

Alaskans: The time is now to limit state spending
By Kati Capozzi, Alaska Chamber President and CEO

As Alaskans, we face these fiscally uncertain times together. With the private sector's success inextricably linked to how the rest of the economy fares, we must ensure that we continue to grow our businesses. After all, investment and job creation are mandatory to the state's future success. Yet as long as significant state budget deficits remain, economic growth is in jeopardy.

The Alaska Chamber represents 100,000 Alaska employees and businesses large and small. Smart spending habits and pro-business policies that grow our economy are the cornerstones of the Chamber's advocacy efforts. As the voice of Alaska business, our membership votes every year to determine our public policy positions. The positions naturally change with time, but one key issue has consistently remained a priority for more than twenty years, both when the state was flush with cash from high oil prices, and when it was struggling through economic recession: the need for a sustainable fiscal plan focused on Alaska's future.

Every year, we also look outside our diverse membership to better understand Alaskans' attitudes about the state's much-discussed fiscal situation. Recently, the Chamber conducted its annual statewide poll— and the 2019 numbers are in. Unsurprisingly, state spending and the Permanent Fund Dividend remain the overwhelmingly dominant issues on Alaskans' minds.

Alaskans have spoken. They want reasonable restraints on government spending, and a final say in big budget decisions.

Based on the data, without a doubt Alaska's fiscal dilemma remains residents' top concern. Interestingly, 47% of Alaskans rate the state economy as good, an improvement of nine points from last year. That said, when asked in a separate question if they felt Alaska was on the "right track" or "wrong track" economically, 64% of Alaskans still think the state is on the wrong track. That number is virtually unchanged from last year, indicating that Alaskans want closure on the public policy debate that has been raging in our state for nearly five years now. The good news is opportunities exist now for state leaders to stabilize — and improve — the health and direction of the Alaska economy.

It is clear Alaskans have paid close attention as the new governor and Legislature tackle tough issues related to budgets. We asked Alaskans where they stand on current proposals meant to fix Alaska's budget dilemma.

The proposals of particular importance to Alaska Chamber members that enjoy majority support:

- 75% support requiring the Legislature to obtain voter approval before a statewide tax could take effect.



- 61% support a constitutionally mandated state spending cap.

Other policy issues that saw majority support:

- 69% support a work requirement for Medicaid recipients.
- 65 % support exploration and production in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

Over the remaining days of the legislative session and interim, we will share insights and meaningful trends from the 2019 polling data with partners and communities across Alaska. The data we present is pulled from one of the largest surveys conducted in the state, and representative of Alaska's unique electorate.

While Alaska continues to climb out from under a record-breaking recession, the good news is that we may have turned a corner. Especially encouraging is the revelation that many issues still unite Alaskans, even in challenging times. While the voices that seek to divide us are loud, we look forward to people and businesses uniting around public policy that Alaskans from across the state can support. Clearly, civil conversations on the merits of the proposals on the table are a good place to start.