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Inside Today

Outdoors: Camera-wearing grizzlies show scientists how they survive • A6



JACK BARNWELL/NEWS-MINER

Former Anchorage Mayor Dave Bronson, right, announces Fairbanks financial advisor Josh Church, left, as his running mate for governor during a reception on Wednesday.

Dave Bronson taps Fairbanksan Josh Church as running mate

By Jack Barnwell

Former Anchorage Mayor Dave Bronson tapped Josh Church, a Fairbanks financial advisor, as running mate in a bid for the governor's seat on Wednesday.

Bronson and Church made the announcement during a recep-

tion at Gene's Chrysler. Bronson cited Church's financial and business background, his youth and energy, and a common agreement on issues facing the state.

"If I wanted to do a good job as a governor, I'd have to have a running mate who understood what was going on [in the Interior]," Bron-

son said. "I'm not going to bring on someone as a lieutenant governor and sit him at a desk somewhere and tell him to guard the seal ... the person I'm going to pick is going to be my primary advisor on all things. It will be a partnership."

Bronson, who is running as a Republican, noted that if a natural

gas line were to be built, Fairbanks would be the economic and industrial hub for much of that development.

"Fairbanks was the city that started it all, it was mining, trapping, logging and all these things," Bronson said. "I knew when I was going

CHURCH » A5

UAF leaders talk upcoming legislative session

By Anna Lionas

In anticipation of the State Legislature gaveling into session on Monday, Interim Chancellor of University of Alaska Fairbanks Mike Sfraga held a panel to discuss the institution's goals for this year's session.

The panel included Lisa Putnam, Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce board chair, Chad Hutchison, UA director of state relations, Jackson Nelson, student body president of UAF and Theresa Baker, director of development and alumni relations.

State Budget

In Gov. Mike Dunleavy's proposed 2027 budget he appropriated \$358 million for the University of Alaska system, which is \$121.6 million less than what the Board of Regents budgeted for.

"That's the difference between what we need as an institution to maintain and grow strategically and what the governor has proposed," Sfraga said.

So over the course of the legislative session the UA system will be asking for the Legislature to fund them to the full ask, but a common theme of the panel was it's not just funding UA, it's an investment in the state's future.

The delta of funding impacts 10 priority areas at UAF, employee compensation and benefits,

UAF » A3

Judge overturns state law limiting live music at breweries and distilleries

Political compromise isn't a reason to restrict free speech, Judge Adolf Zeman says

By James Brooks

ALASKA BEACON

An Alaska Superior Court judge has ruled that a state law limiting live shows at breweries, distilleries and wineries in Alaska is an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment and the Alaska Constitution's protections for free speech.

Judge Adolf Zeman issued his decision Wednesday in a two-year-old lawsuit filed by three alcohol manufacturers against the state of Alaska's alcohol regulator two years ago.

"The speech restrictions fail the tests of strict and intermediate scrutiny, and such suppression of speech by the state cannot stand," Zeman wrote at the conclusion of his 25-page order.

Until 2022, alcohol manufacturers were prohibited from having entertainment — including TVs, dancing, games and live music — on site. That year, as part of a sweeping modernization of the state's alcohol laws, breweries, distilleries and wineries were allowed up to four live events per year if approved by the Alaska Alcohol and Marijuana Control Office, the state regula-



JAMES BROOKS/ALASKA BEACON

Musicians perform Sunday, Feb. 18, 2024, at Devil's Club Brewing in Juneau. The event was among the first three allowed under a newly amended state law.

tor.

Bars continued to be allowed an unlimited number of live events without permit; the difference in limits was billed as a political compromise necessary for the reform to pass the Legislature and become law.

Three companies — Zip Kombucha, Sweetgale

Meadworks and Cider House, and Grace Ridge Brewing Company — filed suit to overturn the four-event limit, raising free-speech and equal-protection claims.

They were represented in court by a national group, the Pacific Legal Founda-

tion. While the plaintiffs eventually dropped the equal-protection argument, the free-speech debate continued through written arguments.

Zeman ultimately concluded that the state failed to show how restricting live entertainment at breweries

MUSIC » A2

Borough eyes repurposing landfill building for new recycling facility

By Jack Barnwell

The Fairbanks North Star Borough administration wants to take a page from the recycler's guidebook: why build new when you can repurpose?

An ordinance sponsored by Borough Mayor Grier Hopkins would push forward a \$2.5 million scoping phase for a new central recycling facility to replace the one on Marika Road.

"We're looking at refurbishing an existing facility at the landfill instead of trying to build an entirely new facility," Hopkins told reporters Thursday. "It will be fiscally responsible and make sure we



ANNA LIONAS/NEWS-MINER

Bales of aluminum sit at the FNSB Central Recycling Facility on Nov. 15, 2025.

use the infrastructure we have in place as best we can."

Hopkins said that the borough originally eyed

building a new central recycling facility. However, he picked up an idea from the former Mayor Bryce Ward's administra-

tion to repurpose a facility instead.

"Under my watch, I did not want to go forward with a new building," Hopkins said. "We need to be responsible with our tax dollars and that's the direction I want to go."

The borough leases its current central recycling facility on Marika Road from the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Hopkins said there are several advantages: a centralized location at the landfill, personnel, and equipment.

"One of the bottle necks we have at the current recycling center ... is that the doors are not big enough to get big com-

mercial trucks into the facility," Hopkins said. He added the facility's balers, which compact recycling materials into squares, "are not big enough to do it economically."

He noted that the borough received a large horizontal baler from the military a few years ago. However, it's been sitting unused in the borough's landfill warehouse, which it wants to repurpose because it can't fit in the Marika Road facility.

The Assembly last year programmed \$17 million for design, scoping and construction costs for such a facility. However, Hopkins said he hopes the scoping phase for refurbishing the existing

landfill warehouse will reduce costs.

"This will make recycling in our community economical for the first time," Hopkins said. "That's something I've been hearing about for my whole life here."

Refurbishing the building will take work since it's essentially a steel building. That work includes insulation, central air, electricity and other essentials.

"It has a pretty solid foundation, and the bones of the building are good," Hopkins said.

He noted a larger facility would allow the borough to accept recycling

RECYCLING » A3

GOOD MORNING



The weather

A little snow; some ice early

High today33

Low tonight 5

Sunrise: 10:24 a.m.

Sunset: 3:38 p.m.

WEATHER » A3

Aurora forecast

Active aurora activity forecasted. If skies are clear, active auroral displays may be visible overhead from Utqiagvik to Anchorage and Juneau, and may be visible low on the horizon from King Salmon and Ketchikan.

This information is provided by aurora forecasters at the Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. For more information about the aurora, visit <http://www.gi.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast>



SOURDOUGH JACK:

"I'd rather have 60 below than winter rain!"

