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Juneau Independent

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August 23, 2026

Primary shows Peltola leads over Sen. Sullivan

Nick Begich III has 46%-39% lead over combined major opponents; Democrats positioned to gain seats in the Legislature; proposition limiting donations gets dominant win.

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

The major takeaways of Alaska's primary election as of early Wednesday morning, with a solid majority of votes cast seemingly counted:

- Mary Peltola is ahead of Sen. Dan S. Sullivan by more than 5% and would still be ahead if all of the 2.44% voting for Dan J. Sullivan were confused.

- Two Democrats are dominating individual results in the governor's race with nearly 42% between them, and there has been discussion of a deal

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A sign greets voters at the Mendenhall Valley Public Library on Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

Dzantik'i Heeni playground opens

Ribbon-cutting ceremony precedes the first day of school for 1st-12th grade a playground.

By ELLIE RUEL, Reporter

Over 100 children eagerly waited for the ribbon across the entrance to a new playground on the Dzantik'i Heeni campus in Lemon Creek to be snipped during an opening ceremony on Wednesday.

The Dzantik'i Heeni campus is a former middle school that now houses Yaakoosgé Daakahídi High School, Montessori Borealis and Juneau Community Charter School due to consolidation efforts to solve a budget crisis in 2024. It was the only school in Juneau with elementary-aged students lacking

"This is kind of picking up the debris field from the consolidation where we moved different programs into this building," said Juneau Board of Education President Britteny Cioni-Haywood. "Elementary schools, by state law and regulations, are supposed to have a playground."

Before the playground was constructed only one smaller park, Sigoowu Ye on Pine St, was available to families in Lemon Creek. That site was recently updated with new equipment

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Assembly OKs selling City Hall to Sealaska Heritage Institute

Supporters say nonprofit has made significant improvements to downtown; opponents question if city getting fair value from \$1.5M sale rather than an open auction

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Selling City Hall to Sealaska Heritage Institute for \$1.5 million rather than auctioning the site for a minimum bid of \$2.5 million was approved by the Juneau Assembly by a 6-3 vote on Monday night.

The Alaska Native nonprofit organi-

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Southeast Alaska voters speak on issues important to them in state primary elections

'I believe that this is probably going to be one of the most important turning point primaries'

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

Dionna Jackson, a Juneau resident originally from Kake, was encouraging other young voters to cast their ballots in the Alaska primary election on Tuesday afternoon.

"It doesn't matter who you vote for as long as you use your right to vote," she said at the Mendenhall Mall polling station. "Politics do affect you in your everyday life. It affects your wage, the cost of living here, it affects what's going to happen in the future, what's going to happen to your children."

Alaskans voting in the primary are narrowing the races for governor, U.S. House and U.S. Senate, and the Alaska Legislature to a field of four candidates each in the Nov. 3 general election. A measure ending unlimited campaign donations was also on the ballot. Final unofficial primary results are expected Aug. 28. The results will be certified by Aug. 31.

Leaders emerged in early primary results on Tuesday night, as well as Ballot Measure 1, which prohibits donors in state-level elections from giving a candidate more than \$2,000 per election and limits groups to \$4,000 per candidate passing 72%-28% as of 11:58 p.m.

Jackson added it's important for voters to educate themselves on candidates and ballot propositions before voting.

Winston Warr said he would like to see a new governor who supports education since his daughter is in high school.

"Teachers aren't being paid enough and not supported enough," he said.

After voting, Juneau resident Eric Harrell said his biggest concern at the moment is the control structure of government. The November midterms will de-

See Alaska Voters on Page 6

Assessment of 2026 glacial lake outburst flood confirms less damage than last year

Tree strikes remain the biggest threat to HESCO barriers; extent of their reinforcement and repairs still under review, CBJ says

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

Although this year's glacial lake outburst flood caused the Mendenhall River to crest below forecast at 14.7 feet on Thursday afternoon, there was still risk, said the city's emergency manager in an update to the Juneau Assembly on Monday.

"Frankly, we're very lucky that there was a slow release and that the crest of the lake and the river was not much higher," Ryan O'Shaughnessy said. "When we have these slower releases, generally that can mean a lower crest in the lake and the river. But I'd like to highlight that tree strikes are the most probable failure mode of the HESCO barriers."

He said a slower release means more time water is pushing against the semipermanent levee, which stretches approximately five miles along the Mendenhall River.

"There's more vulnerability from a timing perspective for tree strikes against the HESCO barriers," he said.

The addition of Phase 2 barriers installed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers this summer added more homes to the Mendenhall Valley evacuation zone in the case of a breach. O'Shaughnessy said some residents in the new evacuation zone of 1,900 homes took the advisory seriously, but others did not.

"We continually see people standing on top of the HESCO barriers in extremely dangerous situations. Even during active tree strikes in that moment at that spot," he said, asking the public to heed the advisory in future years.

An American Red Cross emergency shelter at the Floyd Dryden gymnasium was open for two nights. Six people stayed the first night and 18 people the second night, along with cats and dogs, according to O'Shaughnessy.

The 14.7-foot crest at about 2:15 p.m. Thursday was the lowest for a full release of Suicide Basin in the past four years, and was significantly later and lower than initially forecasted by the National Weather Service Juneau.

Suicide Basin was announced to be full last Tuesday and began releasing that same day. The river was initially forecast to crest between 16.1 and 16.6 feet early Thursday morning, but was shifted multiple times due to the basin releasing more slowly than anticipated into Mendenhall Lake.

The exact cause of the later timing and slower release is currently un-

known, but the University of Alaska Southeast, U.S. Geological Survey and weather service are working closely to better understand the event and improve forecasting for future years.

Flood damage was significantly less than in years past, according to the city's preliminary assessment.

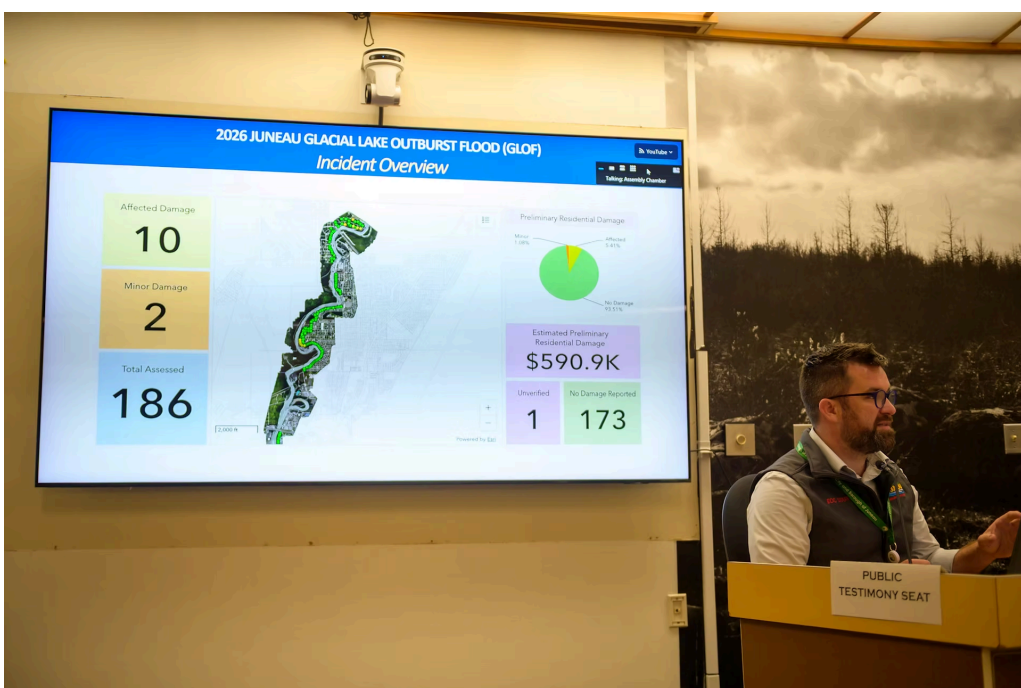
O'Shaughnessy said of 186 homes along the river, 10 were listed as "affected damage" and two sustained minor damage.

The city uses a Federal Emergency Management Agency damage assessment matrix for flooding in conventional homes.

"What affected would mean...there's some amount of water in a crawl space, but generally doesn't affect the living area of a home. When we say minor damage, we mean that there was some amount of water in the living area of a home, but generally not enough to exceed the height of a standard electrical outlet," O'Shaughnessy explained.

The preliminary assessment shows damage was concentrated in two primary locations: the bend of Meander Way and on View Drive. Last year,

See Flood on Page 4



Ryan O'Shaughnessy, the emergency manager for the City and Borough of Juneau, presents an incident overview of the 2026 glacial lake outburst flood on Monday, Aug. 17, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

FLOOD

Continued from page 3

damage was concentrated in similar areas.

More than three dozen homes sustained damage during a 2023 flood that peaked at a then-record 14.97 feet and severely eroded the banks of the Mendenhall River. Nearly 300 homes were damaged during a 2024 flood that crested at an unexpectedly high 15.99 feet. Both disasters caught officials and many residents off-guard.

2025 also broke a record at 16.65 feet, but O'Shaughnessy said damage has been significantly reduced since the installation of HESCO barriers. This year's addition of 41 pumps provided by the Army Corps made a difference, along with the construction of Phase 2.

The two homes with minor damage were on View Drive, where HESCO barriers are not installed.

"View Drive fared far better than it has in years past, but absolutely not without risk and not scot-free," O'Shaughnessy said.

He said many residents living in the flood zone who know to expect a disaster feel anxiety ahead of the flood every August. O'Shaughnessy said homeowners expressed that cycle had already started again.

He encouraged members of the public who felt damage at their home was missed to self-report.

"People can fill out a form with photos, any description of damage that they may have, and we'll follow up with that and make sure that their property is included in our initial damage assessment," he said.

O'Shaughnessy added the damage assessment is not tied to state individual assistance — a disaster declaration by Gov. Mike Dunleavy on Wednesday only authorizes public assistance.

But the damage assessment will be forwarded to the state, O'Shaughnessy said. Individual assistance was not available after the 2025 outburst, which also caused minimal widespread damage, according to the city.

"At this point, we believe that impacts to public infrastructure are very low. We're aware of some scour around the abutment of the pedestrian bridge at Dimond Park, but as far as impacts to our utility — our wastewater, water supply, stormwater — we believe those to be relatively minor," he said, adding the footbridge near Dimond Park is currently closed with plans to reopen this week. The Kaxdi-goowu Héen Dei west trailhead is also temporarily closed.

"Just for our awareness as we document this event and forward that information to the state, it's really important for folks, if they have damage in their home, we'd love to hear about it," O'Shaughnessy said. "And that really helps us get a full picture of the impacts of this event."

Another incomplete "full picture" is the full extent of damage to HESCO barriers and how they were impacted. An initial assessment is ongoing by the city's Engineering and Public Works department and the Army Corps.

O'Shaughnessy said the system performed well, with Phase 2 experiencing minor issues. Assembly member Christine Woll asked how much damage would need to be fixed before next



Army Corps crews chainsaw a log that struck a HESCO barrier across from Meadow Lane on Thursday, Aug. 13, 2026. (Photo by Corinne Smith / Alaska Beacon)

year's outburst.

"That's the many-million-dollar question," O'Shaughnessy replied.

He said the ongoing assessment involves opening up the HESCO barriers.

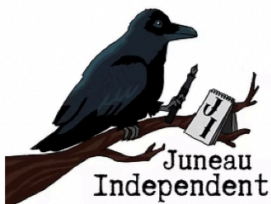
City Manager Katie Koester said Monday the city's ongoing annual maintenance of barriers may be higher than previously thought, according to feedback from the Army Corps.

The city anticipated \$6 million to \$10 million in annual costs earlier this summer. Koester told the Juneau Independent it's unclear at this time how much higher that number could be.

"That really adds to the sense of urgency," she said.

Koester said she looks forward to the Army Corps' promise to fast-track a permanent solution and an "industry day" is planned Friday at the council chambers of the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. The goal of the event is to receive ideas from potential partners and bidders.

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Travelers make alternate plans as ferry to Skagway remains paused indefinitely



The Alaska Marine Highway ferry terminal dock (center) seen in Skagway on June 18, 2025. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

High school cross-country and Klondike Road Relay participants are ready to run in Skagway. Will the ferry be?

By NATALIE BUTTNER, Reporter

Damage to the Skagway ferry terminal will need further assessment before a timeline for the resumption of service can be determined, according to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. In the meantime, tourists, locals and athletes are making alternative plans for getting to and from the town.

Cracks were first observed in the concrete abutment supporting the vehicle transfer bridge and passenger walkway on Thursday, according to Gabe Strong, a spokesperson for the Alaska Marine Highway System.

DOT engineers monitored the cracks and determined that the terminal should be closed after observing the cracks “spider-webbing out and continuing to grow.” On Saturday, AMHS and DOT issued a statement the Skagway terminal was closed and service to Skagway suspended indefinitely.

According to a statement posted on

AMHS Facebook on Sunday, commercial divers are traveling to Skagway to conduct underwater inspections of the terminal’s anchor chains, and electricians have begun disconnecting electrical power to the float.

Strong said properly assessing the damage to the terminal requires using a crane and barge to remove the vehicle transfer and passenger bridges from the damaged allotment, tentatively scheduled for Wednesday.

“They can access the damaged area and start trying to figure out how deep the damage goes and how bad it is,” he said.

There are some alternative routes for those hoping to travel to and from Skagway.

For moderately higher ticket prices, private ferry companies such as the Haines Skagway Fast Ferry and Alaska Fjordlines offer alternative transportation options for passengers traveling through Skagway until mid-to-late September. Regional airlines

also offer flights from Skagway Airport.

“As far as vehicle traffic, there is the option, obviously, to drive around to Haines,” Strong said.

Strong said this option isn’t ideal. Haines and Skagway are 15 miles apart by water, but 350 miles apart over land via the Klondike Highway, Alaska Highway and Haines Highway.

High school sports teams regularly use the Alaska Marine Highway to reach competitions with neighboring teams.

According to Skagway School District Activities Director Kaylie Smith, the Skagway student athletes and coaches will use Alaska Fjordlines to travel to upcoming sporting events. However, Alaska Fjordlines’ season ends on Sept. 12. If the repairs to the terminal take longer, Smith said the school district would be in a “tough situation”.

“We’ll probably just go (Alaska) Seaplanes, which is super duper expensive,” Smith said. “But at the end of September, that’s kind of where we’re going to regionals and important meets, so hopefully they get the ferry up and running by then.”

Skagway was scheduled to host a high school cross-country meet on Sept. 5. Smith said this event will probably be hosted in Haines if the terminal is not fixed.

“I think that was probably our biggest impact,” Smith said. “We were all expecting to host and watch our kids run this year, and it looks like we’ll just have to wait till next year.”

A pause in ferry service also may impact athletes participating in the Klondike Road Relay, a 175-kilometer race from Skagway to the Yukon capital of Whitehorse, Canada. The annual relay is scheduled for Sept. 11-12.

According to longtime race participant Don Bremner, the race involves a lot of logistics for teams. In addition to gathering 10 people willing to run

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FERRY

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through the night, each team requires accommodation and at least one support vehicle.

"This coming year is going to be my 19th year running it and there is always something with the state ferry system," Bremner said.

Last year, the state ferry MV LeConte canceled service between Juneau and Skagway due to an engine malfunction. While the MV Hubbard and catamarans carried racers to the start, some athletes had to make alternative arrangements for their support vehicles.

Bremner said his team's third support vehicle was scheduled to ride on the LeConte. Though they rented a car, Bremner said the expense and limited availability of rental vehicles make this an inaccessible option for many teams.

A Race Yukon spokesperson said the organization is waiting on further information from the ferry system before releasing a plan. However, Bremner and his team have already opted to send their vehicles to Haines and drive around to Skagway before the race starts.

Skagway Tourism Director Jaime Bricker recommends waiting for further updates from AMHS. The Skagway Visitors Department has created a flowchart for those traveling through Skagway and hopes to release a statement soon.

"There is so much that this affects," Bricker said. "When you consider I've lived here my entire life, and how dependent we are upon the lifeline that is the Alaska Marine Highway System. I'm just really hopeful that they can get mobilized and get things fixed quickly."

• *Contact Natalie Buttner at natieb@juneauindependent.com.*

ALASKA VOTERS

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termine control of Congress for the remainder of President Donald Trump's term.

"I personally believe that there's a current overflow of corruption right now in our government, and I believe that this is probably going to be one of the most important turning point primaries that we're probably going to see in our lifetime for a while," he said, adding that's why it was important for him to vote in the primary election.

Harrell said he feels the Trump administration is not paying attention to the people's interests, and the House of Representatives and Senate "are really the only people who can make changes with what's going on right now."

He said he'd like people in office who prioritize the "interests of people, not the interests of either things like super PACs or business interests."

"That's kind of the whole point of the government in the first place, is to care for the interests of the people," he said. "I feel it's important for all of us to come together and actually, one, figure out what it is that we all want. For example, I want to be able to see better conditions for lower-income families."

He added that while data centers haven't emerged in Alaska, he's aware of politicians who support and oppose them in the future. Data centers are one issue of many in state primaries, which also took place in Florida and Wyoming on Tuesday.

Harrell said there are plenty of ways to make changes for people experiencing poverty, and the first step is to vote.

"The people you vote for is obviously going to have the biggest effect on that outside of coming together making community groups to purposely target those issues to try to fix it locally. But I'm also looking at the sort of bigger picture in all of it as well," he said.

Harrell said he thinks a drastic change is needed and voting is the place to start. He said if an issue is happening in Juneau, it's likely happening elsewhere in the state.

Virginia Oliver of Wrangell voted in Juneau on Tuesday while visiting the capital city. She said grocery prices are skyrocketing back home.

"The prices are sky high for food. Everything has to be shipped in because we're on an island," she said. "But mostly we're just looking for representation that is conscientious of our needs and what is most important to us, and that is making a living, getting our food in, fuel, things like that."

She said funding and maintaining a reliable state ferry system is another challenge that's important to her.

"It's like a highway. It's the Alaska Marine Highway, and all these other highways they take care of, and they fix. But ours — it just comes to us less and less, and that's our way to get around," Oliver said. "And then facing the airfares, they're outrageous, outrageous. From here to where we live is \$319, even if it's two weeks out. On the ferry, it would only be like \$90, \$92, or \$118, which is manageable. But we have to go, so then we have to pay it."

Oliver added she'd like state representatives who are willing to collaborate and work with Indigenous people.

"Our language is important to us, to have our representatives be conscientious of our language in the school system," she said. "The language is in crisis, but we're producing second-language speakers, and hopefully we can get more help with our representatives that would be supportive of what we want."

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Weaver Donedin Jackson dances after the robe Haa Shagóoní is cut off the loom and welcomed by song. On the right, partner weaver Shaawat gé Rae Mills watches with a smile near the Goldbelt Tram Lower Terminal on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

Haa Shagóoní robe-cutting celebrates completion of ceremonial Chilkat robe

‘We remain here among songs woven in the threads’

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

After two years, weavers Donedin Jackson and Shaawat gé Rae Mills celebrated the completion of their Diving Whale Ceremonial Chilkat robe on Wednesday afternoon. The robe was cut from its loom and lifted onto the weavers’ shoulders at the Goldbelt Tram Lower Terminal, where it was welcomed by song.

“Traditional women’s work is not often given the same platform or reach as the more prominent traditional practices and these collaborations signal that change,” Jackson told a crowd of more than 70 witnesses of the robe cutting ceremony.

She said Chilkat robes are important to show in public spaces “to show our work, to show our story, to share with other people, other places and other worlds.”

“While the world continues, we remain here among songs woven in the

threads, healing ourselves with what our ancestors gave us through our hands, connecting us to a place, time and sense of self,” Jackson said. “Every person who witnesses this story carries a piece of it with them, ensuring that this work will go further in time and space.”

Attendees received a Chilkat tassel as a small gift for being present. The gifts were thigh-spun by Goldbelt Heritage Foundation apprentice weavers.

The robe, commissioned by Goldbelt, will eventually be on permanent display in a place of honor in the Mountain House at the top of Mount Roberts. For now it is on display in the tram’s lobby as it is finished with fur, handles and other details. The weavers’ last official day of work is set for Aug. 28.

Since the robe will be housed at the Goldbelt Tram, acid dyes were used due to the robe’s prolonged exposure

to ultraviolet light. Robes traditionally rest in hand-carved bentwood boxes when not in use. The robe “will live as an education and demonstration for the public,” according to Jackson.

Naaxéin, or ceremonial Chilkat weaving, is a traditional Tlingit art form with deep cultural significance.

“Naaxéin ceremonial Chilkat robes aren’t just beautiful things that are created,” Jackson said. “They are memory. They are community. They are our living ancestors. They are born from history, songs and story. This is where children are taught who we are, where we come from, and how to care for each other.”

She explained that Chilkat weaving are coastal peoples’ historical documentation.

“Each design is intellectual property that carries a story, and each story is owned,” Jackson said, adding that traditional ceremonial weaving is held in the highest regard and whole family lines are tasked with the caretaking of robes that live for hundreds of years.

“If somebody tells a story they don’t have permission to tell, it is considered theft,” she said.

She noted the diving whale story and design have been gifted to the public at large so that anyone can weave, wear, or caretake one of these robes and cause no offense. The robe’s name is Haa Shagóoní, meaning “our most precious” in the Lingit language.

Jackson said Naaxéin ceremonial Chilkat weaving is considered the most complex weaving practice since the warp hanging from the loom is non-warp weighted, meaning there is no tension on the ends of the warp as they hang from the loom.

“Every single stitch is placed by hand at the time of weaving and the tension comes from the weaver themselves as they weave,” she said.

Naaxéin ceremonial Chilkat weaving is the practice done by the Tlingit,

See Chilkat Robe on Page 8

CHILKAT ROBE

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Haida and Tsimshian peoples of the Northwest Coast whose territory spans from the coast of Alaska inland into Canada, into the Yukon and British Columbia.

Jackson is a citizen of the Teslin Tlingit Council First Nation in the Yukon Territory, Canada. She was named Shakóon or Ts'udugáxh. She is of the Eagle moiety and is a Yeil Koowú Ravenstail and Naaxéin Chilkat weaver, teacher and a Tlingit language learner.

Traditionally trained as a ceremonial Northwest Coast textile weaver, she completed her apprenticeship under Wooskindein Daa.áat Lily Hope in 2024.

Jackson partnered with Shaawat gé Rae Mills, who is Tlingit Kaach.ádi X'áakw Hít (Raven Freshwater Marked Sockeye House).

Mills was born and raised in Southeast Alaska, and adopted into the Kaach.ádi clan by K̄aanák Ruth Demmert at a young age. They witnessed weaving classes growing up, held by culture bearers such as Delores Churchill, Della Cheney and Cheryl Samuel. Mills apprenticed under Hope and Kay Parker.

They were trained as a Northwest Coast Traditional textile weaver and are experienced in Yéil Koowú Ravenstail, Naaxéin Chilkat and cedar weav-



Weavers Donedin Jackson and Shaawat gé Rae Mills cut the robe Haa Shagóoní off the loom near the Goldbelt Tram Lower Terminal on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

ing. Mills was also one of five mentor weavers for the two Pride robes woven at the Zach Gordon Youth Center from 2024 to 2026.

"They are currently the first weaver documenting non-binary peoples in a full-size Yéil Koowú Ravenstail combination robe, woven communally at the university in Juneau, where they currently reside," Jackson told the crowd. "Traditional weaving has served as a healing practice that has sparked a deeper knowing of the sacred, both within and without."

Haa Shagóoní's first dance event will be at the Northwest Coast Textile Symposium in April 2027, where Mills will dance the robe to life.

Mills also restored a more than 100-

year-old robe with a similar diving whale design. Repairs included the strengthening of strings and reinforced braids. The repair work was done simultaneously while finishing Haa Shagóoní.

Both robes were witnessed together in dance after Haa Shagóoní was cut off the loom.

"We wanted to bring out this ancient robe woven by our ancestors' hands to be able to greet the new robe being woven by our future ancestors' hands," said Jackie Pata, the first vice president of the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska's executive council.

The ancient robe belongs to the
See Chilkat on Page 9

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CHILKAT ROBE

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Kiks.ádi clan. Its caretaker, Jerrick Hope-Lang, visited Juneau for Wednesday's ceremony from Sitka, where the robe resides. He said Mills approached the restoration with care.

"She's making it sturdy so it can be used in ceremony, not just like a static item, but something that can be worn," Hope-Lang said. "And without her doing that work, it wasn't stable enough to be worn."

The robe was worn for the first time since 1962 this year for Celebration.

"It's always a thrill when you can wear a robe, especially one that's been restored and brought back home," Pata said after wearing the ancient robe during Wednesday's ceremony and dancing alongside Jackson.

Jackson said the ripple effect of Haa Shagóoní will be felt for generations.

Samantha St. Clair and Kenneth Willard, both 17 and tram employees, took their first steps as apprentice weavers over the duration of the project, learning how to thigh spin. Their work can be seen on the overlay dance fringe and bottom of the fringe.

"I finished the copper cones on there and there were like about 1,000 that I had to put on there by hand," Willard said in an interview after the ceremony. "It took over three days."

He said the experience was amazing overall and taught him a lot.

"It all started because we said we were bored around aunties," St. Clair said with a laugh when asked how she and Willard started apprenticing.

She held out her first Chilkat woven headdress in the sunshine. St. Clair said she plans to keep it and looks forward to weaving a medicine bag or another headdress.

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Seven US Coast Guard crews compete in Buoy Tender Olympics



U.S. Coast Guard members competed in the "heat and beat" event onboard the deck of the USCGC Fir in the Buoy Tender Olympics on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026. (Natalie Buttner / Juneau Independent)

Annual event is the 'seminal moment' in week-long training visit

By NATALIE BUTTNER, Reporter

More than 250 crew members from seven U.S. Coast Guard cutters competed in the Coast Guard Buoy Tender Round-Up Olympics on Wednesday. The olympics are an energizing event within a week of networking and training for buoy tender crew hosted in Juneau.

Amid the cheers of his colleagues, Samuel Heilig used a small hammer to pound in the finishing touches on a rapidly cooling shackle pin. Once he finished, a judge locked the time for the team representing the USCGC Cypress, where Heilig serves as a damage controlman.

The "heat and beat" technique is used to permanently close shackles. Heilig said that onboard the Cypress, the crew uses the 'heat and beat' in buoy maintenance fairly often.

"Chain comes in 90-foot sections generally, so some of our moorings are way deeper than 90 feet. So we have to hook that chain together," explained Craig Campomizzi, a senior chief boatswain's mate aboard the USCGC Elderberry. "Well, how do you connect it? You make a chain link."

First, the pin is heated with an oxy-acetylene torch.

"Then you're going to have two guys hit it with the sledges, try and get it as flat as possible, and then once you get it as flat as possible, that's where I came in with the smaller hammer," Heilig explained.

The metal is forced into a mushroom shape, preventing the shackle from coming undone. In addition to racing for the best time, judges assess the quality of the shackle in factoring each buoy tender's final score.

"I'm just trying to smooth out the
See Coast Guard on Page 10

COAST GUARD

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shackle or the pin until it's nice and round and smooth, and then it should be good to go," Heilig said.

The "heat and beat" is the finale of the olympics. Leading up to the event, the cutters participated in other events that tested their strength and skills including chain pull, line toss, tug of war, and boom spot.

"The boom spot is my favorite event because it's a technical skill that applies to our everyday job as we're working a ton," said Lt. Cmdr. Ryan Foust, commanding officer on the USCGC Fir. "It's not like the chain pull or the tug of war; it takes skill, patience, a little bit of everything."

In the boom spot, competitors use the on-deck crane to maneuver a five-gallon bucket filled with water, swinging at the bottom of a three-foot tagline. Competitors are assessed on how fast they can move the bucket through an



Boatswain's Mate Julian Williams cheers for her colleagues aboard the USCGC Aspen as they compete in tug of war on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026. According to Williams, the trident is used in ceremonies on the Aspen as part of a longtime tradition. "We got it from Poseidon himself," she said. (Natalie Buttner / Juneau Independent)



U.S. Coast Guard members competed in the chain pull on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026. This event includes untangling, moving, and laying the chain in an organized manner. (Natalie Buttner / Juneau Independent)

obstacle course, and how little water is lost. This event simulates moving buoys on deck.

"It takes a little bit of practice and finesse to be able to maneuver those buoys, keeping them at a certain level off the deck," said Aaron Phillips, a competitor in the boom spot.

Buoy tenders Anthony Petit, Aspen, Cypress, Elderberry, Elm, Fir, and Henry Blake attended this year's roundup.

"It's great networking," Phillips said. "One of the big things is going around to the other platforms that we don't get to see, and just kind of get ideas from each one of the platforms: things that they do better, things that we'd like to do."

According to Cmdr. Daniel Davis, the rest of this week's roundup includes a plethora of training, including leadership and management training, and physical structure building. Ship cooks also received additional culinary training.

"The Buoy Tender Olympics are always the thing that gets people energized, and it's the seminal moment," Davis said. "I suppose if you think of the training, it's exciting, but the emphasis of this whole week is on professional development training, bringing them things that they need to do their jobs better and be more resilient on the home front."

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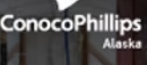


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DOJ issues grand jury subpoenas in probe of Dan J. Sullivan's US Senate candidacy

Election Day reports in national media refer to actions by grand jury last week in federal investigation of namesake of Alaska's incumbent senator

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

With national media already focusing on Alaska's U.S. Senate race during the state's primary election on Tuesday, a new flurry of stories surfaced during the afternoon about the U.S. Department of Justice issuing grand jury subpoenas in its investigation of Dan J. Sullivan's candidacy.

Sullivan, a retired Petersburg teacher, is running as a Republican against namesake incumbent Sen. Dan S. Sullivan. Republican party officials, as well as the Alaska Division of Elections, have accused Dan J. Sullivan of being a sham candidate trying to confuse voters.

The subpoenas were first reported by NBC News, citing "a law enforcement official" and noting the issuance of them last week "to compel information from witnesses linked to the campaign of Dan J. Sullivan" has not been previously reported. Other news agencies including Reuters published subsequent reports, also citing unnamed sources.

"The revelations come on the day polls opened in the closely watched Senate primary," NBC News noted.

Reports of federal officials investigating Dan. J. Sullivan's candidacy surfaced in early July, following actions by Alaska Lt. Gov. Nancy Dahlstrom and state Division of Elections Director Carol Beecher, both Republicans, to disqualify him as a candidate.



This combo shows U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan, left, in Palmer, Alaska, on Aug. 17, 2026, and a candidate in Alaska's U.S. Senate race, Dan Sullivan, right, in Petersburg, Alaska, on July 3, 2026. (AP Photos/Mark Thiessen/Becky Bohrer)

The Alaska Supreme Court ruled in late June that Sullivan is a legitimate candidate and ordered his name to be put on the ballot, but Beecher took unprecedented steps by labeling Dan. S. Sullivan as "incumbent" and listing the challenger as "Sullivan, Daniel J. Jr." with no party affiliation.

Dan J. Sullivan has denied in court filing and media interviews his intent is to cause confusion or divert votes from Dan S. Sullivan. He told The New York Times in a story published Tuesday his candidacy as a Republican was sincere, but he voted for the Democratic nominee in the last three

presidential elections, did not vote for Sen. Sullivan in his past two elections, and did support Mary Peltola — the main Democratic challenger in this year's Senate race — during her U.S. House bids in 2022 and 2024.

A poll published Monday by Alaska Survey Research shows Sen. Sullivan and Peltola tied at 44% each among respondents, with Dan J. Sullivan at about 5%.

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

Surgery on assault victim who died likely to be key issue in case against two accused attackers

Prosecutor says Alfred Willis Torres Sr. died getting treatment necessitated by attack; defense attorney says 'there's going to be incredible causation questions' about how he died

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Surgery performed on a man who died after being assaulted in a downtown parking garage is likely to be a key issue in the case, an attorney for one of the two defendants said Thursday.

Alfred Willis Torres Sr., 53, died in a Seattle hospital about four weeks after the April 6 assault, with Devon Rivera, 29, and Chelsea Willis, 37, each facing manslaughter and eight other charges as the alleged attackers. Among the injuries inflicted was a skull fracture that resulted in a doctor trying to correct Torres' jaw, Juneau District Attorney Whitney Bostick told Superior Court Judge Larry Woolford during a bail hearing for Willis on Thursday.

"That fracture, while the jaw was being manipulated, became much more substantial and severed the basilar artery, Your Honor," Bostick said. "That basilar artery is what resulted in Mr. Torres' death. The fracture that caused that was caused by Miss Willis' and Mr. Rivera's conduct."

Willis' attorney, Anna Maria McDonald Ambrose, told Woolford



Chelsea Willis, 37, right, is represented by public defender Anna Maria McDonald Ambrose during a bail hearing at Juneau's Dimond Courthouse on Thursday, Aug. 20, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

"there's going to be incredible causation questions" by the defense about the autopsy indicating the cause of Torres' death.

"The surgery itself as well, I think that will be a litigated issue in this case," she said.

Rivera originally faced three felony assault charges, and Willis faced felony tampering with evidence and misdemeanor assault when they were arrested shortly after the attack. But on July 13 the charges against both were revised to include manslaughter, criminally negligent homicide and multiple counts of felony assault.

Both defendants, who are in state custody, made initial court appear-

ances on the new charges this week at Juneau's Dimond Courthouse.

Rivera, on Tuesday, told Judge Marianna Carpeneti he wants to represent himself in the case. A representation hearing is scheduled at 1 p.m. on Aug 25.

Willis will also need a representation hearing due to a conflict of interest issue involving the Alaska Public Defender Agency, Ambrose said during Thursday's hearing. Willis' next scheduled court appearance is a readiness hearing at 8:30 a.m. Sept. 9.

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PLAYGROUND

Continued from page 1

and reopened earlier this month.

“This playground's impact reaches further than just these schools and these students,” Cioni-Haywood said. “For a long time this area, our community, has not really had a large playground to gather in; this will help fill that gap. On evenings and weekends we hope to see this serve Lemon Creek families with a space for neighbors, siblings, grandparents to come together and have a little bit of fun on the equipment. A school is always stronger when it's woven into the life of its community.”

Karen Levasseur brought her two children, Rose and Luc, to see the playground before school started. Both go to Montessori Borealis, and Levasseur works in the building.

“It's so exciting to actually see them,” Levasseur said. “They've been very creative with their play, but to actually have something where they can run around and climb.”

She said her son hopes to see monkey bars added in the future.

Currently, the playground is split into two sides divided by age group. The area for 2- to 5-year-olds is fenced off, and the equipment for 5- to 12-year-olds features a communication board, wide slide and climbing areas.

One element that hasn't been installed yet is personalized bricks from a “Buy A Brick” fundraiser for the playground. Among those are four purchased by a former school board member criticizing city leaders.

According to JSD Director of Operations Kristy Germain, the bricks will be installed this fall by students enrolled in the Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé house build program.

“It's a nice starter project for them to



Brittany Cioni-Haywood snips a ribbon at the official opening of the new Dzantik'i Heeni playground in Lemon Creek on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)



Children play on the new Dzantik'i Heeni playground on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)

start the year,” she said.

Harmony Rushton teaches second and third grade at Juneau Community Charter School. She said her students are excited for the new space.

“I think it's totally gonna just open up their choice of activity,” she said. “They'll be able to interact with each other in a different way.”

Parent and volunteer Cindy Norbryhn said she was so excited to see the playground opened she drove by every day. Previously the students had “mud and ice” as a play surface.

“We're truly grateful,” she said. “It's so good for everything, for your kids

with dexterity. And any kid with ADHD or anything, it's so good for their brains and their bodies.”

Ryan Pankratz brought his first-grade son to see where he'd get to play when school starts on Thursday.

“We're happy. He's happy. He's already spinning on the wheel,” he said. “His friends will have a lot better time out here than just playing in the mud puddle.”

• Contact Ellie Ruel at ellie.ruel@juneauindependent.com.

PRIMARY

Continued from page 1

where one drops out and supports the other. So the Republicans' chances of winning in November may depend on if enough top-finishing conservatives withdraw to allow a moderate challenger who would siphon votes from a Democrat to be one of the final four general election candidates.

- Republican Rep. Nick Begich III is living up to the Cook Political Report's "Likely Republican" rating with 46% compared to the combined 39% by independent Bill Hill and Democrat Matt Schultz, the latter of whom has withdrawn and is supporting Hill.

- Ballot Measure 1, reimposing limits on campaign contributions to individuals and groups, passed easily.

- The Alaska Beacon reported the statewide legislative races were favorable for Democrats: "No incumbent Democrat trailed a Republican on election day, but several incumbent Republicans trailed Democrats."

Returns from the primary election by the Alaska Division of Elections as of 2 a.m. Wednesday are for 132,713 ballots representing 22.08% of the state's registered voters in 378 of 403 precincts. About 193,000 ballots were cast during the midterm primary in 2022.

This year's primary results will be tallied until Aug. 28, with updates periodically released by state officials, with final unofficial results announced on that date. Certification of results is expected by Aug. 31. The top four finishers in all candidate races will advance to the Nov. 3 general election.

Governor: JKT and Bernadette Wilson positioned for faceoff

First it needs to be clear if Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (currently at 21.67%) or Tom Begich (20.1%) — both former state legislators — is the top Democratic finisher. Both candidates have acknowledged the next likely

step is discussions about a deal that involves one supporting the other.

Similar discussions are expected among a more crowded field of Republicans who finished with a higher combined total than the two Democrats.

A key aspect of the race's dynamics was provided by Tom Begich, the uncle of Nick Begich III, who told The Alaska Landmine on Tuesday night that the combined support of himself, Kreiss-Tomkins, independent former Gov. Bill Walker and moderate Republican Click Bishop total well over 50% — enough to beat a conservative such as Anchorage businesswoman Bernadette Wilson if the other like-minded Republicans join to support her.

The leading non-Democratic candidates are Wilson with 10.47%, former Anchorage Mayor Dave Bronson with 8.42%, former state Attorney General Treg Taylor at 7.45%, former state Sen. Bishop at 7.14%, former state revenue commissioner Adam Crum at 5.69%, former state Sen. Shelley Hughes at 5.58% and Walker at 4.43%.

If the second-place Democrat drops out, that means Bronson or Taylor would also have to drop out for Bishop to make the final four. Both of them, along with Crum and Hughes, would have to drop out for Walker to also be on the general election ballot.

US Senate: Sen. Sullivan sets underdog tone as Peltola finishes strong

Two-term incumbent Dan S. Sullivan used an Election Night speech to portray himself as a "grassroots" candidate who will face a better-funded challenger this fall, although both his campaign and Peltola's are being heavily supported by out-of-state donors.

"D.C. Democrats don't have an agenda or a vision for Alaska," the

senator told his Election Night audience. "They have a target on Alaska and we're not going to let them do it."

Peltola's current lead over Sullivan of 48.04%-42.84% increased as more results came in and, as with her past U.S. House races, that margin is likely to grow since many of the ballots remaining to be counted are from remote areas where she has received strong support. In her Election Night speech, she matched the incumbent by taking a combative tone against her main opponent.

"Dan Sullivan, every single vote, votes along with corporate greed," she said. "He is there for every fat cat in the nation."

A poll released on Monday by Alaska Survey Research showed Dan J. Sullivan, a retired Petersburg teacher, with about 5% of support among respondents, and Peltola and Dan S. Sullivan tied at 44% each. The Petersburg challenger is well behind that showing, but far enough ahead of 13 other Senate candidates to be essentially assured of a spot in the top four for the general election.

Cook Political Report rates the race as a "toss up" between Peltola and Dan S. Sullivan, and it is among a handful of seats considered potentially decisive in which party controls the Senate during the final two years of President Donald Trump's second term. Republican officials have accused Dan J. Sullivan of being a sham candidate trying to confuse voters and it was revealed Monday that the Trump-led U.S. Department of Justice has issued grand jury subpoenas as part of an investigation into the Petersburg resident's candidacy.

US House: Begich has solid, not insurmountable, lead heading into fall

Nick Begich, a first-term incumbent who defeated Peltola in 2024, will face

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PRIMARY

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a lesser-known main challenger in Hill this fall — but also now has a record the congressman will tout and his opponent will attack.

The incumbent is currently well ahead of Hill 46%-31%, but Schultz at 8% has withdrawn from the race and is endorsing Hill.

"We've been doing a lot of hard work in D.C.," Nick Begich told The Alaska Landmine during its Election Night livestream. "We've been delivering wins for Alaskans, and this is true whether you're a rural Alaskan or an urban Alaskan, whether you're in Southeast or all the way up to the top of the (North Slope). My job is to represent everybody, and that's what we tried to do and I think it's reflected tonight in the results."

Hill, in an Election Night statement, declared "Alaskans are sick and tired of paying more for healthcare, gas, and groceries so that Nick Begich can give himself and his billionaire buddies another tax break."

An additional factor if the race narrows is Eric Hafner, a New York prison inmate running as a Democrat, is a solid fourth in the primary with 3.8% of the vote and has already been certified previously to compete in a general election in the state.

Alaska Legislature: Democratic-led majority poised to pick up seats

Only five of 50 legislative races had more than four candidates, so nearly all of the contests were essentially a measuring point for how campaigns are faring heading into fall.

In Juneau's House District 3, for example, incumbent Democrat Andi Story is well ahead of Republican challenger Annette Kreitzer, a former state commissioner and Haines borough manager, 69.84%-30.16%. Both



People line up to vote at the State Office Building on the morning of Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

will advance to the Nov. 3 general election.

Story said she is encouraged by her showing so far.

"I really feel like I have good rapport with many of the people in my district, and I feel I have a good understanding of the importance education is to them (and) on the importance of keeping our young people in our communities," she said. "I really feel like I am the right candidate for this district and I think that the results showed that."

Attempts to reach Keitzer on Wednesday were not successful as of mid-afternoon.

The House currently has a 21-member majority consisting mostly of Democrats and a 19-member Republican minority. The Senate has a 14-member majority that includes nine Democrats and a six-member Republican minority.

The Alaska Beacon noted a handful of House races held by Republicans where Democrats or independents were leading, including Denny Wells ahead by a slight margin against Republican Rep. Mia Costello in Anchorage, and nonpartisan candidate Brent Johnson with 55% of the vote against incumbent Republican Rep. Sarah Vance of Homer with 45%.

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CITY HALL

Continued from page 1

zation plans to demolish the 75-year-old building in favor of a new \$40 million three-story structure featuring a glass-blowing studio, retail gallery for "high-end art" and other facilities. SHI President Rosita Kaahani Worl, during public testimony before the Assembly debated the proposal, said the new building will be for "the long-term benefit of our community and cultural diversity."

"It'll be a crown jewel of Heritage Square," she said. "We are grounded in traditions, but we are also forward-looking in thinking and planning for our future, and a community that supports cultural diversity and well-being of its citizens."

The new site would create a five-building Sealaska complex along both sides of Heritage Way, including the headquarters of its for-profit corporation and four occupied by the independently run nonprofit established by the company. The other buildings include a retail gift shop, offices, historical exhibits, traditional crafts workspaces, and a recently opened Indigenous Science Building featuring digital as well as traditional activity areas.

Assembly members and residents supporting the sale to SHI noted the nonprofit's other nearby buildings have been significant upgrades to what were sometimes dilapidated spaces. The Walter Soboleff Building that opened in 2015, for instance, replaced a "pit" left by the destruction of a historic building in a 2004 fire.

"As we move out of that space I think it is so important to think about what we leave in that space," said Assembly Member Alicia Hughes-Skandijs, who made the motion to approve the sale to SHI.

"I think it would be a no-brainer for us to leverage this opportunity that is

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going to result in maximum community good."

Among the residents testifying who opposed the sale to SHI was Paulette Simpson, a Douglas resident, who said she supports an auction in part because "over past several years an alarming number of properties have gone off the tax rolls."

"This is not the time to rush into a sale that would weaken our city treasury," she said. "We need more property on the tax rolls and not less."

As a nonprofit SHI is exempt from paying property taxes except for space it leases to for-profit operators. SHI, at a webpage dedicated to its City Hall replacement project, notes the organization pays taxes to the city from leased space in the nearby Walter Soboleff Building and Indigenous Science Building, and has contributed more than \$13 million to the Juneau School District and University of Alaska Southeast since 2015.

Concern about selling the building to SHI without fully evaluating other options was expressed by Assembly member Neil Steininger, who joined Nano Brooks and Deputy Mayor Greg Smith in voting against the sale.

"I don't think it is prudent for us to go forward without either knowing how much this building is worth," Steininger said.

Also, while ensuring what becomes of the City Hall space is a community asset is a worthwhile goal, "I think we owe it to the public to walk through and say what these characteristics are that we're looking for here, and not just

take kind of the first proposal that comes in front of us," he said.

City Manager Katie Koester, in a March 16 memo to Assembly members, stated the suggested \$2.5 million minimum in a sealed-bid auction "was determined with input from the City Assessor."

A key selling point: "It is zoned mixed use, which means there is significant flexibility in how the land can be used," she wrote.

Assembly Member Christine Woll, who chaired the Finance Committee during months of hearings earlier this year when city leaders were trying to patch a \$16 million budget shortfall said the sale of the building is one-time revenue and thus won't fix the ongoing yearly deficit.

"There's so many other ways to address our budget deficit," she said. "We just have to do that."

The alternative proposal on the Assembly's agenda would offer City Hall in a sealed-bid auction with a minimum bid of \$2.5 million. Both options were intended to recover some money being spent to relocate City Hall programs and offices to the first two floors of the Michael J. Burns Building, which is expected to be completed by next May at a cost of roughly \$20 million.

Lee Kadinger, SHI's chief of operations, said in an interview after the Assembly's vote that he will consult with the city manager's office before proceeding with the next steps of demolishing the old building and constructing the new complex.



Assembly Member Alicia Hughes-Skandijis talks with Sealaska Heritage Institute Chief Operating Officer Lee Kadinger after the Assembly approved the sale of City Hall to the Alaska Native nonprofit on Monday, Aug. 17, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

Also discussed during the Assembly meeting was the fate of the 61-foot-long "Raven discovering mankind in a clamshell" mural on the outside wall facing Marine Park. Kadinger said "we've looked at a multitude of ways of preserving the memory of the mural," adding that "right now it's been defaced quite a bit."

Kadinger, in a previous interview, said he believes it will take about four years to raise the funds for the new building and construction will take about 18 months.

The 21,884-square-foot City Hall was constructed as a fire station in 1951 and renovated during the 1970s to serve as City Hall. The city has long leased additional space because the building isn't big enough for all staff working downtown, which combined with the maintenance issues of the aging building has had Assembly members looking at new sites for several years.

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Voices

Alaska's salmon deserve better than a war over fisheries

By ANDREA KEIKKALA

Last week, I was back home in Juneau, where I grew up and where my connection to Alaska runs deepest. I spent several days on the water with my family fishing for coho and halibut, pulling crab pots and shrimping. I came home with a well-stocked freezer, a taste of home to last the year, and another reminder of just how deeply wild seafood is woven into life in Alaska.

That connection to Alaska's wild fisheries is personal to me. It is also why I believe we should be able to have open and honest conversations about how our fisheries are managed. Fisheries' politics in Alaska have always been contentious, and complicated management questions can quickly become deeply divisive arguments over which fishery is to blame. That is increasingly the case in conversation about the future of Alaska's salmon, where concerns about salmon have become intertwined with campaigns against trawl fishing. As Executive Director of United Catcher Boats (UCB), representing the majority of American-owned catcher vessels fishing for pollock and Pacific cod in the Bering Sea, I think there is room in this conversation for something that too often gets lost: context.

The Bering Sea pollock fishery accounts for roughly 90% of the U.S. pollock harvest. Pollock is our nation's largest fishery, providing approximately 3 billion pounds of American seafood each year. With a fishery of that scale comes an enormous responsibility.

So, what does fishing for pollock in the Bering Sea actually look like, and what does the science tell us about its

impact?

Pollock fishermen use pelagic trawl gear. The gear is designed to fish at different depths to target pollock wherever they are in the water column. Fishermen use acoustic technology to locate schools of pollock and position the gear to target them. When pollock are higher in the water column, the gear can be fished higher. When adult pollock gather near the seafloor, portions of the gear can contact the bottom.

Our industry is actively engaged in the Gear Innovation Initiative, working with scientists, fishermen and gear experts to better understand bottom contact. But fisheries management is rarely as simple as changing one thing. Gear changes can also affect our ability to target pollock and avoid prohibited species like salmon and crab. The goal is to keep improving how we fish without creating another problem.

The important question is not whether contact ever occurs. The questions are: Where? How much? What is the habitat? What is the effect? And what does the science tell us?

Those are not questions the fishing industry gets to answer for itself.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires NOAA Fisheries and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to identify and protect Essential Fish Habitat as part of federal fisheries management. At least once every five years, that habitat is reviewed using the best available science, including an evaluation of the effects of fishing. The analysis considers where fishing occurs, the gear used, fishing effort, habitat type, and the susceptibility and recovery of different habitats.

The 2023 EFH five-year review updated the Fishing Effects model with additional years of vessel data, new sediment and habitat information, improved habitat maps and longer recovery times for sensitive habitat features.

The updated model also incorporated methodological corrections that resulted in a more accurate accounting of trawl impacts.

That last point matters to me.

Science-based management should not mean accepting science only when we like the answer. It means acknowledging uncertainty, correcting mistakes and following the evidence wherever it leads.

After that review in 2023, none of the stock assessment authors recommended that a species be elevated for additional mitigation because of fishing effects on EFH. The North Pacific Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee concluded that adverse effects of fishing on EFH remained "minimal and temporary" in nature.

"Minimal and temporary" is standard fisheries management language. It does not mean fishing has no effect on the seafloor. It means scientists evaluated the fishing activity, habitat and its ability to recover, and determined that the effects did not rise to the level requiring additional mitigation under the federal EFH standard.

That is a very different picture from the narrative increasingly dominating social media: that pollock trawl fishing is responsible for the challenges facing Alaska's salmon and that banning trawl fisheries would bring salmon back. The reality is far more complex.

A myriad of factors affect salmon abundance and survival, including changing ocean conditions, warming temperatures, freshwater habitat, food availability, predation, disease, incidental bycatch in commercial fisheries, and harvest in commercial, subsistence and recreational salmon fisheries. Reducing those challenges to a single fishery or gear type ignores the complexity and the science needed to understand it.

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SALMON

Continued from page 17

Those narratives are not spreading by accident. Well-funded environmental advocacy organizations are campaigning and fundraising around trawl fishing, pitting Alaska fishermen against one another. In an election season, candidates are also promising simple solutions to extraordinarily complex fisheries problems. Those promises may make good campaign soundbites, but poorly informed fisheries policy can have devastating ripple effects across fisheries, coastal communities and Alaska's economy.

The alternative to that rhetoric is not ignoring our impacts. It is doing the hard work of understanding them. Robust science gives us the information to keep improving, and our current monitoring programs give us the accountability to know what is actually happening on the water.

It may surprise many people that the pollock fishery chose to operate under a federal requirement for 100% monitoring. That began with federally trained observers aboard every pollock vessel on every trip and has evolved to include either human observers or multiple cameras aboard every vessel, every trip.

This is independent monitoring and verification, not simply an industry asking the public to take its word for what happens on the water. Catch is accounted for, data are transmitted daily, and fishermen share real-time information to move vessels away from areas where prohibited species such as salmon are encountered.

For 2026, the pollock harvest limit was set 30% below the biological limit and 45% below the overfishing limit. Fishermen, scientists and managers continue working on gear innovation, bycatch avoidance and ways to further minimize our environmental footprint.

That is what responsible fishing looks like to me. Not claiming perfection. Not zero impact. Measuring our impacts, being accountable for them and continually working to do better.

Alaska does not have to choose between salmon and pollock. We do not have to choose between protecting ecosystems and producing food. Complex fisheries do not lend themselves to simple promises, especially promises to ban an entire category of fishing gear encompassing very different designs, fisheries and impacts because it makes for an easy campaign message or fundraiser.

Decisions with consequences across fisheries, coastal communities and Alaska's economy deserve more than that. And we certainly do not have to tear down one group of Alaska fishermen to celebrate another.

Today, I'm back in Washington state, with coho from Juneau in the smoker and the smell of smoke drifting through my house. A week ago, I was on the water with my family, catching those fish just miles from where I grew up. I'm already missing home.

I know how fortunate I am to have had that experience. For many Alaska families, particularly along the Yukon and Kuskokwim, bringing salmon home has not been possible in recent years. That reality deserves to be taken seriously, and so does the difficult work of understanding why some salmon runs are struggling.

Alaska's wild salmon deserve to be protected, valued, and understood. So do the fishermen working every day to responsibly harvest the seafood our oceans provide. I am proud of the fishermen I represent and the work being done every day to fish responsibly and continually improve.

None of those things are mutually exclusive. In fact, I believe caring about Alaska means making room for all of them.

• *Andrea Keikkala, a former Juneau resident, is the executive director of United Catcher Boats, a Seattle-based trade association representing the independent catcher vessel fleet that harvests wild Alaska pollock and Pacific cod in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska, as well as Pacific whiting off the West Coast.*

As we adapt to climate change, let's also reduce it

By STEVE BEHNKE

Juneau is spending a lot of money adapting to climate change. After four straight years of damaging Mendenhall glacial outburst floods, we're weighing long-term solutions that could cost hundreds of millions of dollars more. We need to make that investment — protecting people, homes, and businesses has to be the priority.

But there's a second responsibility that should ride along with it. Juneau didn't cause the flooding, and cutting our local emissions won't stop the glacier from melting. But the warming behind it is a global problem every community contributes to and has a responsibility to help solve.

We've actually already committed to that. The CBJ Assembly adopted a Climate Action and Implementation Plan in 2011 and a Renewable Energy Strategy in 2018, both calling for more efficiency and a shift from fossil fuels to our local hydropower for heating and transportation. But we've never put real money behind them. The scale of the flood response offers a chance to fix that.

My proposal: commit 5% of the amount spent on Mendenhall flood protection to implementing the climate and renewable-energy plans we already have on the books. \$5 million for every \$100 million spent on flood protection would be a small slice of a huge project, but enough to make a real dent in Juneau's energy future.

That money could:

- Make homes and buildings more efficient, cutting both energy bills and emissions
 - Help homeowners swap oil heating for heat pumps
 - Electrify transportation — charging
- See Climate Change on 19*

CLIMATE CHANGE

Continued from page 18

infrastructure, EV incentives, buses, shore power for cruise ships – the works

– Green CBJ's own buildings and operations, cutting the city's costs and emissions while showing other building owners what's possible

To be clear, this isn't about taking money from flood protection. It's about recognizing that adapting to climate change and cutting the pollution causing it are part of the same job.

Five percent won't solve the climate problem. But it would allow us to do our part to make Juneau cleaner at the same time that we're making it safer.

• *Steve Behnke is a co-founder and board member of Renewable Juneau, a nonprofit that helps Juneau reduce costs and carbon emissions through energy efficiency and beneficial electrification.*

Newspapers writing the story of their own future

By LARRY PERSILY

Newspapers used to stand tall in their communities across the country, Alaska included. But now they stand like stricken spruce trees, falling victim to declining revenue and readership, much like trees decimated by spruce beetles that feed on the vital, inner layer of wood.

And though the beetle infestations and spruce die-offs come and go with the weather — hard or mild winters and droughts — the decline in newspapers is not ebbing and flowing. The number of newspapers, readers and newspaper jobs is on a one-way fall.

Nationwide, the number of papers crashed from more than 7,300 in 2005 to just under 4,500 in 2025. Daily

newspaper circulation plummeted from more than 50 million readers in 2000 to about 15 million in 2025. Jobs at newspapers shrunk and shriveled from 365,000 in 2005 to 91,500 in 2025, as reported by The Associated Press, a nonprofit cooperative of news organizations worldwide.

It's nothing personal, it's just that people's habits have changed. They now get most of their news from the screen on their phone, reading or watching in short bites and bytes. Turning the pages of a newspaper is about as antiquated as popping a cassette or CD into a tabletop player in your home.

It's also political, as more people look for “news” that matches their opinions, with an expanding number of influencers, TikTok'ers, Facebook posters and podcasters making a good living from feeding people what they want to see and hear.

It's all been bad for the newspaper business, which lost classified ad revenue to Craigslist years ago and then Facebook, and then lost retail advertising revenues as department stores closed and more businesses and government agencies moved their ads to social media.

Like I said, most of it isn't personal, it's just people making choices about where to get whatever news they want to see, and advertisers choosing to spend their money differently than they had for decades.

For the newspapers that don't shut down, a number are converting from for-profit businesses to nonprofits, though they hadn't made a profit in years. In Alaska, half a dozen newspapers are money-losing ventures, including the Wrangell Sentinel.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of new online newspapers are starting up, trying to make a go of it without the heavy cost of printing, with smaller staff and with donations. There are more than 500 nonprofit news operations around the country, according to

the Institute for Nonprofit News.

In Alaska, nonprofit online newspapers now exist in Juneau, Homer, Seward and the Mat-Su region, with nonprofits taking over print newspapers in Fairbanks and Kodiak and others considering a similar move.

The trend toward nonprofits is growing, whether print or online, as a final effort to make the finances work to keep newspapers alive. Particularly in small towns, that would mean newspapers competing with senior centers, high school sports teams, food pantries, churches, public radio stations, community work projects and every other nonprofit for a limited pool of donor money.

A lot of nonprofit newspapers are looking to national funders for bigger checks to get started, but those big-money donors favor startup expenses and specific reporting projects, not ongoing subsidies.

Which leaves it on the communities to fund their newspapers, if the paper can deliver what readers are looking for. I hope every Alaska newspaper and its community can figure it out, whether nonprofit or for-profit. The forest looks empty when the spruce die off; it would be the same for newspapers.

• *Larry Persily is the publisher of the Wrangell Sentinel, which first published this column.*

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY TO US OR THE COMMUNITY?



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Sports

Crimson Bears cheerleaders face new challenges

The 'Gridiron Girls' look to rebrand after leadership change

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

In one sense they are the “Gridiron Girls.”

Although not the main attraction when fans pack the Adair-Kennedy Memorial Park field to watch the Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa. at Kalé Crimson Bears football team play, they put in the same hours on and off the field, feel the same pains and rejoice in the same victories.

They are the JDHS football cheer squad. A team in transition with a new coach to lead them.

“This season brings new challenges and opportunities,” new head football cheer coach Carlene Nore said. “I have not coached football cheer since 2022. I was not initially anticipating that I would be coaching football cheer this season. It has been a busy transition, requiring a lot of adjustments to personal schedules and getting back on track with prepping for a season with a month notice.”

An abrupt change in the coaching staff saw Nore step in. Unfortunately the team was left with no money for travel, uniforms or warm-ups for rain protection that funds previously had been raised for, and few of the eligible returning members from last season. The team is currently wearing 2017 JDHS basketball cheer uniforms, the threads of which have performed in one of Nore’s 10 state basketball cheer championship wins.

“We have a lot of fundraising ahead of us as we work toward purchasing new uniforms and warm-ups for the team,” Nore said. “Our team is young, energetic and full of school spirit. We have one senior, who serves as our team manager, while the majority of



The 2026-27 Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa. at Kalé football cheerleaders are, back row, left-to-right: sophomore Hope Scharen, freshman Amelia Ryder, freshman Courtney Parkin, freshman Helea Bethers and junior Theresa Whitehead. Middle row: freshman Karli Porter, junior Laura Parker, junior Lacie Whitehead, freshman Lucy Burke and sophomore Kristine Ryan. Front row: Sophomore Gena Swanson, sophomore Dakota Barger, freshman Grace Frederick and senior manager Alexa Scarano. Not pictured: Sophomore Ashlynn Beedle. (Photo courtesy Carlene Nore)

our athletes are freshmen and sophomores. We are focusing on the basics, building strong skills, and most importantly, learning how to work together as a team.”

Three cheerleaders have come with Nore from the basketball side: senior manager Alexa Scarano, junior Laura Parker and sophomore Hope Scharen.

“I never thought I would pick up cheer in high school, let alone for both basketball and football,” Parker said. “Football cheer is definitely going to be a different experience compared to basketball, but I am excited to see where this season takes us. A big factor in deciding to stick with football cheer this season is thanks to my brother Christian Parker, who was a running back for the JDHS football team. He has and continues to play a

big mentor role in my life, and I would love to cheer and be a part of a team that means a lot to not only him but my family.”

“I think this year is a great year to rebuild and create a good foundation for the years to come. This year I feel is a great time for me to focus on not only improving on myself but also how I can help another teammate do the same. This team really is amazing about being there for one another, which is just an uplifting feeling when you are not feeling like practicing that specific day, and someone comes to get you into a better mindset.”

Junior classmates include Theresa Weighardt and Lacie Whitehead. Sophomore cheer team members include Dakota Barger, Ashlynn Beedle, *See Cheerleading on Page 21*

CHEERLEADING

Continued from page 20

Kristine Ryan, Scharen and Genalee Swanson.

"I am excited to bring fun energy to the crowd," Swanson said. "And excited to learn new skills and make great memories with my teammates. I expect to become a stronger and more confident cheerleader while having practices that will challenge me and help me grow."

Freshmen members of the team include Helea Bethers, Lucy Burke, Grace Frederick, Courtney Parkin, Karli Porter and Amelia Ryder. The assistant coach is 2012 JDHS graduate and football (3 years), basketball (1 yr), Alaska Elite (1 yr) and dance team (3 yr) member Chelsea Kilgore, and volunteer coach is 2026 JDHS graduate and four-year Crimson Bears cheerleader Karina San Miguel.

"As a freshman coming into this team, I am excited to have the opportunity to bond with and learn alongside teammates," Burke said. "As well as getting to help bring more spirit into our school this year. I expect for this season to be challenging as we continue to learn and grow together, but I also expect to make new fun memories with my teammates."

Education is an important part of their program.

The team has completed courses on concussion awareness and sportsmanship, which Nore says "are extremely important to us as student-athletes and representatives of our school and community...Along with developing our cheer skills, our team is excited to promote school spirit and encourage more students and community members to attend games. I remember the days of packed stands, and while we may never return to exactly what that looked like years ago, increasing student participation and bringing more energy to the games would be amazing."

Nore had a prior stint with football cheer. She coached the team in 2008 up until they became the Juneau Huskies but was unable to apply for the job as it went to school employee preference. She returned a few years later for two years and then turned the program over to new coaches, but not before helping the football cheerleaders take first place at the Alaska Spirit Coaches Association and Rally in the Valley Cheer Competitions.

Nore also started coaching the JDHS basketball cheer squad in 2011. She took a break from coaching from 2014 to 2016, but has since resumed coaching with the basketball squad. Under her guidance, and the team members' hard work, the basketball cheer team has won 10 state titles and two runner-up finishes. They have never placed below second at state.

"There are many traditions connected to both the football and cheer programs, and we are excited to learn, honor and continue those traditions," Nore said. "Coaching alongside me this season is Chelsea Kilgore, who also brings experience from coaching Huskies cheer and basketball cheer. Together, we bring many years of experience to the program during this transition in coaching staff...We understand that big changes can be challenging, but we are excited for the opportunity to build, grow and get back on track. This young team is ready to learn, improve, create new memories and proudly cheer on the Crimson Bears. This season is challenging with the changes, new expectations, different coaching styles, but the team is coming together and are eager to learn and lead."

The first home game is Aug. 29, when the JDHS Crimson Bears host the North Pole Patriots at Adair-Kennedy Memorial Park. The varsity game is at 7 p.m. (JV play at 4 p.m.). The varsity cheer team will support and be supported by the JV cheer team members.

Before then, the cheer team will be busy with fundraisers. They will hold a car wash and bake sale at the Juneau Bone and Joint Center this Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The cost is \$15 per car or truck.

They will also be part of selling season passes along with the football team. Cost is \$20 to \$30. They will hold sponsorship opportunities through End Zone and a blanket sale fundraiser. To buy passes or sponsorships or contribute to the cheer team, patrons can contact Nore at 907-723-6580. A possible garage sale and outreach on social media are also in the works.

"As we are getting very close to the first home game of the season, I am ready and excited to get out on the track," sophomore cheerleader Parker said. "I am ready to have some fun with this team, while we are cheering on the football team for the next few months. I am expecting some highs and lows, but I am hoping through the season we just keep improving. There is always going to be days that feel harder to put in the work, and days that feel easier where I'm giving my 110%."

"Coach Carlene always says, 'Everyone's best is going to be different. What matters is knowing your best and striving to be that and more the next day, so the next time you step on the mat all the things that once were hard begin to get easier and easier.' So I hope nearing the middle and end of the season the things that seemed hard are going to be our minimum. For myself it is improving and working hard enough to reach potential. I have already made close connections with all the girls on the team so I am excited to see how those friendships grow. I have a good feeling about this upcoming season."

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

Crimson Bears' roar silences Thunderbirds

Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé football team storms through East Anchorage

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé Crimson Bears drove 70 yards on their first possession Saturday at Bettye Davis East Anchorage High School's home field and never looked back, earning a 17-14 road win over the Thunderbirds.

"Our defense ran into a pretty powerful run game and I thought just make some nice adjustments," JDHS coach Rich Sjoroos said. "And they did get a long drive, like a 10-minute drive after we scored and tied the game up at eight, and then after that we really kept them in check. Pretty much all the way until the final drive of the game."

The opening drive took just seven plays and JDHS senior Jaxin Jim rushed in from eight yards out for the score. JDHS senior Ethan Van Kirk ran in a two-point conversion for the 8-0 lead.

Sjoroos praised the play of senior quarterback Krew Ridle, senior running back Ethan Van Kirk and junior running back Sylvion Washington.

"East runs a little softer coverage and I just figured we could find some spots and muscle our way down the field," Sjoroos said. "Krew did a great job of that. They all did. Driving their legs after contact and turning the two-yard gain into a four-yard run. You do enough of those and you get a first



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé junior lineman Helaman Aitaoto-Tele'a (49) and sophomore linebacker Carter Day (1) stop Bettye Davis East Anchorage junior quarterback Kiona Toa (12) during the Crimson Bears' 17-14 win over the Thunderbirds in Anchorage, Saturday, Aug. 22, 2026. (Photo courtesy Stephanie Burgoon)

down. So it was great."

East matched that effort with a score on their first possession, moving 12 plays down the field - and into the second quarter - and punching in a five-yard run by junior Devon Peseti. Senior Sunu Fatialofa ran in a two-point conversion to tie the score at 8-8.

JDHS had to punt on their second possession and East struggled to get the ball past midfield and punted from their own 30-yard line.

A JDHS 12-play drive from their own 49-yard line against the solid East defense turned into a field goal attempt from 20 yards out and Crimson Bears senior Sonny Mazon drilled the kick for an 11-8 advantage.

East called a timeout to preserve three seconds on the clock, but the JDHS onside kickoff was recovered by the Crimson Bears with one second left in the half. A run play up the mid-
See EAST on Page 23

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- ✓ See elections.alaska.gov for more information.

AUGUST 18, 2026
PRIMARY ELECTION

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF JUNEAU

EAST

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dle resulted in five yards as the first half expired.

“Field position was a big deal today,” Sjoroos said. “We took advantage of a drive towards the end of the half. It started near midfield and we were able to get it down to field goal range. It would have been nice to get a touchdown, but at the same time just having points and having the lead going into halftime was big. I’ve been on this end of it where we played East on the road before or even at home and they make some nice adjustments at halftime and come out and take that first drive to the third quarter and just march down the field and get points, and they didn’t today and that was big for us.”

East had first possession in the second half, but the JDHS linebacker corps stepped up. Crimson Bears sophomore Carter Day stopped a run, junior Helaman Aitaoto-Tele’a another, senior Jake Chambers yet another and JDHS took over on downs.

JDHS’ Krew Ridle threw a sideline pass to junior wide receiver Andrew Sanders as part of an eight-play drive. The action stalled with an interception by East, but at the Thunderbirds’ own 15-yard line. The Crimson Bears had good defensive position to work with and after three plays JDHS’ Jim intercepted a pass and ran it back 20 yards for a 17-8 lead. The extra point by Sonny Mazon was just shy.

“I can’t tell you how big that interception was,” Sjoroos said. “It gave us that two-score cushion and just a little bit of breathing room on the road... I feel like you always kind of wonder how you’re going to play on the road. Getting up early at 5 a.m. or 4:30 and



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior quarterback Krew Ridle (14) battles for extra yards during the Crimson Bears’ 17-14 win over the Bettye Davis East Anchorage Thunderbirds in Anchorage, Saturday, Aug. 22, 2026. (Photo courtesy Stephanie Burgoon)

getting to the airport, can the kids get the right nutrition in them and stay hydrated and have the right energy. All that kind of stuff. A lot of times you just need something big to happen early in a game to kind of get you going because you just don’t know. I thought that pass from Krew Ridle to Andrew Sanders down the sideline just really got the sideline hyped up and the team hyped up and we were able to cash that in and get some points early in the game. Of course you have to play four quarters after that. But I thought that was a good way to start in a tough environment on the road. So that was great. And I am glad that the kids could do that and then see it all the way through to the end, it was pretty awesome.”

On East’s next possession JDHS junior linebacker Caleb Aube tackled a Thunderbird for a loss and Jim sacked the East quarterback to force a

punt.

JDHS ran down the remainder of the third quarter clock but also had to punt possession away.

East had the ball on their own 43-yard line but ran just three short plays before JDHS junior linebacker Jarry Maghinay intercepted a pass and the Crimson Bears had possession on their own 38-yard line with 9:20 remaining in the game.

“Once again, and I know I said this last week too, our defense had another solid game,” Sjoroos said. “Our linebackers especially, Jaxin Jim, Carter Day and Caleb Aube did a nice job of filling holes...”

Sjoroos noted the standout play of junior interior lineman Leonidas Tualo-Fale and junior defensive lineman Helaman Aitaoto-Tele’a and credited defensive line coach Jeff Hedges for the surge of play defen-

See EAST on Page 24

“WHEN IT COMES TO MEANINGFUL MENTAL HEALTH CARE,
MEETING VIRTUALLY IN SOMEONE’S HOME CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.”

Dr. Koko Bravo, Psychiatrist

SEARCHC

LEARN MORE

EAST

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sively.

"It was a really good move by coaches putting them in together because they play off each other so well," Sjoroos said. "And Jake Chambers and Jaxin Jim and Jarry Maghinay, he played a corner today and did a phenomenal job... Ethan Van Kirk and Caleb Aube, they both tackled so well... just lots of positive things."

In a masterful possession JDHS worked through nine plays and over seven minutes of game time to put the ball at the East 29 yard line. A last-play incomplete pass gave possession to East, but on their first play JDHS' Day uncorked a big tackle to stop a gain.

"We were able to eat about six minutes off the clock," Sjoroos said. "I know I didn't get points out of it, but I've always said over the years when you have a two-score lead in the game, eating time is almost as valuable as getting more points. We were able eat a lot of the clock down there so even when they got it back, time was against them at that point. We had good opportunities to learn situational football today and that is great for earlier in the year that will probably pay off later on down the road."

East stayed in the game with a series of short passes and worked the ball over midfield and down to the JDHS 16-yard line where junior Logan Womack, Aube and junior Sylvion Washington gang-tackled a runner.

East junior quarterback Kiona Toa threw an eight-yard touchdown pass to sophomore wide receiver Kaiedenn Sanders to close to 17-14. The point after was tipped at the line of scrimmage and fell short.

JDHS recovered East's onside kick-off attempt to end the game.

"They made a pretty nice adjustment and they went to a spread with an empty set and put it in a pretty fast," Sjoroos said. "He was kind of a dual-threat guy, somebody that could really



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé sophomore Carter Day (1), senior Jaxin Jim (20), junior Jarry Maghinay (22) and senior Avei Tuvaifale celebrate Maghinay's interception against Bettye Davis East Anchorage during the Crimson Bears' 17-14 win over the Thunderbirds in Anchorage, Saturday, Aug. 22, 2026. (Photo courtesy Stephanie Burgoon)

run. And it really kind of got us on our heels a little bit in that last two minutes of the game and then getting that score right at the end. But I thought we just played better. Special teams was way better. Our kick coverage, our punts, everything was better. And then offensively, I thought we blocked better. Once we got some film and got to self-evaluate and make some adjustments and things, I figured we would play better. Pretty much everybody around the state makes improvements, right, from week one to week two, but you just hope you make enough to start getting some victories and for us it worked out that way."

The obvious eye test on the field was the size difference between the two teams. East easily had more - and bigger - players across all positions, but JDHS would not be tossed aside.

"We hear that a lot from coaches," Sjoroos said. "It's like, 'How does Juneau, with guys half our size, hold up against us?' And I hear that week in and week out. It is just kind of a testament to the type of players that we have on our team. They are just gritty. And it comes from the guys before them and the guys before them, and it is a foundation that was laid a long time ago for successful football. And Juneau is just tough kids. Maybe we

don't win the pregame. But when it comes to playing on the field, most games we are pretty tough and we match up and just get after it and today was one of those days.

The Crimson Bears host the North Pole Patriots on Saturday, Aug. 29 at Adair-Kennedy Memorial Park field.

"It is going to feel really good to play at home for a couple weeks," Sjoroos said. "I feel like we have been on the road for what feels like a month now. We are a quarter of the way through the regular season and we haven't had a home game yet so we are ready. The few people that were there with us in Anchorage did a great job of cheering for us today. Imagine when we get the bleachers full. And talking to Brian Van Kirk, the band director, they are going to have the pep band out there all year too. So it is going to be great."

The JDHS JV defeated the East JV 27-0.

• Contact Klas Stolpe at sports@juneauindependent.com.

SCORE BY QUARTER

Juneau 8 - 3 - 6 - 0 = 17
East. 0 - 8 - 0 - 6 = 14

HOW THEY SCORED

1ST QTR

8:27 - Crimson Bears - Jim 8-yard run. Van Kirk 2-pt conversion scores. 8-0.

2ND QTR

11:14 - Thunderbirds - Peseti 5-yard run. Fatialofa 2-pt conversion run. 8-8.
0:08 - Crimson Bears - Mazon 20-yard FG. 11-8.

3RD QTR

3:45 - Crimson Bears - Jim 20-yard interception. Mazon PAT no good. 17-8.

4TH QTR

5:50 - East - Toa eight-yard pass to Sanders. 17-14. PAT blocked.