



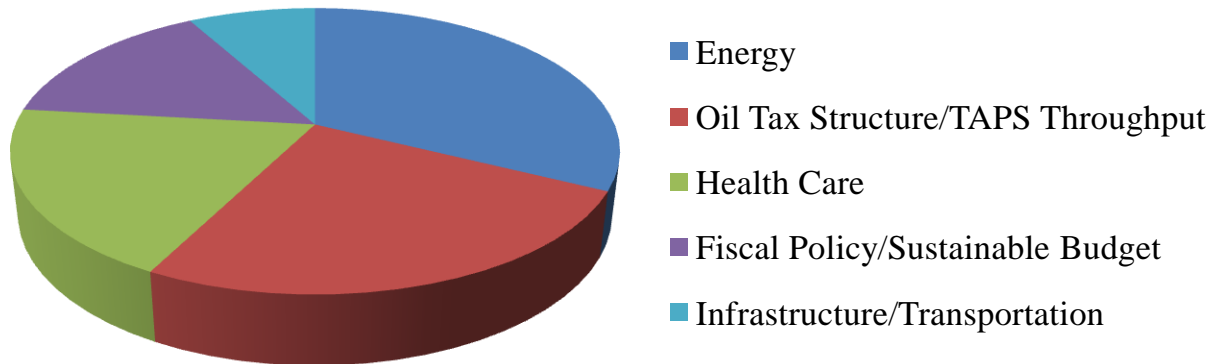
## COMMONWEALTH NORTH

*Illuminating Alaska's Issues*

*Our purpose is to educate our members and others on significant public policy issues affecting Alaska and its future, and assist in their resolution*

### **Legislator Meet and Greet Debrief**

Commonwealth North hosted one of the largest gatherings of Legislators outside of legislative offices at our Annual Legislator Meet and Greet on December 12. All Legislators and Commonwealth North members were sent our 2013 Briefing Book to help facilitate table discussions. The Briefing Book contains summaries of the issues, recommendations, and actions taken by Commonwealth North study groups and action coalitions to address some of Alaska's greatest policy challenges. Participants were asked to rank the importance of those priorities or present their own. We interpret these results as a validation that our priorities are consistent with those of our membership and the public policy leaders of Alaska.



### **Commonwealth North 2013 Top Public Policy Priorities**

#### **Energy**

The hallmark of a healthy, sustainable community is the availability of reliable and affordable energy. Alaska is rich in natural energy resources and yet many Alaskans struggle to meet rising energy costs. Alaska needs a long range, statewide energy plan which would enable targeted energy infrastructure development to spur economic invests in the future.

- Create a statewide energy vision, plan, and implementation strategy by adopting a holistic view of statewide energy sustainability which serves all Alaskans similarly
- Prioritize the interconnection of rural communities into regional electrical transmission grids in order to develop economies of scale, create efficiencies, reduce redundant infrastructure costs, and develop a greater potential for alternative energy projects
- Mitigate the high cost of energy in rural Alaska by reducing diesel consumption through increased efficiencies and utilization of economically viable alternatives
- Ensure high-value and effective investments in energy projects through the creation of an investment structure that can serve as an aggregator of financing for energy projects and requires equal competition amongst funding opportunities across all energy sectors and technologies
- Strive to eliminate the need for the Power Cost Equalization Program by reducing the electric rates paid by rural consumers to levels comparable to those paid by consumers on the Railbelt
- Southcentral utilities and local governments should assess the potential of a gas deliverability disruption and take steps to mitigate this danger
- Alaska should have a clear regulatory standard for review of gas supply contracts
- Alaska must adopt a strategy to diversify its energy portfolio to other viable energy alternatives
- Evaluate all factors to encourage oil and gas development and the construction of a natural gas pipeline

## Oil Tax Structure

It is the responsibility of Alaskans to ensure the State establishes a fiscal and tax structure that, among other goals, assures long term economic stability through continued development and production of Alaska's oil resources. An effective tax policy can remove many of the barriers to development and can make an economy more competitive by establishing a tax system that is balanced and stimulates further investment and development activity.

- Alaska's current oil tax structure under Alaska's Clear and Equitable Share must be made more competitive in order to encourage oil profits to be reinvested in Alaska. The progressivity tax should be reduced and/or capped
- Alaska should continue to encourage exploration for new oil reserves through tax credits and incentive programs
- The Governor and the Legislature must make oil production a matter of the highest priority

## Health Care

Commonwealth North believes health care is not a goal or end in itself. The real goal is healthy Alaskans. To that end, Alaskans must identify and improve the aspects of health care that are under our control. With coordinated effort Alaskans can positively impact the cost of care by raising public awareness and increasing personal responsibility for wellness; making services and insurance more widely available; continuing to improve the quality of care that is delivered; and reducing the costs of service delivery and insurance to make them more affordable.

- Continue to encourage and promote the establishment of incentives to bring more qualified Medical professionals to Alaska to combat the critical health manpower shortages in both our urban and rural areas
- Continue to encourage and promote the establishment of an Electronic Medical Record with a common interface as a means to improve safety, efficiency, and quality of health care in Alaska

## State Fiscal Policy

Alaska's fiscal future must be planned through a partnership with the Legislature, Governor, and civic organizations. Alaska's economy is at a crossroads. Nearly 90% of the State's revenues come from oil production that is declining every year. At the same time, in recent years State spending has increased dramatically. The health of Alaska's economy rests on the stability of the State's finances. Alaska needs a comprehensive fiscal strategy that looks into the future so that strategic decisions can be made today.

- Engage Alaskans in an informed discussion about the State's future fiscal choices
- Enhance Permanent Fund management by adoption of the percent of market value payout formula suitable for an endowment fund, enhance board selection and evaluation, operate a branch in Anchorage and outside offices to maintain better contact with the investment world, and competitive compensation of its staff and board of trustees

## Critical Infrastructure

Infrastructure projects in Alaska should reflect the interest, and meet the demands, of local communities, be arrived at through the democratic process and should work to capture the entrepreneurial energy of the private sector to move a project forward. The State should create a comprehensive statewide Transportation and Energy Infrastructure Plan that looks at all opportunities and resources concurrently, and applies an integrated approach to infrastructure development based upon economic and social criteria.

- Alaska should create a comprehensive statewide Transportation and Energy Infrastructure Plan
- Establish and provide long-term funding for a Transportation and Energy Infrastructure Commission to oversee the implementation of a statewide Infrastructure Plan
- Create a fund for transportation and energy infrastructure planning, development, and maintenance
- Fund currently deferred transportation and energy infrastructure maintenance needs

Other important topics discussed between Commonwealth North members and Legislators included *Education, Resource Development, State's Rights, Natural Gas Commercialization, Local Hire, and Economic Development*. Commonwealth North is currently engaging in public dialogue concerning *Education, Resource Development, and Economic Development*, and these issues have been detailed in past reports. These other topics provide insight into additional policy areas and Commonwealth North will continue to observe their importance to all Alaskans.

