



REPRESENTATIVE MARY PELTOLA
Address to the 33rd State Legislature
2.17.23

Good morning. Thank you, Mr. President and Madam Speaker for inviting me to be here. It still feels a little unreal that I get to speak to this entire body as Alaska's Representative in Congress. I remember sitting in those same seats when Lisa and Ted gave these addresses when I was a State Rep. I can still point out my old desk.

I'm so glad to be standing here with all of you today. It's truly the honor of a lifetime. Thank you for having me.

I want to start by telling you all about a question that I've been getting a lot lately.

The question colleagues and reporters ask me goes something like: "Tell me about the Alaska Model. How does that work?"

If you're confused - I wasn't sure what they meant at first either! They're talking about bipartisan governing coalitions in our legislature, about the fact that we often ignore party lines to work together for Alaskans' best interests.

It's strange, to hear that something we take for granted here at home is so foreign in the rest of the country. But it's also inspiring because it gives me faith that for all the challenges Alaska

faces, we're doing something right – we've sparked the interest of Americans who are tired of a broken system in DC that too often highlights gimmicks over policy.

To those of you in this room who put together those bipartisan, or really multipartisan coalitions, or co-sponsored a bill with someone from another party, or joined a bipartisan working group to tackle a complex issue - thank you.

And I want to give a shout-out to the freshman caucus. I'm glad to hear you've been shaking things up already. A bipartisan freshman caucus never would have crossed my mind when I first joined the House. You made it happen.

You get how messy bipartisanship and tripartisanship can be—but you forged ahead to find consensus. You are the Alaska Model.

I also want to thank our Senators, Lisa and Dan, who have made it clear they don't care that I'm a Democrat. I'm the sole representative from Alaska in the House of Representatives – and they prioritize Alaska and our delegation.

Don used to describe our Alaska Congressional delegation as “small but mighty.” Thanks to Lisa's experience, Dan's tenacity, and Don's legacy, our voice is loud, and it is powerful. You can see some of the impact in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Just this year, we've brought home:

\$285 million for our state's ferry system.

\$136 million in grants for broadband and rural internet.

And \$332 million in funding for Alaska and Arctic defense. As we've seen over the past few weeks, our Alaskan armed forces are on the front lines of our nation's defense—it's our responsibility to make sure they have the tools they need to protect our nation's sovereignty and security.

Making DC work for Alaska is our delegation's job –and I'm proud to take up that task.

But we are just one piece of the puzzle. The work you are doing in this body will shape Alaska for the next generation.

Will we invest in our youngest and care for our oldest?

Will we fund a public workforce that encourages people to live, stay, and retire in Alaska?

Will we build an internet system that brings telehealth, vocational training, and human connection to all Alaskans?

Will we fortify our grid and build a diverse, renewable economy that lowers energy prices?

I hope the answer is yes! Our delegation has made a real down payment on this future.

Together, we can make it happen!

One of the reasons Alaska has such a loud voice is that we know the value of speaking in one voice.

I want to thank the Governor for reaching out to me early in my tenure. We quickly found common ground when Typhoon Merbok barreled through Western Alaska. Alaska leaders acted as one to prioritize the immediate safety of all Alaskans in the region. Then, we worked

together to fund the rebuilding effort, lobbying the President to approve a 100% federal cost share for the first 30 days of emergency assistance.

Another area where our delegation and the Governor are all in concert is our support of the Willow Project. My team is working with the Democratic Leadership in DC to help them understand what this project means to our state budget, our union workforce, and Alaska's ability to invest in our future. I'm asking them to speak to the President and the Department of Interior in one voice in support of this project.

When Senator Sullivan spoke in this chamber last week, he requested a resolution supporting the project—and I ask the same from all of you. We are close, but the President already knows where Lisa, Dan, and I stand—it's you, and the constituents you represent, who can help sway him.

The President understands our country's need for gap oil. He said as much during his State of the Union address last week. And Alaskans feel the need when we fuel up our boats and airplanes in the summer; when we heat our homes with stove oil in the winter; and when all of you assemble the budget to meet our Constitutionally mandated obligations to every resident of Alaska.

But gap oil is only gap oil if it helps serve as a bridge between our current needs and our future renewable capabilities.

Make no mistake, we must reckon with the impacts of fossil fuels. Every year, Alaskans see our ice melting. We suffer through choking summer wildfires. We watch as our houses sink into thawing permafrost. We are on the front lines of this battle, and we must invest in a renewable future. In that future, we continue to lead in the energy sector as we cultivate our wealth of renewable energy resources. And in that future, Alaskans don't pay 3 or 5 times more than our friends in the lower 48 just to go to work, get our kids to school, or warm our homes.

I'm working with other Alaskans to try to direct billions of Inflation Reduction Act grant dollars to important renewable projects to the state--and I want to make my office a resource for all of you as we undertake the task of applying for and distributing these funds in our communities. This is a generational opportunity, and we need to work together to maximize the benefit - and make sure those dollars help rebuild our aging harbors, improve our roads, make our bridges safer, and strengthen communities across our state.

I feel confident that this group of legislators is ready to build an Alaska that invites a new generation to live and work in our state.

We all know a few people who came to Alaska for a season and never left.

My dad was one of those people. But this is not necessarily the case anymore. Now, outmigration is the norm. Alaskans move to the Lower 48 for school or work and never come back. Others want to move here or stay here, but worry about how they will educate their kids, buy a home, and retire comfortably.

We need to make it easier and more affordable to live, work, and raise families here. As a mom, I can tell you that the times I had reliable childcare were the times when I felt most able to work and contribute to my community. I promise to work with all of you to bring down the overall cost of living that's strangling our economy and pinching our wallets.

Stemming the tide of outmigration also requires that we invest in ourselves. In our education and in our workforce. This includes the workers who care for our elders in facilities across the state, and for our children. This includes the union workers who build our ice roads, fight our fires, care for us when we are ill, and deliver our packages. And it includes our indispensable public employees: teachers, police officers, and SNAP administrators--many of whom are not eligible for Social Security.

And of course, I couldn't end this talk without mentioning fish!

Fish unites us! Alaskans from every community and culture are pro-fish.

Why am I pro-fish?

Alaskans are fish people. For at least 12 thousand years, we've been learning from and managing this incredible natural resource, and it has become a part of us. For many, our children teethe on dried salmon strips. Salmon is our first solid food. It nourishes us in a way that nothing else can. And when it is gone, we feel it deeply.

Thinking about getting to fish this summer helps me get through those long, weird days in the nation's capital.

I cannot accept a future where our grandchildren don't have this same experience. While some places like Bristol Bay have seen record returns in recent years, others like the Yukon and Kuskokwim have seen salmon stocks crash. Climate change, bycatch, inadequate research funding, and an antiquated management system have left us with ecosystems on the brink of collapse.

Our economy depends on fish. Our cultures depend on fish. All Alaskans depend on fish. Fish was the reason we pursued statehood. Please join me in fighting for our fish - our future depends on it!

Working for All Alaskans is what our jobs are all about. We are strongest and most effective when we work together.

So, for those of you here who don't already have my phone number, let's meet!

I want to hear about your districts. I want to understand the challenges your communities are facing. I want to help identify solutions. I want for all of us in this body—and every Alaskan—to work together to define and build a future that meets our needs for this generation and the next.

And I'm asking for your help.

The truth is—as much as people ask me about the Alaska Model, it's you who are implementing it every day here in the legislature.

I think people ask me about this Alaska Model because they realize that business as usual in D.C. isn't working anymore.

But slowly and surely, the partisan rancor from recent years is losing its appeal. People are remembering that politics, first and foremost, should be about fixing things, not just launching cable news careers or racking up retweets.

We must work together to fix things. That is the Alaska Model boiled down to its essence. It is rooted in our values - it comes from the way we live our lives, every day.

It comes from the time we spend together setting nets in the summers and clearing each other's driveways in the winter. It comes from trusting our lives to boat captains and small plane pilots, from sharing our catch and helping our neighbors keep their freezers full. It comes from sharing in the incredible natural beauty of this place and knowing that it is our responsibility to protect it for the next generation.

The Alaska Model is working. People are paying attention. Let's keep up the good work.