come together, win that relay, and secure the state championship was an unforgettable moment. I couldn't have imagined a better way for them to finish their season, especially for our senior girls. For many of them, this was their first state championship, which made the victory even more meaningful."

This was Kelly's first year as head coach, assisted by former JDHS swimmers Dakota (Isaak) Hubert and Mesa Moran. JDHS brought 16 senior to state and 15 competed.

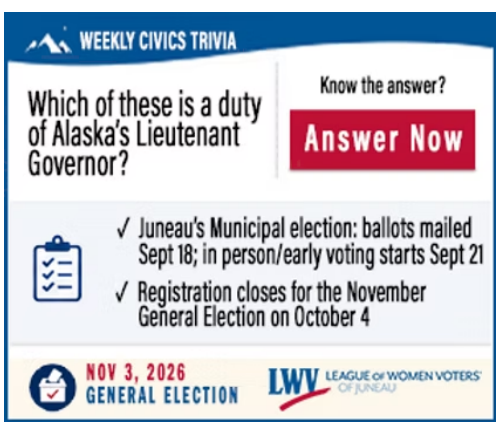
JDHS senior divers Moira Bahn and Adeline Williams had outstanding performances in the preliminaries but did not make the finals. The podium finished with Colony senior Claire Wallstrum in first place with 467.85 points, Colony senior Lyza Krozel second (393.50), Service senior Lexie Bond third (339.05) and Kodiak junior Dannica Sharratt fourth (338.35).

"This weekend was bittersweet for me because I've had the opportunity to coach most of these athletes over the past several years," coach Kelly said. "Realizing that this was the last time I would watch many of them compete as Crimson Bears was emotional.

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SWIM

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They're an amazing group of young adults, and I've had the privilege of watching them grow both in and out of the pool. I know they have bright futures ahead of them, and I'm excited to see what they accomplish next. For our senior girls, getting to finish their high school swimming careers as state champions was especially meaningful. One of the things that made me proudest this weekend had nothing to do with times, placements, or trophies. It was watching how our athletes supported each other and even athletes from other teams."

The Team Sportsmanship Award went to Eagle River High School and the Team Academic Award earned by Colony High School.

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Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé sophomore Katya Foy is hugged by mother Cathy Foy after finishing the anchor leg of the Crimson Bears state-winning 400-yard freestyle relay during the 2026 ASAA Swim and Dive State Championships, at Anchorage's Bartlett High School pool, Saturday, Nov. 7, 2026. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

JDHS ends season with loss to Wasilla at the 4A state volleyball tournament

Scrappy Crimson Bears earn Warriors' respect despite falling in straight sets



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior Haley Gilbert (7) blocks a kill attempt by Wasilla senior Emelia Solsvig (14) during the Crimson Bears' 3-0 (25-16, 25-17, 25-15) elimination match loss to the Warriors in the 2026 ASAA/First National Bank Alaska 4A Volleyball State Championships at Anchorage's Alaska Airlines Center, Friday, Nov. 13, 2026. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

The last rally of the Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé volleyball team in their elimination game against Wasilla during the second day of action at the 2026 ASAA/First National Bank Alaska Volleyball State 4A Championships on Friday at Anchorage's Alaska Airlines Center, was exactly how the Crimson Bears got here.

And it was exactly what their opponents dreaded.

"They are so scrappy," Wasilla head coach Elizabeth Olivo said. "On the way here today we were talking about the Juneau game that we watched yesterday and kind of what we should expect as a team. And in the car it was like, 'they are so scrappy. They have so much heart and they have a coach that really believes in them.' Those were the three things that we were fighting against. And those are very important things. So I do feel like teams lack a lot of heart and there was no doubt in my mind that they had a lot of it."

Trailing 24-15 at match point, senior Liliane Veikoso, after killing a shot for possession, rifled a serve across the net. It began an exchange across the net that seemed to last five minutes, and court officials noted had gone between the two sides at least 14 times. A scrappy show of unwillingness to leave the court. The ball would not fall on the opponents' side, however, and state play ended 3-0 (25-16, 25-17, 25-15).

JDHS would exchange an early lead in the first set until Wasilla opened a 11-5 advantage and pushed that out to a 23-12 lead behind kills by senior Emelia Solsvig, Jada Barnes and junior Rosie Gutierrez. The Crimson Bears could not make up the deficit despite strong play from both back and front lines and fell 25-16.

"And then there number seven, their blocker," Wasilla coach Olivo

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VOLLEYBALL

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continued. "She is really good. She is great at reading the block and she is just a really good hitter. And defensively they are just all over the place. And they kept us out. They kept us just like guessing what is going to happen. So that was really great on their part."

Number seven is JDHS senior Haley Gilbert, a dominant player that did not make the varsity team last season.

"That is one of the best compliments I could ever get," JDHS' Gilbert said. "Having it from a coach that lives in Anchorage and sees amazing players on the daily is just a better compliment that I could ever get. I am sad that we lost, but I know we played our hearts out. And I am so excited for the team that is coming up next year, and they are going to do great I believe."

JDHS coach Ibias also noted Gilbert's play and the senior class.

"I am going to take a lot of pride in Haley on getting her to where she is," coach Ibias said. "I guess if I could have one wish, I would have her here for one more year. Not to say I don't want everybody else, but Haley is just a special girl. I am really going to miss having her in the middle. But the whole group of seniors — we talked about this in the locker room — at the beginning of the year we had groups of girls. A clique here, a clique there. But every match that we went to I could see them start to intertwine with each other. And when we go to the vans, it didn't matter what van they rode in. They talked a lot about how they were felt like they were sisters and they were family, volleyball is a family. And you hear that a lot. But I truly watched them grow and really start to respect each other. I am prideful of that."

In set two JDHS took a lead on a block from senior Liliane Veikoso and a scoring tip by senior Clairee Overson. Wasilla would surge ahead 6-3 and 8-4 behind kills from Solsvig, senior Allison Brewer, and aces by senior Paylinh Luangsaysana. JDHS took a 9-8 lead with blocks by Gilbert and senior Analia Perry and a kill by sophomore Bela Pyare. The lead changed sides and Wasilla held advantages of 12-9, 13-11, 14-12, 15-14, and 20-15 before closing out the set in two short rallies of 23-15 and 25-17.

In set three JDHS never found the advantage. Wasilla led early 6-1, 8-3, 12-4, 14-5, 16-6 and 17-7 before JDHS closed to 17-12 behind a kill by Gilbert and a double block from Veikoso and Gilbert. Wasilla had a small rally for a 20-12 lead, 21-13, and 24-14 before Veikoso killed for the final service possession and the inevitable match end.

Through all three sets Wasilla pounded their spikes through defiant JDHS defenders at the net and along the back row and middle. Notable were the digs from seniors Brie Powers, June Troxel, Leila Cooper and sophomore Winter Osterhout among others, and the block attempts by Troxel, Gilbert, Veikoso, senior Analia Perry, junior Ruby Koski and Pyare - playing in place of injured junior Nellie Stowers.

Wasilla coach Olivo noted the Warriors responded by, "Being calm. Doing the little things. That is something we are fighting against. Every single one of these kids have not played in a state tournament. So yesterday we got some nerves off, unfortunately with a loss. But today, hopefully, they are just starting to build that confidence and being calm. Serve receive is a huge thing and then just not letting the scrappiness get us anxious. Just still being calm and watching the ball wherever it goes. None of these girls has played in the state tournament. Wasilla didn't make the state tournament last year. So this is a whole new team and none of them have played in this exact setting. So that is a new thing for them. It is kind of what we were battling a little bit yesterday, but today I think they are starting to get their momentum."

Unofficial stats had Gilbert with three kills, three blocks and two scoring tips; Veikoso two kills, two blocks and two scoring tips; Troxel two aces, a block, two kills, multiple digs and assists; Koski a kill and scoring tip; Perry two blocks and a kill; a kill apiece from Powers and Pyare; a coring tip from Overson; an ace from Cooper; and multiple digs and assists from Powers, and Cooper among others.

Unofficial stats for Wasilla have Gutierrez with seven kills and six aces; Solsvig five kills and two blocks; Brewer five kills and two aces; Luangsaysana five aces; senior Chloe Richardson a kill and a block; senior Brystal Shelton a kill, an ace and a scoring tip; junior Payton Sherlock a kill, a block and an ace; and freshman Muriah Dompier a kill, a block, and a scoring tip.

"I think that every single person on our team really brought their all," senior Brie Powers said. "We knew going into it we wanted to just have a fun game. Especially since our team is

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VOLLEYBALL

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mostly seniors we definitely just wanted to make the most of it. We had a long talk in the locker room after. It is good. We really went out with all we had and I think we gave it all we got. You can probably tell our team doesn't have all the height like the other teams, so we try to mix things up so we can score. I think coach Arnold really does achieve that. He is a really good mentor and coach."

Wasilla's praise impacted the JDHS team.

"It meant a lot," Cooper said. "We did come up her two years in a row and this is our third year up here. But this team really did feel like a family and we are really bonded, and we all love each other so we all gave it our all for all of our seniors. This is our last time up here. We really love playing the Anchorage teams. Southeast teams we play all the time, but Anchorage is new and it is really fun going against these teams like Dimond and Colony, all these teams. They help us get better. We watch them in warmups, watch film, and like after one mistake we know we need to fix something, it is just being aware of what is going on."

That awareness is how the Crimson Bears respond to the next play.

"That is the heart of what we tried to do this year," coach Ibias said. "We wanted to be that defensive team. We wanted to keep the ball in play. We wanted the girls to fight for every point. We talked often about winning one point at a time. Unfortunately today we let Wasilla get two or three points and then a side out, two or three points and then a side out. And we couldn't reciprocate. I am definitely not upset. We did what we wanted to do. We came up here and had been talking about it all year. We wanted to come up here and make some noise. The noise being when people start respecting Juneau volleyball. We all feel like this, coaches and players, we feel like we accomplished that. Obviously it would have been great if we had one a match but it wasn't totally about that. Obviously you want to win, but it was more about getting us back on the map again. I think we did that."



JDHS sophomore Winter Osterhout digs a Wasilla serve during the Crimson Bears 3-0 (25-16, 25-17, 25-15) elimination match loss to the Warriors in the 2026 ASAA/First National Bank Alaska 4A Volleyball State Championships at Anchorage's Alaska Airlines Center, Friday, Nov. 13, 2026. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

JDHS brought eight seniors to state and had 13 in the program. Cooper, Powers, Troxel and Veikoso were the four with the most experience the past three seasons. Key juniors Koski and Stowers were swing players between varsity and JV last season. Seniors Gilbert, Overson, Perry and Faith Contreras were not on varsity last year.

"It is never fun to lose, especially when you know how much everyone has put into it," Perry said. "Looking back at where we started and how far we made it, I am really proud of this team. We came such a long way and I wish we could play just one more game and have one more chance to be out on the court tether. Even when it ended you could see how much it meant to everyone, which made it even harder. I am also thankful for my coaches and everything they have done for me, pushed me to be better, and helped me grow as a player. I appreciate all the time and effort they put into us. I am so grateful I got to be a part of this team."

The ASAA Player of the Game selections for the match were Wasilla junior Rose Gutierrez and JDHS senior June Troxel.

"It meant so much," Troxel said of the honor. "Just kind of proof that I worked hard and despite the loss I still had fun and gave it my all. This state year means so much, especially being able to play with this team. We have a really big team full of seniors so just playing our hardest and having fun that is all that really matters at the end."

Told of the Wasilla coaches compliment about the Crimson Bears, Troxel said, "It just proves that we are a team that works hard and has grit and determination and we really show that. Especially against opposing teams. Getting words like that from another coach means a lot and it proves that."

Said JDHS coach Ibias, "It is a huge compliment, obviously coming from a good coach. A huge compliment. I mentioned that to our girls and the look in their eyes, the respect they felt was like, 'wow.' Because they were worried that teams were looking at us like an easy win. They wanted to earn respect. And I think we did that up here."

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VOLLEYBALL

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JDHS' Contreras said, "This season personally has been about building self-confidence on the court. Not letting others contradict how I see myself as an athlete. I think that building the bonds with my teammates have really helped me with that, which goes to show how much we have grown, not just as a team but a family. Not seeing these girls every day will be such a change, but I know what we have but here has really linked us together."

JDHS' Veikoso said of the season, "Nothing to lose, nothing to gain was the mindset for that last set against Wasilla. And this season was the best season of my life, being able to connect more with myself in my play and with my teammates. That feels like family, spending every day together, every down and back, every up the hill conditioning run. We were there for each other. Yes, I am sad about how it ended, but I am happy who it ended with."

4A SCORES

Thursday championship round 1:
Dimond over JDHS 3-0 (25-14, 25-13, 25-13)
Chugiak over Wasilla 3-0 (25-21, 25-17, 25-18)

South Anchorage over Soldotna 3-1 (18-25, 25-18, 25-17, 25-16)
Colony over West Valley 3-0 (25-8, 25-12, 25-12)

Thursday champ R2:
Dimond over Chugiak 3-0 (25-15, 25-14, 25-11)
Colony over South 3-1 (25-22, 25-21, 24-26, 25-16)

Friday consolation R1:
Wasilla eliminates JDHS 3-0 (25-16, 25-17, 25-15)
Soldotna eliminates West Valley 3-1 (17-25, 25-9, 25-23, 25-21)

Friday consolation R2:
South eliminates Wasilla 3-1 (25-15, 25-16, 16-25, 25-21)
Soldotna eliminates Chugiak 3-1 (25-15, 16-25, 25-17, 25-20)

Friday champ R3:
Colony over Dimond 3-2 (25-17, 25-16, 20-25, 19-25, 15-10)

Friday consolation R3:
South eliminates Soldotna 3-0 (25-20, 25-9, 25-11)

Saturday consolation R4:
Dimond vs South (elimination game)

Saturday championship:
GM1 - Colony vs Dimond/South winner

GM2 - (if both teams have one loss)

SITKA WOLVES END STATE RUN WITH LOSS TO VALDEZ

"We started out behind in the 5th set," Allen said. "And we just could not find that same groove as the previous sets."

Allen noted that the Sitka season this year, "Was about love and working hard. They all really enjoy volleyball and playing to together. They are just a competitive and fun group of players."

Sitka senior Bristol Clifton was selected the ASAA Player of the Game.

"To receive player of the game was such an honor because I feel like I played my hardest and really left it all out on the court," Clifton said. "Especially it being my last game of volleyball and for how hard I worked to get back to playing after my ACL tear benching me last season."

3A SCORES

Thursday championship round 1:
Nikiski over Nome 3-0 (25-15, 25-23, 25-16)
Kenai over Barrow 3-0 (25-13, 25-17, 26-24)

Monroe over Sitka 3-1 (25-14, 22-25, 25-23, 25-17)

Homer over Valdez 3-1 (25-16, 25-16, 22-25, 25-14)

Thursday champ R2:
Kenai over Nikiski 3-0 (25-13, 25-19, 25-13)
Homer over Monroe 3-1 (25-22, 16-25, 25-18, 26-24)

Friday consolation R1:
Barrow eliminates Nome 3-2 (18-25, 20-25, 25-13, 25-11, 15-8)

Valdez eliminates Sitka 3-2 (25-14, 25-22, 13-25, 20-25, 15-8)

Friday consolation R2:
Monroe eliminates Barrow 3-0 (25, 25-23, 25-15)

Nikiski eliminates Valdez 3-2 (18-25, 24-26, 25-22, 25-21, 15-8)

Friday consolation R3:
Monroe eliminates Nikiski 3-1 (22-25, 25-10, 25-20, 25-19)

Friday champ R3:
Homer over Kenai 3-0 (25-19, 25-20, 25-19)

Saturday consolation R4:
Kenai vs Monroe (elimination game)

Saturday championship:
GM 1 - Homer vs Kenai/Monroe winner
GM 2 - (if both teams have one loss)

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