

# Adams criticizes leadership on budget

Inupiat Paitot  
People's Heritage

## OPINION

By Sen. Al Adams  
Floor Address, Jan. 10

As I approach the end of my first decade in the Legislature, and as Alaska begins the last decade of the 20th century, I would like to speak about lessons learned.

As most parents do, ours dreamed that we would be richer than they were. They were most successful in that dream. We have experienced riches beyond their dreams.

It began almost a century ago, when gold was discovered in Alaska, and in 1891, the first oil claims were staked in Cook Inlet.

True, there were boom and bust years in between until 1969 when we obtained our first \$900 million for oil leases at Prudhoe Bay. There is no question that our major resource has been oil exploration and its revenues.

Although the majority of this oil wealth originates in rural Alaska, it is a resource that belongs equally to each Alaskan. It must continue to be treated as such.

The 1980s was a wealthy decade. Our general fund revenues went from over a \$1 billion in 1979, up to a peak of over \$4 billion in 1982 and settled down at over \$2 billion in 1989.

During those years we intoxicated the state with injections of dollars. We repealed income taxes. Being born in Alaska — and staying — brought money into Alaskan pockets for our toddlers, for our senior citizens and everyone in between.

It's an almost unbelievable concept to others that we, as a state government, cut checks for our residents who choose to stay here.

We also believed in the integrity of our local governments. We transfused our cities and boroughs with municipal assistance, revenue sharing and capital projects. To a certain extent we believed in economic development.

We hosted jobs bills, we are building Bradley Lake, we financed a road to the Red Dog Mine and we bought a railroad, to name a few.

mand close attention and assessment. There are lessons to be learned and unlearned. But first, we must place these incidents and precedents in the proper perspective to guide our future actions.

One of the more recent and historic incidents that will shape our future, one way or another, was the oil spill of March 1989.

This was not an exploration or development disaster. We must remember that. It was a transportation disaster.

And it was an intentional disaster — intentional to the extent that the risks were known and those risks were ignored. In the 1990s we can't continue with salon exercises, with good intentions made in the air when it comes to our unique environment or any of our resources.

But neither can we blind ourselves to the fact that there is more oil to be discovered, there is more coal that can be put to use, there are trees to be harvested, there are minerals to be extracted. We can do these things without jeopardizing the air, water, land, fish or wildlife if we learn the lessons taught by the oil spill of 1989.

The spill was a riveting experience for all of us. Let's not make our greatest obstacle for the future the conviction that we cannot change or grow because we are dependent on what has been wrong or what went wrong. We can continue to reap the rewards of a state rich in resources and we can do it right.

Many have drawn a correlation between the oil spill and last session's change in the Economic Limit Factor. Perhaps that's true. If the argument has one virtue it's in the sheer simplicity of the proximity in time between one event and the other. Quite frankly, spilled oil had nothing to do with my vote, and it never was that simple.

Now some feel that the oil industry should be taxed even more vigorously, that their current financial obligation is a flash in the pan compared to their profits. The spill is being used to fan sentiment toward this.

I'm not interested in an increase of these taxes without just cause or fairness. This is the same stance I took last year and many years preceding the spill. We have set the stage for scrutinizing our current oil and gas tax

ing on a precipice." He's right. There are fundamental implications in those words. But this is not the first year that we've been sitting on the brink.

We were right there on the edge last year, too, faced with an infrastructure we can ill afford, faced with a decline in oil production, faced with sagging federal support.

And what did we do? We extended the precipice even further. That's what we did. And we violated both our own uniform rules and the public trust in order to do it.

Oh, yes, there are lessons to be learned, lessons in leadership most of all.

Rather than being on the forefront of government, our leadership had the nerve — or the lack of nerve — to go out on the streets and solicit the opinions of the public about an economic problem we know the solution to, and which we should solve. Even then, we neither followed the public's direction, our own uniform rules, nor our own conscience.

What should have been a cure turned out worse than the disease. Last year's budget process was not only abominable, it was illegal. What went on in conference committee, the ad-

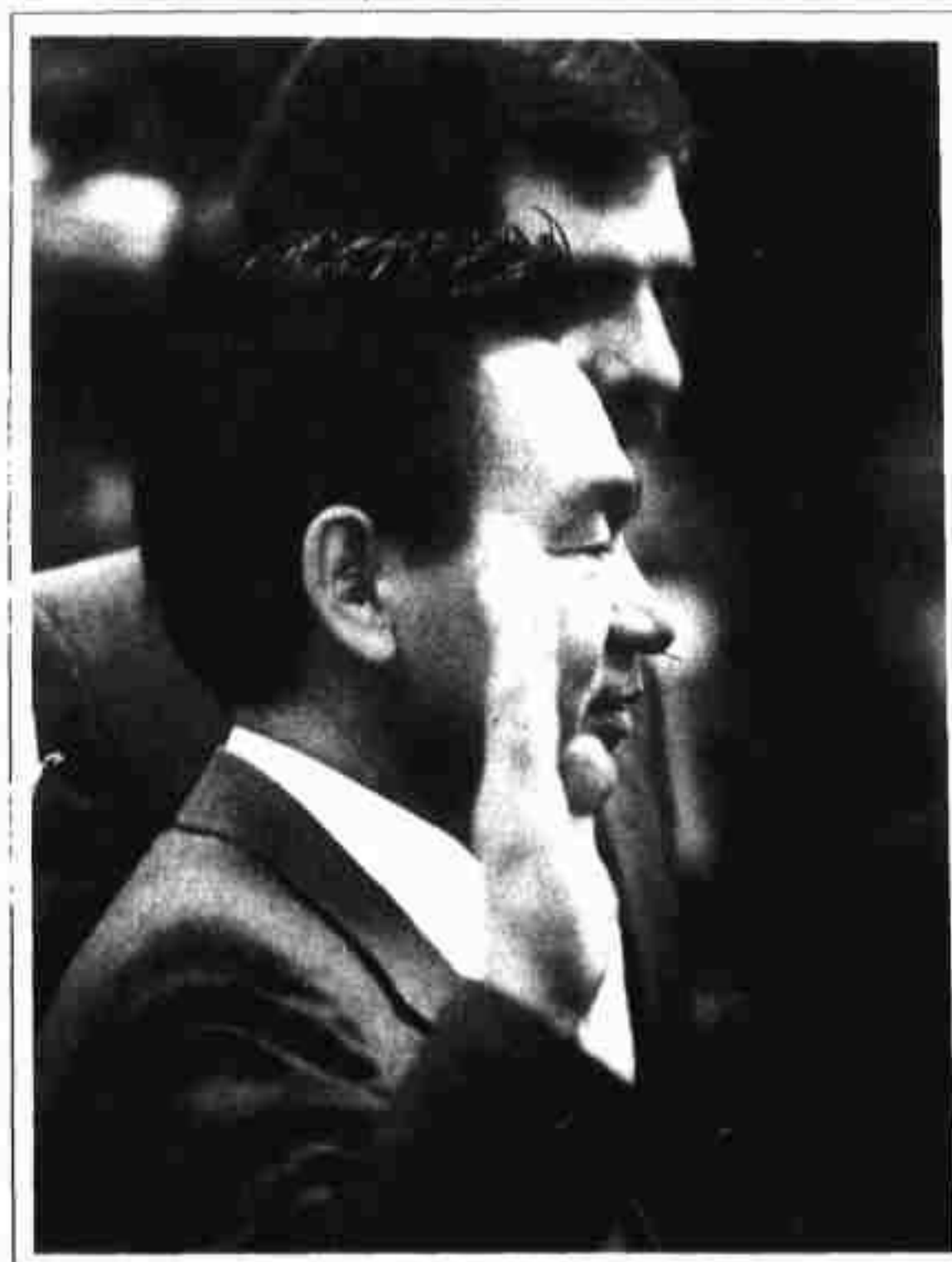
would be a truly lamentable posture before those who elected me to office. I stand by my decision not to be a party to agreements which are the opposite of what I believe in, and for which I was elected, regardless of the consequences.

How we deal with the budget this year will be our litmus test for future generations.

Economic development and resource development need our strict attention. They should not become something that we cheer during campaigns in our districts and then shove under the table in Juneau.

There is oil and gas to be explored, discovered and developed. There are areas of the state such as the Northern Arctic Coal Province that show promise of one of the richest coal resources in the world. There are other minerals to be extracted. The port in Nome needs completion. Even Spenard Road needs efforts continued to make it a business success.

Beyond the budget and economic development, there are other issues this session that demand scrutiny. Our governor laid down his card, the Education Endowment. Heaven knows, I've always leaned toward cer-



Sen. Al Adams, D-Kotzebue delivered an address to his colleagues Jan. 10.

*What should have been a cure turned out worse than the disease. Last year's budget process was not only abominable, it was illegal.*

Lest we forget, we, who have been the beneficiaries of wealth from economic development of our resources, have the very same obligation to our children, our successors. It's the same duty that our parents and our legislative predecessors held for us — that there be more individual and collective wealth, an affordable cost of living, basic services such as running water, clean air, clean water, more job opportunities, a better education, more peace of mind.

And the means by which we reached our stars during the 1980s sheds light on our quest to keep Alaska economically and ecologically vital through the 1990s and into the 21st century.

There have been incidents and precedents in the past decade that de-

formulas with the international tax comparison group. We need to abide by their work, their deliberation and their final product.

The other important issue we need to abide by is a commitment many of us made to this and future generations of Alaskans — legislation that would take \$150 million from the General Fund and appropriate it to the Alaska Permanent Fund.

There was a commitment made in this body and that should be honored. We have the vehicle to do this — sitting in Senate Finance — and it should be our first order of business this session.

Mr. President, this week we received the revenue commissioner's forecast. The bottom line, in his words: "The State of Alaska is stand-

ding of money for items not considered prior to that time, was and remains a direct violation of Uniform Rule Number 42.

The Senate Rules chairman can correct me if I am wrong or if she thinks that did not happen.

What makes this lesson even more necessary to learn, Mr. President, is that the agreement to break this rule was made, and anyone in the majority who refused to vote on the budget and opposed this violation of the rules on the floor, was removed from the majority and stripped of his committee offices.

Some of us here paid a dear price for following the rules, and our constituents are paying an even higher price this year. But I don't think I was elected to relinquish my integrity. That

tain things being well endowed, but this proposal could come to be called our education internment if we are not careful.

Before any of us swear our support, there should be questions asked and questions answered. There should be genuine and open debate. What are the criteria for this endowment? What are the guidelines? Is there a floor? Does it include facets of education beyond the classroom such as pupil transportation? Does it include debt reimbursement? Is it bigger than a bread box or is it a bread box? Does it include construction costs?

Mr. President I believe there was a colossal error in judgment on your part to send this bill only to Judiciary Committee and Finance. What about

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State Affairs Committee?

This session I'm sure we will hear and see a full constellation of bills having to do with alcohol and drug abuse. This body passed a bill recriminalizing marijuana last session. The other body should get on with it. The public shouldn't have to prance around gathering referendum petitions because their elected representatives won't budge.

No doubt abortion will have its day, too, now that the courts have shifted the politics to the state's responsibility. But then again maybe not. The pollsters may have done us a favor in Alaska. It's one issue that politicians now feel they must retreat in panic from.

We'll see bills on flag burning. Which one of us is going to be the reddest, whitest and bluest to carry that flag?

If my remarks indicate grievance, Mr. President, it is with good reason. In the last month, two State Supreme Court decisions dealt punishing blows to my constituents and many other Alaskans — the local hire decision and the subsistence decision.

If the former pleases some commercial interests in this state or outside it, I'm sure the latter has pleased and divided still other Alaskans. Yet these two decisions threaten to throw the economic balance in this state even further off kilter.

The stark realities of life in rural Alaska still find many villages without running water, without sewer, without adequate garbage disposal, without warm homes and many other basic amenities that urban Alaska can take for granted.

Economic development, as important as it is, should not cloud our attention to details left undone in the past decade.

A recent survey in the Northwest Arctic Borough found that only 28.3 percent of the population had full-time jobs. Subsistence activities fill the gap both economically and culturally. And subsistence is precisely how 71.7 percent get food on their table.

Now the courts have ruled that virtually any sports hunter from any urban area can — on a weekend jaunt — zoom in to villagers' hunting areas in an airplane, swipe the caribou and moose that may have been the villagers' dinner, go back to their hot tubs in the cities and off to their jobs on Monday morning.

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Our work this session, and for the next decade, need to address the inequities in this state. This body must address the fact that there are some very basic discrepancies between lifestyles.

It's not that rural Alaskans are asking that their tables be spread with glass and silver. It is quality of life I am talking about. Rural Alaskans merely want to be able to wash their hands with warm running water and dispose of waste in a sanitary and healthy way — very basic activities that you and I did this morning without a moment's thought of appreciation.

It's no wonder that suicide, drugs and alcohol problems are rampant in rural Alaska. It's only a wonder that we are not addressing the rattling changes that have taken place there.

If Alaska's courts and legislators want to see these problems multiply beyond their worst nightmares, then go ahead and allow the food to be taken off their tables, give what jobs there are to others, open roads they don't want opened so that Winnebagos can drive through and further erode their lifestyle, continue to ignore the fact that basic human services are something every citizen in this state deserves and which our constitution should guarantee — or there is not a constitution for all Alaskans.

In my heart of hearts, I don't think that's what we're all about.

Can we, the elected representatives of the Alaskan people, hit the brakes on our past spending patterns? Yes. Can we create a budget that equalizes lifestyles? Yes. Can we become less contradictory for the public between what we say and what we do? I hope so.

But it will require that we alter our style of leadership and challenge the methods that currently dominate most of our decision making. Our job is to serve the people of Alaska — not its politicians.

Because I resisted that style of leadership, I am no longer a member of the Senate Majority or chairman of the Community and Regional Affairs Committee. Thus, I have but one single voice and but two staff members to represent the people in the 47 communities that I am elected to serve here.

Considering how I got to be a minority member, I can live with it.

Considering how I became a minority member, my people can live with it, too, considering the alternative. They recognize that, as a Native Alaskan, I am a born again minority member, and they recognize that stripping my staff is a politically motivated decision to prevent those in the minority running for re-election from getting their jobs done.

So, let me issue an appeal for help for the people of Northwest Alaska. Anyone here willing to can volunteer to answer my phones. It's easy to qualify. Just be able to say, "Senator Adams office, minority Democratic majority leader."

One component of our society that unfortunately does affect much of our behavior is the media. It, too, has gone through a metamorphosis in the last decade. We have seen the press condemn individuals, groups and companies without the just circumstances of being innocent until proven guilty.

Editorial comments somehow flew off the editorial page and landed on the front. Innuendoes, speculations, hunches, circumstantial evidence and sometimes downright lies made the news as fact. Some individuals have been tagged guilty by association. Careers and reputations suffered.

The lesson I've learned is that I should have my rights read before consenting to a reporter's interview.

If we assume guilt by association to be an appropriate conclusion, look at an article written during the oil spill which stated that the absorbent pads used for cleanup were tossed out of a helicopter by the oil industry, and the oil company spokesperson replied it was not true and the reporter was stupid. Then does that mean that all reporters are stupid?

Or if a writer for the *Daily News* is accused in a sex scandal, are Howard Weaver and Stan Jones sexual deviants?

I don't think so. Conclusions and the lessons we learn need to be based on evidence.

Maybe we should deliver Soapy Smith awards ourselves. We could give one for fun couples to Jimmy Bakker and the *Anchorage Daily News* for both giving it to the public. Or to Exxon and the *Anchorage Daily News* for being Mr. and Mrs. Clean.

Yes, newspaper reporting and journalism in general changed colors in the last decade to a curious tone of yellow. Their true colors? I hope not. I'd rather attribute what has transpired to their lack of being housebroken.

There's been a failure here by the media: the failure to differentiate between theater and fact, the failure to recognize fair and unfair, the failure to clearly differentiate between allegations and the truth. What they've succeeded at is their addiction to the lurid and sensation. What needs to guide them is a sacred obligation to the plain and most often simple truth.

Do I believe in freedom of the press? Very much so. But we, and the people of this state need to restore a system of checks and balances. We need to call them on their inaccuracies, write letters about their biases.

Yes, we still need to give them a little respect. They have a hundred barrels of ink and reams of paper. I just have one voice. The pen being mightier than the sword has never been truer. Sure, I'll talk to them. I'll greet them. I'll even go as far as waving at them.

But it will never be necessary that I use all my fingers when I do it.