

Assembly woman Harriet Drummond's Farewell Speech to Assembly Dec. 18, 2012 Regular Meeting

This meeting is the last of my almost-13 years of service in local government. With each year I faced challenges, along with my colleagues, who helped me learn and grow as a public servant.

In my nine years with the School Board, I learned to appreciate the professionals who make the day-to-day operation of the business of education work effectively; I developed a deeper appreciation for our teachers who are on the front lines of education and guide and inspire and protect our children. And most of all, I was and still am inspired by the thousands of parents who partnered with their children's schools to make learning a life-long process and not just a school project.

In my nearly five years on this Assembly, I came to appreciate the full scope and meaning of local government in Alaska. This municipality serves a constituency incorporating almost half of the population of the state. We are neither a county nor a borough nor merely a city, but as the authors Cease and Saroff call it in their book of the same name, we are "A Metropolitan Experiment in Alaska." Anchorage is intended, under powers granted to the people by way of our charter, to make the state as irrelevant as possible to the local citizen; local government—that government nearest to 'the people'—said the authors, would be in charge.

Indeed, our Charter sets up a system of neighborhood governments called community councils, I have a great deal of respect for these folks as I have been watching them over many, many years. Community councils are supposed to provide a 'bottom-up' method of informed consent on matters of policy and budget—not a top-down dictatorial view of policy which seems to have become the style around here lately. To understand what I mean by that, I simply have to say 'Title 21' and most Community Council members would nod their collective heads.

The founders of our state incorporated a progressive vision in Article X, which guides the partnership between the State and the local governments. The resources of the State were intended to be complementary of local government, not quasi-federalist top-down bully, which is the style of the last several governors. Making unilateral decisions about Health Care Exchanges, for example, without local deliberation, may be satisfying to political partisans in this state, but it is a failure of BOTH local government and State government leadership to leave such important decisions to a closed caucus of partisans rather than to fully engage our neighbors and the stakeholders affected. Where were the public meetings eliciting the opinions of parents of sick children, of small business owners trying to do their best by their employees, of health care providers who need the system to work so they can deliver care, of local governments and school districts that could save taxpayer dollars in their benefit packages?

I look forward to working in the legislature to the restoration of that original vision of our local governments. We must restore our towns, villages and regional governments their rightful place as partners with the state. This means not only returning a significant revenue-sharing component to the State budget to reduce local tax burdens, but also to remind the governor—of whatever party—that decisions as important to Alaskans as health exchanges should be reviewed publicly by us all.

Another issue that the state is handling poorly on Anchorage's behalf is snow removal. This last storm has been well handled by Anchorage's municipal crews, at least in my area—thank you—

but has lots of issues on the so-called “state” roads. I promise to explore this issue, and many others, in the coming months and years.

I am preparing for my 90 day residency in Juneau by clearing out many years’ worth of documents. Here are most of the blue folders I saved from nearly every meeting, Madame Clerk, since April 2008. Most of their contents, after being reported to my community councils, and Mr. Hall’s, in West Anchorage, went out in the recycling bin this morning (thank you, Solid Waste Services, for the excellent automated pickup!). The only ones I kept are the public notice ordinance this body passed in January 2010, and Ordinance 64 from the summer of 2009. I will continue to follow the Municipality’s work on electronic public notice, now ably led by our wonderfully capable Clerk, Barbara Jones and excellent Ombudsman, Darrell Hess. I have a feeling that Ordinance 64’s intent will be coming back in some form, whether from the public or from another source, and so I am keeping the file.

The third pile I am keeping is my work on Title 21, but I didn’t haul it in here tonight, for a reason. You know what it looks like, you’ve seen Ms. Ossiander’s file on the subject, and that’s just what she’s been bringing to Title 21 committee meetings in the last few months. I understand she has at least half a room in her house devoted to Title 21! I might give my file to whomever this body chooses to fill this seat in the coming months, but only if a decision is actually made on Title 21 before next April’s election. I have to say I am EXTREMELY disappointed that my several years’ work on Title 21 will not culminate in amendments and a vote from me, nor from many others who have also invested years and years in this issue, as professional staffers, as members of the community, and as members of this body.

It has been an honor working with all of you, especially Mr. Hall, in the last few years, serving West Anchorage’s neighborhoods and businesses and institutions in a collaborative way that I really appreciate, along with our excellent Assembly aides Bonnie Jack and Ira Perman—what a team we have been! And it’s been an honor to work with all the dedicated and talented Municipal employees that make this city go. Thank you!

But I would most like to single out my dear friend, Elvi Gray-Jackson, who has been a staunch and stubborn advocate for her constituents and her values. We were elected at the same time and I feel fortunate, indeed, to have had her counsel and support in these last five years. And, I now feel pleased that I represent her neighborhood in House District 16. And, darn it, I hope I do as good a job representing 16 as you do Midtown, Ms. Gray-Jackson, thank you.

I won’t be far away, and I’ll only be out of town for about 90 days, but you can bet I’ll be keeping tabs on you by way of this laptop and those cameras! Thank you.