

Standing strong in opposition to ore haul

By Ashley Carrick

During my first year in the Alaska State House, I've had the pleasure to hear from our community. Pushback opposing the Manh Choh ore haul has topped the list, with hundreds of emails and dozens of phone calls expressing nearly unanimous objection. Additionally, I have followed the Advocates for Safe Alaskan Highways as they have collected over 3,000 signatures on their petition of opposition. I would like to reassure Fairbanksans concerned about this trucking plan that they have an ally in the Alaska State Legislature.

First, let me emphasize that I continue to support responsible natural resource development in the Interior. With the transition to renewable energy that will help power our future, we need critical minerals. Alaska is uniquely positioned to lead this transition for the U.S. Additionally, mining is a part of my family history. My grandfather was a 39-year teamster at Usibelli Coal Mine in Healy. I know the importance of a miner's paycheck for working families and

mining helped keep my family in Alaska.

However, it has become abundantly clear to me that industrial trucking from Tetlin to Fort Knox is against the goals that led me to run for office last year and which continue to inform my work as a legislator. I believe in promoting Alaska's economic future, but this project will ultimately cost the state since we will shoulder the cost of additional highway maintenance degradation, as well as the added public safety costs along the route.

Another goal I have is to protect the public health, safety, and wellbeing of Alaskans. However, this project is antithetical to that goal. No additional EMS or Troopers are expected to be employed as a result of this project, despite increasing traffic by orders of magnitude on the Alaskan, Richardson, and Steese highways. These roads have few shoulders, and already support the load of tourism traffic, large numbers of commuters, 86 school bus stops, and military convoys. This added traffic will create new and worsened hazards on our roads.

Perhaps these risks

would be worth the costs, until you consider that we'd be doing so for the sake of mining gold, the vast majority of which is used in the jewelry industry. Furthermore, when I look at this issue from a budgeting standpoint, I have serious reservations about the amount of funds expected to be utilized to support this private industry project. Recently, Alaskans were invited to provide public comments on the Statewide Transportation Implementation Plan, which is an effort by the Department of Transportation to identify transportation needs and improvements. I raised concern over the \$604 million the Interior is set to receive by 2030, of which nearly \$450 million will be invested in projects along the Manh Choh corridor. That's nearly 75% of these once-in-a-generation funding investments. While some of the projects along the corridor are necessary improvements, many are not. We need to invest this money wisely for the long-term benefit of all Alaskans.

We as the Alaskan public have a say in how public funds, public roads, and public services will be utilized and impact-

ed. The easiest way for industry to compromise would be to construct an ore mill in the Tetlin region. This approach has multiple advantages. Firstly, it would take these ore trucks off our highways, alleviating the public safety concerns. Secondly, with other mining opportunities in the Tetlin region, Kinross could further process ore and provide additional jobs.

I've seen the value of long-term industry planning firsthand in my tours this year of the Pogo and Greens Creek mines, which both have the capacity to process raw material onsite. Pogo Mine is even in the process of expanding their operations, and that's great news for their private company and the mining industry as a whole. Of course, another alternative for Manh Choh to transport ore is a rail extension, and while this alternative has a high cost, it will provide long-term benefit for the mining industry.

I continue to stand with this community. I continue to oppose the ore haul.

Representative Ashley Carrick serves House District 35, West Fairbanks in the Alaska State House.