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Juneau Independent

The True Local Newspaper of Alaska's Capital City October 25, 2026

Filipino American History Month bridges culture bearers

'Bridging Our Stories' film released earlier this year explores rediscovery of culture, transmission to younger generations

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

In the documentary "Bridging Our Stories," Ketchikan resident Alma Manabat Parker took a journey to the Philippines to reconnect with her culture. She met T'boli culture bearer Lyn Buti there.

Buti is scheduled to visit Juneau this weekend.

"You guys get to share in this wealth of cultural sharing and I hope you do take advantage of it," Manabat Parker said.

Buti is an artist, musician, and community leader from Lake Sebu,

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Zofina Volkmann, 14, Alma Manabat Parker and Angela Estipona-Hernandez, 14, from the dance group Magsayawan Ketchikan perform a T'boli dance on the stage at Gold Town Theater on Sept. 19, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

Taking away $1 trillion in healthcare, giving back $50 billion in project grants

As Trump and supporters tout series of RHTP awards in Alaska and elsewhere, critics say they don't help now-uninsured people when they break a leg

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

One set of headlines is dire warnings about millions of people losing health insurance and hospitals closing due to a $1 trillion cut in federal health spending during the next decade. The other is a steady stream of upbeat announcements about projects getting funding during the next five years from the $50 billion Rural Health Transformation Program.

A total of $249 million in RHTP funds for 254 projects in Alaska was announced Thursday by the Trump administration, including portable X-ray units and cellular-enabled remote monitoring of people with chronic conditions for villages in the northern part of the state.

Also recently announced for Juneau are several RHTP projects including

*See **Healthcare** on Page 10*

On first day of voting, election officials receive 983 ballots in Juneau's two districts,

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor | JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

Total votes for District 3 were the second-highest statewide

Ballots from nearly 1,000 people in Juneau's two voting districts and 12,000 people statewide were received on the first day of early voting in the midterm elections, according to the Alaska Division of Elections.

A total of 285 in-person early votes were cast in House District 3 —

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Celebration 2028 scheduled June 7-10

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

The next biennial Celebration is scheduled from June 7-10, 2028, according to Sealaska Heritage Institute, which organizes the Alaska Native dance-and-culture festival.

The lead dance group will be K̲éex̲' K̲wáan, a multigenerational group from Kake. K̲éex̲' K̲wáan translates to "Mouth of the Dawn Peoples," according to an SHI press release published Tuesday. The release states the group has 150 Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian members.

"Its roots trace back to the 1970s, when a group of children called the Kake JOM Dancers began to learn traditional songs and dances," the release notes. "In 1989, they started making regalia and performing as K̲éex̲' K̲wáan."

The lead dance group is first to perform during the Grand Entrance and Grand Exit at Celebration that features all groups. This year's event featured more than 1,800 dancers from 34 dance groups.

The SHI release notes people planning to participate in 2028 "are encouraged to book hotel rooms early as accommodations fill quickly in Juneau."

Celebration originated in 1982 as a way for Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people to gather and celebrate their cultural survival. It is now one of Alaska's largest cultural events with an estimated 5,000 total participants.

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Cost concerns, subsistence rights highlighted by the SHI president in AFN keynote address

Worl encourages Alaska Native leaders to take action as challenges mount for residents in rural communities

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor



Sealaska Heritage Institute President Rosita Kaaháni Worl addresses attendees after the Grand Entrance during Celebration 2026 on June 3, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

Rosita Kaaháni Worl, president of Sealaska Heritage Institute, urged Alaska Native leaders to advance solutions for subsistence challenges to state and federal governments during her keynote address at the Alaska Federation of Natives' 60th annual conference on Thursday.

The AFN convention began Thursday at the Dena'ina Center in Anchorage and ends Saturday. This year's theme is "Rooted in Land and Tradition, Rising in Our Voices."

Indigenous residents in rural Alaska are facing soaring fuel prices, food insecurity, lack of jobs and other hardships as they also confront uncertainties about sovereignty rights, Worl said. She shared the history of past leaders and their efforts to resolve aboriginal land claims as a model to address ongoing threats to cultural survival.

"As a student of Alaska Native history and culture, I believe we have come to another juncture in our history in which we must unite, as our historic leadership did, to address two major threats to our cultural survival: subsistence and the vitality and survival of our rural communities," she said.

Worl, who also serves on the AFN Board of Directors and chairs the subsistence committee, said she was honored to be chosen to speak. AFN is the state's largest Native organization, representing more than 140,000 Native people.

Worl opened her speech by sharing a traditional lesson to address the challenges she said Alaska Native people currently face.

She recalled a 1980 peace ceremony held to memorialize the reconstruction of a sacred Peace Rock on the bank of the Chilkoot River. The state highway department destroyed the sacred rock while widening the road to improve access for sport fishers and tourists.

Worl said clan leaders chastised state officials in Lingít for "their continued transgressions against Native people," and the peace ceremony was not carried out. Instead, elders at the 1980 ceremony encouraged young people to reflect on ongoing transformation and threats to their culture.

One elder attending the ceremony, George Davis, Kichnáalx̱, clan leader of the Deisheetaan, was a lead orator. Worl said he challenged Native youth to ponder "the significance of the waves of change surging across our homeland and revolutionizing our world." He warned that ongoing forces of change threatened cultural survival.

"Just as the Peace Rock had been transformed from its original society, so had tribal cultures been altered from their original forms. Like the Peace Rock, which had been destroyed and then reconstructed piece by piece, the elder offered the promise that Native people can rebuild their traditional cultures on the knowledge and values of their traditional society," Worl said.

Native leaders obtained the largest aboriginal land claim settlement in the nation in 1971 — the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). The settlement transferred 44 million acres of land to 12 regional corporations and over 200 village corporations. ANCSA is still the largest land claims settlement in United States history.

"Our Native leaders were adamant in their demand that we should have full control and ownership of our land and not be subject to federal control," Worl said.

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SHI

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But she added leaders recognized flaws and dangers in ANCSA that conflicted with cultural values.

"It is rare that an entire society, let alone a society comprised of five different cultural groups speaking different languages, meet to identify their common values and to discuss legislative action to ensure a society's cultural survival," Worl said.

Several amendments to ANCSA, commonly known as the 1991 amendments, were signed into law in 1988. The historic provisions recognize values identified by Alaska Natives during a 1984 AFN leadership retreat.

"I cannot overemphasize how astonishing it was that Alaska Natives met in five leadership retreats and seven conventions to identify their common cultural values, to develop resolutions to identify their common cultural values to the identified problems, and then to formulate amendments to ANCSA, all to ensure Alaska Native cultural survival," she said.

Year after year, Worl said, AFN resolutions are adopted in conventions that have identified actions to resolve subsistence challenges.

She said AFN proposals include repealing the extinguishment of Alaska Native aboriginal hunting and fishing rights in Section 4 of ANCSA and affirming those rights, amending the subsistence priority in the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA) to provide for a subsistence priority for all Alaska Natives and rural residents, and amending the Alaska State Constitution to recognize Native subsistence rights.

"We have consistently proposed co-management of fish and wildlife resources," Worl continued. "We have also proposed amending the different definitions of Alaska Natives in ANCSA and ANILCA and the Marine Mammal Protection Act to create a unified definition of Alaska Natives without regard to the federally defined one-fourth Native blood quantum. We know what needs to be done, but we have yet to advance these measures to Alaska's congressional delegation and Alaska's governor and legislators."

She said the current generation of AFN leaders must develop and implement strategies to accomplish the proposed resolutions to ANCSA, ANILCA, the Alaska constitution, and fish and wildlife management.

Worl said an observation by Senate candidate Mary Peltola, D-Alaska, "tragically highlights" challenges Alaska Natives face: choosing between feeding their family or keeping them warm.

"In one of my early papers, I described the dual economies, including subsistence and a cash economy, that characterize our rural communities. Today the interrelationship between these dual economies has become especially apparent," Worl said, pointing to surging fuel prices in rural Alaska and a lack of jobs in villages.

The price of a gallon of gasoline in the northwest Alaska village of Shungnak was $26.82 in August, according to the Alaska Beacon. Rising prices for fuel and essential goods are hitting rural Alaska especially hard. The increases are largely attributed to the U.S. war against Iran that began in February and tariffs imposed by the Trump administration.

"We can assume that the productivity of hunters decline and the food security of villages is threatened with these high prices," Worl said. "This reality demonstrates the need not only to focus on the resolution to subsistence challenges, but also the need to enhance and develop our cash economies in these villages."

Alaska's two Republican U.S. senators, Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, both acknowledged cost concerns during opening-day speeches to the convention.

Worl encouraged simultaneous action on subsistence challenges and economic depression, especially in rural communities. She said action is vital for the survival of Alaska Native culture and necessary to halt outmigration.

Worl added that even Juneau, as the capital city, is reporting a dramatic outmigration. She noted a consequence of outmigration is the potential closure of more schools across the state.

"Native people fought an aggressive

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Juneau Independent

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SHI

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battle to protect their land base and cultures," Worl said. "Miraculously, they survived, but in the wake of the cultural encounters and disruption, their communities were left weakened with a host of both physical and social pathologies that ate away at the core of their culture and continue to plague us today."

She said she believes Alaska Native people have the capacity and strength to resolve subsistence challenges and ensure economic survival of rural villages. She told the younger generations attending the AFN conference to consider these lessons.

"We must remain vigilant and undaunted, and look to the lessons offered by our ancestors who spent centuries battling to protect our way of life," Worl said.

"Natives, with the knowledge of their elders, the lessons of colonialism, and forced but failed assimilation, can envision new ideologies to control and channel the waves of change," she said.

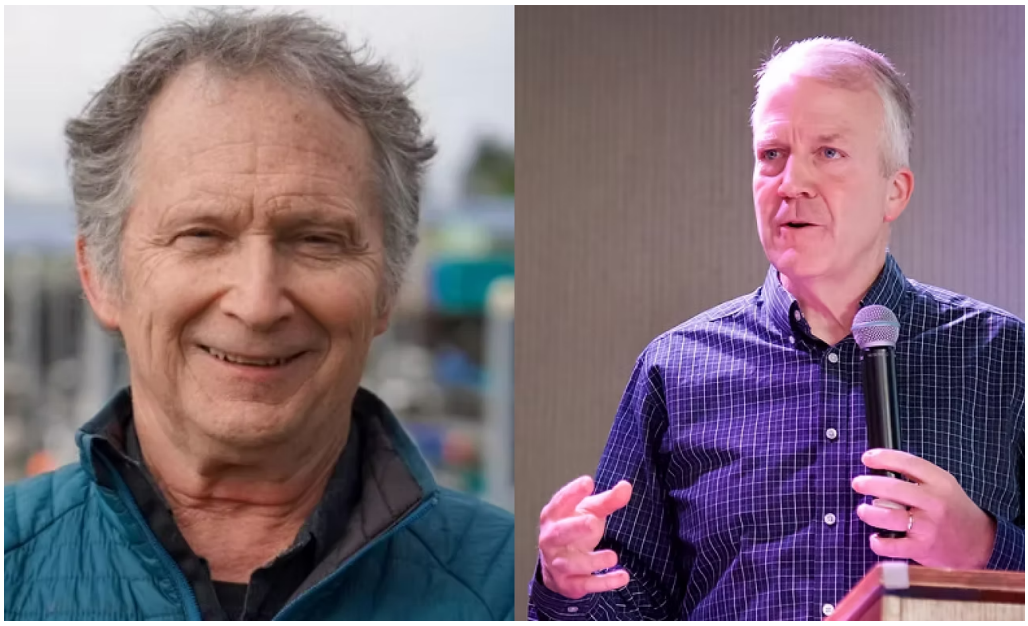
Worl said the task of AFN is to bring resolutions identifying solutions to subsistence challenges to the state and federal governments while developing sustainable village economies that do not harm the environment.

"This work is complex, requires dialogue, consensus building, and a deliberate process to ensure the best legislative language and strategies are utilized to achieve these goals," she said in closing.

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Trump says he ordered DOJ lawsuit to block the Alaska's Senate results if Sullivan loses

Federal government's filing against state would apply if Peltola wins and votes cast for Dan J. Sullivan are enough to change the outcome



Petersburg resident Dan J. Sullivan, left, and U.S. Sen. Dan S. Sullivan. (Photos from Dan J. Sullivan's campaign and by Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

The Trump administration on Thursday filed a lawsuit seeking to block the results of Alaska's U.S. Senate race if Republican incumbent Dan S. Sullivan loses and the votes cast for namesake challenger Dan J. Sullivan, a Republican retired teacher from Petersburg, are enough to change the outcome.

President Donald Trump told reporters on Friday he ordered the U.S. Department of Justice to file the lawsuit.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Anchorage against the State of Alaska and state election officials, including Division of Elections Director Carol Beecher. Her removal of Dan J. Sullivan from the ballot earlier this year for similar reasons alleged in the lawsuit was overturned by the Alaska Supreme Court.

The justices upheld a lower court ruling that state law restricts the discretion of elections officials to whether a candidate meets the constitutional requirements of the office sought — and motives aren't included in those qualifications.

Beecher responded to the ruling by taking unprecedented measures in listing the two Sullivans on the ballot. Dan S. Sullivan is the first candidate in the state to ever have "incumbent" listed next to his name, while Dan J. Sullivan's name was altered to "Sullivan, Daniel J. Jr." and lists no party affiliation, also a first.

The Trump administration — like Beecher, Sen. Dan S. Sullivan and many of his supporters — alleges Dan J. Sullivan is a sham candidate intended to confuse voters. Most of those accusations also claim the challenger's effort is being coordinated by supporters of Democratic challenger Mary Peltola.

"The sole purpose of (Dan J. Sullivan's) candidacy is to benefit the Peltola campaign by reducing the number of votes for Senator Sullivan," the fed-

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eral government lawsuit claims.

"To guard against this danger, it is vital that Defendants not certify any election result that may be impacted by voter confusion. An election result may be impacted by voter confusion if: (1) Senator Sullivan does not win the election; and (2) had all votes cast for Daniel J. Sullivan been cast instead for Senator Sullivan and Alaska's rank-choice process played out accordingly, Senator Sullivan would have won the election."

The lawsuit states the election should not be certified until "an investigation to determine whether votes cast for Daniel J. Sullivan were meant to be cast for Senator Sullivan." How such an investigation would occur is unknown since ballots are cast anonymously.

"Such factual investigation is essentially impossible (the best evidence that voters preferred one Sullivan over another is how they marked their ballots) and a reason why parties bring ballot access cases before the ballots are printed rather than after, so such a factual caveat is largely meaningless," Derek Muller wrote in a post Friday at the Election Law Blog.

Peltola and Dan S. Sullivan are locked in a tight race that could decide which party controls the U.S. Senate, with most polls showing Peltola with a small lead of 2% to 3%. Trump and Vice President JD Vance, plus other prominent Republicans, have made appearances in Alaska during the past two weeks on behalf of the Republican incumbent.

Dan J. Sullivan, in an email to the Juneau Independent on Friday, stated "This morning's news was a surprise to me and I will need some time to understand what it means. Thanks for your patience."

He has previously denied the accusation of trying to confuse voters or that the Peltola campaign is behind his candidacy. He was a member of the Alaskan Independence Party until it was formally dissolved in January, and said the Republican Party mostly closely aligns with his beliefs, but he is disappointed with the incumbent senator's actions.

"It's a free country," he told Courthouse News in August. "Most Alaskans are proud independents, and it's my sincere hope that people know who and what they are voting for, but ultimately, choice is good and voters' intent will be as varied as the candidates who are running."

Harry Child, a spokesperson for the Peltola campaign, said in a prepared statement Friday that "This is a despicable political threat to overturn an election, designed by Senator Dan Sullivan's allies to suppress the voices of Alaskans because Sullivan is terrified he'll lose the seat that has allowed him to enrich himself at Alaskans' expense for over a decade."

"We will fight to ensure every single eligible voter in Alaska can make their voice heard and that no bureaucrat or politician from the Lower 48 can interfere with our lawful, secure elections," Child added.

A statement issued Friday by Nate Adams, a spokesperson for Sen. Dan S. Sullivan's campaign, declared "We'll let the DOJ complaint run its course."

"Alaskans can tell the difference between a Democrat sideshow and Senator Sullivan's strong record of delivering for Alaska," Adams added.

Sam Curtis, a spokesperson for the Alaska Department of Law, stated in an email Friday afternoon "The Division of Elections and the Department of Law are focused on running the ongoing election and giving voter's[sic] confidence that their votes will count."

"This also includes assisting voters and avoiding voter confusion — whether through the information in the Official Election Pamphlet, asking questions of a poll worker, or bringing others to assist you with voting as permitted by law. The complaint is being reviewed, and we do not have any comment on the litigation."

The Associated Press on Friday reported "The Trump Department of Justice has increasingly been used to bolster the president's political operation, targeting his enemies and filing lawsuits against Democratic-controlled states in the run up to the election. Democrats and many voting rights advocates have long feared the Trump administration will try to block certification of elections the president's party loses much as Trump unsuccessfully tried to do when he lost the 2020 presidential election."

The federal government's lawsuit seeking to nullify a loss by Sen. Dan S. Sullivan largely repeats the accusations detailed in Beecher's attempt to remove Dan J. Sullivan from the ballot. It also notes the results of the Aug. 18 primary — when Peltola got 49.5% of the vote, Dan. S. Sullivan 41.4% and Dan J. Sullivan 2.5% — and current polls suggesting the general election will be a tight race.

The lawsuit also invokes Alaska's ranked choice voting, which many Republicans — including Trump — have criticized and sought to eliminate. A ballot measure to repeal ranked choice voting and open primaries — and eliminate some campaign finance restrictions — is on the Nov. 3 general election ballot.

"Some supporters of Senator Sullivan likely will inadvertently vote for Daniel J. Sullivan," the lawsuit alleges. "Other supporters of Senator

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DOJ

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Sullivan likely will be confused as to how to rank the three Republican candidates as to defeat Peltola. They might not rank Senator Sullivan at all, resulting in votes for Daniel J. Sullivan to be transferred to Peltola after Daniel J. Sullivan's all-but-guaranteed elimination in the first or second round of tabulations."

David Becker of the Center for Election Innovation and Research, a nonpartisan group that advises election officials, told The New York Times he cannot recall a similar instance in which the federal government sought to block certification of an election, "and certainly not 11 days before an election."

"D.O.J. making this claim this late smells of political interference and is against D.O.J. policy," he told the newspaper. "The feds have absolutely no authority to tell Alaska when and how to certify. The state officials are following Alaska state law, as the Constitution requires." He said he expected the courts to reject the administration's lawsuit.

The case is before Judge Sharon L. Gleason, an appointee of former President Barack Obama, according to The Washington Sun.

Muller, at the Election Law Blog, states "the legal argument is one of the worst ones I've ever seen."

"In short, like many Department letters over the last few years, it is designed to win the press release rather than the litigation. This one simply takes the form of a complaint," he wrote.

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Juneau Assembly to accept testimony about new e-bike regulations Monday



An e-bike sits along a bike path in Santa Monica, Calif., Monday, Aug. 10, 2026. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

After months of public uproar, the Juneau Assembly is set to hold a hearing on adding prohibitions on e-bikes and enforcing a penalty of up to a $150 civil fine for violations. But a desire to expand the regulation's scope may mean a decision is delayed.

The concern of e-bikes was first reviewed by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee in July and most recently discussed at a Committee of the Whole meeting on Sept. 21. During the latter meeting Assembly members considered regulating e-bikes citywide rather than only in parks and recreation areas.

"In general, folks are interested in pursuing the e-scooter, e-skateboard later really," said Assembly Member Alicia Hughes-Skandijs regarding an Assembly Lands, Housing and Economic Development Committee discussion on the topic in August. "People also discussed not really focusing on the e-bikes right now, but to focus on the e-moto issue."

City Manager Katie Koester is recommending the Assembly table the currently proposed ordinance on Monday because members have expressed interest in working on citywide regulations. The next regularly scheduled Assembly meeting where it might be considered is Nov. 16.

The proposal would amend Title 67 to establish regulations for electric bicycle use in city parks, trails and recreation areas, and on designated Eaglecrest trails. The ordinance generally prohibits electric and motorized bicycles on parks and trails where motorized vehicles are prohibited, according to the agenda. Class 1 e-bikes and powered adaptive bicycles may be used on trails open to bicycles, unless otherwise posted.

"We wouldn't completely dismiss this, but we would focus more on the other issues up for regulation and then spend some more time later on dis-

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E-BIKE

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cussing or crafting regulations for these other items," Assembly Member Paul Kelly said during the Sept. 21 meeting.

"It's something that you are not alone in struggling with," Deputy City Manager Robert Barr told the Assembly members present, noting it is a significant topic in many municipalities and state legislation has been passed.

He said e-motos are more powerful compared to e-bikes.

"They are much more appropriately compared to a gas-powered dirt bike than they are to an e-bike. And we've been lucky, I would say, to not have seen significant injury — not no injury — but significant injury or more serious incidents of e-moto on pedestrian type of activity, but we are a little bit unique in that respect," Barr said. He said there are examples of serious injuries happening in other communities.

"We have had lots of complaints from the public, and I'd characterize it as just general outreach from the public that there are a lot of, in some cases, very young youth on these e-motos that have a lot of power that give rise to a lot of safety concerns," he said.

Public testimony will be accepted in person at City Hall and online during the Assembly meeting scheduled at 6 p.m. on Monday. Public hearings are also scheduled to be held on other proposed ordinances.

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Goldbelt dock gets preliminary the state OK for tideland lease

25-year lease will allow reassessments of area use beyond the construction period of the proposed two-ship private port on Douglas Island, according to DNR



An overhead view of the proposed Goldbelt Aaní cruise port in a conceptual illustration. (Image by Port of Tomorrow MG)

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

A tideland lease that is one of many required regulatory steps for Goldbelt Inc.'s proposed two-ship private cruise port on the west coast of Douglas Island received preliminary approval Friday from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

The preliminary decision is open to public review and comment until Nov. 23.

The Goldbelt Aaní port, first announced in 2024 by the Juneau-based urban Alaska Native corporation, is seeking to open by the 2028 cruise ship season. Goldbelt has stated it plans to offer a range of tour facilities and traditional cultural experiences at the port site, which it hopes is the first phase of more extensive development on land it owns along the coast of the island.

"If two cruise ships are in port, there could be up to 10,000 guests and 2,000 to 3,000 cruise ship workers on site," the company's application states.

Goldbelt CEO McHugh Pierre, in an email to the Juneau Independent on Friday, stated "I don't have a confirmed date for (the port) opening. We have permits to secure and construction to line up before I can give you a firm

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DOCK

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answer on a projected opening date."

Various concerns about the private port's impact on Juneau's tourism industry have been expressed by some city leaders and residents. Key among those is an unresolved question about whether it would draw a large percentage of existing cruise traffic away from downtown — to the concern of businesses there – or add roughly 500,000 more passengers to the 1.7 million now arriving annually. Pierre has previously stated the company's intent is to spread out existing traffic rather than adding more.

The preliminary decision by DNR's Division of Mining, Land and Water recommends a 25-year lease for the tideline lease "for the construction, operation, and maintenance of the cruise ship berths and associated facilities requested." While Goldbelt states it intended to build the port facilities over a four-year time span, the decision notes the longer lease allows "for the re-evaluation of the land and state resources at a more regular interval and to reassess the use of the area."

DNR's review of the application includes responses from several state agencies, as well as the City and Borough of Juneau. No objections to the tideline permit are made by those agencies, but there is a lengthy list of requested actions and restrictions meant to limit adverse environmental and other adverse impacts during construction and the port's operation.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, for instance, notes the project "will likely also have a significant impact on commercial and personal use crab fisheries, but impacts could be mitigated or lessened by avoiding construction during certain key dates." The preliminary decision includes such limits for specific activities during portions of the year. Other recommendations by fish and game officials address issues such as bear protections, and waste and fuel storage.

DNR also noted the project will affect publicly navigable waters in Stephens Passage.

"Site operations will involve loud, heavy equipment and daily use will involve increased marine traffic," the preliminary notice states. "Public access along public waters at this site may be unsafe during operation; therefore, DMLW will allow temporary, seasonal closure of the public access easement…Closure shall only occur when necessary, due to a risk to public safety and the lessee shall provide notice to the public in the form of posted signage near the easement area."

Public comments can be submitted by 11:59 p.m. Nov. 23 via email at melissa.allen@alaska.gov, fax at 907-269-8904, or traditional mail to DNR Division of Mining, Land and Water, Southeastern Regional Office, P.O. Box 111020, Juneau, AK 99811-1020.

The Goldbelt Aaní project also needs approval from a range of other agencies ranging from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the Juneau Planning Commission. Pierre, in his email, noted the "permitting process for upland work is a staged approach, meaning the final vision will not occur with the first conditional use permit issued."

"We have two more studies to complete, and we will have answered all of the outside agency questions through the conditional use permit process," he wrote. "We expect the final report to be submitted to the planning department in December, which would begin a planning commission public process in 2027."

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

VOTING

Continued from page 1

which covers the northern portion of Juneau, plus surrounding communities such as Skagway and Haines — while 151 absentee ballots were received by mail, online and in-person. In District 4, covering downtown Juneau, 419 in-person early votes and 128 absentee ballots were received.

The 547 total votes for District 3 were the second-highest statewide behind 562 votes received in House 25 in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, according to the Division of Elections figures.

Six ballots in local districts and 65 statewide were partially or fully rejected for procedural reasons such as missing signatures.

Statewide, 6,744 in-person early votes and 5,134 absentee ballots were received, with 65 partially or fully rejected.

A first-day tally of votes from previous elections is not available from the Division of Elections, which only tracks the full early voting results upon completion, according to Stephen Kirch, a spokesperson for the division.

During the last midterm elections in 2022, a total of 267,047 ballots were cast by 601,795 eligible voters in Alaska, a turnout of 44.38%, according to the Division of Elections.

Breandán Ó Ciarraid, the Region I elections supervisor — spanning House Districts 1-6 — said the Mendenhall Mall location was busier than anticipated on Monday morning. It took a bit of time to get a second computer up and running to keep up with voters eager to cast their ballots.

Ciarraid added there was some user error at the downtown voting center,

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VOTING

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involving mistakes voters made when feeding ballots into machines.

But later that afternoon, the line was flowing steadily.

Juneau's two early voting locations — the State Office Building and Mendenhall Mall Annex — are among a handful in Alaska where residents registered in all 40 of the state House districts can cast ballots. Voters can also drop off by-mail ballots to the absentee official at the location during hours of operation.

Both locations are open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the mall annex is open Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m.

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HEALTHCARE

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$3.6 million to transfer the largely empty St. Ann's building into a senior care center and $215,000 toward a childcare center for Bartlett Regional Hospital employees. A total of $272 million was allocated for Alaska during the first year of the program, part of roughly $1.4 billion for the state over five years.



A Capital City Fire/Rescue ambulance on Oct. 9, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

"The Rural Health Transformation Program is expanding access to quality healthcare, regardless of a patient's ZIP code, while equipping first responders with the lifesaving resources they need when every second counts," a press release issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on Thursday states. "This funding will make critical investments to strengthen rural healthcare, expand access to lifesaving services, and bring modern technology to communities across Alaska."

Such projects can be helpful, but they can't replace 34,000 Alaskans who've lost health insurance since last year and average premium increases of 346% for residents who lost enhanced subsidies under the Affordable Care Act, said two Juneau state lawmakers during a press conference last week. The conference focused on cost concerns to patients and medical facilities.

"It's not going to change what happens when you break your leg, it just doesn't," said Sen. Jesse Kiehl, D-Juneau. "It's got nothing at all to do with the cost of labor and delivery. That's not a function that is impacted by what this Rural Health Transformation Program can pay for."

State Rep. Sara Hannan, D-Juneau, said RHTP projects "may reduce some health risks on down the road, but for the people who already have health needs it's not going to help them get their health needs done."

RHTP funds can be used for projects such as improving existing facilities (but not building new ones), technological advancements, assessing ways to more efficiently provide services and community efforts such as farm-

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HEALTHCARE

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to-hospital food programs. The money cannot be used to duplicate or replace personal health insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid coverage.

Bartlett Regional Hospital could lose up to $4 million annually in lost Medicaid revenue due to the cuts passed in the 2025 federal budget bill, according to CEO Joe Wanner. He also stated in May that 200 to 400 Juneau residents are expected to lose health insurance because of the cutback in Affordable Health Care Act (ACA) subsidies.

The $1 trillion in health coverage cuts over a decade and $50 billion in RHTP over five years don't represent every cut or addition to federal healthcare spending during the coming years. But they are what policymakers are largely referencing while debating the health insurance and medical treatment impacts of spending passed during President Donald Trump's second term.

During a debate last week between the two leading candidates in Alaska's U.S. House race, independent challenger Bill Hill asked incumbent Republican Nick Begich III about a conversation with a mother in Southeast Alaska.

"She was paying just over $400 a month for healthcare," Hill said. "She had a growing family, bunch of young kids. She lost the ACA tax credits. She was faced with over a $3,000 a month bill. What do you say to her?"

Begich responded by claiming high levels of fraud in the ACA program — a common focus of Republican candidates nationwide this election cycle — and stating "I am supportive of extending support for people who need it."

"That's why we invested over $1 billion over the next five years in Alaskan healthcare in our rural communities," he said, switching the focus from ACA to RHTP. "It's so important to make sure that people have access to effective, efficient care."

A similar exchange between the two leading candidates in Alaska's U.S. Senate race occurred a day later. Incumbent Republican Dan Sullivan responded to a question about thousands of Alaskans losing insurance by stating RHTP will provide "$1.4 billion to transform Alaska's healthcare system, which is a great opportunity for all of us."

Modern healthcare costs outpaced inflation for decades before the current Trump administration's policies were enacted. The New York Times reported Wednesday one year of health insurance for a family plan in 1987 cost an average of $7,058 (adjusted for inflation) compared to $26,993 in 2025. Experts cite a range of factors such as technology advances, an aging population, and employers and insurance companies shifting more costs onto individuals.

Age plays a major role in health insurance rates, with older people in particular facing "skyrocketing costs," the finance magazine Kiplinger reported in May. That gap is expected to widen with the cuts imposed by last year's budget bill.

Silver-plan health insurance coverage in 2027 would cost about 16% of the after-tax pay for a 30-year-old person making $60,000 a year and about 38% of take-home pay for a 60-year-old person making the same amount, according to estimates provided in the article. A further search shows gold-plan coverage would cost more than 50% of the latter person's after-tax salary.

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

STORIES

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South Cotabato, Philippines. Through art, cuisine and cultural education, she preserves and shares T'boli traditions.

Buti is coming with the Parangal Dance Company to teach traditional Filipino dances and lead a cooking class on how to make the T'boli dish Onuk Nelut, a chicken dish that is cooked inside bamboo.

Workshops are being held on Saturday and Sunday with Filipino Community Inc. to celebrate Filipino American History Month. The history month, recognized every October, was recognized by Congress in 2009 and the Alaska Legislature in 2023.

Registration for the workshops is open to everyone.

Workshop Registration

Filipino Dance Workshop with Parangal Dance Company and culture bearers at the Filipino Community Hall on Saturday and Sunday from 10 am to 3:30 p.m.

Onuk Nelut: A T'boli Food & Cultural Experience at Auke Recreation Area's Eagle Shelter on Sunday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. (Limited space)

From Roots to Rhythm: Cultural Peformance by Parangal Dance Company on Saturday at the Filipino Community Hall at 7 p.m.

Bridging Our Stories

The documentary "Bridging Our Stories" follows Manabat Parker's journey to embrace her role as a culture bearer in Ketchikan. She immigrated to the United States at 8 months old.

"Am I Filipino — am I Filipino American — am I American enough?" she asks in the short documentary directed by Rafael Bitanga.

The 24-minute film explores the intersectionality of cultural identity. It

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took 100 hours of filming to create.

It was a full theater at Gold Town for the first time the film was shown publicly in Juneau. More than 65 people overflowed out of the theater during a free watch party last month.

The film won five awards and world-premiered in May 2026 at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival. Since then it's played at more than a dozen film festivals, a conference and several community screenings.

Those included educational screenings for Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé and the University of Alaska Southeast Asian American/Pacific Islander Club. The AAPI club facilitated a panel with the documentary's team during the event.

AAPI is scheduled to show the film again Friday at the UAS Egan Library at 6 p.m. with free admission, including a teaser performance from Parangal Dance Company.

At 8 years old, the director immigrated to Kodiak Island from the Philippines. Bitanga began filming in 2023 and production wrapped in 2025.

"I think one of the questions I was always asking is, 'Why are Filipino stories not seen in media, specifically in film?'" he said during an interview. He added he studied hospitality, not film, but became interested in media during a college project.

"Bridging Our Stories" is his first film, which he pursued after graduating. He said he first learned filmmaking through the nonprofit organization See Stories.

Bitanga said he connected with Manabat Parker through the Alaska State Council on the Arts and she was a grantee for the Youth Cultural Heritage program.

"Being a Filipino immigrant myself and having parents who ended up working for the cannery in Ketchikan, it was from those types of connections that ended up leading me to 'I am from the community.' This is a story that I think really matters to many more communities, which has actually now led us here to Juneau itself," he said.

He said by hosting community screenings and discussions, the production team hopes to inspire people to take action within their own communities.

"Yes, this is a Ketchikan film about a Filipina in Alaska, but much more universally, I think it answers the question of — for the younger generation — what can they learn from the history of decolonizing Filipino history that has been transmitted?" he said.

"So that the younger generation can start to understand: Yes, we were colonized by Spain, by the United States, by the Japanese. So those are the different things that we would love to be able to continue to work with our elders and be able to share with the younger generation that this is a different part of our culture that's not often said."

Producer Lailanie Gadia grew up on the Island of Guam, where she said there's also underrepresented stories and a large Filipino population.

"A lot of these stories don't exist in mainstream media. And so, I think it's really important that we really push to bring this film beyond Alaska," she said. "I'm just excited by the journey that this film has already taken, and just the interest that we're getting from so many people across the nation who are interested about Filipinos in Alaska."

She agreed with Bitanga that it's important to uplift culture through the film, adding it was an all-Filipina production team. She came onto the project in November 2024 to help Bitanga finish the production and strategize the film's release.

"We really wanted to make sure that our voice and our story was authentic, and so we were really very intentional about building the team. And I think when we're trying to tell stories from our community, we really want to make sure that we build a strong team that understands the intention of the film," Gadia said.

Both said they are proud of the documentary, but Bitanga added "we're only halfway there."

"We've made the film, we're doing the screenings," he said. "Let's continue to activate communities across



Ketchikan resident Alma Manabat Parker, whose story is featured in the film "Bridging Our Stories," speaks during a panel discussion at Gold Town Theater on Sept. 19, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

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Alaska and across the U.S. regardless if there's a Filipino community center or not."

'See what's at stake'

In the film, Manabat Parker grieves the closure of Ketchikan's Filipino community hall where she grew up. It closed in 2015 due to a lack of funding. She was taught Filipino dance in the 1980s by Helen Lamarsh.

"What does it mean when these physical spaces are lost?" she asked.

Juneau's Filipino Community Hall was originally constructed in 1909 during the gold rush era and the building downtown was later added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1994.

"What is the story that's going to be told for younger generations to actually see what's at stake?" Bitanga said during a panel after the Juneau screening. "I think to ground it here in Juneau, I am incredibly grateful to see that we have the only standing Filipino community center in the state of Alaska, right here in Juneau."

In the film, Manabat Parker talked about the importance of having a place to gather and practice dance. She said when Ketchikan's center closed, it felt like a symbol of Filipino immigrants being continually invisible. Filipinos comprise 10%-12% of Ketchikan's population, and many came for cannery work and military service.

"I was really trying to reinvigorate our Filipino culture and music dance scene, because when I was growing up, as the film showed, we were really vibrant, and then something happened," she said. "We don't know what happened, and it could have been the physical space, it could have been a disconnect from different generations that come and immigrate to Alaska.



From left to right: Kaye Roldan, Krista Barril and Andrea Fransisco Nguyen are seen pictured in a framed photo at the Gold Town Theater on Sept. 19, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

But when I was awarded the Rasmuson Individual Artist Award, I was like, 'What can I do? And what can I do to change that?'"

After its closure, Manabat Parker began cultural enrichment classes in Ketchikan's elementary schools. The film follows her seeking a deeper connection with her heritage to mentor her dance students, which led her back to the Philippines.

"I felt the need to reconnect with my Filipino identity to be a teacher — felt a need to bridge the gap," she said.

Manabat Parker said colonized dances are traditionally what Filipino children in Alaska learn. She described the Indigenous Filipino dances she witnessed during her trip as vibrant and rich.

"Traveling helped me feel like a part of the Philippines," she said. Manabat Parker added she doesn't think traveling is necessary to reconnect with culture and "the journey is however you want to take it."

"We're just all in the presence of learning," she said. "You all can absorb regardless of your age, and again, you don't have to travel to do so. You can find it in your community, and by us coming to Juneau, we hope we've extended that opportunity to extend our family and our community for sharing and cultural exchanges and broadening that throughout the state of Alaska. Because again, Filipino presence is here."

Manabat Parker said she hopes the film inspires leaders of all cultures, drawing parallels to cultural revitalization efforts of the Alaska Native community.

After the film was shown in September, two of her students danced on stage with her.

Zofina Volkmann and Angela Estipona-Hernandez, both 14, said in an interview they've been dancing for about five years.

"It's really cool to see us being represented and our culture," Volkmann said about the film.

She explained the dance at the film screening was from the T'boli tribe, as were handmade clothes they wore for the performance.

"There's different variations of the dance. Like this one is an updated version of the other ones. So we practically took all the other dances from the

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variations, and then we mix it into one," she said.

"There's all different cultures coming to see us, and I feel connected with the people who are Filipino and the people who aren't Filipino, and it feels so special for me to share," Estipona-Hernandez said.

Manabat Parker described experiencing a full-circle moment during the film showing. She said she hopes she is doing justice to what her elders passed down to her.

"We're doing this for the next generation to understand — to represent us," she said, adding both Volkmann and Estipona-Hernandez now teach dancers themselves.

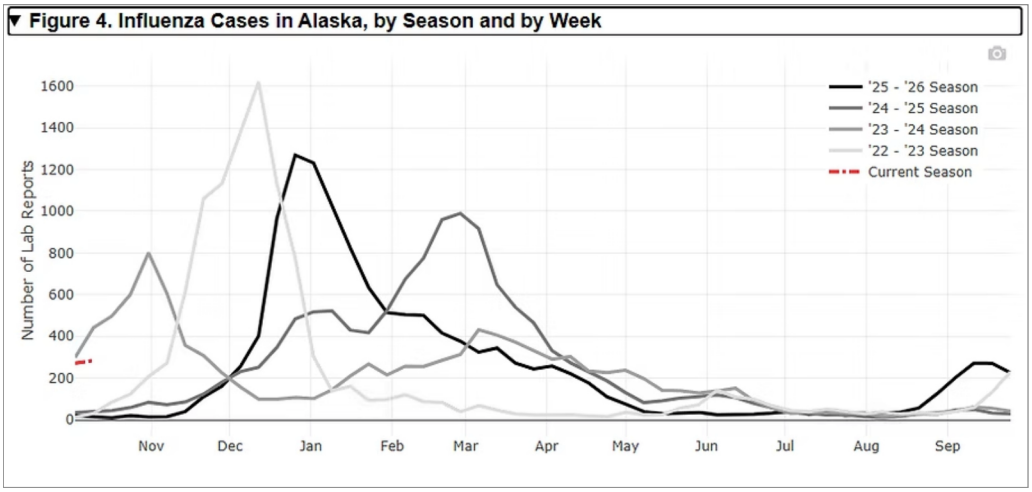
• Contact Jasz Garrett at jasz@juneauindependent.com or 907-723-9356.



From left to right: Zofina Volkmann, Angela Estipona-Hernandez, Alma Manabat Parker, Lailanie Gadia and Rafael Bitanga are recognized for the film "Bridging Our Stories" at Gold Town Theater on Sept. 19, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

Juneau sees steeper and earlier flu season

Hospital infection preventionist attributes this largely to tourism; recommends residents get flu shot before exposure



The Alaska flu snapshot compares influenza from season to season. (Alaska Department of Health screenshot)

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

In the last month, Juneau has consistently had a steeper and earlier rise than the rest of the state in influenza A, according to Charlee Gribbon, the infection preventionist at Bartlett Regional Hospital.

She said usually a rise in positive flu cases occurs in late October, making this one about a month early.

"Juneau is a small town, but having four or five people in the hospital with flu was not expected. So that was alarming to me and unusual," Gribbon said in an interview Thursday.

She said the hospital had 22 admits total in September and none in October.

"You also see a subsequent rise in flu going around in the school-age kids," she said. "But hospital-specific, I look at the positive cases and the people who are admitted. Most of them have been over 65. There's been a couple in the 40s, age 40s, for hospitalizations with severe respiratory symptoms. Most of those people over 65 are off the cruise ships."

She said most patients developed symptoms on the cruise ship and then went to the emergency room. Gribbon said there's generally always a sicker set of patients near the end of the cruise ship season. Juneau's last cruise ship departed on Oct. 6 after breaking another record.

"You can't really tell unless you're asking people who they had contact with. But a cruise ship passenger comes into a local gift shop; I sometimes go downtown," she said regarding the correlation to local cases. "We

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FLU

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share the same air, then I go home, a couple days later, I feel sick — so yeah, if a person is in the community, they've had contact with our community, it's going to make its way into the population.

However, she added "this year it's pointed right at tourism" with the flu flying in via planes or coming in on cruise ships.

"Sicker people later on in the season are bringing it to us when they normally wouldn't," she said.

Southeast Alaska is outpacing most other regions with a case rate of 116 (new infection cases per 100,000 residents) in the week ending Oct. 3, according to the state Department of Health. Juneau's case rate was 136.8 per 100,000 residents.

Juneau also saw a steep early rise in the 2023-2024 flu season.

Gribbon said the hospital usually has a summer increase in patients with COVID-19, but it remained low this year at Bartlett Regional Hospital. COVID-19 activity slightly increased over the summer for the state overall but remains relatively low, according to the Department of Health respiratory virus snapshot.

"There's only been one or two people admitted to the hospital, and so I haven't seen a lot of COVID, not at all," she said.

But Gribbon said that with influenza A early and no COVID spike this summer, patterns feel disrupted.

"I still want to have the message out there that COVID is a bad respiratory infection, and that you should still take precautions when anybody's got the sniffles or cough or feeling bad," Gribbon said. "They should recognize those symptoms, stay home."

She gave prevention tips to the Juneau community, recommending residents get their flu shot now before exposure and any planned travel.

"It's a great idea to get your COVID shot while you're already at the pharmacy," she said. "For people over 65, it's especially important because you see those people getting hospitalized and having long-term illness. It's not just a week or two sick; it's more like a month. So over 65 definitely first line of prevention is a flu shot. Next line of prevention is if you're in crowded areas, wear a mask."

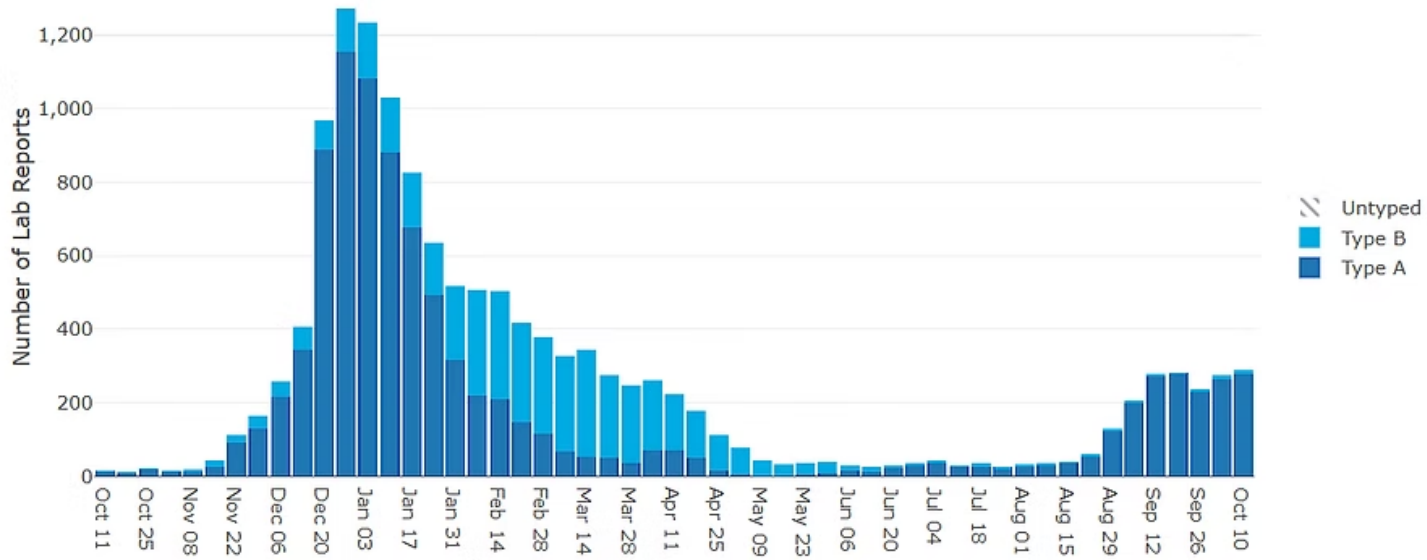
Gribbon said this year and last year track with fewer and fewer people trusting the flu vaccine.

"Getting the flu vaccine isn't just about you. It's about your community, your kids, your workplace," she said. "The more people that get the flu shot, the more we can control the spread of flu."

Gribbon added that regularly washing hands, getting good sleep, staying hydrated and managing stress are also good prevention measures. She added that influenza B cases typically increase in late winter to early spring. The traditional influenza season runs from October through May.

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

▼ Figure 6. Lab-Confirmed Influenza Types in Alaska, 2025–2026



During the 2025-26 season, influenza was predominantly type A, with increasing type B activity in the first half of 2026. The recent increase in influenza activity since June has been type A. (Alaska Department of Health screenshot)

Juneau's election results certified with 36.11% turnout

1% seasonal sales tax passes by 14%, higher mill rate cap fails by 5%, closest candidate race sees winner prevail by more than 6%

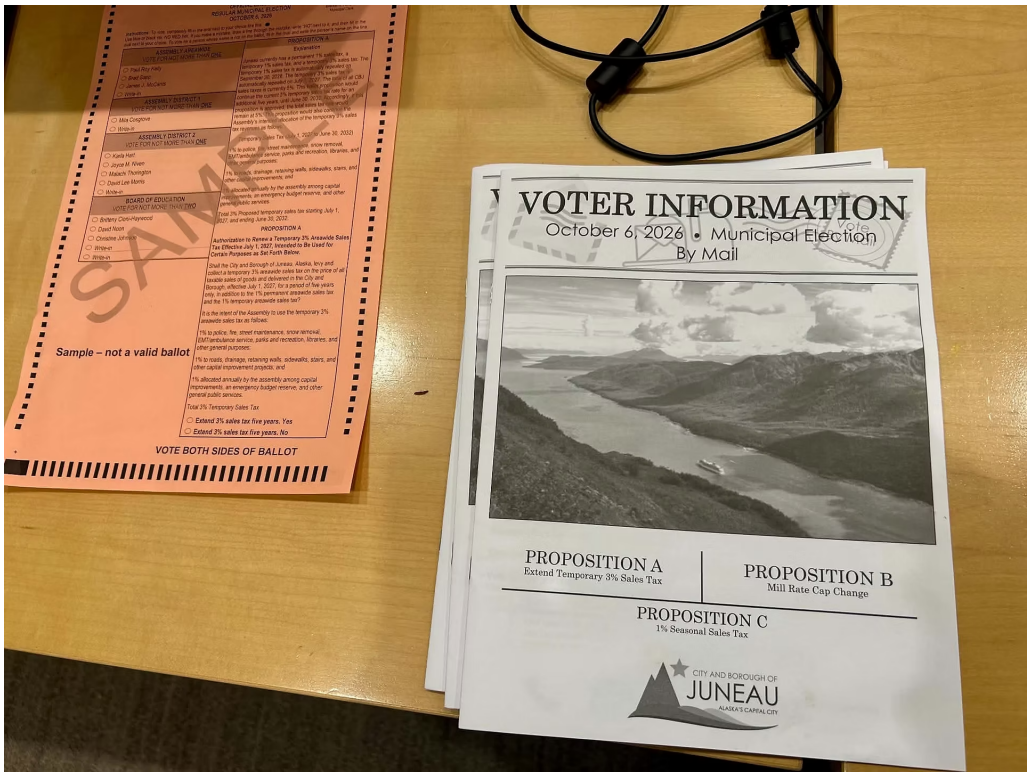
By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Results of Juneau's Oct. 6 municipal election were certified Tuesday, with the 10,027 voters representing a middling turnout rate of 36.11% compared to the past several years, according to the city clerk's office.

The certified winners of the three Juneau Assembly races, two Juneau Board of Education races, and three tax-related ballot propositions were unchanged from preliminary results released on Election Night. All of the races had winners with decisive margins of 5% or more.

Paul Kelly was reelected to a second Assembly Areawide term with 62.09% of the vote, ahead of challengers Brad Sapp with 32.13% and James McCants with 5.78%. In the other competitive Assembly race, Joyce Niven was newly elected to a District 2 seat with 33.06%, defeating Malachi Thorington with 25.78%, Karla Hart with 24.11% and David Morris with 17.05%.

Mila Cosgrove was elected to her first term as an Assembly District 1 member as an unopposed candidate.



A sample ballot and voter information packet outlining the three propositions in the local election seen at the Mendenhall Valley Public Library on Oct. 5, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

First-term school board incumbents David Noon and Britteny Cioni-Haywood each were reelected by solid margins, respectively getting 40.1% and 36.29% against challenger Christine Johnson at 23.61% for two open seats.

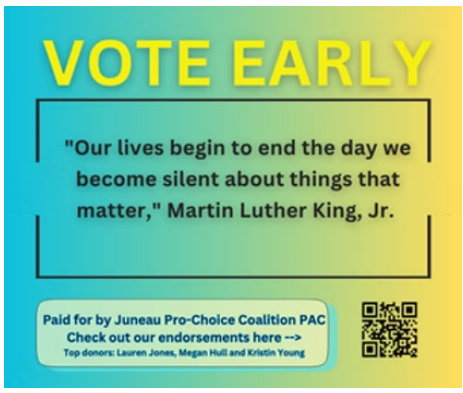
Juneau voters easily renewed a temporary 3% sales tax for another five years with 80.11% voting yes and 19.89% no. An additional 1% seasonal sales tax between April 1 and Sept. 30 passed with 57.16% in favor and 42.84% against, while raising the mill cap to 12 instead nine failed by a vote of 47.52% in favor and 52.48% against.

Voter turnout in past elections was 36.63% in 2025, 38.7% in 2024, 33.98% in 2023 and 32.87% in 2022, according to the clerk's office.

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







Voices

I'll take results

By PAULETTE SIMPSON

Too many politicians spend their airtime and political capital on trendy national issues that have little to do with helping the people they represent. They're after social media hits, invitations to the fanciest fundraising events, and TV spots.

I deeply appreciate that all three members of Alaska's congressional delegation are not like that. Instead, we are blessed with a team of serious workhorses – not show horses – who put Alaska first in everything they do.

Hardcore partisans can't seem to separate their emotions from issues relevant to Alaska (or Juneau) so there's no grace given, or gratitude expressed, for good things that come our way – or even assigning credit where credit is due.

I understand that voting is a highly personal exercise. But the consequences of our individual votes affect the community in which we live, so it's important to get it right.

That said, in a just world, Sen. Dan S. Sullivan would win Juneau by a landslide on Nov. 3.

Why? Consider the icebreaker and GLOF (glacial lake outburst flooding).

The homeporting of the icebreaker Storis in Juneau will be an economic gamechanger for the capital city. This isn't happening because Juneau is an ideal coastal community or because we pay a lobbyist to look after us in Washington, D.C., or because we fund the Juneau Economic Development Council to bring jobs to Juneau.

It's simply a fact that for the past four years, Sen. Sullivan has done most of the heavy lifting with his Senate Commerce Subcommittee membership and chairmanship to convince the U.S. Coast Guard to select Juneau as the homeport for the Storis. Sullivan's diligence and mastery of the committee process were necessary conditions for the opportunity to materialize.

Relationships matter. Hard work matters. Seniority matters.

Something that does not matter — at least to Dan Sullivan — is that this town he has helped so much has never supported him politically. Juneau is not his stronghold — or even a place where most voters support him. But decent public servants do the right things for the sake of doing them.

Further consider Sullivan's work to address the GLOF. The staggering amount of federal attention and investment Juneau has received to address Juneau's flooding issue has come about largely because of Sullivan's work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Of course, the long-term fix is still in the works. Disrupting that progress by switching out the congressional member and staff delivering it — because of partisan or philosophical differences — seems counterproductive.

Yet some in Juneau can't seem to quit saying that, "Sullivan hasn't stopped Trump from (insert offending item here)." I have two questions for you: Has any Republican succeeded in "stopping" Trump at much of anything? And when some may try, does that usually help or hurt their constituents secure critical natural disaster aid or perhaps an icebreaker?

Elected by some to take care of all is the way public officials are supposed to serve, and not all do. When they channel their time, energy and influence into delivering big things that matter to a community's long-term viability, regardless of that community's political support, good faith should flow in both directions. It's something Juneau should think about.

Will any of this matter to the people of Juneau when we vote? I do not know.

But it will most certainly matter afterwards.

• *Paulette Simpson is a Douglas resident and a member of Women for Dan Sullivan, which receives financial support from Alaskans For Dan Sullivan, the senator's principal campaign committee.*

Trapped by a web of deceit

By RICH MONIAK

Tuesday's rally in Wasilla was supposed to be a chance for President Donald Trump to make the case for reelecting Sen. Dan Sullivan. But his speech that ran on for more than 80 minutes was mostly about himself. It also wasn't surprising that he made no serious effort to address the war in Iran or its effect on the energy prices.

Neither did Sullivan. "Whether you're heating your home or filling up your truck or running a small business, these costs matter," he said without mentioning the war. "Alaskans should know that all of us, from the president on down, are working on these challenges every day."

Then he added the solution for "Alaska's energy challenges is to produce more Alaskan energy by and for Alaskans."

That's the same lame line his spokesperson used after Trump violated the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act.

Sullivan was one of many cosponsors of the Graham sanctions bill.

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WEB

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Originally introduced in April 2025, it was intended to put pressure on Russia to end its brutally unjust war against Ukraine. One of its provisions would allow the president to impose a 500% tariff on imported goods from countries that buy Russian oil and gas.

Trump signed it into law last month. Then on Friday, he announced Russian President Vladimir Puttin had agreed to export about 36 million barrels of diesel to U.S. and global markets during the next several months. It won't affect prices much, though, because it's barely more than the daily global demand.

A bipartisan group of senators, including Sen. Lisa Murkowski and five other Republicans, demanded Trump rescind the deal. It won't "benefit Americans," they wrote. It "only provides Putin with more fuel to finance his war machine and enables Russia to continue its brutal attacks on Ukrainian civilians."

In a stunning display of self-serving hypocrisy, Sullivan didn't sign the letter.

"When America buys Russian oil, we fund Vladimir Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine and his threats against the U.S. and our NATO partners," he said when he introduced a bill to ban Russian energy imports a few days after the war began.

President Joe Biden signed an executive order to that effect the same week. During the next two and a half years, Sullivan frequently criticized him for not doing enough to support Ukraine.

Almost immediately after taking office, Trump blamed Ukraine for starting the war and pressured them to cede territory to Russia to end it. Sullivan did push back on that. He believed Sen. Graham's original sanctions bill spooked Putin into agreeing to meet Trump in Anchorage last year.

A few weeks after that summit failed to produce a ceasefire, Trump called on European leaders to stop purchasing Russian oil because it was funding Putin's war machine.

It wasn't the last time he reversed positions on the war. That's partly why it took him well over a year to support the Graham sanctions bill. Then he violated it in less than a month.

Trump's deal with Putin wasn't intended to bring down the price of diesel. Just like his campaign bribe to give every American adult $5,000 if Republicans hold on to their congressional majorities, it was an act of desperation spawned by his fear they will lose the House and possibly the Senate.

Sullivan is desperate too. That's why he participated in last month's fake White House announcement that South Korea committed to investing $54 billion in the Alaskan LNG line.

He's not stupid though. He knows Putin has been playing Trump like a fiddle. But like them, he trapped himself in a web of deceit.

When Putin invaded Ukraine, he called it a "special military operation" that would be over within days. It's been raging for almost five years and he still won't admit it was a colossal blunder.

Trump's war against Iran hasn't resulted in nearly as much death and destruction. But like Putin, he foolishly expected it to be over quickly and failed to consider its economic repercussions. The odds of him admitting it was mistake aren't any better than finally acknowledging he lost a free and fair election in 2020.

Sullivan helped Trump escape accountability for trying to overturn that election, then helped him win back the White House. And now he's afraid to admit how well that worked out for Putin.

• *Rich Moniak is a Juneau resident and retired civil engineer with more than 25 years of experience working in the public sector.*

A question of honor

By SIMON LISIECKI

Sen. Dan Sullivan, alongside 46 of his Republican colleagues, has voted in near-total compliance with the Trump administration. His notable breaks were opposing a Justice Department compensation fund and funding the White House ballroom.

Sen. Sullivan's military background means he understands the reality of war. By failing to forcefully check the administration's escalation with Iran — despite explicit warnings from the entire defense establishment — he chose partisan compliance over strategy. That is a profound failure of leadership.

Sen. Sullivan has long stated that America's ultimate weapon against China and Russia is our global network of allies. Yet he remains silent as the administration insults and slaps random tariffs on our Canadian and European partners. This, too, is a failure of leadership.

In this election, Alaskans face a critical moral and economic choice. While Sen. Sullivan offered mild criticism over the administration importing Russian diesel and waiving mandatory sanctions, a mere television appearance is not enough when America breaks its word. This is a question of national honor. Alaskans must vote their conscience and send someone to Washington who answers to the Constitution and national interest, never to blind party loyalty.

Simon Lisiecki
Anchorage

Sports

Swimmers show strong strokes at Sitka Invitational



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé sophomore Saana Amundson and other swimmers get set to compete in the 400-yard freestyle relay final at the Mt. Edgecumbe High School Aquatic Center Saturday, Oct. 17, 2026. (James Poulson / The Daily Sitka Sentinel)

Crimson Bears win 12 events on Friday, 11 on Saturday

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé swim team won 12 of 24 events on Friday at the Sitka Invitational and 11 on Saturday, as they continue to swim into the approaching Region V championships Oct. 30-31 at the Dimond Park Aquatic Center.

"I am incredibly happy with how our athletes performed this weekend," JDHS coach Amber Kelly said. "They did an amazing job, especially considering how tired and worn down they are from the hard work they have been putting in at practice day after day."

JDHS seniors Avery Smith, Amy Liddle, Kennedy Miller and Bailey Fisher opened Friday's meet in Sitka winning the girls 200-yard medley relay (MR) in one minute 58.6 seconds (4. sr Kaelyn Szefler, so Maddie Manlulu, sr Maddox Rasmussen, sr Adeline Williams 2:06.62; 6. so Natalie MacKinnon, so Elinore Higgins, fr Nyah Harris, sr Moira Bahn 2:22.40; 7. So Hannah Plang, so Ila Mannino, so Augustine Kvasnikoff, so Brook Taintor 2:27.95).

JDHS' junior Liam Kiessling and seniors Kaden Aldrich, Josh Edwards and Sam Pallenberg won the boys 200 MR in 1:41.34 (5. fr Josh Ely, sr Ben Pallenberg, so Levi Phelps, so Henry Thatcher 2:01.05).

Liddle won the girls 200 individual medley (IM) in 2:14.21 (2. Miller 2:29.40; 5. Harris 2:57.41) and the 100 breaststroke in 1:10.82 (4. Manlulu 1:16.51; 5. Janz 1:25.04; 6. Van Kirk 1:25.32; 7. Crocker 1:25.40; 11. Mannino 1:45.22).

Fisher won the girls 50 freestyle in 25.98 (4. Szefler 26.71; 5. Woodruff 26.84; 6. Manlulu 27.32; 8. Smith 27.89; 10. Taintor 28.28; 12. so Clara Van Kirk 29.04; 14. Higgins 29.20; 15. jr Mae Crocker 29.31; 15. Plang 29.31; 18. Mackinnon 30.01; 19. fr Kaylin Janz 30.33; 23. so Saana Amundson 31.88; 24. Kvasnikoff 32.29; 24. fr Genevieve Coleman 32.29) and Miller the girls 100 butterfly in 1:05.20 (2. Szefler 1:05.52; 3. Rasmussen 1:10.73; 6. Harris 1:19.70).

"Meets are not always about the times on the scoreboard," coach Kelly said. "Sometimes, they are about focusing on the little things that make a big difference on technique, strong turns, solid finishes, breath control, and all the details we have been working on in practice. Those were the things we were looking for from our athletes this weekend, and they absolutely delivered. They showed us that even when they are tired, they can stay focused, execute the skills we have been practicing, and race with purpose."

Edwards won the boys 100 fly in 53.04 (5. Boily 1:05.54) and 100 breast in 1:04.06 (2. Aldrich 1:04.65; 4. Thatcher 1:15.61; 5. B. Pallenberg 1:15.98).

Kiessling won the 100 free in 49.73 (6. Andrews 56.13; 8. Giron 1:00.47) and 100 back in 56.98 (3. S. Pallenberg 1:00.55; 6. Ely 1:08.26).

JDHS sophomores Maddie Manlulu, Brook Taintor, Annabelle Woodruff and senior Fisher won the girls 200 free relay (2. Liddle, Smith, Rasmussen, Miller 1:48.95; 4. Szefler, Janz, Kvasnikoff, Plang 1:55.84; 6. Amundson, Van Kirk, Coleman, Harris 2:11.72).

JDHS senior Easton Berger won the boys diving Friday with 178.45 points (2. Davis 156.40; 3. Newport 156.20; 7. Aldrich 97.50). Ketchikan's Lina

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Merrill won the girls with 143.60 (2. Bahn 143.25; 5. Williams 121.85).

"They did well," JDHS dive coach Savona Kiessling said. "They generally performed their region lineups split across both days in order to evaluate which dives need the most attention these next two weeks."

Petersburg's Lexie Tow won the girls 200 free in 2:02.88 (4. Woodruff 2:13.34; 5. Rasmussen 2:13.92; 6. so Sarah Anderson 2:27.57; 9. Mannino 3:15.87) and Sitka's Zach Martens the boys 200 free in 1:49.14 (3. S. Pallenberg 2:02.89; 4. Thatcher 2:04.70; 6. Ely 2:08.71; 9. sr Chedi Giron 2:19.52).

Petersburg's Cyrus Hulebak the boys 200 IM in 2:04.84 (jr Axel Boily DQ).

Sitka's Corin Colliver won the boys 50 free in 22.38 (6. so Keagan Andrews 24.64; 7. Phelps 24.99; 10. B. Pallenberg 26.26).

Petersburg's Tori Miller won the girls 100 free in 59.41 (2. Taintor 1:02.54; 3. Plang 1:04.23; 4. Anderson 1:05.53; 5.



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior Josh Edwards fistbumps Sitka's Corin Colliver after finishing the last leg of the 400-yard freestyle relay final at the Mt. Edgecumbe High School Aquatic Center Saturday, Oct. 17, 2026. (James Poulson / The Daily Sitka Sentinel)



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior Kaelyn Szefler competes in the 100-yard backstroke final at the Mt. Edgecumbe High School Aquatic Center Saturday, Oct. 17, 2026. (James Poulson / The Daily Sitka Sentinel)

Higgins 1:05.83; 7. Amundson 1:12.60; 8. Kvasnikoff 1:13.87).

Sitka's Colliver won the boys 500 free in 5:25.63 and Sitka's Taryn Fleming the girls 500 free in 5:37.42 (3. Fisher 6:16.74).

Sitka's Olivia Jarvill won the girls 100 back in 1:05.92 (2. Smith 1:06.55; 3. Mackinnon 1:18.20; 5. Coleman 1:29.43).

Sitka's Tommy McCarthy, Ben Lihou, Zach Martens and Colliver won the boys 200 free relay in 1:30.37 (3. Kiessling, S. Pallenberg, Thatcher, Berger 1:43.75; 5. Edwards, Phelps, Giron, Davis 1:45.63; 6. Aldrich, Andrews, Boily, Newport 1:45.79). Lihou, James Nellis, Sawyer Bastian and Cedar Powers won the boys 400 free relay in 3:32.20.

The JDHS girls did not race a 400 relay on Friday.

"I have been foregoing the 400 free relay on Friday nights as the kids are exhausted," coach Kelly said. "And I want to get them out to get food and get to bed in a timely manner."

On Saturday, Bahn won the girls diving with 156.35 (6. Williams 107.80). Berger won the boys with 171.60 (2. Newport 140.25; 6. Davis 117).

"Easton looked very strong and nailed his difficult dives, which I was happy to see," coach Kiessling said. "Moira also performed well despite having to perform the reverse category, which has been giving her some concern since she performed it a bit too close to the board a month ago. When that happened, it can be difficult to perform the dive with the same confidence. Brady continues to up his difficulty, Alex is busy refining his lineup and is still working on adding one additional high DD (degree difficulty) dive. Addie continues to polish up her dives by adding height. Kaden dove Friday and performed well despite how new he is to the sport. Alex in particular had a very strong performance Friday, which was great to see."

JDHS' Szefler, Manlulu, Liddle and Woodruff won the girls 200 MR in 1:57.97 (5. Mackinnon, Crocker, Rasmussen, Higgins) and Kiessling, Edwards, Phelps and Aldrich the boys in 1:43.03 (3. S. Pallenberg, Andrews, Boily, Thatcher 1:55.31).

Liddle won the 200 free in 2:01.30 (2. Fisher 2:10.49; 3. Smith 2:11.31; 5. Taintor 2:17.83; 6. Manlulu 2:26.78; 7. Plang 2:28.30; 8. Kvasnikoff 2:33.45) and Sitka's Colliver the boys in 1:50.54 (3. Aldrich 1:53.33; 4. Edwards 1:55.57; 6. Phelps 2:05.33).

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Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior Kennedy Miller swims in the 100-yard breaststroke finals at the Mt. Edgecumbe High School Aquatic Center Saturday, Oct. 17, 2026. (James Poulson / The Daily Sitka Sentinel)

Sitka's Fleming won the girls 200 IM in 2:22.43 (3. Szefler 2:31.07; 4. Rasmussen 2:34.93; 5. Mackinnon 2:48.38; 6. Crocker 2:49.18; 8. Van Kirk 3:01.41) and Sitka's Martens the boys in 2:03.69 (3. Ely 2:31.45; 5. Giron 2:56.51).

JDHS' Woodruff won the girls 50 free in 26.90 (2. Miller 27.16; 6. Anderson 29.02; 7. Harris 30.62; 8. Coleman 32.29; 9. Mannino 40.26) and Sitka's McCarthy the boys in 22.82 (8. S. Pallenberg 24.50; 10. Thatcher 25.75; 12. Boily 26.33).

JDHS' Woodruff won the 100 fly in 1:03.32 (2. Liddle 1:03.83; 5. Fisher 1:16.51) and Kiessling the boys in 54.44 (2. Aldrich 54.64).

Petersburg's Tow won the girls 100 free in 57.62 (5. Manlulu 1:00.83; 6. Taintor 1:01.67; 8. Higgins 1:05.41; 9. Van Kirk 1:06.63; 10. Mackinnon 1:06.70; 12. Crocker 1:07.66; 13. Janz 1:07.83; 14. Anderson 1:07.89; 15. Harris 1:08.20; 17. Amundson 1:10.86; 18. Coleman 1:11.48) and Sitka's Colliver the boys in 49.28 (3. Edwards 50.77; 7. Phelps 54.08; 9. S. Pallenberg 54.63; 11. Ely 57.88; 12. B. Pallenberg 58.52).

JDHS' Rasmussen won the girls 500 free in 6:01.91 (5. Mannino 8:29.29) and Sitka's Elliott Galanin the boys in 5:31.45 (2. Thatcher 5:39.85; 7. Andrews 6:52.12).

JDHS' Fisher, Woodruff, Taintor and Smith won the girls 200 FR in 1:49.24 (5. Plang, Janz, Harris, Van Kirk 2:03.40; 6. Kvasnikoff, Coleman, Mannino, Amundson 2:19.72). Sitka's McCarthy, Lihou, Martens and Colliver won the boys in 1:29.93 (2. Kiessling, Aldrich, Phelps, Edwards 1:32.24; 5. B. Pallenberg, Ely, Boily, Giron 1:46.14).

Petersburg's Bella Miller won the girls 100 back in 1:07.46 (2. Szefler 1:08.95; 6. Plang 1:18.60; 8. Janz 1:20.68; 9. Amundson 1:26.76) and Sitka's Martens the boys in 58.56.

Petersburg's Tow won the girls 100 breast in 1:12.13 (2. Miller 1:13.82; 4. Smith 1:20.88; 5. Higgins 1:27.16; 6. Kvasnikoff 1:28.47) and Petersburg's Hulebak the boys in 1:04.63 (3. Kiessling 1:06.90; 4. Andrews 1:11.42; 6. Boily 1:14.72).

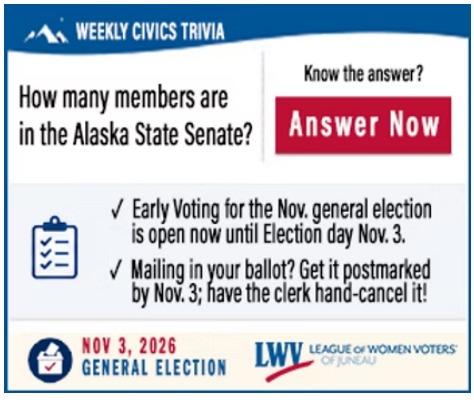
JDHS' Fisher, Liddle Szefler and Miller ended the girls meet winning the 400 free relay in 3:54.72 (3. Manlulu, Smith, Janz, Rasmussen 4:16.09; 4. Crocker, Taintor, Higgins, Mackinnon 4:26.90; 6. Amundson, Kvasnikoff, Harris Coleman 4:55.60). Sitka won the boys in 3:19.38 (2. S. Pallenberg, Andrews, Thatcher, B. Pallenberg 3:47.53)

"I am proud of their effort, their progress, and the way they continue to push themselves," coach Kelly said. "The times will come, but right now, we are building for strong performances when it matters most, at regions and at state."

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Southeast Showdown puts 11 Crimson Bears on top

JDHS takes team titles; Wrangell's Carney, Barnes are boys, girls outstanding grapplers

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé wrestling team honored its senior grapplers on Saturday and proceeded to sweep the team titles in the Southeast Showdown, placing 18 boys and 13 girls on the three-tiered podium with 11 earning championships.

"This means a lot," Crimson Bears senior Ethan Van Kirk said. "Especially since it is senior night, our last home tournament. It means a lot to be able to show up for the community."

Van Kirk decisioned Metlakatla senior Porter Hudson 5-2 in the 160-pound title match.

"I was thinking about being a senior, honestly, quite a bit tonight in my match," Van Kirk said. "It was on my mind quite a bit. Obviously the goal was to go out there and just wrestle, but it is always in the back of your mind that this is the last home tournament match I am ever going to have."

That last match also was laden with blood as Van Kirk took a blow to the nose on a Hudson move and the match would have a few stoppages to quell the bleeding. The issue was ultimately resolved with tape wrapped around Van Kirk's head and nose.

"They wrapped me up in some new headgear," Van Kirk mused. "It was harder to wrestle in. I had a little bit of trouble with my hair mixing in with the tape, I couldn't see much, but it was enough to go finish the match. I got that reversal at the end and that really cemented the win. It put me three points ahead and after that there was a few seconds left, and I just finished out the clock."



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior Ethan Van Kirk grapples with Metlakatla senior Porter Hudson during their 160-pound championship match under the spotlight at the Southeast Showdown in Juneau's George Houston Gymnasium, Saturday, Oct. 24, 2026. Van Kirk won by a 5-2 decision. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

The JDHS boys scored 280 points, Wrangell 125.5, Petersburg 104, Metlakatla 80, Mt. Edgecumbe 74.5, Dimond 64.5, Hoonah 62, Sitka 50, Thorne Bay 50, Haines 45.5, Skagway 26.5, Angoon 16, Craig 14, and Kake seven.

JDHS senior captain Jed Davis pinned his way to the 145-pound title, putting Petersburg senior Tanner Caulum on his back with 31 seconds left in the second period.

"It feels great," Davis said. "I expected to win and I did, and it feels good. Always does…To be honest I don't know what I did out there, but consistency in the practice room is the key to winning all the time. You just get in there, you work hard, and you make things happen on the mat."

The Crimson Bears girls scored 115 points, Wrangell 62.5, Mt. Edgecumbe 61, Dimond 43, Angoon 29, Kake 28, Craig 28, Hoonah 14, Sitka 11, Thorne Bay five, Haines and Petersburg 0.

JDHS sophomore Madelyn Dale scored a 10-2 major decision win over MEHS sophomore Audrina Dull for the girls 126-pound title.

"For me winning this tournament was really cool; last year I lost in finals so this year I got some redemption," Dale said. "I think my key to win was just being confident in myself and enjoying it. I was really excited to wrestle, and I went out and wrestled my match."

The two-day tournament was dealt a twist with Ketchikan falling prey to

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the somewhat challenging skies over Southeast Alaska and having to deplane in Wrangell on the 'milk run' to Juneau, missing the first day of matches. The Kings were accommodated with inclusion into Saturday's second chance tourney to earn matches under the spotlight in the evening (Kayhi team points were not included in the boys and girls varsity placings).

The Wrangell Wolves traveled earlier and claimed multiple placings on the podium with 152-pound senior Jackson Carney earning the boys Outstanding Wrestler of the tournament and 132-pound junior Kourtney Barnes the girls Outstanding Wrestler.

"I think the thing I was most pumped about is just the opportunity to be back on the mat with tough competition," Carney said. "I had some great matches this weekend with some guys like Jed Davis and Keller Jackson. It was just getting back on the mat and getting back into saying, 'All right, I know how to do this. This is what we love.' So really, coming to the Southeast Showdown is just a reminder of how much I love this sport. And what a blessing it is to have the opportunity to do this."

Carney earned a technical fall, two pins and a 15-4 major decision in the championship over Dimond senior Keller Jackson to improve to 15-0 this season. He also wrestled an exhibition win over JDHS' Davis, the two combatants have battled on weight bracket mats their entire high school careers.

Barnes pinned Mt. Edgecumbe senior Ashlynn Lonewolf with 45 seconds remaining in the second period and is also undefeated this season.



Anchorage's Dimond High School sophomore Payton Baker pins Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa. at Kalé junior Harlee Brown in the girls 145-pound championship match under the spotlight at the Southeast Showdown in Juneau's George Houston Gymnasium, Saturday, Oct. 24, 2026. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

"It just shows me how much I improved since last year," Barnes said. "I haven't gotten a single tournament title since last year except at my own home tournament. It just feels really good to see that my work is really beginning to pay off. In the final match it was my armbar that was key for me."

Wrangell's 107-pound sophomore Jenna Meissner also earned the podium, winning by fall over MEHS sophomore Kaija Donath.

"I think it was awesome," Meissner said. "Just coming out of cross country season this is kind of a blast and I just love the sport so it was fun to be here. The transition from cross country to wrestling just kind of comes and I think it was easy. So I normally like to throw a lot of head-and-arm. So I switched it up and I won with a headlock. I had to switch it up because they know I am always throwing the head-and-arm."

Girls champions included JDHS 114-pound junior Nixie Schooler by fall over PSG freshman Freya Fenner; CRG 120-pound senior Athena Fraley over JDHS freshman Leighton Hall; Dale at 126 pounds; Barnes at 132 pounds; JDHS 138-pound freshman Feangai Kivalu by 18-1 technical fall over Kake freshman Amari Davis; Dimond 145-pound sophomore Payton Baker by fall over JDHS junior Harlee Brown; JDHS 152-pound sophomore Ciara Dutton by fall over MEHS sophomore Kira Oxereok-Weyapuk; CRG 165-pound sophomore Eva Clark by fall over JDHS junior Keira Jenkins; and JDHS 235-pound sopho-

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more Phoebe Martin by fall over KAK junior Sassy Sharclane-Wo.

“It was fun taking my third home tournament title,” JDHS’ Schooler said. “But it was also sad realizing it was some of my friends’ last home tournament. I didn’t use any special moves, I just went out there and showed up.”

Anchorage visitor Payton Baker enjoyed Dimond’s first trip to Juneau.

“I am just really excited,” Baker said. “I thought it was fun just to wrestle. That is really all I wanted to do, win or lose. I just didn’t want to get in my head, so I just made sure to watch other people's matches, have fun and just pay attention to people. It was so fun to be in Juneau. It is so beautiful. The mountains are so pretty. Right when we got here I was like, ‘I want to go on a hike.’ It was awesome.”

On the boys title mats HNS 103-pound sophomore Luke Bell won by fall over JDHS freshman Logan Sivertsen; SIT 112-pound sophomore Jene Keith by 18-3 technical fall over TB sophomore Waylon Matejowsky; MEHS 119-pound senior Benjamin Balluta by fall over HNS freshman Asher Jimenez; and JDHS 125-pound sophomore Matthew Shockley by 7-3 decision over WRG junior Curtis Harriger.

“Losing in the finals in the Southeast Showdown tournament last year had a big impact on me and made me not want to lose in front of my home crowd ever again,” Shockley said. “The key to my victory in my finals match was wrestling with my emotions in check and using the skills all the coaches have been teaching throughout the season. My opponent was from Wrangell so I was already mentally prepared because I know Jack Carney has a very strong program with all of his wrestlers and could give each wrestler a great game plan for their upcoming matches. I learned a lot in my previous match against my teammate (jr Carson Kautz) and I got a little reckless and did not wrestle with good fundamentals."

"Coach Mesmer pulled both of us aside after the match and gave us both some really good advice on wrestling to our strengths and staying away from situations that would compromise us. I remembered what coaches talked to me about going into my finals match and I wanted to make sure I did not put myself in any position that would be dangerous. Being able to get JDHS a win on senior night means a lot to my teammates, my coaches, and me. While this victory means a lot in the moment we are not done yet and we are taking this one week at a time, this season has just begun and we have a long way to go.”

JDHS 130-pound sophomore Landon Hill won by 14-5 major decision over senior teammate Felix Hesson.

“It feels great to dominate in front of my people,” Hill said. “It is hard to wrestle someone that you know all their moves and counters and you practice against. I just thought to myself dominate this match, get him tired, and have some fun out there. Man this sport is fun!”

JDHS 135-pound senior Camden Messmer won by fall over MET junior Jeshua Mowers.

“It feels good to be a champ,” Messmer said. “I went into the match wanting to maintain control and I think I did a good job controlling him thoughout the match. Then I pinned him in an arm bar.”

JDHS 140-pound junior Joshua Beedle by fall over classmate Michael Carson.

“It is pretty cool,” Beedle said. “I get the opportunity to wrestle in front of my peers and it feels great. I kind of just tried to wrestle my match. Keep it in my field. It is hard to face someone you practice with. We wrestle every day. We know exactly what each other are going to do. It is just who remembers more, really.”

Davis won at 145 pounds; Carney at 152 pounds; Van Kirk at 160 pounds; HNH 171-pound senior Lawrence Howland won by fall over SIT sophomore Landon LaDuke; PSG 189-pound senior Eli Anderson won by 16-11 decision over WRG senior Everett Meissner; PSG 215-pound junior Edgar Olsen won by fall over JDHS junior Hugo Rank; and 285-pound MET senior Josiah Bergtold won by fall over JDHS junior Sean Fairchild.

“Oh it is really great,” PSG’s Anderson said. “I am a senior so this is my last year and I am just trying to do the best that I can. I was just working on my shots. Just getting in, trying to set them up, execute them, work through them and do what I know how to do. I know the competition is strong. These guys know how to wrestle. There is a lot of strong competition in Southeast and I am excited to see how the season goes.”

JDHS honored seniors Samuel Buttner, Jed Davis, Landyn Dunn, Tyler Garrison, Felix Hesson, Jaeger Hubert, Jaxin Jim, Gage Keller, Camden Messmer, Tyler Oudekerk, Tristan Ridgway, Ethan Van Kirk and Max Webster before the Saturday finals.

“I think our team did well,” JDHS coach Adam Messmer said. “We have a lot of young kids on our team and they improved thoughout the tournament. Our older kids are right where we want them and it was a good tournament to shake off some rust before heading back up north next week.”

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

Gallery with more than 100 photos from Southeast Showdown at juneauindependent.com