Atautchimukta
“Let us unite as one!!” for a better Borough.

Mayor
Harry K. Brower, Jr.

The STATE of the BOROUGH

September 12, 2017
State of the Borough Address
by Mayor Harry K. Brower Jr. September 12, 2017

Good Afternoon North Slope Borough Assembly members, staff, and listening audience. In accordance with section 5.010(b)(7) of the North Slope Borough Municipal Charter, it is my pleasure as Mayor to report to the Assembly on the activities undertaken by my Administration over this past year.

This Year marked the 45th Anniversary of the Borough. We have witnessed dramatic changes during this period. When oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay, it started a chain of events that have had tremendous impacts on our lives. Because of the visionary leadership of the people who walked before us, we have opportunities to better the lives of all the people that call the North Slope their home. That was the focus of our celebrations this year.

My Administration began with the focus of restoring confidence in our Mayoral led form of government, uniting us and improving relationships with Industry, the State and Federal Government.

We gave community concerns a high priority, documenting these concerns each month and reporting our responses to the Assembly. “Improving street lighting”, a concern the Assembly has heard for years, has been addressed and we are continuing to make lighting improvements a priority. In response to community concerns we initiated a Winter Residential Housing Heating Upgrade program for the most urgent needs of elders and low income single parents that had been told for years no help was available. We improved 137 homes over the last year.

We minimized our footprint by closing Anchorage and Juneau offices. This has resulted in a cost savings of over one million dollars a year, encouraging business on-slope.

We reduced off-slope travel for training and conferences by 60 percent, implementing a procedure that requires Mayoral approval for all off-slope travel. We are bringing the trainers to us, when practical.

My administration was the first to present a unified “Mayor’s” budget presentation to the Assembly for approval instead requiring separate presentations by department to defend individual budgets. This required the administration to be more informed and to remove “walls” between Departments and unify as one budget. Each Department was made available to the Assembly to answer operational and technical questions.

As we began to meet the Assembly’s expectations, our people began to see what we can accomplish when we work together.

With the support of the Assembly, my Administration has led the settlement of outstanding tax claims with our largest taxpayers, where we were headed down the path of years of litigation at the expense of our residents. This will allow the Borough and the taxpayers to proceed with financial planning without legal interference. This is improving our relationship with Industry.

I am establishing an assessing function to replace a diminishing state resource and take a leading role in assessing the taxable asset values of the Borough’s largest taxpayers.

We are the first Administration/Assembly team to use a new modifier under the new tax cap formula to increase operating dollars and budget permanent fund contributions.
We have the largest balanced operating Budget in the history of the Borough. Our Debt is the lowest it has ever been due to the actions we have taken in the last year. Our Bond rating is the highest it has ever been. Financially, we are reducing our dependencies, and are preparing for a stronger self-sufficient economic future.

We are listening to the communities. We have increased our Communities’ share of payments we receive in lieu of taxes. We have recognized the increase cost of living in the villages and have introduced the first ever Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for our employees in the Villages.

We have improved our relationship with the State by negotiating cooperative agreements with the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Energy that open communications regarding the development of North Slope Infrastructure and responsible development of our Natural Resources. The State’s ASTAR Initiative with Millions of Dollars committed to on slope Planning Efforts is a product of this new dialog.

We have improved our relationships in Washington D.C. We have the attention of the Army Corps of Engineers on coastal erosion again and they are working with us towards a solution. The Air Force, the Navy and the Coast Guard are coming to us to hear the Borough’s concerns about increased activity in the Arctic. The Federal Government is beginning to recognize that the US is an Arctic Nation.

I am listening to the unemployed. I am shifting the focus of the Human Resources Department from workplace training to the recruitment of the un-employed and creating equal opportunity for our residents. The Human Resources Department will partner with Ilisagvik College to continue fulfilling the Borough’s training needs.

We are building and purchasing itinerant housing so that will be able to return up to 31 housing units to our communities during the next year.

We have adjusted the criteria for the revolving residential construction loan program and will have the first home constructed under the revolving residential loan program this winter.

With the Approval of the Assembly we now have adequate funding to deploy more programs for Housing.

We have embarked on a Community Wellness Program that began with a healing event following Kivgiq, this past year. We then facilitated a Borough, Traditional Government and Community representative, Drug and Alcohol Task Force retreat to develop meaningful initiatives. Now, with the Approval of the Assembly, we have adequate funding to deploy preventative, treatment and after treatment programs to improve the wellness of our residents.

We have accomplished so much in one year. When we work together, we can do so much more.

I thank you all for your continued dedication to the North Slope Borough and the people it represents, and may God continue to bless all of us.

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NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH MAYOR, HARRY K. BROWER, JR