

# Commentary

## Focusing on our children's futures

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by Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer

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The 21st century always seemed so far away, and now it is just around the corner. What do we need to do today to make sure that our children will be ready for the future? How do we need to change what we are presently doing to improve education, health care, public safety and child care? And how do we accomplish our goals with the revenues available to pay for these programs?

In the State of the Budget address the Governor asked me to join with the Children's Cabinet to reach out to the Alaskan people to ask these questions. In the coming months we will be criss-crossing our state, holding public forums. We want to report to you on the changes we have already made in public policy to

directly benefit Alaska's children and families. We also want to present to you in person proposals the administration is introducing this legislative session. Only with your help can we develop a collective Alaskan vision for the role of government in the next century.

Grass roots initiatives began with the Transition Team process and have continued with the State and Local Government Task Force, the Governor's Conference on Youth and Justice, The Alaskan Education Summits, the revitalization of the Children's Trust, and the Community Partnerships for Access, Solutions, and Success (COMPASS) initiative. They are all based on the premise that working together we can find the answers to the toughest problems. New Alaskan partnerships are growing between parents, educators, business lead-

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ers, public officials, and local institutions to focus our resources on positive change for Alaskan's children.

We want to redesign state government to support community innovation and creativity. We must reject "treat the symptom" solutions and programs that are structured on funding proposals that must report the situation as worse each succeeding year. This management by crisis mentality only deepens the cycle of

dependence on outside solutions to local problems. With your help we can design a different blueprint for success.

Communities are not built from the top down, or from the outside in. Each community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. Alaskan villages, cities, and boroughs are really about relationships among people, organizations, businesses, and institutions. Many of these partnerships have already found unique and creative ways

to affect positive change.

We need to support and encourage all those Alaskan communities who are on the front line solving their own problems every day. We need to become "barrier busters" at the state level by identifying and breaking down unnecessary regulations that keep agencies and funding streams from being used in the most effective and efficient ways by local partnerships. Public policy must recognize that economic development, safe water,

solid waste disposal and freedom from domestic violence are every bit as important to the health and well being of our children as good schools, quality health care, and early childhood programs.

The Children's Cabinet's mission: "In partnership with families, ensure that all Alaska children have opportunities for happy, healthy and productive lives." To accomplish this mission we must invest in Alaska's future by putting increased emphasis on intervention and prevention strategies to ensure that every young child arrives at our school healthy and ready to learn. Schools must be equipped with the latest technology, and staffed with professionals who recognize that, while each child learns differently, success is measured in producing responsible, self sufficient, civic minded young adults.

The Children's Cabinet wants to develop with you plans for integrated education, health, and social service delivery models that recognize the value of community based partnering and decision making. Welfare reform, One Stop Career Centers, Marketing Alaska, the quality schools initiative, and other state and federal programs designed to meet the challenges of the next century will impact each Alaskan community differently. Only broad, inclusive partnerships within these communities will have the knowledge and skills to design a successful local program.

I hope to see and listen to many Alaskans in the coming months. For those of you we cannot visit in person a full report will be forthcoming with an opportunity for your suggestions. We are eager to continue our dialogue with you for the sake of Alaska's children.