

Alaska Dispatch News

Alaskans must get involved, show support for solutions to close fiscal gap

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Gov. Bill Walker's long-term fiscal plan for the state is not perfect. But give him credit, it was a bold step to propose multiple spending cuts and new revenues to close the state's \$3.5 billion annual budget gap.

Fact is, he took a huge step in spelling out the reality to Alaskans -- the reality our state has long avoided. We are the only Americans paying neither a state income tax nor state sales tax, yet we enjoy a robust slate of public services due to successfully maximizing the value of our natural resources.

That era has ended. Oil prices in December are down 25 percent from the summer and oil production is down three-quarters from its peak. While the state is working hard to encourage investment in new oil, no one expects a huge upturn in production. We need to learn to live with what we have, not what we hope to find.

[Research conducted last summer and fall for the Rasmuson Foundation](#) shows that a majority of Alaskans support a comprehensive approach of spending reductions and new revenues. Most Alaskans understand we are in the unenviable position of needing to pay more and be willing to live with less. Alaskans are also telling us they want to see waste eliminated before being asked to do either.

Getting to a sustainable budget is a delicate balancing act that, if we don't get it right, could jeopardize Permanent Fund dividends, future business investment, the state's economy and, ultimately, the well-being and future prospects for our residents.

Alaskans must put aside their differences in the interest of building a strong economy for our kids and grandkids. The state's savings accounts are shrinking, the risk to essential public services is growing larger and the time to adopt solutions is growing shorter.

It's time to act. Invite your professional and personal networks to engage in this issue. Endorse a resolution (at work, social club or house of faith) that specifically calls for a comprehensive solution to the fiscal gap. Let your legislators know they cannot delay and must act in the upcoming session to close the fiscal gap. Most important, let legislators know you will support them in making the tough decisions that need to be made.

Rasmuson Foundation has launched [a statewide educational campaign to talk with Alaskans](#), to share facts and options, and to explain the urgency. In coming days we will launch a fiscal tool to help Alaskans understand more about state spending and revenue options. Learn more and sign up for alerts online at www.Plan4Alaska.com.

There is no easy fix to our problem. We do not hold the answer, nor is it our place to tell the Legislature and the governor what course they should take, what package they should adopt. But we will say that doing nothing should not be an option for any of us.

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