

**Bennie Colbert  
House District 1  
Democrat**

1. The Legislature's Permanent Fund Working Group issued a report in January outlining three options for the future of the PFD. The group only agreed on one thing: the draw of the permanent fund earnings reserve, including the dividend payment, should not exceed 5.25% of the fund's market value.

The other options include: 1) a full dividend in line with the 1982 formula in state statute, 2) a standard yearly \$1,600 dividend, and 3) a concept referred to as the "surplus dividend" that would pay out what's left after government is funded, an amount that could vary depending on government funding levels.

What change, if any, do you support making to the permanent fund dividend formula? Explain.

*This is a complicated issue that affects Alaskans very differently. For the people of my district, defending the PFD often means the difference between heating costs and feeding the family. If we want to invest in our community, we have to find the money somewhere. I want to protect the PFD, but I understand that this sole solution has consequences that affect the community as a whole, and I have an issue with that. We need to find sources of revenue that support the needs of the state.*

2. Do you support continued use of the state's Constitutional Budget Reserve savings account to fund the government? Why or why not?

*No, we shouldn't be spending the reserve on everyday expenses. We need to save this fund for future unexpected needs. We have to be responsible stewards of Alaska's dollars.*

3. Is it time for Alaska to have a statewide sales or income tax? Explain.

*We have to develop some form of additional revenue source. I lean toward an income tax which would generate revenue that could help. I do not support a sales tax, as this disproportionately affects individuals with lower incomes who need to buy food and clothing. My efforts to raise revenue focus on investing in energy development that produces more efficient energy sources to lower costs on public infrastructure.*

4. An initiative on the November general election ballot seeks to repeal Senate Bill 21 and change the state's oil and gas tax system. Should Alaska change its oil and gas tax system? Explain.

*We provide many tax breaks to large multimillion dollar businesses that take their money outside the state. I think we need to modify the tax structure so that Alaskans receive the tax breaks. If we close the gap on taxes on oil and gas, the conversation of personal sales and income taxes, or the future of the PFD become less prevalent as ways to fill this gap.*

5. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the state's COVID-19 response? Explain

*Alaskans have done a fairly good job of keeping the spread to a minimum; however, I fear we are backtracking on our progress currently. The state's response has been palatable, but we are seeing numbers because we opened our state too soon, and not enough people are taking personal responsibility for doing the right thing for public health.*

6. In June, Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz approved a municipality-wide policy mandating the wearing of masks in public indoor spaces. Many boroughs and municipalities do not have the powers to enact policies of that nature. Would you support a statewide policy requiring the wearing of masks or cloth face coverings in public spaces? Explain.

*Yes. If it helps protect lives, I think we should do whatever we can to follow the CDC guidelines.*

7. The University of Alaska narrowly avoided financial exigency last year after state funding for the university was cut by \$25 million. The university has sustained annual cuts in state funding since 2012. Do you support the budget cuts the university has seen? Explain.

*No. Public education is a priority of mine. Without higher educational options in the state, we force individuals who need professional skills to get a job outside of the state. Having strong higher educational institutions is an economic stronghold that puts dollars back into the economy and keeps families in the state.*

8. Alaska's prison system is the number one provider of mental health services in the state. What, if anything, should the state do to improve mental health and substance abuse services across the state?

*There is no question that Alaska is failing our public on mental health and substance abuse issues. We are giving tax breaks to large corporations without funding services that could help the people of Alaska get out of a dangerous, downward spiral. We can do better to address these issues at a young age and change the culture of abuse and mental health.*

9. In the wake of George Floyd's death at the end of May, large-scale reforms in law enforcement and policing are being called for across the country with specific calls for de-escalation, mental health and racial prejudice training and more transparency and attention to police misconduct. What, if anything, do you propose for Alaska? Explain

*I will propose reforms for continued education on institutional racism and de-escalation tactics with individuals who have mental health issues. First responders need to have tools to respond to a population that includes an understanding of the triggers within a community and how best to address them .*

10. Nearly one-third of the Interior rural communities represented by Tanana Chiefs Conference have no running water village-wide. What steps would you take to improve village sanitation?

*Decisions like these should be made with the citizens of that community and what works the best for them. There are many organizations who are working on solutions that work for rural Alaska. I will listen to my rural colleagues on how to address this critical issue.*

11. Alaska's fish and game boards have historically consisted of hunters and fishers. Should the boards have one or more seats designated for representatives of non-consumptive uses of Alaska's fish and wildlife?

*No.*

12. The governor last year introduced legislation to repeal the authority of a local government to levy its property tax on oil and gas properties within its jurisdiction and to repeal the related credit for that amount an oil company receives against the state tax on the same properties. Last year, owners of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline paid the Fairbanks North Star Borough \$11.4 million in property taxes. Do you support or oppose repeal of these provisions?

*The repeal of these provisions sets a dangerous precedent that I would not support. Local government should be able to levy property taxes as needed. This was a way to cost-shift from the owners of the pipeline to Interior taxpayers, which I do not support.*

13. Gov. Mike Dunleavy vetoed \$50 million in state Medicaid funding in 2019 and \$31 million in 2020, resulting in losses in coverage for Alaskans on Medicaid and payments for providers through the Medicaid program. Do you support this decision to cut state spending for Medicaid? Explain.

*No. I do not support cuts to Medicaid. It was working with less money and better results. These cuts hurt the entire health care system and well-being of Alaskans unnecessarily.*