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Juneau Independent

The True Local Newspaper of Alaska's Capital City

July 31, 2025

Taxes dominate fall ballot

Assembly OKs seasonal sales tax proposal for Oct. 7 election; school and utility bonds indefinitely postponed

By JASZ GARRETT
Managing Editor

A seasonal sales tax will appear on the fall election ballot after being approved by the Juneau Assembly on Monday. But the Assembly rejected

two bond measures to fund nearly \$20 million in school and utility projects.

Both bond measures were described as high-priority needs by local officials who spent months drafting project lists. However, concern was ex-

pressed about residents facing too many ballot items that affect their finances, especially after recent increases in property and utility taxes.

The Assembly's actions largely complete the

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MARK SABBATINI / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

Rescue officials, observers and volunteer "victims" perform their roles during an emergency exercise at Juneau International Airport on Saturday, July 26, 2025.

Still standing up for fired staff at Mendenhall Glacier

Union, other supporters expect more RIFs under reorganization plan

By JASZ GARRETT
Managing Editor

Former Deputy Mayor Michelle Hale began organizing "Stand for Staff" weekly protests at the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area in late April.

It started with three people and the largest attendance so far has been 13. Most days, the group has stood in the rain. Last Thursday morning, eight Juneau residents held colorful signs under a

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Cascade Point ferry terminal deal questioned

Doubts about value for travelers; coincides with mining company's plans for ore facility at the site

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A \$28.5 million agreement for a ferry terminal at Cascade Point, signed this week by the state despite objections by Alaska Marine Highway System board members, is being welcomed by a gold mining company planning an ore shipping facility at the site.

The agreement dated Monday for site preparation and other work with a 2027 completion date does not include funds for the ferry terminal itself, with the total project cost estimated at \$77 million. The site is on land owned by Goldbelt Inc., which agreed in 2023 to partner with the state on the ferry terminal and also has a cooperative agreement with Grande Portage Resources Ltd. for that company's proposed ore shipping terminal.

"Development of the ore terminal is not contingent on development of the passenger ferry terminal — it can be developed prior to (and independently of) the passenger ferry facility," Grande Portage stated in a May 29 press release. "However, having the ferry terminal proceed first is highly advantageous as it would result in the development of infrastructure that will also be necessary

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Police blotter

This report contains public information available from local emergency response and law enforcement organizations. This report includes arrest and citation information, not conviction information. Therefore, those listed in this report are presumed innocent. Information about these incidents can be reported anonymously at juneaucrimeline.com.

Saturday, July 26

Attempt to Serve

At 8:26 p.m. on Saturday, Jose O. Lopez, 51, was arrested on Shell Simmons Drive on a \$100 Juneau Police Department warrant for failure to appear, with the original charge of theft of services. He was taken to Lemon Creek Correctional Center.

Domestic Dispute

At 4:20 a.m. on Saturday, Louis Tagaban, 49, was arrested on David Street for domestic violence assault. He was taken to LCCC.

At 2:31 p.m. on Saturday, a 22-year-old female reported she was assaulted by a 37-year-old male on Glacier Highway.

Driving While Intoxicated

At 9:56 p.m. on Saturday, Theodore Lund, 55, was arrested on Franklin Street for driving while intoxicated. He was taken to LCCC and the vehicle he was driving was impounded.

Harassment

At 8:42 p.m. on Saturday, an 81-year-old female reported harassment by a 69-year-old male on Teal Street.

Theft

At 3:12 a.m. on Saturday, Devin Hammonds, 28, was arrested for vehicle theft, driving while intoxicated and driving without a license. He was taken to LCCC.

Traffic Stop

At 12:55 a.m. on Saturday, Ashton Allen Schaa, 22, was arrested for driving under the influence. He was taken to LCCC and his vehicle was impounded.

Sunday, July 27

Disturbance

At 4:09 a.m. on Sunday, Pearl Sharclane, 22, was arrested on Second Street for domestic violence criminal mischief. She was taken to Lemon Creek Correctional Center. Alcohol was involved.

At 5:52 p.m. on Sunday, the Juneau Police Department received multiple calls about a report of a disturbance on Rainbow Row.

Domestic Dispute

At 3:15 p.m. on Sunday, Justin Andrew Woodbury,

30, was arrested on Glacier Highway for domestic violence assault, interfering with the reporting of a domestic violence crime.

Fight

At 2:23 a.m. on Sunday, Gustavo McHenry, 24, was arrested on Front Street for disorderly conduct. He was taken to LCCC. Alcohol was involved.

Traffic Stop

At 12:58 a.m. on Sunday, Lave Iputi, 33, was arrested on Front Street on a \$25 JPD warrant for failure to appear on the original charge of driving without a license. He was taken to LCCC.

At 3 a.m. on Sunday, Eric Roskowski, 37, was arrested on Douglas Highway for driving while intoxicated, driving without a license, and violating conditions of release. She was taken to LCCC.

Trespassing

At 4:33 p.m. on Sunday, Lindsey Rae Ann Yandell, 37, was cited and released for criminal trespass and violating conditions of release on Glacier Highway.

At 7:51 p.m. on Sunday, Paul Tomasi, 29, was arrested for criminal trespass and violating conditions of release on Teal Street. He was taken to LCCC.

Monday, July 28

Out With Subject or Situation

At 10:01 p.m. on Monday, the Juneau Police Department impounded a vehicle for a parking violation on Egan Drive.

Suspicious Activity Vehicle Subject Device

At 6:38 a.m. on Monday, JPD responded to a report of damage to a business on Franklin Street.

Theft

At 10:41 a.m. on Monday, a 33-year-old male reported a stolen firearm.

At 3:40 p.m. on Monday, JPD responded to a report of a theft from a person at a business on Whittier Street.

At 6:07 p.m. on Monday, a 61-year-old female reported a stolen vehicle on Glacier Highway. JPD recovered the vehicle soon after and an investigation is ongoing.

Trespassing

At 11:31 p.m. on Monday, Dora Williams, 37, was arrested on Egan Drive for disorderly conduct and violating conditions of release. She was taken to Lemon Creek Correctional Center. Alcohol was a factor.

Union: Teacher impasse about more than money

Elimination of top salary tier and job protections, less prep time cited as issues in contract talks

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

An impasse in Juneau School District contract negotiations now involves a much smaller difference in wage increases than at the beginning of the year. But a major sticking point remains the district's proposed elimination of the top pay tier for senior teachers, according to officials and documents published this week.

The district is also offering lower health insurance benefits and preparation time for some teachers than sought by the Juneau Education Association, which represents about 275 teachers and certified staff.

The impasse was announced last Thursday in a joint statement by the district and JEA, with both parties agreeing to mediation and blaming uncertainty about state funding as a key cause of the stalemate.

A special legislative session is scheduled to begin Saturday, with the top item expected to be an override vote for Gov. Mike Dunleavy's veto of \$200 out of a \$700 increase in per-student education funding.

"If they come to town and they override the veto, and that extra \$200 per-pupil funding is released, then my hope is that would solve the problem," said JEA Past President Chris Heidemann in an interview Tuesday.

The veto cost the district \$1.4 million, according to documents posted at the district's website. A statement published at the site Tuesday noted JEA's current offer would cost about \$1.84 million for the current fiscal year while the district's offer would cost \$673,127 — a difference of about \$1.17 million.

But Heidemann said there are also sticking points in the negotiations that go beyond the amount of funds available. Among them are what he called a drastic reduction in preparation time for teachers and the repeal of a "maintenance of standards" clause.

"(That) provides protection for teachers in the contract for things that are not specifically written into the contract so they can expect that the terms of their employment will remain the same, even if things aren't explicitly written into the contract," Heidemann said.

The district, in a statement published on its website Tuesday, noted it is facing threats to fund-



MARK SABBATINI / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

Thunder Mountain Middle School, where the Juneau School District's administrative offices are located, on Friday, June 27, 2025.

ing at the federal, state and local levels — resulting in both a tenuous and unpredictable financial situation. Those uncertainties include the Trump administration's cuts to federal programs and a pending state proposal that may significantly reduce funding municipalities can provide to districts.

"Members of the Board of Education remain committed to a fair and respectful bargaining process," the statement notes. "We deeply value our teachers and the critical role they — and all staff — play in the success of our students. We remain committed to working through the formal negotiation process to reach a fiscally responsible and sustainable successor agreement."

The district also published copies of the "last best offers" by both the district and JEA — each of which is 78 pages and identical in language except for a few key provisions — noting it was to fulfill state transparency requirements.

"However, the upcoming mediation, and any future arbitration, or reopened negotiations will be kept confidential or non-public in accordance with the parties' ground rules or rules for those proceedings," the website states.

Key differences in the two offers to establish a new three-year contract between the district and educators include: • A wage increase of 4.25% during the first year sought by JEA, compared to a 3% increase offered by the district. The district initially offered a 2.5% salary increase and JEA sought a

10% increase when negotiations began in February.

• The district is offering to pay \$1,664 toward health insurance, while JEA is seeking \$1,704 per month. The district's offer also contains a passage stating "when the final contract day ends in May, the district will provide health insurance in June for those educators who were contracted more than ninety-one (91) days and are on contract on the last day of the school year."

• The district's proposal eliminates the top-tier "Step 18" pay classification, placing those educators at Step 17. Teachers, during embittered testimony before the Juneau Board of Education, have denounced that as an insulting pay cut for the district's most-experienced educators.

• JEA's proposal states "Middle School educators shall be provided a period of ninety (90) minutes per day for preparation time during the student day." The district's offer provides those educators the same 250 minutes a week that high school educators get in both proposals.

A stalemate resulting in mediation also occurred during the previous contract negotiations three years ago. That impasse declared in December of 2022 was resolved when JEA members narrowly approved a new contract in May of 2023. It provided a 2% pay increase the first year, 2.5% the second and 3.25% the third.

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School, utility bonds left off ballot

BALLOT, from page 1

process of determining what will be on the Oct. 7 municipal election ballot. Four candidates are seeking three seats in both the Assembly and school board races this fall, and residents will vote on measures to lower the maximum property tax rate and exempt food and utilities from sales taxes.

One rejected bond proposition provided up to \$10.735 million for Juneau School District capital improvements. Projects included reroofing and boiler room renovation and upgrades at several schools, as well as districtwide security and safety upgrades.

Assembly Member Christine Woll asked to postpone the two general obligation bond propositions to the 2026 ballot.

"My motivation really is about not crowding the ballot," Woll said in an interview after the meeting. "The utilities and school board are really good proposals, I think, but they can wait."

Juneau Board of Education President Deedie Sorenson told the Juneau Independent on Tuesday that the school improvement projects cannot wait until they become emergencies.

"We'll have major failures," she said. "I mean, the boiler room at JD (Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé) is at a critical point. We have other boilers in buildings that are on their very last legs, and when they go out, then buildings are cold."

Sorenson said the bond idea originated after city officials discussed the need to build a playground at Dzantik'i Heeni.

"I understand that the community is feeling pretty negatively about the strain on their wallets," she said. "I fully understand that, but I also feel like there's needs and wants, and the school maintenance is a need."

At the meeting, Woll made a motion to move the Dzantik'i Heeni playground project forward, which passed unanimously. The Finance Committee will oversee the playground site preparation.

The Assembly also unanimously postponed an \$8 million bond proposition for water and wastewater utility infrastructure improvements to 2026.

No members of the public signed up to testify on the utility or school board bond measures.

Getting far more public notice was the Assembly's proposed ballot measure to replace Juneau's 5% sales tax with a seasonal sales tax of 7.5% between April 1 and Sept. 30, and 3.5% between Oct. 1 and March 31. The seasonal rates include a temporary tax of 1% voters have renewed for decades, while a permanent 1% sales tax and temporary 3% tax also renewed many times would be repealed.

An amendment by Deputy Mayor Greg Smith reduces the winter rate, paid mostly by residents, from 3.5% to 3%. It would still generate more annual revenue than the current year-round sales tax,



JASZ GARRETT / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

The Juneau Assembly meets in Centennial Hall on Monday, July 28, 2025.

according to city financial documents.

The Assembly unanimously approved placing the proposition on the ballot. It is estimated to replace any revenue reduced due to an exemption of essential food and residential utilities, according to Before the proposal was amended, residents asked the Assembly to consider postponing or removing the implementation of a seasonal sales tax.

"As a lifelong resident, it doesn't make me feel good about my hometown when we're sticking it to the visitors," Bob Jacobsen, a downtown resident, said. "It looks like we're being too greedy and exporting our taxes on people who don't live here."

He said his family has started and operated numerous businesses in Juneau over the past 72 years, and he hopes future generations of his family continue to pay property and sales taxes. But Juneau is becoming less affordable for young workers and entrepreneurs, Jacobsen said.

Affordable Juneau Coalition member Angela Rodell opposed the seasonal sales tax, calling it ill-timed and unaffordable for many community members who are already struggling with the rising cost of living, housing, food, childcare, and utilities.

"While the proposal is framed as seasonal increase with a decrease included for six months over the fall and winter, the effect of this ordinance is a permanent rise in the overall sales tax," Rodell said. "The new annual sales tax rate will be 5.5%, not our current 5% and it will be permanent. That means anyone who buys school supplies in August, flood mitigation needs in July, or household necessities in June, will be paying a higher rate, 7.5%

just for living their everyday lives."

Smith, when proposing the lower winter tax rate, said it makes the average annual rate 5.25% instead of 5.5%.

Rodell said the proposal is not a targeted tax on tourists, but it would affect everyone who shops locally from April through September.

"People are exhausted by trying to figure out how to get more money in their pockets and how to pay for things, and that Juneau just feels like every day it gets a little bit more expensive," she said.

Assembly Member Wade Bryson said he previously opposed the concept of a seasonal sales tax because he is a summer business owner. But in the last few months, he said he realized many cities in Southeast Alaska are already "taking advantage of the additional traffic during the summer to the benefit of the community."

Smith acknowledged tension from residents not working in tourism who feel they do not benefit from the industry. He said a seasonal sales tax aims to help them.

"If I don't work in it, or if I don't have my children working in it, and I get all these impacts of helicopter noise and whale watch wakes and congestion downtown — and we get significant amounts of revenue, without a doubt," he said. "There's also on a number of those sources of revenue, significant strings. We can only expand marine passenger fees and commercial vessel taxes in certain ways."

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PEI study retains all second Douglas crossing options

Final PEL study for second Douglas crossing scores Salmon Creek as top option, but all routes

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

A final report released Wednesday for a lengthy review of a second Juneau-Douglas crossing declares all five proposed routes should proceed to the next step for an in-depth review of their environmental impacts.

The Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study gives the highest score to the so-called Salmon Creek option — the one closest to the existing Douglas Bridge — due in part to public concerns expressed about alternatives that cross the Mendenhall Wetlands. However, there are unanswered questions about the risk a breach of the Salmon Creek Dam would pose to that crossing.

People shouldn't read too much into the scores in the PEL report since there isn't a huge difference between them and the alternatives are evaluated on a "pass-fail" basis, said Greg Lockwood, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' project manager for the Juneau-Douglas Second Crossing, in an interview Wednesday.

"They're not going to mean anything when they get into the next round," he said, referring to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process.

Scores of the five alternatives, in descending order, were Salmon Creek (3), Twin Lakes (-10), Vanderbilt (-18), Sunny Point East (-20), Sunny Point West (-23). The no-build alternative scored -16, with the study noting it "does not meet purpose and need but will be carried forward into the future NEPA process to provide a baseline against which to evaluate other alternatives."



LAURIE CRAIG / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

The Mendenhall Wetlands Refuge looking toward Gastineau Channel on Sept. 8, 2024.

The report also notes the Salmon Creek crossing would be located in the failure zone of the concrete Salmon Creek Dam built in 1914, according to Alaska Electric Light and Power. Annual inspections are required by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), but recent results from those are not known.

"A Freedom of Information Act request was made in August 2024 seeking the most recent evaluation of the Salmon Creek Dam to assess the risk of a dam breach event," the PEL report notes. "To date, this information has not been provided and would be reviewed in a future NEPA analysis."

The Sunny Point East option just south of Juneau International Airport scored highest in a study presented to city leaders in March of 2024, but Lockwood said that option and Sunny Point

West (which finished third then) dropped in the ranking due to the volume of public input.

"Basically, everything we weighted to the Mendenhall wetlands affected the scores," he said.

A second crossing has been discussed since the 1980s, but is not included in the Alaska Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) with a hoped-for completion date of 2030.

The projected cost of the project has increased significantly from the \$90 million estimate in a City and Borough of Juneau capital improvement projects study published in 2020. Recent estimates place the cost of the alternatives between \$340 million (Vanderbilt) and \$530 million (Sunny Point East).

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Two people seriously injured in crash near Glacier Highway

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Two people were seriously injured when a vehicle veered off Glacier Highway near Sunny Drive, hitting other vehicles that were unoccupied in a business parking lot late Wednesday morning, according to police and fire officials.

Officials were notified about the accident at about 11:30 a.m.

The two people in the vehicle had to be extracted before they were taken to Bartlett Regional Hospital, according to Capital City Fire/Rescue, and Glacier Highway was closed during the re-

sponse and subsequent scene investigation, which lasted a couple of hours.

Jessica Hyatt said she was driving south on Glacier Highway at about 40 miles per hour when the accident happened in front of her.

"They were just driving and went off the road and into the parking lot," she said.

Hyatt said she immediately pulled over and called 911, with emergency rescue workers arriving within a few minutes.

CCFR initially posted a message on its Facebook page stating a multiple-vehicle accident occurred, but that was due to the unoccupied vehicles

in the parking lot that were hit, said Juneau Police Department Cmdr. Nick Garza.

"We're still investigating, but it looks like the occupied vehicle was inbound (toward downtown Juneau) on Glacier Highway and left the lane of travel," he said. "These cars along the other side of the brush line that you see parked here belong to employees of the business."

• Contact Mark Sabbatini at editor@juneauindependent.com or (907) 957-2306. Juneau Independent Managing Editor Jasz Garrett contributed to this story. She can be contacted at jasz@juneauindependent.com or (907) 723-9356.

Doubts linger for Cascade Point ferry terminal

FERRY, from page 1

for the ore terminal, particularly the new access road and bridge. This reduces the time and cost required for future ore terminal development."

Grande Portage in March announced exploratory plans for a new Amalga gold mine north of Juneau and south of Cascade Point.

Gov. Mike Dunleavy and officials in his administration say the new ferry terminal 30 miles north of Juneau will improve access by cutting about two hours from the six-hour boat trip between Juneau's Auke Bay terminal and Skagway. It's also promoted as part of a "Chilkat Connector" plan that involves at least two new ferry terminals — the other at the end of a road from Haines extending southward along the mountains on the west side of Lynn Canal.

"That ferry ride would be very short, and you would have an even bigger fuel and time savings," Sam Dapcevich, a spokesperson for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, said Wednesday. "You could potentially run it three times a day, back and forth, or maybe more between Cascade Point and William Henry Bay."

"So if you were a Skagway or a Haines resident, you might be able to come down (to Juneau) in the morning and take care of business. And I don't know if you could make it back in the same day, but you might be able to only spend one night in Juneau versus multiple, so it would improve transportation there."

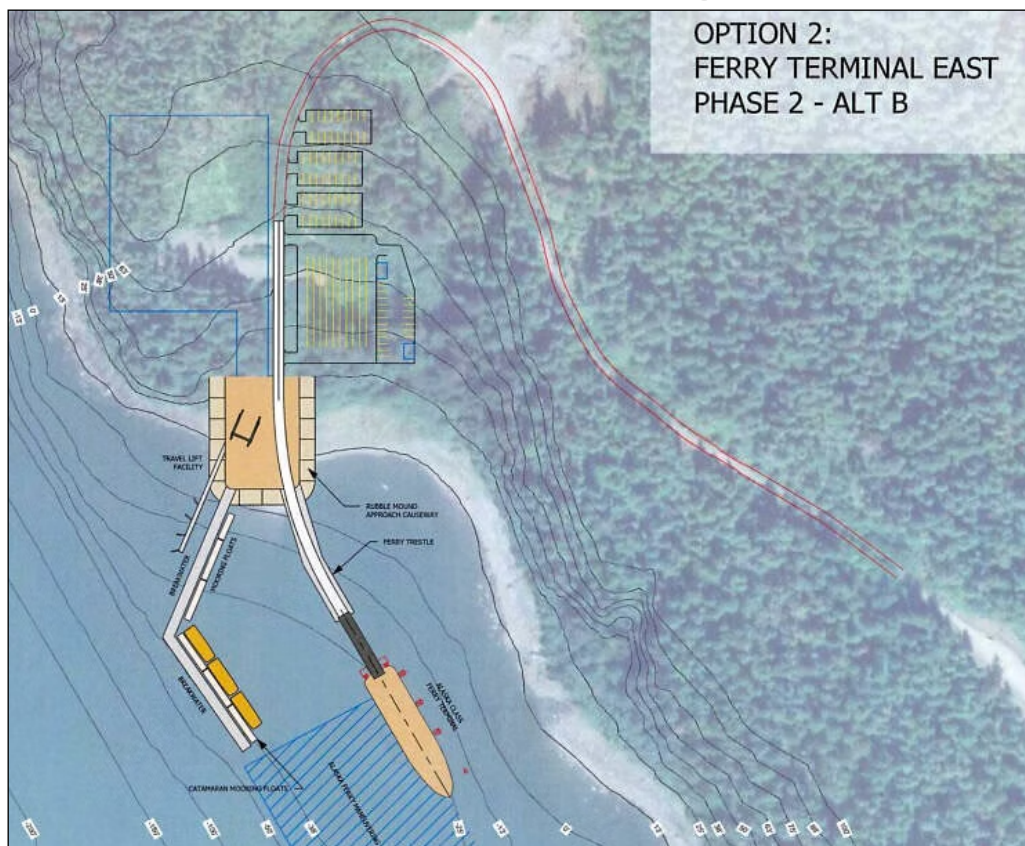
One of the goals of a 20-year long-range ferry system plan released earlier this year is "to shorten up routes, where you can with roads," he added.

But skeptics say road access to Cascade Point poses plenty of practical problems for travelers such as hazardous conditions during winter and access for walk-on passengers without vehicles. Those skeptics include members of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board, who in a meeting last Friday reiterated statements from earlier meetings that the Dunleavy administration has failed to show the project makes sense economically and for travelers.

"It seems like our inquiries are being ignored and, without knowing anything else, I'm just going to go on record that I'm against this until we have more information," said Bob Horchover, a board member appointed by Dunleavy. "And to continue to develop without even the reason for doing it is, to me, a boondoggle and so until something's presented I am fully against development of Cascade Point."

Opposition to the Cascade Point terminal has been expressed by the municipal governments of both Skagway and Haines.

"It is difficult to understand why the State is choosing to invest in the construction of a new marine facility rather than rehabilitating existing terminals, many of which — including those serving northern Southeast Alaska — are in urgent need of



ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

A conceptual design for a new ferry terminal at Cascade Point north of Juneau.

repair," declares a letter by the Skagway Assembly sent to the state last month.

The Haines Borough, in a July 23 letter, states "In the past four years, we have sent two letters to the state requesting answers to concerns about the Cascade Point site, including but not limited to the state's provisions for getting walk-on passengers to their destination, Juneau. Our long-term assumption is that the state ferry provides our access to Juneau and the Cascade Point location would get many of us only halfway there. Our questions have not been answered."

Skeptics say Dunleavy has been hostile toward the ferry system throughout his seven years in office, from trying to eliminate most of its funding early on to failing to take full advantage of hundreds of millions in federal funds intended for fleet and infrastructure upgrades.

As such, his motives for supporting the Cascade Point project are being questioned — especially since he is a strong proponent of resource development, including endorsing President Donald Trump's plans for full-scale activity in Alaska by repealing all federal regulations that prevent maximum utilization of those resources.

Offering public testimony in March of 2024 about the Cascade Point terminal before the presentation to the board was Gabriel Baylous, a Ketchikan resident who said it appears the main beneficiaries are Goldbelt, local mining companies

and other commercial interests.

"It will inconvenience walk-on passengers who are in the most need, and do nothing to address systemwide problems and take away funding from communities in need," he said. "But this project is of great benefit to Goldbelt, Coeur Alaska, Kensington, Berners Bay landholders and construction companies."

Grande Portage, in its press release, states the proposed Amalga Mine project is an "outgrowth of the Herbert Gold discovery situated approximately 25 km north of Juneau."

"The Company holds a 100% interest in the New Amalga property," the release states. "The New Amalga gold system is open to length and depth and is host to at least six main composite vein-fault structures that contain ribbon structure quartz-sulfide veins. The project lies prominently within the 160km long Juneau Gold Belt, which has produced over eight million ounces of gold."

When asked about the characterization of Cascade Point as a "boondoggle," Dapcevich said a DOT study showing the economic and other benefits of the Cascade Point terminal is scheduled for release soon.

"The economic report is in draft form, but should be coming out pretty soon," he said. "We'll show why it is good for the ferry system."

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Protesters: Goal is informing public about layoffs

GLACIER, from page 1

cloudy sky. Tourists walked by them on their way to see Juneau's most popular attraction. The "Stand for Staff" protests are held on Thursdays from 11 a.m. to noon.

Hale emphasized the protest does not oppose tourism, but instead aims to educate the public. Mass firings by the Trump administration in February left two employees remaining at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center. But protesters said federal workers have experienced uncertainty since January.

"I just wanted to let people know that we support their staff and I wanted tourists to know," Hale said. She paused the interview as taxi drivers driving by honked and waved in support.

"Thank you," she shouted back.

Hale said the group plans to continue protesting until the end of the cruise season in October.

"I spent a lot of my career working in government, and I've spent a lot of my career seeing people hate on government, and it's wrong," she said. "So I support all the federal workers that are in such a horrible situation." She said most interactions with tourists over the last few months have been friendly, with some stopping to share their support.

"Solidarity is so important," Hale said.

Eric Antrim, recording secretary of the National Federation of Federal Employees Local 251, has been attending the protest for months. He held up a "Solidarity" sign decorated with painted Ukrainian and Canadian flags.

Antrim said it is a challenge to build solidarity because NFFE Local 251 represents non-supervisory U.S. Forest Service employees in a diverse range of locations and professions across Alaska. It has workers spread throughout Anchorage, Cordova, Craig, Fairbanks, Girdwood, Gustavus, Hoonah, Juneau, Ketchikan, Moose Pass, Petersburg, Sitka, Thorne Bay, Wrangell, and Yakutat.

Antrim said employees still feel they have no job security.

"A lot of fear, a lot of trauma, a lot of fear of the unknown," he said. "Folks aren't happy. Folks are demoralized. Folks are feeling like their work doesn't matter to the American people."

Before coming to the protest, Antrim attended a staff meeting discussing a memorandum issued that morning by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The memo outlines a Department of Agriculture reorganization plan, stating that it will "phase out" the Forest Service's nine regional offices.

It also says the Forest Service will maintain a reduced state office in Juneau. Antrim was asked how many Forest Service employees remain in Alaska as of July.

"We still don't have good numbers, and that's one of the main complaints is they're calling it a plan, but there's still no acknowledgement of what the numbers are, what the programs are," Antrim said.

The memo also calls the Department of Government Efficiency layoffs voluntary.

"Much of this reduction was through voluntary retirements and the Deferred Retirement Program (DRP), a completely voluntary tool," it states. "As of today, 15,364 individuals voluntarily elected deferred resignation." Antrim said he's hearing pushback to that from former and current staff.

"It was all under duress and that's the opposite of voluntary," he said.

On July 8, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Trump administration could move forward with plans to slash the federal workforce and dismantle federal agencies.



MAP COURTESY OF NFFE LOCAL 251

The Forest Service manages 193 million acres of land, roughly the size of Texas. It is divided into 10 Regions, with the Alaska Region (also known as "Region 10") having the most National Forest land at 21.9 million acres.



JASZ GARRETT / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

Tourists walk at the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area on Friday, July 25, 2025.



JASZ GARRETT / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

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Eric Antrim hands out pins to tourists on Thursday, July 24, 2025.



JASZ GARRETT / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

U.S. Forest Service employee Brad Schumaker swears in junior rangers on Friday, July 25, 2025.

Activists worry layoffs at MGVC not over yet

GLACIER, from page 7

The ruling allows the administration to pursue restructuring efforts. Nationwide, at least 75,000 federal employees took deferred resignation and thousands of probationary workers have already been let go, according to the Associated Press.

In May, the Juneau Assembly approved spending up to \$200,000 to hire additional staff for the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area.

City Tourism Manager Alix Pierce said the money is still sitting in reserves.

To use it would take a multi-agency decision from the Forest Service, Discovery Southeast, and cultural ambassadors from the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. The funds would go toward Discovery Southeast employees and cultural ambassadors. Both have supported the Forest Service at the Mendenhall Glacier this summer.

"We don't know what that reduction is going to look like," Pierce said regarding the reorganization plan. "Hopefully it doesn't affect the Juneau office more. They've already been hit pretty hard. But it's there if we need it and hopefully we don't

have to spend it."

The Department of Agriculture reorganization plan is "only the first phase of a multi-month process."

For now, the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center will continue to operate with limited hours and staff. It is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Sunday through Friday. It is closed on Saturdays. The hours for the recreation area remain unchanged, open daily from 6 a.m. to midnight.

Ten minutes before the visitor center closed on Friday, a group of tourists became junior rangers. Forest Service employee Brad Schumaker, who came from Admiralty Island this summer to help, swore them in.

Liv Seagrave, 14, was visiting from Phoenix, Arizona. It was her first time in Alaska. She proudly held up her junior ranger patch.

"We were sworn in to take care of national parks and learn about other cultures," she said. "It's important to protect and preserve the beauty of the world because we're kind of guests here."

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JASZ GARRETT / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

Eric Antrim holds out an activism pin he gives out to tourists on Thursday, July 24, 2025.

Voices

We're not hiding our faces

By **MICHELLE BONNET HALE**

A group of 10 or 12 of us show up on the Glacier Spur Road once a week to let our embattled federal workers know that we support them and care deeply about them, and to let visitors know of the mass staff firings at the glacier visitor center they are headed towards.

We hold signs like “Staff Fired” and “Families Disrupted” as cars and taxis and buses drive by — and often honk in support.

We talk to tourists walking toward the glacier, always respecting them if they are not interested, but engaging in many conversations with people from other countries and other cities in the United States who are horrified at what is happening in our country.

We're only there for an hour one day a week and we know that our effort is tiny relative to the huge trauma dished out by the Trump administration. Yet we know from both staff and tourists that our efforts are meaningful. We've been there since April and we'll be there through the end of the cruise ship season.

We've stood for staff during many cold and wet days, dressed warmly in our winter gear and raincoats, hats and in May even mittens. It was cold!

But what we have not done, ever, is hidden our faces. Nor have the thousands of Juneauites who have shown up to the many protests that have taken place in our town since President Trump was inaugurated.



JASZ GARRETT / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

Demonstrators concerned about layoffs at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center make their presence known to tourists going to the U.S. Forest Service facility.

With the rapid building of concentration camps throughout our country and the disappearing of undocumented immigrants to bizarre locations like Eswatini in Africa, not to mention notorious pris-

ons in El Salvador, we have reason to fear who the administration will come after next. We have reason to cover our faces so that we can't be identified

See SUPPORT, page 10

Dunleavy's legislative expert claims incompetent lawmakers 'f***up' transportation funding

By **DERMOT COLE**

Jordan Shilling, who really should take his talents to the private sector, is supposed to be Gov. Mike Dunleavy's point man who deals with the Alaska Legislature.

Note what he said below about legislators, calling them incompetent and claiming they “f***ed up” state transportation funding.

He also attacked Iris Samuels of the Anchorage Daily News, who is doing the best political reporting in Alaska.

Dunleavy needs a new point man. Lol, as Shilling would say.

Sen. Bert Stedman, an expert on the state budget, says Shilling doesn't have a clue.

Here is what is really going on:

Legislators worked with the Legislative Finance Division to identify old state appropriations with funds that were not encumbered.

Legislators used that money to help qualify for the 90 percent federal match for hundreds of millions worth of transportation projects for the next fiscal year. Stedman said the list was based on a thorough review and not done lightly.

In short, the money was available. Shilling is wrong.

But Dunleavy vetoed the transfers, which means that the state share of federal highway funds could be cut by as much as \$600 million. The exact number is not clear.

What is clear is that the Dunleavy administration has not told Alaskans the truth about this mess.

The state is clouding the picture by claiming that everything is normal. It's not.

I first wrote about the situation June 18.

Dunleavy vetoed \$70 million in transportation match money that was transferred by legislators from dozens of older projects, money that budget analysts said was legally available. The \$70 million was necessary to qualify for about \$600 million in federal matching funds.

A big part of the money, about \$37 million, was transferred by legislators from the Juneau access project, an effort that had long been stalled.

The timing on all this will be critical to examine.

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Fighting cruelty with compassion

SUPPORT, from page 9

for future arrests and deportations. Yet we do not. We are openly exercising our freedom of expression.

The travesty of a budget bill recently passed by Congress includes \$29.9 billion in funding for the mass deportation effort, to build concentration camps and hire an additional 10,000 ICE agents. Do we really think they're going to stop rounding up people once they've brutally swept our country of undocumented immigrants?

ICE agents, also known as America's new secret police force, say they hide their faces because they fear retribution if people know who they are. They've got to be kidding. We have a secret police force in our country detaining people in droves and we are not allowed to know who they are? They're the ones who fear retribution?

I've been dabbling in a little history of the Roman Empire lately. The wanton cruelty that existed in Rome and was perpetrated by many of its own emperors (think Caligula) has me connecting the dots. This rounding up of largely brown-skinned immigrants is not about ridding our country of criminals and welfare frauds. If it were, ICE would not be targeting workplaces and detaining people as they are working.

No, the cruelty is the point. This is bloodlust. Even calling a detention facility "Alligator Alcatraz," where detainees are forced to eat like dogs and sleep on concrete floors, should be unthinkable in our country. Undocumented immigrants are scapegoats to create this opportunity for bloodlust. It's as if through our fractured and dysfunctional news media we have new Roman coliseums popping up on our screens daily. We are all

spectators in this hideous "sport," hiding behind our screens.

It has been said that President Trump is "playing to his base," and I assume that some who voted for him share in this bloodlust. I also know many decent and loving people who voted for him who don't. I appeal to them and to all of us: If we don't stop this wanton cruelty, if we don't unmask these secret police terrorizing our communities, the bloodlust will continue and it will be insatiable. It is not acceptable now what our country is doing to undocumented immigrants, human beings every single one. It will never be acceptable.

• *Michelle Bonnet Hale's roots go deep in Juneau and Southeast Alaska. She and her partner share their household with various relatives and three dogs. She served for six years on the Juneau Assembly.*

Cascade Point part of governor's financial games

FUNDING, from page 9

In April the Legislature began moving to transfer the money that had not been spent as matching funds, including the \$37 million that had not been spent on the Juneau project.

But on May 23rd, after years of inactivity, Dunleavy resurrected plans to use the money. This was no coincidence. It was not an accident.

The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities rushed to throw a plan together to spend the money to build part of a ferry terminal project that would cost \$77 million. It is important to understand that there is no money to build a dock or a terminal.

The Haines borough put together this list of documents that contains many unanswered questions about the Dunleavy plan. The refusal to do a feasibility study is one of the biggest problems.

Grand Portage Resources, a small mining company that seeks an ore terminal, is celebrating the Dunleavy decision: "Development of the ore terminal is not contingent on development of the passenger ferry terminal — it can be developed prior to (and independently of) the passenger ferry facility. However, having the ferry terminal proceed first is highly advantageous as it would result in the development of infrastructure that will also be necessary for the ore terminal, particularly the new access road and bridge. This reduces the time and cost required for future ore terminal development."

The Dunleavy administration pretends that the miracle rebirth of the project is all part of the Dunleavy master plan, not an attempt to prevent the Legislature from using the money to qualify for a few hundred million federal dollars.

In the meantime, the Legislature approved the budget for the fiscal year that began July 1 with the \$37 million from the Juneau work transferred to



OFFICIAL PHOTO FROM THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Gov. Mike Dunleavy addresses the media at a press conference.

help qualify for hundreds of millions in federal highway funds.

But Dunleavy vetoed the \$37 million transfer, claiming the money was not legally available.

In the end, the state is missing out on hundreds of millions in federal funds, with road projects statewide delayed or at risk of being cancelled. The Juneau project appears to be a poorly planned boondoggle because there is no complete budget or analysis.

In that context, I highly recommend this story published today in the Anchorage Daily News by Samuels about the Dunleavy administration's signing of a \$28.5 million ferry-related contract that an "oversight board said the state had not proved that the project is economically viable."

This new contract is the result of the terminal

rebirth in May.

"Dunleavy administration officials say the new terminal at Cascade Point, located 30 miles north of an existing terminal in Auke Bay, will cut ferry time from Juneau to Haines and Skagway by two hours," Samuels wrote.

"But the chair of the Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board — which was created by Dunleavy four years ago — says the department hasn't shared "some kind of business plan or feasibility study" to establish that the terminal is necessary and economically viable."

• *This column was originally published at Reporting from Alaska, an independent political analysis and commentary website by Alaska reporter and author Dermot Cole. It is republished here with his permission.*

Sports

Aukeman field is largest in years

Volunteers can help athletes at Sunday's race qualify for USA Triathlon Nationals on Aug. 9-10

By KLAS STOLPE
Sports Editor

Sunday marks one of the year's most epic sports contests in Juneau, as the Aukeman Triathlon offers three race distances that are qualifiers for the USA Triathlon Nationals in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on Aug. 9-10.

Volunteers can help the large field of athletes, who can range from first-time triathletes just looking to finish to more experienced racers looking for personal best times.

"We would love to have some more people on course," Aukeman race director Daniel Wiersma said. "The message is, more volunteers make a better event. We have what is needed, but more makes things easier. We are also happy to have a few more participants...We have 40 participants from outside Juneau, including a group of women from a triathlon team in Ohio."

The registration for Aukeman closes Friday. Athletes can register at <https://aukemantri.com>.

The Aukeman Triathlon consists of three races. To date, 70 athletes have registered for the Sprint Distance, 45 for the Olympic Distance and 15 for the Long Distance.

The Long Distance Course starts at 6:30 a.m. and features a 1.9-kilometer (1.2-mile) swim, 90-kilometer (56-mile) bike and 20-kilometer (13.1-mile) run.

The Olympic Distance Course starts at 6:45 a.m. and consists of a 1.5-kilometer (0.9-mile) swim, 40-kilometer (24-mile) bike and a 10-kilometer (6.2-mile) run.

The Sprint Distance Course starts at 7:15 a.m. It consists of a 0.75-kilometer (0.47-mile) swim, a 19-kilometer (12-mile) bike and a 5-kilometer (3.1-mile) run.

Each race touches a similar portion of the course. All swims start at the University of Alaska Southeast dock and finish at the Auke Lake ramp with the LDC marked by green buoys, the ODC by white, and the SDC by blue. Swimmers will have swim caps colored according to the course they are competing in.

The transition areas between portions are at the UAS parking lot. Each bike portion of the three races will travel to the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center and on the return, the SDC stop at UAS while the ODC continues to Tee Harbor and turns, and the LDC turns back at Sunshine Cove.

Each run portion leaves UAS through the Auke



KLAS STOLPE / JUNEAU INDEPENDENT

A triathlete cycles towards the Mendenhall Glacier during the 2024 Aukeman Triathlon. The 2025 race is Sunday at Auke Lake with the Long Distance starting at 6:30 a.m., the Olympic Distance at 6:45 a.m. and the Sprint Distance at 7:15 a.m.

Bay boat ramp and onto Auke Lake trail. SDC runners turn left at Goat Hill and run on the road back to UAS. ODC and LDC runners carry on to Black Bear Trail and Kaxdigooowu Heen Dei trail, detour across the Mendenhall River to Thunder Mountain Middle School campus and out to Glacier Highway, and then back past Auke Lake to the UAS plaza for the finish. LDC runners do that loop twice.

"We have had excellent growth in relay and under-18 participation," Wiersma said. "Numbers are slightly better than last year by outlook. We had great support from Travel Juneau with national advertising. I think the local support is really shining through this year with groups running aid stations and great event swag for participants. We are thrilled that Forbidden Peak, Forno Rosso and DJ AI from Boogie Wonderland will be contributing to a great finish line."

Race packets for registered athletes can be picked up between 9 a.m. and noon Saturday at the UAS Plaza. A pre-race briefing is at noon at the UAS Lecture Hall in the Egan classroom building.

On race day, the transition area opens at 5:30 a.m. for athletes. The LDC athletes move to the

starting line at 6:15 a.m. and start at 6:30 a.m. ODC athletes move to the starting line at 6:30 a.m. and start at 6:45 a.m. SDC athletes move to the starting line at 7 a.m. and start at 7:15 a.m.

"Overall top three individuals in each race for male and female racers get overall medals," Wiersma said. "And medals for just the winner in each age group or relay team. We also have a new Red Lantern Award for the athlete enduring the course the longest."

Among favorites are former Juneauite Will Coleman in the LDC. Coleman competed in the 2024 Ironman 70.3 World Championships in Taupo, New Zealand. Coleman will challenge favorites John Bursell (nine-time Ironman World Championships competitor) and Brandon Ivanowicz. Juneau's Melanie White, Ken Platt and Michele Shirakura are favorites for the ODC, and Kim Campbell for the SDC.

SDC awards are presented at 10:15 a.m. (adjusted for all athletes finishing), ODC awards at 11 a.m. and LDC awards following the finish of the Red Lantern Athlete.

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