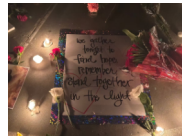


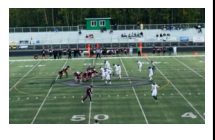
High fuel prices help
Juneau avoid sales
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as JDHS wins on
the road 41-27
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Juneau Independent

The True Local Newspaper of Alaska's Capital City

September 13, 2026

First Lingít opera makes world premiere in Juneau

'This is a gift of our culture and our history and our beauty and our tragedy and our fierceness'

By ELLIE RUEL, Reporter

After eight and a half years of work, a production reclaiming Lingít epic storytelling through emotional historical accounts of war in Sitka came to life onstage for the first time Friday.

"*Kutulagaaw: The Tlingit – Russian Battles*" was commissioned by Sealaska Heritage Institute President Rosita Kaaháni Worl to further Lingít voices in Western performing arts, harkening back to ancient forms of oratory and dance performed in natural amphitheaters. *Kutulagaaw* loosely translates to "the war we are in" in Lingít.

"Our vision is to challenge stereo-
See Opera on Page 14



A scene showing the 1802 battle between the Kiks.adi clan and Russian invaders is acted out during a dress rehearsal of "*Kutulagaaw: The Tlingit – Russian Battles*" at Thunder Mountain Middle School on Thursday, Sept. 10, 2026. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)

Remembering sacrifices 25 years after 9/11

'We can take care of each other, we can serve with courage and compassion, and when someone needs help, we can show up'

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

Local first responders and community members gathered at Riverside Rotary Park on Friday to pay homage to those who lost their lives 25 years ago in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The annual gathering organized by the Juneau Glacier Valley Rotary Club also pays tribute to the first responders who helped countless people during the deadliest attack on U.S. soil. Al-Qaida extremists hijacked four commercial jets, crashing them into both twin towers at the World Trade Center in New York City.

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A crowd, including local first responders, gathers on Friday, Sept. 11, 2026, for the Juneau Glacier Valley Rotary Club's remembrance ceremony at Riverside Rotary Park. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

Requiring nonprofits to charge sales tax again before Juneau Assembly

Original proposal modified due to concerns about impacts on essential services and intermittent fundraising events, but some officials say changes make it worse

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

A proposal requiring nonprofit organizations to charge sales tax for goods and services was approved by the Juneau Assembly's Finance Committee on Wednesday after changes were made to address concerns about charging tax for essential social services and occasional activities such as bake sales.

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Reduced-size farm at Back Loop residence gets Planning Commission OK

Up to 100 chickens and ducks, plus 15 other farm animals — half the number sought — allowed; neighbors express concerns about noise, odors and harm to property values

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

A man seeking to keep up to 200 chickens and 30 farm animals on his Back Loop neighborhood property will be allowed half that total — and a much lower number during colder months — under a conditional use permit approved by the Juneau Planning Commission on Tuesday.

The approval came after several neighbors objected, citing concerns such as noise, odor, environmental degradation and bear activity. A neighbor interviewed after the hearing said the reduction in animals allowed did not alleviate her concerns.

Shawn Kantola, who applied for the permit, told commission members he plans to start with much fewer animals for a non-commercial farm on his 2.2 acres of property at 10226 and 10228 Silver Street. But he said he hopes the effort will grow over time to fulfil his family's food needs.

"My family, with seven mouths to feed under one roof, I think we could eat two to three chickens a week," he said. "So if you had 52 weeks a year, two and a half chickens per week, you're 125 chickens to raise at that time."

The family also hopes to raise other farm animals — with Kantola mentioning pigs specifically. When asked if he was seeking to raise 30 cows, he replied "No, that'd be horrible."

Kantola has also said previously he and his wife are homeschooling their children, so the project may be an educational activity for them. He said he is still finishing construction of a house at the property and hopes to begin raising animals next spring.

The Planning Commission at an Aug. 11
See Farm on Page 6

Juneau avoids much of feared drop in sales tax revenue due mostly to higher fuel, other prices

'We're about \$3.2 million short of our budget, but we are about \$6 million higher than we expected, given the exemptions' on food and utilities, finance director says

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Juneau's sales tax revenue hasn't suffered as large a drop as expected since a voter-approved exemption on food and utilities took effect during the past year, but that's mostly because of higher fuel and other inflationary costs, according to a report presented to Assembly members last week.

Local officials a year ago predicted Juneau could lose more than \$10 million in revenue a year with the sales tax exemptions. City Finance Director Angie Flick told the Assembly Finance Committee last Wednesday "we're about \$3.2 million short of our budget, but we are about \$6 million higher than we expected, given the exemptions."

"I'm happy to tell you that the sales were strong, but I will tell you that sales were strong mostly due to inflation," she said.

Fuel costs have soared since the U.S. war with Iran began in February, and tariffs and other policies implemented by President Donald Trump have been cited for other price hikes on items ranging from food to steel.

The city's budget for the fiscal year that ended June 30 initially anticipated \$70.1 million in sales tax revenue, with \$66.9 million actually collected, according to Flick. She noted a series of events during the past year and a half affected both expectations of income and actual sales tax revenue.

"If you'll remember last summer we had a new federal administration, people were losing jobs, government contracts were being cut, grants weren't happening," Flick said. "I don't know how you felt about folks wandering

downtown. It didn't feel like downtown was very busy, even though we had the same number of ships and tourists as we did the year before."

Flick said this summer, she sees more cruise ship passengers walking around with shopping bags downtown.

"So we're seeing stronger numbers as it relates to the summer increase of visitors as well. So there's a number of things that created the strong sales," she said.

Angela Rodell, a member of the Affordable Juneau Coalition that sponsored last year's tax-cut measures, said in an interview Tuesday the sales tax revenue earned by the city after the exemptions were enacted shows fears expressed by city leaders were overblown.

She acknowledged higher costs the city may face due to inflation need to be considered, but in a broader context that also evaluates increases in tourism and other economic activity. Also, Rodell said the financial forecasting of city leaders has been off-target in recent years.

"They tend to overestimate what they think they're going to need and underestimate what they think they're going to get in revenue," she said.

Exemptions from Juneau's 5% sales tax for residential utilities and essential foods (excluding items such as hot prepared foods) took effect last Nov. 20. Also passed by voters in last October's election was a proposition lowering the cap on property taxes to nine mills instead of 12.

This year two ballot measures are seeking to offset some of those impacts by imposing a 1% seasonal sales tax between April and September, and

restoring the property tax cap to 12 mills.

Flick said there are now six months of data to evaluate impacts, but plenty of additional factors to consider when city leaders begin planning next year's budget later this fall.

"If inflation is driving up sales, it's also going to be driving up our costs," she said. "As we look at (next year) we know that we've got larger increases for wages per our negotiated agreements, and we'll have to look at how these various price drivers are affecting the city's expenses as well. I mean just in the most basic of operations where we've got street sweepers and bulldozers and police cars and fire trucks running around that are consuming fuel and having to buy at higher rates."

The city is still working with some merchants to clarify when the sales tax exemptions apply, and additional work will be needed starting Oct. 1 when several tax modifications passed this year take effect, Flick said. Among the changes is raising the sales tax cap on a single purchase to \$50,000 rather than \$15,000, meaning buyers will pay the current tax of 5% on the first \$50,000 of an item or service, with the rest exempt. The change does not apply to vehicles costing \$50,000 or less.

"We're doing as much outreach as we can," Flick said. "I think there will be a learning curve over the next quarter for sure."

The recent tax changes approved by the Assembly are intended in part to offset revenue loss from the voter-approved sales tax exemptions, and were part of months of budget deliberations

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TAX

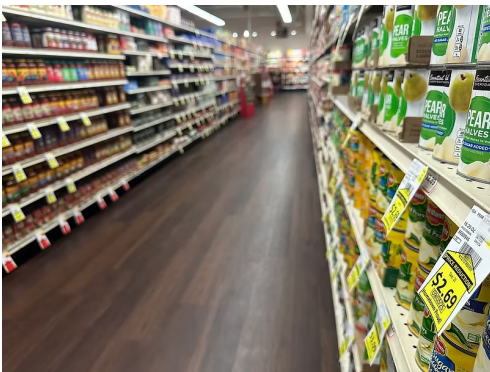
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that resulted in several million dollars of cuts to administrative and program costs.

Rodell said the budget trims made this year are a good initial step, but believes more are possible and increasing local taxes — either through this year's ballot measures or Assembly action — isn't warranted given the sales tax results for the city during the past year. She said she also believes the exemption measures passed last year are achieving their goal of making everyday costs for residents a bit more affordable — which may also have boosted spending by locals.

"I don't have any evidence other than anecdotally — you do hear people who feel like they can buy a little bit more at the grocery store, or buy that extra little thing at Fred Meyer for kids' school," she said. "So I think there may have been a little bit more spending."

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



A grocery aisle at Foodland IGA on June 19, 2025. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

Treg Taylor back in the governor's race despite him violating state campaign law

Dunleavy administration responds to controversial decision putting former attorney general back into governor's race by challenging filings by 91 of 121 candidates



Lt. Gov. Nancy Dahlstrom speaks at an Anchorage event on Oct. 30, 2024. (Official State of Alaska photo)

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

It's OK to put Treg Taylor back in the governor's race despite a finding he violated state campaign law because the vast majority of candidates in all Alaska races this year also have questionable filings.

That response was offered by Lt. Gov. Nancy Dahlstrom during a press conference Monday focusing on her controversial decision to restore Taylor and a state legislative candidate to the ballot on Friday, reversing her disqualification of them four days earlier.

Dahlstrom and Gov. Mike Dunleavy sought to redefine the issue by declaring as suspect the information pro-

vided by 91 of 121 statewide candidates to the Alaska Public Offices Commission, citing a Department of Law review conducted during the past week. The list includes all four candidates for governor, and most of the candidates in state House and Senate races.

The review was "limited and expedited," and it's not yet known if any of the questioned filings are valid or a violation of Alaska's campaign disclosure laws, said Rachel Witty, the Department of Law's top civil attorney, during the press conference.

"This was done over the course of a day and a half," she said. "So I can't

See Taylor on Page 5



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TAYLOR

Continued from page 4

emphasize enough that this is a preliminary review. We didn't have time to contact candidates."

The department's investigation was characterized by the Alaska Beacon as "unusual, if not unprecedented," since the agency "typically operates on a complaint-based system, with most actions taken when a member of the public alerts the commission to a potential problem."

Dahlstrom said many of the challenged filings may not be deliberate acts.

"It could have been a comma left out, or a number turned around, or something more," she said.

APOC recommended Taylor, a former state attorney general, not be certified as a candidate because he reported more than \$1 million in rental income, but did not disclose the full names of his tenants as required by Alaska's campaign laws. Dahlstrom said Aug. 31 she would follow that recommendation, then reversed herself in an announcement late Friday night.

In that announcement she also reversed her disqualification of Jose Anthony Tagle, a Republican seeking the Anchorage state House seat held by Democratic incumbent Ted Eischeid. APOC recommended Tagle not be certified after he filed a blank Public Officer Disclosure Form.

When asked if a missing comma or clerical oversight should be given the same characterization as deliberately omitting a significant amount of required information, Dahlstrom said the comma reference "was a poor example on my part." She said more typical examples would be "if someone forgot their address, or if somebody forgot something that they owned, or a place that they lived, or something like that."

Dave Bronson, a Republican candi-

date for governor and former Anchorage mayor, questioned the nature of the Dunleavy administration's findings in a statement Monday night.

"There is an important difference between 'substantial non-compliance' under AS 39.50 that was the basis for Lt. Governor Dahlstrom's original non-certification of 2 candidates, and a technical disclosure question, accidental omission, or information put out by Department of Law that is factually incorrect," Bronson wrote in a post on his campaign's Facebook page.

Both candidates in Juneau's only competitive legislative race for the House District 3 seat — incumbent Democrat Andi Story and Republican challenger Annette Kreitzer — are flagged in the Department of Law's review. The entry for Story states "Possible business affiliation with Juneau School District," while the one for Kreitzer states she "appears to have a current interest in a property located at Lot 2, Block 5, Young Subdivision, Plat 74-3, which is not disclosed[sic] on her POFD."

Kreitzer, in an interview Tuesday, said the flagged property is her primary residence, the address of which does not have to be disclosed under the state's campaign disclosure laws. She said she did disclose she owns the property and its ZIP code to establish it's located in her hometown of Haines.

"I felt that I had complied with what APOC required," she said.

Story, on Tuesday, said she has no known business ties with the Juneau School District.

"To me this just seems like it's distracting everyone from the main issue, and that's the (election) division's decision to not enforce what seems to be purposeful violations of campaign disclosure laws from some of the main candidates," she said.

Unopposed House District 4 candidate Sara Hannan, D-Juneau, is not

flagged in the report.

Because the administration's press conference was held on the Labor Day holiday, APOC officials could not be reached at work for comment.

The agency has long been underfunded and short-staffed, with nine currently funded positions compared to 14 in 2014. Dunleavy said during the press conference a group of former election officials should be formed to investigate "all the laws, the regulations, the processes, the practices, the remediation, the whole list of everything involved in APOC."

"There's, I think, a strong overdue review of not just APOC — I don't want to leave people with the impression that APOC is 'the problem,'" he said. "It's just updating everything from resources to laws to regulations to practices and so forth, so that going forward we make things better."

The Dunleavy administration has taken a number of controversial election-related actions over the past several months, including providing confidential voter data to the Trump administration, removing more than 3,000 people from voter rolls and asking them to verify their citizenship, and using unprecedented ballot tactics to distinguish U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan from Petersburg challenger Dan J. Sullivan after an attempt to disqualify the latter was rejected by the Alaska Supreme Court.

President Donald Trump, in the meantime, is seeking to restrict mail-in voting and other election-related measures to counter his frequent and unsubstantiated accusations of widespread fraud.

Dunleavy on Monday said he wants to shift the current focus to the upcoming election that will choose his replacement since he cannot run this year after serving two consecutive terms.

"We think people need to get on with campaigning," he said. "The people of Alaska need to get on with understanding what the candidates want, what they intend to do while they're office so they

See Taylor on Page 6

TAYLOR

Continued from page 5

can vote for them, and we just have to be able to navigate through our election system here in November."

Kreitzer, when asked about the decision to put Taylor back on the ballot, said the situation exists because of the state's open primary that puts up to four candidates in each race to compete in a ranked choice general election.

"I think that ranked choice voting has encouraged all of this," she said.

The Anchorage Daily News, in an editorial published Saturday, criticized a candidate certification process that "can be reopened and settled behind closed doors on a Friday night, on the say-so of (Dahlstrom) alone."

"Three wrongs don't make a right. Treg Taylor should follow the law. Dahlstrom should release the Department of Law's review in full," notes the editorial, which was published before the review was released Monday. "APOC — not a lieutenant governor acting alone — should immediately notify the public that it is conducting an emergency review of all candidates' filings, and that it will give each candidate five days to correct any deficiencies. After that it will recommend removal of any candidate that doesn't follow the law. Only then can the public trust that the game is being played fairly."

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

FARM

Continued from page 2

meeting, at which only five of nine members were present, asked Kantola to return to September's meeting with more specifics about what type of animals he wants and how many of them. He was also asked a range of questions by commission members on Wednesday such as how he plans to handle sick animals and carcasses.

Kantola said there are things he has not researched such as bird flu and whether any of his neighbors have private water wells. He also did not provide a specific plan for disposal of carcasses, including sick animals, other than saying he doesn't plan to store them on-site.

"Every hunter and fisherman in Juneau disposes of carcasses — fish carcasses, animal carcasses," he said, adding "most animal carcasses are disposed of in a way that goes back into the environment."

More than 20 written comments about the proposed farm were submitted by residents and organizations to the Planning Commission, with the vast majority in opposition. Among those supporting the project was Maureen Shivers, who stated it can be "a responsible and productive part of Juneau's community."

"I believe that a farm of this type would be a positive addition to Juneau and would provide an opportunity to increase local food production and agricultural activity within our community," she wrote. "As with any busi-

ness or land use, there are potential risks and concerns that should be considered, but I believe those concerns should be addressed through reasonable regulations rather than preventing the farm from operating altogether."

Four people offering in-person or online testimony during Tuesday's meeting all expressed opposition to the proposal. Cari Atkinson, a neighbor of Kantola's, said "I don't begrudge him having a farm, not at all. I just don't think it belongs in this neighborhood at all — or any neighborhood in town, to be honest."

"I am definitely allergic to all the feathers, all the hair, all the hay, the whole nine yards...and I'm really afraid that that is going to carry down towards my home and that I'm not going to be able to have a true functioning life," Atkinson said.

Sheryl Weinberg, another nearby resident, said she has concerns about noise, odors and harm to property values, but suggested "there could be a compromise where there are some very strict guidelines in terms of limiting the numbers."

"I don't think (you) should approve it tonight," she told the Planning Commission members. "I think that Mr. Cantola should do more research, and the Planning Commission, and limit it significantly. I don't think that a lot of pigs or any other animals are appropriate in our neighborhood."

A motion allowing up to 100 chickens and ducks, plus 15 other farm animals,

See Farm on Page 7



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FARM

Continued from page 6

on Kantola's property between March and September, and 50 chickens/ducks and four other farm animals during other months was made by Planning Commission Vice Chair Lacey Derr.

"I really appreciate Mr. Kantola being here, and he is trying to do this dream within means and do it the correct way...and he's really not asking for anything outside of the norm, once I started digging into it," she said.

Other commission members generally expressed support.

"We don't know 100% what all of the impacts will be on the neighborhood, on the wetlands, and on the sound and on the odor," Mandy Cole said. "And so, not knowing that it's better to start a little smaller than it is to go straight for the maximum possible scenario, and I think that is a very measured approach and appreciate it."

Concern was expressed by commission member Carlee Simon — after she directed numerous questions to Kantola and city planning staff during the hearing about the potential impacts of the farm — who said "I feel that we don't have enough information to know things."

"He did come asking for 200 chickens and 30 farm animals without us knowing where the manure is going to be kept, without really knowing how it's going to be stored, what is going to be the facility where the processing occurs, what happens with the carcasses, what biosecurity stages are going to be taken care of," she said. "I am feeling very much that there is so much about character and impact and size that we do not know."

Simon joined the other six members at the meeting in voting in favor of the conditional use permit with fewer animals after successfully adding an amendment that "all manure and other refuse must be composted or disposed of at least annually and stored under cover."

"Once it was clear there was support for the motion on the floor, I supported an additional amendment because I believed it improved that motion and added needed limitations," she stated in a message after the meeting.

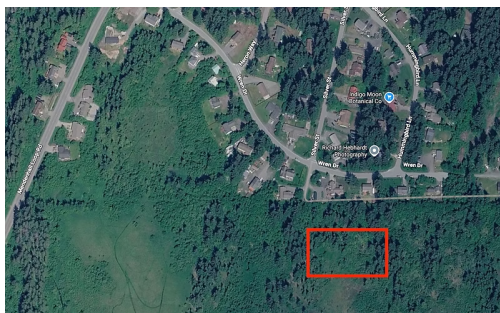
The approved permit has several other conditions that include noise limits, an electrified fence to protect against bears, water quality safeguards, odors not being detectable beyond the property for more than 48 hours, and keeping slaughtering of animals out of view of adjacent properties and public right-of-way areas.

Kantola, when asked after the hearing about the commission's decision and if the reduced number of animals will affect his plans, replied "I don't know" to both questions.

Disappointment about the decision was expressed afterward by Maureen Hansen, a neighbor who expressed opposition to the farm during the hearing. She said 100 chickens instead of 200 will still have a significant impact, and she questioned how provisions such as the odor restriction will be measured and enforced.

"I think it's super short-sighted that they are trying to make a decision on something that they clearly stated is not addressed in our city code in any definitive way, and they just did the precedent," she said. "It's not in any of their neighborhoods."

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



An area marked in red shows the approximate location where a Juneau resident plans to raise chickens and other farm animals on his residential property. (Google Maps satellite image)

Payment of \$1,200 PFDs begins Oct. 1

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

More than 600,000 Alaskans are scheduled to get \$1,200 payments starting Oct. 1 through the Alaska Permanent Fund Division.

The payout includes a \$1,000 PFD plus a \$200 energy dividend approved by the Alaska Legislature this spring. The PFD amount is the same as a year ago — which was the lowest adjusted for inflation since dividends have been issued in 1982 — with the extra \$200 due to extra revenue the state got from oil prices that were far higher than predicted due to the Iran war.

Residents filing online applications and selecting direct deposit who have been determined eligible will receive payment on Oct. 1, according to the division's website. Online and paper applications deemed eligible by Oct. 12 will receive their dividend on Oct. 22 by direct deposit or check.

"Checks are mailed from Juneau starting October 22, 2026," the website notes.

For remaining applications, the division distributes payments on a monthly basis after further eligibility checks.

"If your dividend is determined eligible for payment after the dates above, the disbursement will be distributed in the next monthly distribution," the website notes.

People can view the status of their application, submit updated information or questions, and find other details about the dividend program at <https://pfd.alaska.gov/>.

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

9/11

Continued from page 1

York City, the Pentagon and a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, killing 2,977 people.

Capital City Fire/Rescue Chief Tom Hatley addressed a crowd of more than 100 people during the ceremony, his first time participating after being appointed Juneau's fire chief in February.

Hatley said 25 years ago, he was a firefighter in Lewiston, Idaho, assigned to the airport firefighter crash truck. He recalled it was a lonely day.

"Like so many Americans, I remember watching the events that morning unfold and realized that something had changed," he said. "None of us knew how much that day would affect our country, our communities and those of us in the fire service. A few weeks later I had the opportunity to go to New York and be at Ground Zero. When I arrived, the fires were still burning. I could see and smell the devastation. It is an experience that has stayed with me throughout my career."

Hatley said one moment in particular has never left him.

"I was there when the remains of three firefighters were recovered from the rubble. I didn't know those firefighters or their families, but they were firefighters. And in our profession that means something," he said. "They went to work that morning expecting to do what firefighters across the country do every day: answer the call and help someone who needed them. They could not have known what the call would ask of them, but they went anyway."

Local firefighters also raised a U.S. flag on a CCFR truck at the Mendenhall Wetlands Scenic View Turnout on Egan Drive earlier Friday morning. Two firefighters told the Juneau Independent they became firefighters because of the tragedy that occurred on



Capital City Fire/Rescue Chief Tom Hatley gives a speech to a crowd gathered in remembrance of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on their 25th anniversary at Riverside Rotary Park. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

9/11. Hatley said there are firefighters currently serving who were not yet born that day.

"Many young people know that day only through photographs, history books, memorials like this one, and the stories we choose to tell," Hatley said. "That means keeping that memory alive is now our responsibility, but never forget means more than remembering those who died."

He noted it's also important to recognize the first responders who survived and those who later lost their lives from illnesses associated with service in Ground Zero.

In an interview following the ceremony, the fire chief was asked what he thinks youth should remember on this day.

"Sacrifice," Hatley replied. "What it took for them to do that."

He said when thousands were trying to escape danger, "firefighters were climbing the stairs, police officers were helping people to safety, EMS personnel cared for the injured, dispatchers coordinated an unimaginable response, healthcare workers stood ready. The passengers and the crew of Flight 93

chose to act, and ordinary people saw others who needed help and stepped forward."

He said past memorial events he's attended before coming to Juneau have been more private and department-based in attendance, although the community was invited. Hatley said the Rotary's remembrance event is special because of its large public turnout and support.

The Glacier Valley Rotary Club began holding the ceremony on the first anniversary of 9/11. That same day, Hatley served as a flag bearer during the New York City Fire Department Hero Day. The flag he carried represented 343 firefighters killed on 9/11, as well as their families and the firehouses left with empty chairs.

Hatley said to him, the phrase "never forget" carries great responsibility.

"After more than three decades in the fire service, September 11th continues to remind me of something very simple: None of us knows what the next call will be," he said. "We don't know when our community will need us or

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9/11

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what will be asked of us. What we can control is whether we are ready. We can take care of each other, we can serve with courage and compassion, and when someone needs help, we can show up.”

Attendees thanked the first responders and members of the armed forces present on Friday.

“Let them know how much we appreciate their service and their willingness to put service above self,” said Hayden Garrison, president of the Glacier Valley Rotary Club.

Eric Forst, past president of the Rotary Club, gave an invocation, with the crowd joining him in prayer under a sunny sky.

“God of compassion, we remember the sorrow of this day. We hold in prayer the innocent lives lost. We honor the courage of first responders,” he said. “We lift up families who still grieve.”

The moments of community gratitude were followed by the Juneau Police Department honor guard’s presentation of colors at 9:59 a.m. At the same time in New York on Sept. 11, 2001, the south tower of the World Trade Center collapsed.

As the United States flag was raised, Sara Radke Brown, artistic director of Vox Borealis, sang the national anthem.

JPD Deputy Chief Krag Campbell explained the significance of the monument Juneau residents gathered around, with the flag now at half-staff.

“This memorial is to commemorate the victims of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the downed aircraft over Pennsylvania, to pay tribute to the efforts of the rescue and recovery at each site, and to acknowledge the continued fight to preserve our freedom,” he said.

The memorial’s design of a broken pentagon represents the Pentagon building. Each side measures four feet



Sarah Cannard, a firefighter and paramedic with Capital City Fire/Rescue, is thanked for her service during a 9/11 remembrance ceremony on Friday, Sept. 11, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)



Forget-me-not flowers symbolize the rebirth of patriotism and the promise to never forget at the Juneau Glacier Valley Rotary Club’s memorial in honor of 9/11 on Friday, Sept. 11, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

in length to represent the four lost airplanes. The two missing sides represent the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

“The memorial was constructed with concrete and Pennsylvania marble to represent the strength found in our heroes,” Campbell said. “The forget-me-not flowers symbolize the rebirth of patriotism and our promise to never forget. The flag represents the unity of our

nation. The head of the memorial’s pentagon is aligned with the North Star, a symbol of all Alaskans.”

The ceremony concluded with “Amazing Grace” played by the City of Juneau Pipe Band as attendees closed their eyes in remembrance.

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

TAX

Continued from page 1

But a number of concerns remain as the full Assembly is scheduled to allow public testimony and possibly cast a final vote on the proposal at its Sept. 14 meeting. Among them are unequal treatment for which nonprofits will be charged taxes and that many organizations may not be aware the modifications are being considered.

"I just want to clarify to everybody that we are not taxing the nonprofits, we're just asking them to collect sales tax," Mayor Beth Weldon said during the meeting.

The new requirement would take effect Jan. 1 if approved by the Assembly.

The proposed change is among several involving taxes the Assembly has pursued this year to make up for an ongoing budget deficit, as well as revenue expected to be lost after voters last year approved ballot measures to lower the property tax cap and exempt food and utilities from sales taxes.

Requiring nonprofits to charge sales tax would result in about \$3.3 million in annual revenue, according to City Finance Director Angie Flick. The city collected about \$67 million in sales tax during the past fiscal year that ended June 30, and the budget for the current fiscal year is roughly \$545 million that includes about \$140 million for municipal government functions.

The proposal was put on hold in July by the Assembly when concern was expressed by numerous nonprofit



People visit vendor booths at the inaugural Southeast Summerfest, hosted by the Juneau Arts and Humanities Council as a fundraiser, on Aug. 15, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

officials about anticipated administrative and financial difficulties if they were required to charge sales tax. Juneau Symphony Executive Director Charlotte Truitt told Assembly members at a July 27 meeting it would cost \$2,000 to modify their bookkeeping process and \$500 a month afterwards to charge customers the city's 5% sales tax.

"We're fortunate that we have a bookkeeper who works about 10 hours a month," she said. "But many of the 263 nonprofits in Juneau don't have that luxury. They rely on volunteer treasurers or bookkeepers who donate their time because they believe in a mission."

The Finance Committee's revisiting of the proposal on Wednesday included

lengthy discussions about amendments exempting certain types of organizations, activities and transactions from the sales tax requirement.

An amendment introduced by Weldon and adopted unanimously specifies that an existing social services exemption in the proposed ordinance "means the provision of direct services to vulnerable, disadvantaged, or distressed individuals to meet basic life needs such as food assistance, housing assistance, disability support, day services, or senior and assisted living support."

To reduce the burden on small nonprofits, Assembly Member Neil Steininger proposed exempting such organizations from charging sales tax if

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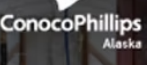


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JSD enrollment 'historically lower now than ever before'; school board to revisit budget later this fall

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

Shawn Arnold shared in a superintendent report on Tuesday evening the Juneau School District is below its projected enrollment for this school year.

"It's historically lower now than ever before," he said.

As of Tuesday, K–12 enrollment is 3,673, which is 94 students below the district projection of a 3,767 average daily attendance (-2.5%), according to data from PowerSchool, the district's student information provider.

The fiscal year 2027 operating budget anticipated roughly \$33 million from the state based on the projection, which also included 130 "intensive students." Intensive students are defined as a student that needs a high level of individualized support and are separately counted from annual daily enrollment numbers.

Tuesday's count of 3,673 and 128 intensive students puts the district's state revenue for this year at about \$29 million, which is \$3.4 million less than expected when the district's budget

was passed this spring.

"Part of the good news is we are receiving a one-time funding," Arnold said, noting this is expected to be about a \$3.6 million boost in per-student funds.

The Alaska Beacon reported \$115 million from war-driven oil revenue will be distributed to school districts according to the state's education funding formula, which is based on student enrollment counts in October. JSD is set to receive an estimated

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TAX

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their gross annual revenue is less than \$300,000. The amendment failed by a 5-4 vote, with the objecting members stating it would result in an uneven treatment of nonprofits in a way that doesn't apply to for-profit operators that charge sales taxes.

"From our perspective we need to see what's the difference between the people who are above \$300,000 and below \$300,000," said Assembly Member Alicia Hughes-Skandijs. "Is there a good reason there besides making it easier for them? We talked about burden and onerousness — we don't give those exemptions to businesses. We don't say, 'Well, you're a pretty small business so you don't probably have the money for a full-time finance staff so you don't have to collect tax.'"

Steininger, Weldon, Paul Kelly and Greg Smith vote in favor of the amendment. Hughes-Skandijs, Christine Woll, Maureen Hall, Nano Brooks and Ella Adkison voted against.

A more nuanced amendment introduced by Hall and unanimously adopted applies the exemption to "intermittent fundraising events," which are defined as "any discrete campaign, gala, auction, bake sale, or tem-

porary market drive conducted by a non-profit entity for the primary purpose of raising organizational funds, provided the physical selling window does not exceed 14 consecutive days and occurs no more than four times per calendar year." The Assembly, by an 8-1 vote with Hall dissenting, altered her original proposal that stated permanent retail establishments were not eligible for the exemption.

The final vote to send the proposed ordinance to the full Assembly for public comment and possible passage was 7-2, with Woll and Hughes-Skandijs opposed.

"This thing is rushed," Woll said just before the vote. "It's a mess. We're going to hear from lots of people who were or were not included in this, and how it affects them. And that's not how we should be setting policy. So I'm disappointed to see a bill with amendments move forward because I do think the original version we came up with was fair and made sense."

Steininger disagreed, stating new ways of generating revenue — including changes to the city's tax policies — have been considered since last year's election.

"We did a lot of work tonight, but that work is built on thinking about this

issue for months, hearing from community members and getting emails for months, and I don't feel like this is rushed policy," he said.

Dissatisfaction with the revised policy after the vote was expressed by Sealaska Heritage Institute Chief Operating Officer Lee Kadinger, who said in an interview "I believe it further muddies the water over what is and what is not taxable."

"Our position is if we're going to tax nonprofits...it applies to everybody. period," he said. "It just applies across the board."

Kadinger said one of his specific concerns involving SHI is that charging tax will make it harder for Alaska Native craftspeople selling items to compete with imported art and other merchandise.

"I very much worry that by increasing the cost on authentic Native art by another 5% it's going to impact our artists who live here, who work here, their jobs are here, they're contributing to our economy," he said. "The money that's going overseas is not."

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

ENROLLMENT

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\$514,000 in state energy relief funding in the coming weeks, Arnold said during Tuesday's school board meeting.

With the one-time funding and current projected enrollment, Arnold said there is "only" an overall budget surplus of \$731,827.

Arnold said he wanted to present these numbers before the Juneau Board of Education so that they could prepare. The school board is not required to revise the budget until November, after conducting a state-mandated count of students during 20 school days starting the fourth Friday of October.

"That's when we'll know what our final student count is after our 20-day official student count that we turn into the state," he said.

The district also needs to project to the state what the fiscal year 2028 enrollment number is by Nov. 5.

He said the district is observing a larger decline in elementary grades, but a slight increase in secondary school numbers. Arnold noted a positive was a boost in Thunder Mountain Middle School's enrollment by 40 students. The district's largest single cohort, 346 students, is currently in sixth grade. High school enrollment remains stable.

Arnold also noted a slight increase in alternative options, including HomeBRIDGE, Juneau Community Charter School, Juneau Montessori

School, and the Tlingit Culture, Language and Literacy program.

"As we have fewer kids, more kids are shifting over to the optional programs," he said.

Enrollment decreased significantly during the 2020-2021 academic year as the COVID-19 pandemic led to a transition from in-person to online schooling, according to Juneau Economic Development Council's 2025 Economic Indicators and Outlook report. The enrollment for the 2025 to 2026 school year was 3,832, according to school board documents.

"As a result of this change and overall safety concerns, many parents switched their children to HomeBridge or other homeschooling programs," the JEDC report states. "Enrollment totals only recovered by 212 during the 2021-2022 school year, displaying a lasting effect from the pandemic-induced decline. This decline is also likely related to the trend of steady decline in Juneau's 0-19 aged population."

Arnold said the lowest drop was surprisingly found in kindergarten numbers across schools. The incoming kindergarten enrollment sits at 188 students (down 51 from a year ago).

"The best explanation — it may not be the correct explanation — is people are having fewer kids," he said, adding a demographer will examine a live birth rate and project out five years.

He showed the six elementary schools on a graph and their projected need for staff compared with the "actual

need" based on updated enrollment counts presented Tuesday.

"The tough decision right now is three of our schools have FTE (full-time equivalent) that they are currently utilizing," Arnold said. He said it's a mismatch for what enrollment is now projected.

An FTE references a full-time workload, but not necessarily performed by a single person, so two people working half-time would equate to one FTE.

Arnold said now that numbers are lower than projected, a question of reallocating staff arises.

"If we don't balance our schools, if we don't remove positions, it could expand that deficit," he said.

He said it's not in policy, but has been common practice for the district in the past. Arnold said he was asking the board to balance equally or not at all.

"Following through with past practice is to reallocate the resources appropriately, so if we have teachers, if they're unfilled, we don't fill those positions — if we need to shift and reallocate a position, that we go ahead and reallocate those positions," he said.

Arnold asked for the board's guidance, recommending that a decision made now in response to a small surplus and decreasing enrollment means less disruption to the schools later on this fall.

"I think we all know we're in a
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ENROLLMENT

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financial position where we would not be able to afford adding additional staff to a building," said board vice president Elizabeth Siddon. "It's why we have the hard conversations about PTR (pupil-to-teacher ratio) and none of us love what our PTR is. We would all love for it to be lower. We can't afford it."

Siddon pointed out there are still vacancies in elementary districtwide programs that the additional staff could support.

Board member Amber Frommherz asked if further tracking could be done for the optional programs' pupil-to-teacher ratio. She said she was concerned about addressing the shifting of students from neighborhood schools to an optional program.

"Let's also not regret the transitions between neighborhood schools to optional programs," Frommherz said.

Board member David Noon echoed Siddon's thought, stating the school board cannot rely on "extra money as a source of additional staffing because we are looking at numbers potentially for next year that are going to contract our enrollment; even if it holds steady, we are going to be down from what we budgeted for this year."

He said the board cannot use one-time funds to fill what could be viewed as a structural problem for revenue.

Siddon asked if TMMS should be allocated an additional teacher due to being 40 students over projection with a pupil-teacher ratio of 30 to one. Arnold said the question would need to be revisited through a future request to the board.

The next regular school board meeting is scheduled for Oct. 27 at the TMMS library.

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

Eaglecrest crafts new strategic plan as new GM takes over struggling ski area

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Eaglecrest Ski Area leaders are creating a new long-range plan for year-round operations following the cancellation of a long-planned gondola earlier this year and hiring of a new general manager who started last week.

The plan seeks to optimize winter operations that have operated at a loss for many years while considering a range of possibilities for warm-weather operations that attract cruise tourists, Jim Calvin, an Eaglecrest board member, told Juneau Assembly members during a Committee of the Whole meeting Aug. 31.

"After the gondola we have to go back to the drawing board, figure out what makes sense in terms of summertime lift development or a full suite of other potential developments in the summertime," he said. "It could be eight or 10 different attractions that each draw 15,000 visitors, or it could be (a) gondola type where we have one big attraction that's drawing 100,000. We just need to step back and take a careful look at all of the opportunities, the range of opportunities, and make sure that we're making good choices as we proceed from here."

Discussions also include partnering with a company such as Goldbelt Inc. and/or other entities, with specifics still to be determined, Calvin said. He said officials "hope to have the heart of the meat of the project done by the end of October."

During an Eaglecrest board meeting on Thursday, Calvin said the strategic plan is about 65% complete, and the goal is to talk to potential partners this fall and next spring.

Eaglecrest, which celebrated its 50th season of operation during the past winter, has been under intense scrutiny from the Assembly during the

past couple of years due to increasing annual financial losses, aging equipment that has resulted in lift and other shutdowns, and leadership and employee instability.

A major setback in plans occurred when the projected cost for a used gondola purchased in 2022 soared from less than \$10 million to more than \$35 million in March of this year. That led to the Assembly voting to sell the gondola at what's expected to be a heavy loss, and repay Goldbelt the \$10 million (plus more than \$2 million in interest) the company provided in exchange for a share of the gondola's revenue.

The Assembly considered a proposal earlier this year by Mayor Beth Weldon to demote Eaglecrest's board to an advisory role, effectively giving the Assembly and city manager direct responsibility for the ski area. But action was postponed because the gondola's future was still being decided and a new general manager was being sought.

The Assembly was scheduled at its Sept. 14 meeting to reconsider the Eaglecrest board's authority, but at the Committee of the Whole on Aug. 31 supported Weldon's request to delay the matter until after the new strategic plan is complete.

Short-term plans for the upcoming season were the primary focus of Eaglecrest's board meeting last Thursday, which was the first for new General Manager Julie Piper after starting the job Aug. 31.

Season pass sales that are now underway, employee housing this winter at the University of Alaska Southeast, and various mountain infrastructure and state-planned work on the road to the ski area were among the topics discussed.

OPERA

Conntinued from page 1

types that depict Indigenous societies as primitive,” Worl said in an artistic statement. “We want to overcome the historical depictions of a tribal society without laws. We want to humanize Native Peoples and portray the deep feelings we have; that we sing, dance, grieve and battle as do others. We want to show that we acted strategically to allow us to survive in this new world that was engulfing us and that we willingly adapted and embraced elements of Western society.”

Worl enlisted the help of Vera Starbard to write the libretto, or script of the opera at a play opening in 2018, with Perseverance Theatre cosponsoring the production. Lingít language expert X’unei Lance Twitchell translated that script.

“She approached me and started talking about what a good idea an opera in Lingít about the Battles of Sitka would be, and it took a couple of those suggestions that someone should do it to realize she was saying, ‘Hey, you should do this,’” Starbard said. “Before the curtain went up opening night, I was texting Ed.”

Ed Littlefield composed the musical element of the opera with orchestrator Rory Stitt. He said that while the opera being entirely sung in Lingít is important, audience members who aren’t fluent will still understand the plot.

“Music is universal. It’s heard in ev-



Tíx’ gathers seaweed with her niece during a dress rehearsal of “Kutulagaaw: The Tlingit – Russian Battles” at Thunder Mountain Middle School on Thursday, Sept. 10, 2026. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)

ery place around the world,” Littlefield said. “We don’t always understand it, but we can feel it. And I guarantee you, anyone watching this will feel the performance.”

He said that viewers can pick up Lingít words through the immersive experience.

A storyteller will open each performance with an explanation of the plot and historical context, keeping with Lingít oral traditions, Starbard said. Her words have a more poetic form than most plays since it’s sung and don’t drive the story on their own.

“Every single word in line is a metaphor upon metaphor upon duplicate meanings,” she said.

The opera follows 1802 and 1804 battles between the Lingít in Sitka (Sheey Atiká) and Russian invaders

(Anóoshi). The opening scene shows Russian men harassing the Kiks.ádi women and being driven out by allied Lingít clans after violating their laws continuously.

Afterwards, preparations for the Russian return from Kodiak are made — with a great tragedy striking, accentuated by a song describing how women feel the realities of war.

“We build and grow and feed the clan. Strangers take and hurt what we nurture. Women know this anger,” a summary written by Starbard reads.

The audience follows the viewpoint of Tíx’, a female translator between the Lingít and Russians.

“Her job was to watch and to listen, and that just captured me as far as how to tell this story,” she said.

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OPERA

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When researching, Starbard said she focused on oral accounts from primarily Lingít sources.

“The funny part about the Russian accounts is every single one of them, especially in Sitka, is like the Sitka Lingíts just sing and sing all the time. They just sing and then they dance and then they sing some more, and they never shut up. They just keep singing,” she said. “To me, it’s such a beautiful punctuation we’re like, ‘Yep, and we’re still singing. The Sitka Lingíts and all of us are still singing together.’”

Each line Starbard wrote was translated from English into Lingít by Twitchell. Sometimes, it was then re-translated to English to check the meanings.

“Vera wrote the lines that she thought would be in there, and then I took them and translated them into Lingít. And sometimes we would text back and forth about things like, ‘This is something that you really can’t say in Lingít,’” Twitchell explained. “Or it’s just going to have a different meaning because every language functions differently. So then we would sometimes talk through some of those areas and make adjustments, or I’d see what the intention was behind this because Lingít is also very specific.”

Twitchell said he’s been making tweaks to the translations after hearing them sung in rehearsal.

For Littlefield, whose ancestors fought in the Battles of Sitka, much of the work came in transforming sheets with Starbard’s original lines, Twitchell’s translation and the meaning of the translation into a Lingít song form.

“It’s usually just a few notes, just a melody sung. Sometimes chants can

be only one note and just words in a rhythm,” he said. “So expanding on that was really fun, and so there’s a natural harmony that goes with those notes. But what I tried to do and what I’ve been trying to do for almost 20 years now, is take those melodies, the melodies I have permission to use, and changing those key centers to evoke a different emotion.”

Littlefield said he spent hours in his studio, trying to sing the lines and come up with a harmony that made sense. Most operas lean heavily on arias filled with “oh” and “ah” notes, but Littlefield honed in on Lingít consonants and rhythms.

“One of the limitations for this is that we didn’t really have a lot of fast words speaking, so if I truly kept the traditional style, it would be like a five or six hour opera because we would have to sing it in that style. So my favorite part was trying to fit all these words into a specific rhythm,” he said. “They were very basic compositions with a chord outlining a groove, a rhythm.”

From there, Stitt orchestrated the compositions. Stitt said they tried to give the pieces texture and substance without completely adhering to the restrictions of Western opera music.

“I think we struck a really great balance of the Western traditional sounds without barreling over or erasing the edges of those Lingít music and language, and try to come up from underneath it I think and support it,” Stitt said. “Not overly harmonized, not overly decorated, but try to stay really true to the pureness of the language rhythm, and that Lingít music is drum and voice.”

Stitt drew on musical tropes, like snare drums and horns indicating a military theme, to support the drumming and language and expand the harmony without overrunning cultural

elements. Stitt and Littlefield settled on wooden sounds like the glockenspiel as complementary to the language.

“If I was ever stuck on something, I’d be like, ‘Well, are you supporting the drum or the voice here?’” Stitt said. “It’s got to go one of these two directions. If it doesn’t serve that, then it doesn’t serve the format of the storytelling that’s just the format of the piece that serves the nature of the art that it’s trying to uplift.”

For Stitt, the opera was an opportunity to apply musical knowledge in a new way.

“I’ve spent most of my life studying classical music and working in that idiom,” Stitt said. “It’s just been a huge gift to be able to bring that knowledge in service of furthering the culture and the language.”

Starbard noted the opera is also musically unique since the performers are not statically placed onstage.

“My husband and I in the early research phase went to an unnamed opera, that very historical Western opera, and they stood and they sang and they stood and they sang, and that was it. They just didn’t move, and what we left there with was like, ‘Well, that’s not Lingít Opera. We’re still creating what Lingít Opera is, but Lingít performance is so much movement,’” Starbard said. “We’d always planned for there to be just dancers too that are in movement.”

Of the 20 cast members, multiple are Lingít dancers, and much of the story’s context is given through movement.

“I actually feel like some of the most emotional beats in the story are when you’re watching it, it’s still a surprise because they’re not hyper literal,” director Madeline Sayet explained. “They’re danced and the music is really emotional in those sections.”

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Starbard said it was an emotional account of the Battles of Sitka, rather than a purely historical one, allowing for room between the literal details to capture the emotional journey.

Sayet said the format could act as a blueprint for other cultures, including her own. Her mother is a Mohegan historian culture-bearer, and was inspired to write plays to help people remember and understand history.

“That’s also just like a really exciting precedent for more groups of people coming together and telling their stories in their languages in different artistic forms,” she said.

Encouraging others to take Lingít culture into new realms in an Indigenous-led way is a goal of the production, Twitchell said.

“I think we’ve been sort of duped into not telling our own stories by living under this sort of idea that only a single clan can tell a particular story, which in some cases, like it is their story, it’s their people. But in other cases, it affects so many of us. And when we come down to who can tell stories in Lingít now, like you can count them on one hand,” he said. “We’ve seen people tell these stories who are not Indigenous, and I think it’s better for us to tell our own stories.”



Actors rehearse “*Kutulagaaw: The Tlingit – Russian Battles*” at Thunder Mountain Middle School on Thursday, Sept. 10, 2026. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)

Starbard said the opera highlights Lingít strength, and shares fierceness, beauty, tragedy, culture and history.

“I thought it was an amazing story to be able to tell something that speaks to the strength of an Indigenous culture,” she said. “Too often, what you see on stage in other media is the weakness or the loss of Indigenous culture, and in this case, it was all about the fight and the success and the triumph of our culture.”

Littlefield hopes the opera inspires more Lingít works.

“These objects and these songs and stories are beautiful, but they’re also

there for a reason,” he said. “I want people to sing these melodies, you know, and have them come out with new Lingít works and new ideas. Lingít people are so creative, and I just want to kind of open that box to new creativity on how we share our culture on our terms.”

“*Kutulagaaw: The Tlingit – Russian Battles*” opened at the Thunder Mountain Middle School Auditorium on Friday at 7:30 p.m., and will run until Sept. 20. Tickets are available online.

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

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Voices

Supporting youth after a suicide

By CHALYEE ÉESH RICHARD
PETERSON, AARON SURMA and
JORDEN NIGRO

Our community recently experienced the preventable tragedy of the suicides of two teenagers. Teenagers who were loved, and still felt alone enough to take their own lives. It didn't have to be this way. We cannot undo what is done, but we can support each other and our community through the loss, grief, and tremendous sense of confusion, anger, and hurt that we are left with when those we love take their own lives. Young people in our community are particularly vulnerable in the wake of these deaths and we want to provide some information that may be helpful if you are wondering what to say (and what not to say) during these heartbreaking times.

First of all, if you are a trusted adult in the life of a child, teen, or young adult, thank you. Research repeatedly shows that one trusted adult can make the difference in a young person's life. Healthy Alaskans 2030 lists having three or more trusted adults as vital for the health and well-being of an adolescent. As of October 2025, only 45% of youth met this criterion. We can do better. As a trusted adult you have the gift of being in a position to support youth who are hurting and have so many questions right now. As you talk with them, please remind them that this tragedy did not need to happen, suicide is never the answer, life can be hard and they are not alone. Encourage them to reach out if they are struggling and to tell their friends to do the same. Let them know that if a friend confides in them that they are thinking of killing themselves, this is not their burden to carry, they must tell an adult.

This can be especially hard for teens, they want to keep each other's secrets, it's a natural part of child development to pull away from adults and start making decisions and choices on their own. But it's important to let them know that you appreciate that and still — this is not the time to keep a secret. This is a time for community and support and no one person can carry that alone, regardless of age.

It's important not to use terms like "they are at peace now" and "there is nothing that could have been done." Suicide is not the answer to creating peace in our lives and there is always something that could have been done to prevent a suicide. When teens are struggling, the last message we want them to get is that suicide is the solution to ending that struggle.

Connection is the antidote to isolation. Connection to culture, connection to family, connection to community. Youth need to be seen and valued for who they are. They need to know without a doubt that they are loved and no matter how hard things feel they are not alone. This work is the responsibility of every one of us in this town. You may not be a parent, grandparent, auntie, or uncle. You may not be a teacher or a counselor or a youth advocate. But you are a member of this community and the mark of a healthy community is how we treat our children. This is sacred work and it takes all of us. Our community has suffered a tragedy that never should have happened, and the fact is it could very well happen again if these coming weeks and months are not navigated in an intentional and mindful way by adults. We know we can navigate our collective grief because we know Juneau is a special place and we know you are as heartbroken as we are about the senseless deaths of two of our precious teens.

So please, listen to young people. Their emotions are big and real and

not to be belittled or not taken seriously. A cry for attention is a cry for help and deserves your action and your tenderness. Young people are filled with complex and brilliant thoughts, and if they come to you with their fears and their worries — have the courage to be there and show up with your whole heart. There is nothing more important — not today — not any day.

The following resources are available:

- 988 is available 24/7 to call or text if you need someone to talk to.
- NAMI Signs of Suicide presentation, open to the public, Thursday, Sept. 17, 5-6:30 p.m. at Floyd Dryden.
- Contact NAMI Juneau if you want help navigating mental health resources in Juneau. 907-463-4251 or namijuneau@gmail.com
- juneamentalhealth.org lists all of the mental health resources in Juneau.
- JAMHI Health & Wellness has 24/7 crisis therapists available. 907-463-3303. <https://www.jamhi-healthandwellness.org/services/24-7-emergency-service>
- Bartlett Regional Hospital and Capital City Fire/Rescue's mobile crisis team is available 9 a.m.-6 p.m., seven days/week. It is dispatched via 911.
- Tlingit and Haida Community and Behavioral Services Healing Center: 907-463-7305
- Zach Gordon Youth Center for connection, community and support. 396 Whittier St. 907-586-2635
- Shéiyi Xaat Hít Runaway and Homeless Youth Shelter: 9290 Hurlock Ave., 907-364-7481

• *Chalyee Éesh Richard Peterson is the president of the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. Aaron Surma is the executive director of NAMI Juneau. Jorden Nigro is the youth services director for the City and Borough of Juneau.*

Guess what, Juneau? Growth still delivers.

By ANGELA RODELL

Here's some genuinely good news. Juneau just proved something this year that's worth celebrating.

Back in the spring, the city was bracing for a difficult budget year. New food and utility tax exemptions were phasing in, and the forecast was revised sharply downward, from a budgeted \$70.1 million to a projected \$61 million. That kind of drop naturally raises concerns, and fueled calls for additional taxes that will appear on this October's ballot.

Then the year happened. And Juneau delivered.

As of the latest numbers released in August, actual sales tax revenue came in at \$66.9 million, not the feared \$61 million, but almost exactly the \$67.3 million the city would have expected if the exemptions had only a modest effect. We finished just \$3.2 million under the original budget, a gap of only 4.6%.

The recovery was visible throughout the year. Revenue ran about \$1.5 million behind in the first quarter, \$1.1 million behind in the second, and by January through March, basically caught up. City finance staff have pointed to inflation, higher fuel prices especially, as a big part of why, and they're not wrong. Some of the improvement is simply a function of higher prices: the same gallon of fuel or the same barge-load of goods costs more this year than it did when the budget was built, and that shows up in sales tax collections whether or not the underlying economy is doing more.

But inflation doesn't tell the whole story.

Our cruise passenger numbers have been flat to slightly down the past two years, and this year's new daily caps

were built on purpose to keep that volume steady, so more tourists didn't do this either.

What inflation alone doesn't explain is a private sector at an all-time employment high, even as total regional job counts have stayed flat. Or an unemployment rate of 2.9%, the tightest it's been in years, or a decade-long shift where tourism-related jobs are up 37%, mining up 32%, health care up 21%, and professional and business services up 10%, even as state government and retail jobs have shrunk.

Rising fuel prices can explain a bigger number on a receipt. They can't explain more people flying in and out of Juneau, a tighter labor market, or 10 years of the local economy rebuilding itself around industries that are growing. Both things are true at once: inflation helped this year's revenue numbers and Juneau earned them.

That is the lesson I hope we take from this year. We did not need to be as scared as we were. The worst-case number that shaped a lot of this spring's budget conversation turned out to be off by almost \$6 million. Even after accounting for inflation, the underlying story is one of a local economy that performed better than expected.

And that's why I believe this is the moment to lean into growth rather than overlook it.

This fall, voters are being asked to approve a 1% seasonal sales tax and raise the mill rate ceiling to 12 mills. Proponents have highlighted recreation projects such as the Dimond Park Field House, Augustus Brown Pool, and Treadwell Ice Arena. But it is important to remember that once those revenues flow into the city's general fund, future Assemblies can allocate them to whatever priorities they determine are most important.

At the same time, Juneau faces a much more immediate challenge than anything being debated at the Capitol:

the Mendenhall Valley's glacial outburst floods. The costs of temporary flood protection have already reached into the millions, and the price tag for a permanent solution remains uncertain. What is clear is that significant local resources will be required in the years ahead.

That reality is one reason I believe growth deserves a larger place in this conversation. CBJ has real needs, and Southeast Alaska's overall job count has remained largely flat, with federal workforce reductions expected to create additional headwinds in 2026. Yet this year's results tell a more encouraging story. Beneath the effects of inflation is a private sector at record employment that outperformed a gloomy forecast in a year when cruise tourism volume did not grow at all.

That is evidence of a community that is still capable of growing its way toward a stronger fiscal future. Every new business, job, investment, and visitor expands the economic base that supports public services without requiring higher tax rates. The more growth we encourage and capture today, the more capacity we will have to address tomorrow's challenges, including the very real costs that may emerge from the Mendenhall River.

Rather than assuming higher taxes are the only path forward, this year's experience suggests we should first ask whether stronger economic growth can do more of the work. Juneau's economy performed better than expected. That's not a reason for complacency, but it is a reason for confidence.

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

Sports

Crimson Bears spike Kings, sweep weekend home matches



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior Haley Gilbert tips a ball over Ketchikan freshman Hailee Simons during the Crimson Bears' 3-0 (25-15, 25-7, 25-23) win Saturday, Sept. 5, 2026. JDHS won 3-0 (25-17, 25-15, 25-19) on Friday. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

JDHS tops visiting Ketchikan in six straight sets over two days

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé Crimson Bears improved to 4-2 overall in Southeast Conference competition and are 2-0 in the SEC 4A division after sweeping visiting Ketchikan in the George Houston Gymnasium on Friday and Saturday.

"We played well," JDHS coach Arnold Ibias said. "Ketchikan is young and their libero, Winter (Loretan), kept them in the match."

JDHS won 3-0 (25-17, 25-15, 25-19) on Friday and Saturday 3-0 (25-15, 25-7, 25-23).

"I like where we are at every match," coach Ibias said. "We seem to get better about everybody being on the same page and believing in what we want to do for the season. What I want us to work on is cleaning up our game so that we are not giving the other team easy points. Having a side out happen is not all bad as long as we refocus and

get the side out. We set goals and I think they all agree that we can get to that goal. And their understanding that we cannot do it without playing like one unit."

The Crimson Bears showed the balance they possess this season with above-average serve percentages. On Friday, seniors Brie Powers and Liliane Veikoso had 13 points apiece scored on their serves, classmate Leila Cooper 10, classmates June Troxel and Haley Gilbert four apiece, and classmate Faith Contreras one. Veikoso had five aces, Troxel three, Powers and Cooper two apiece.

"Being a new member to varsity has been an amazing experience," JDHS senior Faith Contreras said. "It has given me opportunities to play a new position, strengthening my skills and being able to get one-on-one coaching. The returning Varsity has been very welcoming to all of us newcomers. Giving us helpful tips and encouraging us along the way. We can expect lots of energy from everyone on the court, fighting for a win every game, and having fun with each other. I think we

will also grow even more as a team, creating a strong bond between all of us girls."

Sophomore Winter Osterhout had 18 pass attempts and Troxel 12, junior Ruby Koski seven, and Contreras five.

Powers had 21 assists. Troxel had 16 kill attempts, Gilbert 15, Koski 14, Veikoso 11, senior Analia Perry five, Osterhout, Cooper and sophomore Bela Pyare two each, and Powers one. Troxel led with 10 hits in play.

"This year every player brings very high energy and a positive attitude that greatly benefits our team atmosphere on and off the court," Troxel said. "I am very excited to see how we come together and develop a stronger team bond that will benefit us in the future."

On Saturday, Powers led with 18 points scored on service and five aces, Veikoso 14 points (3 aces), Cooper nine points (1 ace), Troxel (1 ace) and Gilbert (1 ace) four points apiece.

Osterhout had 10 pass attempts, Veikoso eight, Troxel six, Cooper five, senior Clairee Overson four, Perry three, Koski two and junior Nellie Stowers one. Powers led with 25 assists.

Veikoso had seven kills, Troxel and Gilbert six apiece, Perry five, Koski two, Powers and Cooper one apiece.

"The difference this year is who is on the court," Veikoso said. "Leaving us with only six returning varsity players brings in opportunity and change, and what I have seen is big changes in leadership and bonding. We can expect to see really good things and see really determined girls fight for what they love to play."

Veikoso and Troxel had 17 kill attempts apiece, Gilbert 11, Perry six, Koski five, Cooper four, Osterhout, Powers, Overson and Pyare one each.

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VOLLEYBALL

Continued from page 19

“We have had to make adjustments because of injuries and I definitely want to give Liliane some major credit for stepping into a role that she is not used to,” Ibias said. “But she understands that we need her to play that role until our injured players have recovered.”

On Friday the JDHS JV won 3-0 (25-11, 25-13, 25-8) and the JDHS C-Team won 3-0 (25-10, 25-17, 25-15).

Among JV stats, sophomore Serena Huang had 20 points scored on her service, junior Maddie Tingey 14 and freshman Kaneisi Talamai 10. Tingey led with five aces. Huang led with 11 assists and Talamai six. Junior Mya Hayes and Huang led with three digs apiece. Tingey led with 12 kill attempts and sophomore Bela Pyare 10.

On Saturday the JDHS JV won 3-0 (25-14, 25-13, 25-18) and the JDHS C-Team won 3-0 (25-14, 25-18, 25-21).

Among JV stats, senior Cassie Chenoweth led with 11 points scored on service, Tingey 10, Huang nine and freshman Sinira Tomanogi six. Pyare led with 15 kill attempts, Chenoweth 11 and Tomanogi 10. Huang led with nine assists and Talamai six.

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



Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé senior Analia Perry tips a ball over Ketchikan senior Addy Secret (8) during the Crimson Bears' 3-0 (25-15, 25-7, 25-23) win Saturday, Sept. 5, 2026. JDHS won 3-0 (25-17, 25-15, 25-19) on Friday. (Klas Stolpe / Juneau Independent)

Crimson Bears harriers win Haines titles



The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé cross country team are shown at the North Cross Country Meet in Haines on Saturday, Sept. 5, 2026. (Photo courtesy JDHS XC)

Eller leads JDHS girls, Thompson wins boys' race

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé Crimson Bears had a strong showing at the North Cross Country Meet in Haines on Saturday.

JDHS junior Sigrid Eller led a sleuth of Crimson Bears' girls across the finish line in a time of 21 minutes 36 seconds. JDHS senior Erik Thompson won the boys' race in 16:41.

“Our top runners all ran solid, according to plan,” JDHS coach Zack Bursell said. “It is another race effort in the legs for them as they build fitness and dial in their mindset in preparation for the state meet.”

Following Eller were juniors Nevah Lupo in 22:03 and Sunna Schane in 22:22.

Haines' Sophia Hedden placed fourth in 22:44.

Thompson was paced by classmate Zachariah Bos, who crossed in second place in 17:15. Skagway's Logan Rupprecht was third with 17:47.

Girls Results: 1. JDHS Eller 21:36; 2. JDHS Lupo 22:03; 3. JDHS Schane 22:22; 4. HNS Hedden 22:44; 5. JDHS fr Grace Rumsey 22:55; 6. JDHS so Emmalynn LaPlante 22:56;

7. JDHS fr Nayeli Hood 22:59; 8. JDHS sr Kaycee Parady 23:28; 9. JDHS sr Sabine Auger 23:49; 10. Hoonah Easton Ross 24:15; 11. JDHS sr Dezerae Bos 24:31; 12. Skagway Khloe Woods 24:42; 13. JDHS so Eliza Albrecht 25:13; 14. JDHS fr Cianna Kahl 25:17; 15. HNS Cora Hoffman 25:30; 16. SKG Mackenzie Mixon 25:37; 17. JDHS so Eleanor Peterson 25:39; 18. JDHS sr Adele Fanning 26:38; 19. HNS Violet Crowe 26:45; 20. HNS Anna Bell 27:00; 21. HNS Makayla Henry 27:06; 22. JDHS fr Coralynn Nelson 27:17; 23. HNS Mary Bell 28:15; 24. SKG Ella Rauscher 28:42; 25. JDHS sr Jillian Levy 28:42; 26. SKG Mina Yee 29:15; 27. JDHS so Kara Schrader 30:15; 28. JDHS sr Anna Reiter 31:42; 29. JDHS sr Callie Stickle 34:27.

Boys Results: 1. JDHS Thompson 16:41; 2. JDHS Bos 17:15; 3. SKG Rupprecht 17:47; 4. SKG Zane Coughran 18:03; 5. JDHS jr Emmett Hightower 18:21; 6. SKG Julius Thole 18:44; 7. JDHS sr Max Webster 18:45; 8. JDHS jr Anderson Murray 18:45; 9. SKG Luca Tronrud 18:51; 10. HNS Yoa Galindo-George 18:51; 11. JDHS Niklas Uschmann 19:04; 12. JDHS fr Luke Miller 19:05; 13. SKG Arthur

See Cross Country on Page 21

CROSS COUNTRY

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Skagway's Logan Rupprecht, and Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé seniors Zach Bos and Erik Thompson swept the podium at the North Cross Country Meet in Haines on Saturday, Sept. 5, 2026. Rupprecht placed third, Bos second and Thompson first. (Photo courtesy JDHS XC)

Aribam 19:05; 14. JDHS jr Caleb Schane 19:29; 15. JDHS jr Lucas Vallejo 19:33; 16. JDHS so Brooks Pinney 19:38; 17. JDHS fr Yakobi Cole 19:59; 18. JDHS sr Samuel Butner 20:16; 19. HNS Luke Bell 20:45; 20. JDHS sr Caden Morris 21:04; 21. JDHS jr Carson Kautz 21:06; 22. JDHS so Knox Francis 21:16; 23. JDHS so Tymur Tkachenko 21:24; 24. JDHS jr Finnan Kelly 21:44; 25. SKG Maddox Tracy 22:07; 26. HNH Gabriel Contreras 22:14; 27. HNH Riley Neal 22:26; 28. SKG Samuel Munson 22:29; 29. HNH James Erickson 22:41; 30. JDHS jr Craig Thorsteinson 22:46; 31. JDHS fr Fisher Goetz 23:58; 32. JDHS fr Riley Humphrey 24:14; 33. JDHS fr Robert Hickman 25:02; 34. SKG Waylon Bricker 26:04; 35. HNS Edgar Nash 29:01; 36. JDHS Giorgi Gagliashvili 35:21.

Runners from around Southeast next meet on Saturday, at the Ketchikan Invitational.

• Contact Klas Stolpe at sports@juneauindependent.com

JDHS takes big lead early on Colony mistakes, holds on for 41-27 road win

Crimson Bears senior QB Krew Ridle again has big game; Knights rally to tie game in 3rd quarter, lose momentum in final minutes



The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé Crimson Bears face off against Colony High School at Pride Field in Palmer on Friday, Sept. 11, 2026. (Screenshot from Juneau Football livestream)

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

The Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé Crimson Bears jumped out to a 27-7 second-quarter lead, aided by mistakes by Colony High School on its home field, then withstood a rally by the Knights to earn a 41-27 victory Friday night that improved their record to 4-1 this season.

JDHS senior quarterback Krew Ridle, selected Alaska Athlete of the Week for a record-setting performance by rushing for 237 yards and six touchdowns last week, had another big game by rushing for 177 yards and five

touchdowns. The final two touchdowns came after Colony (3-2) tied the game at 27-27, with Ridle running for a 27-yard score and then most of the yards on a final drive to put the game away for the Crimson Bears.

"You couldn't ask for a better start in the game, and then it became this other game where we started stumbling a little bit offensively and defensively, and all of a sudden they clawed their way back into it," JDHS Head Coach Rich Sjoroos said after the game. "And that's where I got super

See **COLONY** on Page 22

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Which of these is a duty of Alaska's Lieutenant Governor?

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- ✓ Juneau's Municipal election: ballots mailed Sept 18; in person/early voting starts Sept 21
- ✓ Registration closes for the November General Election on October 4

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GENERAL ELECTION

LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF JUNEAU

COLONY

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proud because part three was when we got off the mat there, and dominated the fourth quarter and closed it out. And I just couldn't be more proud of how we finished that one."

Juneau's defense stifled Colony's running attack during most of the game, but struggled at times when the Knights took to the air in a spread formation. However, a series of early mistakes by the home team allowed the visiting Crimson Bears to get a huge early edge at Pride Field in Palmer.

JDHS, after returning the opening kickoff to its 39-yard line, marched steadily down the field on a series of runs that was aided greatly by two 15-yard facemask penalties. One kept the drive alive after Ridle was stopped for a two-yard loss on a third-and-4 at the Colony 44-yard line, the other gave the Bears a first-and-goal at the Colony 7-yard line. Ridle scored from the 1-yard line three plays later.

Juneau got the ball back quickly when Colony, after returning the kickoff to its 42-yard line, fumbled on its second play from scrimmage, a completed pass where the receiver lost the ball at the Juneau 47-yard line. But the Crimson Bears went three-and-out, punting to the Colony 15-yard line.

Colony tied the score two plays later on an 86-yard run down the right sideline with 2:23 left in the first quarter.

Disaster turned into opportunity on the Crimson Bears' next possession when Ridle threw an interception at midfield that was returned for a Colony touchdown — but the score was negated by a roughing the passer penalty. Ridle a few plays later hit junior running back Sylvion Washington on a pass to the Colony 26-yard line and the quarterback scored on a tackle-breaking run the next play to put Juneau ahead 14-7 with 10 minutes

left in the first half.

The Knights fumbled the ensuing kickoff, giving the Crimson Bears the ball at the Colony 37-yard line. Another personal foul penalty on the Knights put the ball at the 17-yard line, with Ridle then running for 15 yards on the next play and then scoring from the 2-yard line with 8:29 remaining in the half. A failed conversion made the score 20-7.

Another Colony mistake occurred on its next play from scrimmage as JDHS senior Ethan Van Kirk intercepted a pass at the Knights' 46-yard line and returned it for a touchdown to make the score 27-7 with 8:13 left in the second quarter.

The Knights, with a long pass, got to the Juneau 39-yard line on their next possession, but was forced to punt with about five minutes left in the half when the drive stalled. Juneau punted the ball back a few minutes later, with Colony returning the ball to its own 47-yard line.

From there the Knights struck quickly in a spread formation, hitting four passes in six plays, including an 11-yard touchdown pass with 43 seconds left, to make the score 27-14 at halftime.

"That's fine — to have a two-score lead on the road is great," Sjoroos said.

But that success in the passing game carried over to Colony's first possession of the third quarter, moving from its own 44-yard line to the Juneau 14-yard line with three passes, the last of which was accompanied by a facemask penalty. The Knights scored on the next play with a 7-yard run to make the score 27-21 Juneau with 10:06 left in the third quarter.

The Crimson Bears were unable to respond in kind as Ridle, after hitting Van Kirk for a 12-yard gain to near midfield, was sacked for a 16-yard loss on third-and-8, forcing Juneau to punt.

Colony scored five plays later on a 39-yard run, but missed the extra

point, leaving the score tied 27-27 with 4:07 left in the third quarter.

"They just took it up right where they left off (at halftime) and marched down the field and scored again, and so it's 27-21, and then we can't really move the ball again, and we gave them good field position for three drives in a row, and they just took advantage of that," Sjoroos said.

Juneau had Ridle run the ball four straight times on the next possession, advancing the ball to the Colony 43-yard line, but on third-and-8 an attempted flea-flicker resulted in another sack for a loss of 14 yards.

An exchange of punts turned fortune back in Juneau's favor, with a long kick by the Crimson Bears pinning the Knights on their 20-yard line. A three-and-out for Colony was followed by a partially blocked punt, giving Juneau the ball back on the Knights' 33-yard line.

"That's finally the first time since the second quarter that they had not favorable field position and we were able to clamp down defensively," Sjoroos said.

Three runs left the Crimson Bears facing a fourth-and-4. Ridle took the next snap and ran for a 27-yard touchdown to make the score 34-27 with 9:41 left in the game.

That's when Colony's engine ran out of steam. After an 11-yard pass got the Knights close to midfield, they punted after losing six yards on two running plays and only getting four of them back on a third-down pass.

Juneau took over and, with Ridle doing most of the work on the ground, scored again with 2:32 left to take a 41-27 lead.

The Knights' last gasp ended when a pass on second down to a wide-open receiver downfield was overthrown, and an attempted reverse flea flicker on the next play resulted in a fumble recovered by Colony for a seven-yard

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JUMP

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loss. A fourth-down pass fell incomplete with 1:36 remaining and the Crimson Bears ran out the clock.

Sjoroos said he opted to keep having Ridle call his own number with running plays toward the end because it was working when there were struggles with some other play calls.

"We definitely will be a better team if we can get more guys involved," Sjoroos said. "We keep continuing to try to do that, having Sylvion with the big catch and even on a couple misdirection runs and trying to get Jaxin (Jim) going up the middle and trying to do a flea flicker down the field, but it didn't convert. We're trying some things, but sometimes you just got to move the sticks and sometimes it's better just to run behind that O-line when they're clicking, and there's a reason why that single wing's been kind of hard to stop for some teams."

The Crimson Bears' next game is at home at 4 p.m. Friday, Sept. 18, against West Anchorage High School (4-1). The Eagles have three shutout wins this year, including a 20-0 victory over Service High School the same night Juneau beat Colony.

"I think a lot of people peg them as the top dogs in the state and it's hard to argue that," Sjoroos said. "They've been defensively especially really stingy in Alaska, and so I've got to try and come up with a good game plan and I'm glad that game's at home."

GAME SUMMARY

(Statistics provided by Alaska Sports Report)

Juneau-Douglas 7 20 0 14 – 41

Colony 7 7 13 0 – 27

FIRST QUARTER

Juneau – Ridle 1 run (Mazon kick), 7:15

Colony – Forsyth 86 run (Figgins kick), 2:23

SECOND QUARTER

Juneau – Ridle 26 run (Mazon kick), 10:06

Juneau – Ridle 2 run (kick missed), 8:29

Juneau – Van Kirk 46 interception return (Mazon kick), 8:13

Colony – Broeder 9 pass from Lott (Figgins kick), 0:43

THIRD QUARTER

Colony – Forsyth 7 pass from Lott (Figgins kick), 10:06

Colony – Forsyth 38 pass from Lott (PAT missed), 4:07

FOURTH QUARTER

Juneau – Ridle 22 run (Mazon kick), 9:41

Juneau – Ridle 4 run (Mazon kick), 2:32

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING

Juneau – Ridle 31-177, Van Kirk 13-60, Washington 2-9, Jim 2-6, Aube 1-(-2). Colony – Forsyth 2-85, Ortiz 4-5, Pope 4-0, Lott 4-(-4).

PASSING

Juneau – Ridle 3-5-41. Colony – Lott 14-23-195.

RECEIVING

Juneau – Washington 2-31, Van Kirk 1-10. Colony – Forsyth 5-78, Broeder 4-63, Adkins 3-33, Fischer 2-21.

The Juneau Independent's voter guide to the Oct. 6 municipal election is scheduled to be published Sept. 17.

- Profiles of Assembly and school board candidates
- Overviews of the three ballot measures
- Details of how/where to vote

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