

Act Local, Think Arctic

By

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Alaskans are legendary when it comes to independence. “We don’t give a damn how they do it Outside” has been a motto that underscores the resourcefulness and can-do attitude of the State, highlighted by epic endeavors such as the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, the Iditarod, and a buffet of reality TV shows. It is a characteristic that has formed our State, defines our policies, and drives us forward. It is a characteristic, however, that must change.

The Arctic, and the various states, provinces and nations that make up the Arctic, are facing a host of challenges that demand communication, coordinated response, and collaboration. Issues such as reduced ice in the Arctic Ocean, increased shipping traffic, offshore oil and gas exploration, energy security, the ramifications of climate change, and oil spill response cannot be effectively addressed independently or through the lens of a singular character. These issues must be addressed with concerted effort, cooperation, and above all, mutual understanding and respect.

As a young professional in Alaska, it is often difficult to feel engaged in Alaska’s politics and governance, let alone such pressing international issues and policy. Working in the energy profession, however, it has become increasingly critical to understand what other Arctic countries are doing to address such challenges as sustainable energy solutions, strategic energy planning, technology development, and resource exploration and development. Alaskan energy needs are not always being effectively met with status-quo approaches or home-grown solutions. Other Arctic countries are facing similar challenges and in similar contexts, and can be a wealth of information, feedback, and lessons learned.

The same could be true in a number of other fields and professions in Alaska, ranging from education to health care, transportation, and even governance. The lessons learned in education from Finland, economic diversification from Iceland, oil development from Norway, and governance from Sweden could inform day-to-day decisions and actions across the State.

We are acutely aware of countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, and even closer to home with Mexico. Often, however, we know little about the goings-on of our Neighbor to the North East let alone happenings in Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. There is truly a lot to gain from increasing our relationships and communication with our Arctic neighbors. Although seemingly daunting in scope, such global relationships can start with small, personal steps. The following are my top three recommendations for building an Arctic community:

- 1) Travel and explore the North. When planning your next adventure or vacation, consider visiting our northern neighbors as opposed to convenient Lower 48 locales. If the opportunity presents itself, take a road trip on the Dempster Highway, an Icelandair flight to Reykjavik via Seattle, or even a Hurtigruten exploration of the Norwegian coast. It is amazing to witness how these countries enjoy the environment that we Alaskan's know and love and face the challenges that define our character in similar yet different ways.
- 2) Investigate an Arctic issue. The stories that make the headlines of the Anchorage Daily News are also making headlines in Oslo, Vancouver, and St. Petersburg. Climate change, fisheries management, drilling in the Arctic, resource development, urban migration, rural economic development and subsidies, energy challenges and solutions... the list goes on and on. Pick an issue that concerns or inspires you and see how it is affecting or being addressed by another Arctic country. Furthermore, explore the context of the response to these issues given the unique historical, cultural, and social make-up of that country.
- 3) Act local... with others. Alaska is rich in culture, art, music, sports, and even food. It is one thing, however, to get out and simply experience these offerings and quite another to do so with others. Be intentional about seeking out group activities, engaging with family and friends, or meeting new people. Building a closer more vibrant community throughout the Arctic is only possible if we build closer communities here in the State.

Not giving a damn about the Outside is no longer an option given the shared challenges we face today. There is a lot to learn from our northern neighbors, but also a lot to share. We can each take these small steps to begin building a more vibrant and connected Arctic community as we all navigate a changing Arctic.