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Event

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Presenter

Cathy Giessel, MS, RN, ANP, FAANP, Senate President, Alaska State Legislature

I am suppressing the urge to say good morning because in Alaska right now, it's 11 o'clock in the morning. It's hard to adjust the fact that it's afternoon here.

So yes, I am the Senate President in Alaska. And I also maintain my nurse practitioner license. I was asked to speak to you today about the path that I took to leadership and policy in the legislature. Now, you may be asking yourself, "Why should we care?" Good question.

I'm hoping that some of the things that I touch on related to my path to leadership will be helpful to you as you consider the opportunities that you might have before you. So I want to make this talk, while it describes my path, it's not about me. It's about you thinking about how these opportunities may present themselves for you.

Now, I'm very aware because I travel a great deal, last week I was in Tampa at a political meeting, that politics here in the lower 48 is very different than politics in Alaska, but the principles remain the same. When we think about leadership, I'm often asked, "Well, what do you think the most important quality is of a leader?"

And of course, most people would answer, "Integrity." And I would agree with that. I agree. Integrity is a critical landmark piece for a leader. But courage is also a critical piece. And I think as I describe to you, my course that you'll understand where courage comes into it.

There also has to be a real passion for doing this kind of work. And the reason is it's not easy. If any of you are thinking, "Well, Senate President, that must be quite a prestigious position." It's actually a ton of work, W-O-R-K. There's not a lot of glory to it.

So that's where you need to have the passion that keeps you continuing. So nurses, what makes us nurses? Well, for most of us, we became nurses because we care about people. We want to help people with their health problems. That's exactly what one does in the public policy realm also.

That is a motivation for me. That is my passion to make my state a better place for the people of Alaska to live. Healthy lives, productive businesses, healthy families, with children that are going to good schools, that addresses our homeless problem and the opioid issue.

Those are the passionate things that drive me. Sounds a lot like nursing, doesn't it? So, you and I share those same values and passions. So, along the way, despite those glorious passions that we might have and goals, there will be critics.

And that is something perhaps you've already experienced if you're in any kind of public policy realm. One thing that I keep reminding myself is, there are no statues that have been put up to critics. There have only been statues put up to people that have taken risks, risks to do something better for their community, their country, their family.

So, in the course of this, while I'm talking about leadership, you're also going to learn a lot about Alaska. So first of all, where is Alaska? Most school kids think that it's a little place down next to Mexico, because that's where the map people put it.

But in fact, there's Alaska. We believe in Alaska that this is how God looks on planet Earth. So let me orient you. This is the North Pole, of course, and here's Alaska. This dotted line going around here is the Arctic Circle. Okay.

There's a lot of countries that are above the Arctic Circle. The United States is an Arctic nation because of Alaska. But here we have Russia right next door. Yes, right next door. Then we come over here to the northern countries in Europe. There's Finland, Sweden, Norway. Iceland is slightly below the Arctic Circle.

Here's Greenland, a possession of Denmark. And, of course, here's our good neighbor, the Canadians. So I point this out because living in the Arctic brings with it some issues, some challenges, as well as some opportunities. One of the many challenges that we face in the Arctic, of course, is the climate, but is also things like depression, substance abuse, domestic violence, food insecurity.

These are common problems in the Arctic. We're exploring why. Partly, I believe these are issues common to the human condition. But there's also the situation of a very cold climate, very dark time period, half the year is quite dark, things like that.

But these are the kinds of challenges we face. But we also have some wonderful opportunities. And those opportunities come in the realm of oil and gas opportunities. Right up here above the Arctic Circle is an area you may have heard of called the Alaska North Slope. In 1967, the largest conventional oil field in North America was discovered on the North Slope of Alaska, and it's being developed today.

There's gas there as well. There's also oil and gas over here in Russia. Maybe you've heard of a place called Yamal. Russia is exporting natural gas from Yamal right now through the northern sea route, through the Bering Straits, and over here to China. And they're also exporting over here to Europe.

Of course, Norway is well known for all of its oil and gas resources. Fishing is tremendous. Both Alaska and Norway exports huge amounts of fish. And then, of course, Greenland, Canada has lots of oil and gas. And in all of this area above the Arctic Circle are multiple minerals: gold, molybdenum, silver, all kinds of things.

So this is important in that it shaped for me the opportunity for leadership in Alaska. So, let me give you a little bit more perspective on Alaska. This is how Alaska looks if you overlay it on the United States. So again, it's not that little island off of the west coast of Mexico, it's actually two and a half times the size the state of Texas.

So if you cut Texas in half, they'd be the third-largest state. But I wanted to point out to you the distances here. So, I live in Anchorage, which is right down here in South Central. Up here in the interior right there, in the middle of the state is where I was born, the city of Fairbanks.

Juneau is our capital. Juneau is right down here. To get from Anchorage to Juneau, so from here to here, is an hour and a half on the 737. It's a \$600 roundtrip ticket. Not a lot of citizens come to Juneau when we're in session to testify. Consequently, we have to have connectivity.

We have to have internet. We have to have live streaming so that citizens can participate. Now, the distance between Anchorage and Fairbanks is about 350 miles by road. We have a road that does actually go from Anchorage to Fairbanks.

We have a few roads that go over in this area, too. Then there's a road from Fairbanks up to the North Slope. That's the extent of our roads. There are no other roads in the state of Alaska. Everything else is flying. So up here at the top, you see Barrow, its native name is Utqiagvik. That's where our North Slope is.

That's where the oil is located. There's an 800 mile pipeline that comes down here to export our oil to the west coast of the US and to Asia. But the population of Barrow, just to give you an idea, I wrote it down because I couldn't remember it, is about 6,000 people. So to get from Barrow, down here to Ketchikan, you see the distance as if you were traveling from Duluth, Minnesota, down to almost Savannah, Georgia.

It's a huge distance. Over here is a little village called Kotzebue. Kotzebue is important because of just north of Kotzebue is the second-largest zinc mine in the world, providing zinc all over the world. I'll tell you more about that zinc mine.

It'll be relevant again to my opportunities for leadership a little bit later. Kotzebue has a population of 3,000 people. You may have heard of Nome, it's right here. Nome has a population of 4,000 people. You might have heard about the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. So that's a race that goes from Anchorage, weaves around here up to Nome.

So, Nome is another, ironically, population center. I just said it was 4,000 people, right? But this gives you a sense of our state. Now down here in Southwest Alaska is a community called Bethel. Bethel is pretty large, it's 6,000 people.

Bethel is located here in this part of the state. This is the lowest income area of our state. Very poor area. Not a lot of industry. Lots of opportunity, but not a lot of industry. Anchorage is our largest city. Like I said, it's located right there.

So the largest city 300,000 people. Pretty small. I know some of you come from Chicago. That's like a neighborhood in Chicago, right? Fairbanks up here in the middle. Fairbanks and the area around it are about 100,000 people. So I call my home state a small town on a large lot.

Because frankly, there just aren't that many people and it's amazing who we know from all over the state. Very diverse populations. You can see lots of coastal communities and down here in southwest Alaska, these are predominantly Alaska Native populations.

I was born in the state of Alaska when it was a territory before statehood. My father was a pilot for one of the pioneer airlines. And so my father was pretty advanced. I was the oldest child in our family. And he didn't wait for Take Your Daughter to Work Day.

He did it way back long, long ago when I was a child. And so I often got to go to work with my dad. And that meant flying along with him to these small communities. These small communities did not have running water. They were extremely small. The population's subsistence...they lived on what they could hunt or catch or gather.

Very poor. There were no telephones, no running water. And the restrooms, if you will, were what was called honey pots. That's a 55-gallon barrel, or excuse me, a five-gallon barrel pot with a toilet on top. And usually, one of the children would be assigned carrying that bucket to the sewage lagoon, pouring it out there and bringing it back.

Very, very poor. I'll tell you more about that as we go on, but this is a very diverse population. We have a lot of Alaska Native groups. The Inupiat live up here, the Yupik here. Central Alaska is mainly Athabascan. Tlingit and Haida are down here in southeast and the Dena'ina live around the south-central area.

Just to name a few of the people groups that live in Alaska. I remember the days when there were signs outside restaurants and businesses, "No natives or dogs allowed." So, my journey to the Alaska Senate. So, Alaska became a state in 1959.

And so I grew up there. When it was time to go to college, I wanted to go to nursing school. Well, there were no nursing schools in Alaska at the time. So I went to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. And right before I entered as a freshman at the University of Michigan, I was given the wonderful opportunity of serving in Washington DC as an intern for Senator Ted Stevens.

And so I went to Washington and saw what was like to work in Congress. He was a brand new senator at the time. And part of the reason he selected me to be an intern is because I was going to go to nursing

school. The state of Alaska I've described to you how poor those villages were before statehood. We had tremendous problem with disease.

Vaccine-preventable diseases were rampant. We had very poor... We had some public health system, but it was not nearly what it should be. There were no clinics in any of these small villages. And Senator Stevens wanted to change all that. I went to many of the villages with him right before I went to college.

He wanted to visit, see what the conditions were like. So that was a real eye-opener. After I came back from college, I got involved in the local political party. My parents had always been very involved in community issues. In fact, as my father lay dying in the hospital, he was giving me messages to take to the city council on an issue he cared deeply about.

So that was my history. That was just what you did. And so after my husband and I got married, started having kids, we got very much involved in the political party of our choice. I served as a district chairperson for 20 years. At one point, I was the state vice-chair for the party. I helped with numerous campaigns.

One day, someone came up to me and said, "You know, we're going to have a campaign school for women. You should take that." I said, "Why? I'm not planning to run for office." "Oh, well, you can help other people on their campaigns." So I thought, "Oh, help people. Sure. I'm happy to help people."

That's what nurses do, right? So I took the campaign school and thoroughly enjoyed it. I helped on a lot of campaigns and thoroughly enjoyed it. And I realized this is my lane. I feel very comfortable doing this. I really like this. So time went on and I was appointed to the Board of Nursing.

I really enjoyed that. I served for two terms, which was seven and a half years. Six of those years, I was the chair of the board. I loved it. Again, I said, "Wow, this is my lane." One of the really enriching parts of being on the Board of Nursing was coming to stuff like this National Council of State Boards of Nursing.

I learned so much from those meetings. I am so glad all of you are here and I'm sure you are glad you're here too. And I encourage you to keep staying involved in this. After I took the campaign school, I realized how important communication is. The thing that most people fear the most is public speaking.

Yes, public speaking. And so to cultivate that skill and to overcome that fear, I joined Toastmasters. Now, does anybody here know what Toastmasters is? Oh, good.

Some of you are. Because some people have said to me, "Oh, you learn how to give toasts?" No, I wouldn't be interested in that. No, Toastmasters is actually a course in public speaking. You learn how to give different types of speeches. There's an achievement scale, so that meets the competitiveness drive that people have.

But I learned so much in that. They're little clubs, and they're probably all over your communities, especially large cities usually have multiple Toastmasters clubs, and they're made up of diverse people. And that was what I enjoyed so much is I got to hear lots of different perspectives on important subjects.

And the speakers were kind of experts in what they were talking about. I learned what a gold star banner meant, a veteran...a young man that had been killed in war. That meant a lot to me as I went door to door when I later ran.

And I would see a gold star banner in a window in a home. I wouldn't have known that if I hadn't been a member of Toastmasters and had a veteran in my group do a speech on what those star banners are. So when people ask me, "What should I do if I want to run for office?"

I say, "Join the Toastmasters club. You will love it and you'll learn a lot of skills." So a couple years after I had joined Toastmasters, someone came up to me and said, "You know, I think the state senator in your district is probably going to be retiring pretty soon. You should think about running." So, of course, that was a frightening thought, but I went to my husband and said, "What do you think?"

Our children were all grown by then. Now, some people choose to run for office and serve in office, even when their children are small. I wasn't that brave. I waited till my kids were all grown. That would be a huge commitment. I see my colleagues doing that and they do it well. It certainly can be done.

But my children were all raised. It was just my husband and I. And he wasn't so sure, but he said, "Yes, I will support you in doing this." So I began this very frightening endeavor of running for office. Now, I had never run for anything. I'd never served in a school board. I'd never been a PTA president.

Nothing. So I was missing one of the two things that are critical if you're going to run for public office. The first one is name recognition. Nobody knew me. I was going to have to do a lot of work. I filed for office in November of 2009 for an election that would be happening in November of 2010, so a whole year.

And I started going door to door in December of 2009. So I had 11 months before the election. Of course, there was a primary in between which I had to address as well, but I started in December going door to door. Now, in Alaska, that means going door to door through the snow. We get rain in the winter, too.

Sometimes we get what's called Chinook winds, where it might be 15 degrees one day, and the Chinook winds come in and the next day it's 45 degrees and everything's melting and ice and snow and rain. It was an interesting experience. But I went every day, door to door because I had no name recognition and I lacked the second most important thing in politics, money.

Money is the lifeblood of politics. Now, that's something you should remember. It'll matter particularly tomorrow. I'm serving on a panel with a couple of other folks talking about messaging and how to persuade legislators.

No one can run for office without substantial money. I know there are people that try and there's probably a few people that succeed with minimal money, but it's pretty rare. Because in order to get that name recognition that I talked about, you've got to have money for advertising, mailers, throwing events.

All of that stuff costs money. And I was just a regular person, a nurse practitioner. I was working at the time. Yeah, my husband had a job, he is an engineer, but we were not wealthy. So, those were the two things that I had to work on that was really hard for me.

I don't know about you, but as a nurse, I'm used to helping people not asking people to help me, and especially not asking people for money. So that was a huge frightening challenge. The other thing that got kind of scary was the fact that the party chairman for my party decided that I probably wasn't electable.

And so he actually recruited an opponent against me. He recruited a doctor. And it wasn't just a nice family practice doctor, a pediatrician. It was a cardiologist. So a cardiologist, perhaps yes. Well, they have a lot of money, number one, and they stick together and support each other, which meant big donors, number two.

But, fortunately, he had number three. And that was the cardiologist demeanor of I'm the smartest person in the room. And of course, you know that. So he didn't exactly hit it off with the population. And so I did win that primary. Thankfully, it was a three-way primary and assemblywoman filed against me at the very that last few months before that primary election.

And then I had the general election to face. I was still going door to door nearly every day and did win that as well. It was also a three-way. So those are some things to think about if you're considering running for office. What is your name recognition?

How comfortable are you with raising money, think about your communication skills, speech-giving skills, all that kind of stuff, and how you might prepare. What will it cost your family for you to do this? Because I pretty much wasn't home. You know, when we talk about husbands coming home and saying, "Where's the dinner on the table," my husband now is a wonderful cook.

He is. Frankly, even if I'm home one day, I don't make dinner unless it's an exceptional because he's a great cook. That was kind of my course in getting even to the Senate itself. Now, when I first entered the Senate as an elected person, it was in 2011, and I was in the minority.

In fact, the Senate in Alaska has 20 members, four of us made up the minority. We were a very, very small minority. And as the minority, I didn't really get great assignments. I really got pretty low level assignments, had very few meetings or committees that I was on, but I didn't let that stop me.

I did what any nurse would do. I looked at what I needed to know and how I could learn it. And I went to all the committee meetings that I possibly could fit into my day, even if I wasn't on those committees, even if it was a house committee. And I sat in those meetings, I listened, I watched, and I learned.

It was a great foundation for learning legislative rules. It's not Robert's Rules of Order. Most legislators use Mason's Rules of Order. That's a whole different thing. I didn't know anything about those. I didn't know anything about our state's budget, so I went to all the finance meetings.

I didn't know anything about really our resources and where our income came from. So I went to every senate resource meeting there was. Now, while I was in the minority, it is true the Senate President said to me, "You're a nurse. I should put you on the Health Committee."

This may surprise you and perhaps none of you would have made this choice, but I said, "No, I don't want to be on the Health Committee." The reason I did that is there was another nurse in the legislature. She was in the house. Her name was Peggy Wilson. And she had chaired the House Health Committee for 10 years. And I had spoken to Peggy and she said, "You know, I've done all I can on the Health Committee. What I really want to do is get on the Transportation Committee, but my caucus won't let me off."

And so I realized it's easy to get typecast. You're the nurse, you should be on the Health Committee. So I said, "No, actually, I want to be on the Resources Committee." Well, that's kind of a prime seat and I didn't get it. I was on Labor and Commerce and that's fine with me. Even as a minority member on Labor and Commerce, it put me dealing with issues for boards, boards and commissions.

That's my lane. I know how regulations are written. I know how boards operate. I know the best way to allow boards to function. And so it was a great fit actually and I enjoyed my two years on Labor and Commerce. But after those two years, the control in the Senate flipped, and suddenly I was in the majority.

And that's when I said I want a seat on the Senate Resources Committee. So why would I want a seat on Resources if I'm a nurse? Because I believe that committee represents the opportunity for Alaskans to have a good job, a family-supporting wage, meaningful work, and have a life that is productive in our state.

And that is why I wanted to be on Resources. They not only appointed me to the Resources Committee, but they appointed me the chair of the Resources Committee. I held that seat for six years. I'm the second longest-serving Chair of the Resources Committee in our state. The longest-serving was also a woman.

But in that role, I was able to make a difference in the job opportunities in our state. Now, why does that matter? It matters because of this.

So you and I as nurses have to have continuing education to maintain our licenses. And so I'm always reading medical stuff, you know, continuing education stuff comes on the internet and so forth. Well, one day, two years ago, I happened to notice an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Sometimes I look at those and I'm particularly interested in the articles on smoking and the detrimental effects, vaping, those effects opioids, of course, of course, but this one caught my attention. And I'm so glad I read it. It says, "Inequities in Life Expectancy Among US Counties, 1980 to 2014: Temporal Trends and Key Drivers."

Interesting. The summary of this article is captured in this picture. As I flipped through it, I came to this and I said, "Hold it. What's this?" Let me orient you to this. The red areas designate places where life expectancy reduced over the 37-year period that this study was conducted.

So they're looking at life expectancy change over that 37 years. If it reduced, that's designated in red. And the scale increases, the yellow is sustaining, no change in life expectancy. And as life expectancy increases, the areas are indicated in ever-darkening green.

The largest increase in life expectancies are indicated in that dark blue color. And I looked at my state, which is down by Texas, but I looked at that and I said, "What's all this dark blue?" What was happening that caused our life expectancy in these areas of the state to increase 8 to 13 years longer life expectancy during this study time period?

Well, the answer's here on the side. I told you that when we looked at the picture of the globe with the North Pole in the center, this part of our state, the very top of our state is where the largest conventional oil field is located. So oil was found there in the late '60s. And Alaska, of course, wanted to develop that oil.

It was found by an oil company. But in order to develop that oil, a pipeline had to be built from the North Slope down to open water, and nice report 800 miles. So in order to get the permission to do that, we had to go to Congress. Now, this is 1967.

We became a state in 1959. And Congress looked at that and said, "Well, that would allow you to support yourself. That's all a good thing." But here's what happened. Remember, all those Alaska Native groups I told you about still live in Alaska? They stepped up and said, "Hold on. This land is ours too. And we're not going to allow that pipeline to be built unless we have a cut of this."

They wanted property rights, which, of course, Congress agreed they should have. So the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act is an act of Congress that finally passed in 1981.

It was signed into law in 1981 and that opened the door for Congress to give Alaska the authority to build that pipeline. Now, part of the Native Claims Settlement Act is unique. Our native groups do not live on reservations. Because of this Native Claims Settlement Act, they were given 44 million acres in Alaska, 44 million acres of property.

They selected it and about a billion dollars, which they divided among themselves. There are 12 native corporations. There's actually a small 13th one that is for Alaska Native people who live outside of Alaska, but there's 12 main ones. So they divided this up, they made land selections and began their corporations, Alaska Native Corporations.

These corporations now have offices in Washington, DC. They may have some offices here in Atlanta. They own property in Chicago on Michigan Avenue. They have property and business all over the world and are prospering. Our Alaska Native people groups receive a dividend every year from their corporation because of the prosperity that these corporations are developing and sharing with each other.

In fact, there's a portion of the Native Claims Settlement Act that requires that one corporation, The North Slope Corporation right there, of course, makes a huge amount of money because that's where Pluto Bay is, they must share at least 50% with the other 11 corporations. So depending on what their prosperity is, they share among each other. Now, 1981 Kaparuk is part of the North Slope, so that came online.

This is an interesting one. 1989, Red Dog mine opened. So Red Dog mine is on Native Corporation land. It's over here above Kotzebue. Remember Kotzebue has the population...was at 4,000 people, maybe was 3,000. Very small, but the Native Corporation owns that land.

And so the mining company has to go to the corporation and say, "Can we work on your land?" So they formed a partnership. That mining company is now the largest taxpayer. And that area around Kotzebue has actually organized a borough, a government entity.

Most of Alaska does not have government entities unless they're large cities, but that particular area was able to because they have a prospering mine there. More than 50% of the people that work at Red Dog mine are Alaska Native people who are part of that corporation. It is an incredible story of prosperity for not just that region and those people but the whole state.

But you see, these are the kinds of developments that occurred in those dark areas. Down here, there were some fishing settlements. Congress passed a law that pushed foreign fishing fleets off further offshore from Alaska. And that helped our fishing industry which is down in that area of the strait to prosper.

So this one map encapsulated exactly why I wanted to chair the Resources Committee as a nurse. These represent jobs. Now, this top part of the state is a borough also, it's called the North Slope Borough. It's exceedingly wealthy now because of Prudhoe Bay.

And I worked for the North Slope Borough as a nurse practitioner for 10 years. They have seven village schools around the borough. They go one... the furthest village school, I don't think my pointer is working anymore, is way over on the west coast. The furthest east one is way over right next to Canada right at the top of the state, right next to Canada and then others are dispersed in between.

So to get to my work at each of the schools, of course, I took small planes. And so I would work at the school and then I would go down to the airport and catch the plane to the next village. So, let me tell you about an experience I had there. First of all, an airport in rural Alaska is a gravel airstrip. It has a chain link fence with a gate that you have to go through.

There is no terminal. So what you want to do is keep in touch with the airline agent, that's a person in the village, who interacts with the main office, which is usually up in Barrow at the very top of the state, when the plane will be coming. If it's delayed in one of the other villages, then you know. So you don't go and stand at the airport too early, especially when it's 30 below.

So, one day I was finished at one of the schools and so I walked over to the airstrip. And so I'm standing there. I was standing next to the airline agent. We were just chatting about this, that and the other thing.

And all of a sudden, up to the gate pulls this beautiful white Ford F150, which is a pickup, in case, I don't know how many trucks are down here, but anyway, beautiful new pickup.

It totally drew my attention. And, of course, the thing going through my mind is, "How did they get that here? There's no roads." In these communities, the form of transportation is a four-wheeler. Which again, if you don't know what a four wheeler is, it's like a motorcycle, but it has four wheels.

And it's kind of large, you can carry a passenger on the back and you can hook to it a wagon kind of thing. So you can throw your moose in there to carry it home or whatever. So anyway, this was incredibly unusual, a brand new white pickup. So, out of the pickup jumps this young man, and he kisses the young woman in the truck, and the little boy, looked like he was probably four, kissed them goodbye, grabbed his gear bag and came through the gate and stood next to the fence by some of the other young men that were also waiting for the plane.

The airline agent apparently noticed I was noticing all of this and he says to me, "That's Brian. This whole community is so proud of him. He's on his way to his job on the North Slope. He brings his paycheck back to this community. He supports his family. And in the winter, he helps his parents and his grandparents out with their fuel costs. And if there's somebody else in the community that's running out of cash and needs fuel, Brian is there to help them. We are all so proud of him."

I'm going to tell you folks that encapsulated exactly why I wanted to chair the Resources Committee. Here is a young man who is supporting his family with dignity. He has a job and he's supporting his own family, giving himself self-respect. His family has lived there for generations.

His parents and grandparents are still there. They have lived a subsistence lifestyle and in this community, that means hunting caribou. His family has probably been here for generations. And he's still able to live in this small community, he's still able to go caribou hunting and gathering food from the area around himself, but also interface with the cash economy of the Western world.

The job he holds on the North Slope has a zero-tolerance policy. That means you fail a urine drug test, you use drugs or alcohol, you're on a plane home, and that's the end of your job. That tells me that he is living a lifestyle that will sustain that kind of job.

And the community recognizes it. I just left a school, K through 12. Those kids are looking at Brian, and first of all, saying, "If he can do it, I can do it. So I better study. And if he can do it, I can also still live here and support my family and have the dignity of a job."

That's the whole reason that I do what I do as a state senator. So this to me exemplifies why it's so important for nurses, nurses to be in state legislators. If I were not a nurse, I would not have been reading the Journal of the American Medical Association.

I mean, your average fisherman simply doesn't read that. And we have a citizen legislature. And so we have fishermen, we have college professors, we have miners, all professions. They would not have seen this article. They would not have understood the positive impact that we are having, by developing our resources and allowing our Alaska people in cities as well as small rural villages.

Today, I told you when I was a child and went with my dad to work flying around to those small communities and what honey pots were and all the rest of that. Today, I can walk into schools and open my laptop and I'm connected to the internet. They have swimming pools. There's running water. There's safe wastewater treatment now. There are still a few villages that that is not true in, but we are continuing to work to fix that as well.

Now, that is not to say that resource development has solved all of Alaska's problems. We are number one in rape. We are number one in suicide. Opioids, oh yeah. We have the same problem you have, possibly worse because alcoholism has always been quite a problem. And we have homelessness that we're also working on. But that's why you and I belong in the public policy realm.

Because you and I work in these areas and we know that healthy people require relationship with others, access to health care, education, access to jobs. All of those things are pivotal for a healthy population.

So that's the course that I took to get here where I am in the State Senate. I am honored to serve as the Senate President. I will tell you most of the job, I think, is counseling. Because when you have a body of 19 other senators, they're all lead dogs.

So they all want to be in front. And if they're not, they're unhappy. So there's a lot of counseling involved and negotiating. Negotiating, yes. But that's something you and I do, right? Don't we sort of negotiate with our patients? They want to lose weight.

Okay, well, let's talk about the opportunities here then. What could you do? Right? It's a form of negotiation. And we certainly negotiate with people that pay for health care and advocate for our patients. So really, I'm finding this job is a lot like being a nurse. So I have relented and I do serve on the Health Committee now.

And I enjoy it actually. I enjoy it. I have passed a lot of healthcare legislation. The Pharmacy Benefit Manager Bill that I passed reins in the PBMs in my state. A lot of the boards come to me if they have regulation issues, need a statute change.

So I do a lot of work for physical therapists, optometry, psychologists, physical therapists, and then, of course, the Board of Nursing. The battles that we face are shared by our other healthcare colleagues in that medicine often wants to restrict everyone's practice.

I mentioned optometry. For about 10 years, there was a bill in the Alaska legislature to allow optometrists to regulate themselves, to have their own... They had their own board, but their board was very restricted in what it could do. But the State Medical Board and the State Medical Association blocked any change to that bill, or to the optometry board until I finally got my bill passed two years ago.

And the way I did it was by going to the House members, House members in other words, the other body who were not the same political party as I was. And between the two of us, we got that legislation passed. The same thing related to pharmacy benefit managers. I went to the other body, found House members of another political party that were also sharing the same values that I had, we got the bill passed.

So, one of the things I would urge you to keep in mind is just because people may have a certain political party label, be careful about stereotyping them or cast typing them, kind of like the nurse on Healthcare Committee.

It doesn't mean that we don't have shared values. So I would just encourage you in that way. There are negatives to this job. Our bills don't always get passed as we'd like to see them. Even though I may introduce a bill for a healthcare change, everybody else gets their hands on it too.

We have 60 members in our legislature and all 60 of those folks can change a bill. So you as citizens have a role there to advocate for healthcare legislation that you care deeply about. One of the things that I forgot to mention I had done on my course to the legislature is, while I was in graduate school, I realized that nurse practitioners' scope of practice in Alaska was constantly being threatened.

We've had independent practice since 1984. No supervision, full prescriptive authority, including controlled substances, but that was constantly under attack from medicine. So I joined the Alaska Nurses Association. They had a legislative committee that I served on.

And in that role, I learned how to read bills, how to understand what the bill was saying, what a fiscal note is, and as I mentioned, the distances in our state, how to get on the internet and find out what was happening each day in our legislature.

It is incredibly tedious work. Nobody else wanted to do it because it's pretty boring, frankly. But because I did that work, I developed a skillset and a knowledge base that helped me going forward. So I would encourage you, even though it seems like grunt work, even though it seems like emptying a bedpan, you can learn a lot and become extremely valuable, extremely valuable to your healthcare organization, and possibly equip yourself for serving in the legislature yourself.

So, I hope that many of you will consider what you might do in the public policy realm. I understand that someone in one of these meetings that I had spoken at decided to run for office and now serves in the Senate in South Dakota.

I just met a nurse practitioner who's Speaker of the House in Iowa. There are nurses all over the place. We're quiet, and we just busily do our work. We do the hard work that that we're there to do for our patients too. So, it is a lot of work.

Weigh it out before you decide to enter the public policy realm. It will cost you a lot, but the rewards are there. And you will always be challenged. I described being in the legislature as going to graduate school every day. There's always something more to learn.

I get emails about utility issues, things that that are completely out of my lane, but you have to learn about them and it's a great experience. This picture is actually taken on the Copper River. That river behind me is the Copper River.

It looks all gray because of the silt in it. The headwaters is the Kennecott Glacier. So that's where the water comes out of it, comes out of the glacier. And laying on the ground, there are 35 Copper River red

salmon that my husband caught that day. These apparently sell for a very high price on the east coast. Maybe some of you have eaten some of them, but Alaskans have the opportunity to go and fish for ourselves.

The Copper River is named the Copper River because right next to that glacier, the Kennecott Glacier, is a historic mine, the Kennecott Copper Mine. It's poised on the side of a mountain. Most glaciers, of course, are in a valley. So here's the side of a mountain.

And when geologists were looking at that in the early 1900s, they actually thought it was a grassy field. It was so green. They got over there and found out the copper deposit was laying right on the surface. It was an incredibly rich deposit. So the mine was built there. They mined from 1911 to 1938. They took out \$200 million worth of copper.

In today's dollars, that's \$3.6 billion of copper. They built a train rail system to the mine and got the stuff to Tidewater. My point is this river still supports Copper River king, red, silver salmon in abundance.

They are high-quality fish. It is possible to develop natural resources and protect the natural environment. So that's the emphasis I always make to my colleagues as well as my fellow Alaskans and I make to you as well. Technology allows us to do these things and still preserve our environment.

So I encourage you to think about joining me in public policy, whether it's in the administration or in the legislative branch, or even as a staff person. My staff does a tremendous amount of work. I cannot do what I do, unless I have my incredibly competent staff.

So that might be another realm that you serve in. Thanks very much for your time and your attention.