

# Sen. Binkley: No, the state is not broke

by Sen. John Binkley  
for the Tundra Times

During an address to a joint session of the Legislature, Gov. Steve Cowper outlined specific programs he feels need to be cut to meet the projected revenue shortfall this fiscal year and produce a budget for next year with about half the revenues that were available just two years ago.

The governor's proposed fiscal plan is a combination of budget cuts, spending cash reserves and proposed new revenue measures that includes reinstatement of a personal income tax.

Many of those program cuts will have a direct and adverse impact on the residents of rural Alaska. It is now the responsibility of the Legislature to review the governor's plan and to develop its own budget for the state.

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak before the Village Participation Conference here in Juneau. The message I shared with them, and what I'd like to share with you, is the importance of thinking, or perhaps rethinking, what our ultimate priorities are.

We have been very fortunate in recent years in our ability to construct and implement many projects and services throughout rural Alaska. We now have schools, airports, health clinics, community buildings, electrification systems, erosion control and safe water and sanitary systems in our villages.

We have developed an education program which is controlled by local people. We have local community colleges. We have trained public safety officers, health aides, teachers and



teacher aides, as well as village clerks and administrators.

We have a Permanent Fund savings account for our future generations.

We have the Longevity Bonus Program and Permanent Fund dividend program. We have the rural housing assistance loan program. We have the student loan and rural teacher scholarship loan programs.

We have the student loan and rural teacher scholarship loan programs. We have the Power Cost Equalization Program, weatherization, daycare, Headstart, Municipal Assistance, revenue sharing, public school funding, and a myriad of other programs that were largely volunteer or nonexistent in the days before oil dollars flowed into the state treasury.

Yet, we pay not state property or income tax.

In spite of all our good fortune and progress, we tend to see around us what we don't have. It sometimes seems that we have lost sight of our most important asset — the health and well-being of ourselves and our families.

We must continue to strive to make improvements in ourselves and our surroundings. We must continue to fight for what is fair and just. But we must never forget where we have come from in just a few short years. We must not forget our true priorities in life.

No, the state is not broke. The state just simply cannot continue to provide

the same level of financial support for services, projects and programs we have come to expect. We must do with less. That is our challenge.

It is important that you participate in the legislative process by contacting your legislator or my office in Juneau with your ideas and suggestions. It is a time to pull together. To seek new solutions for old problems.