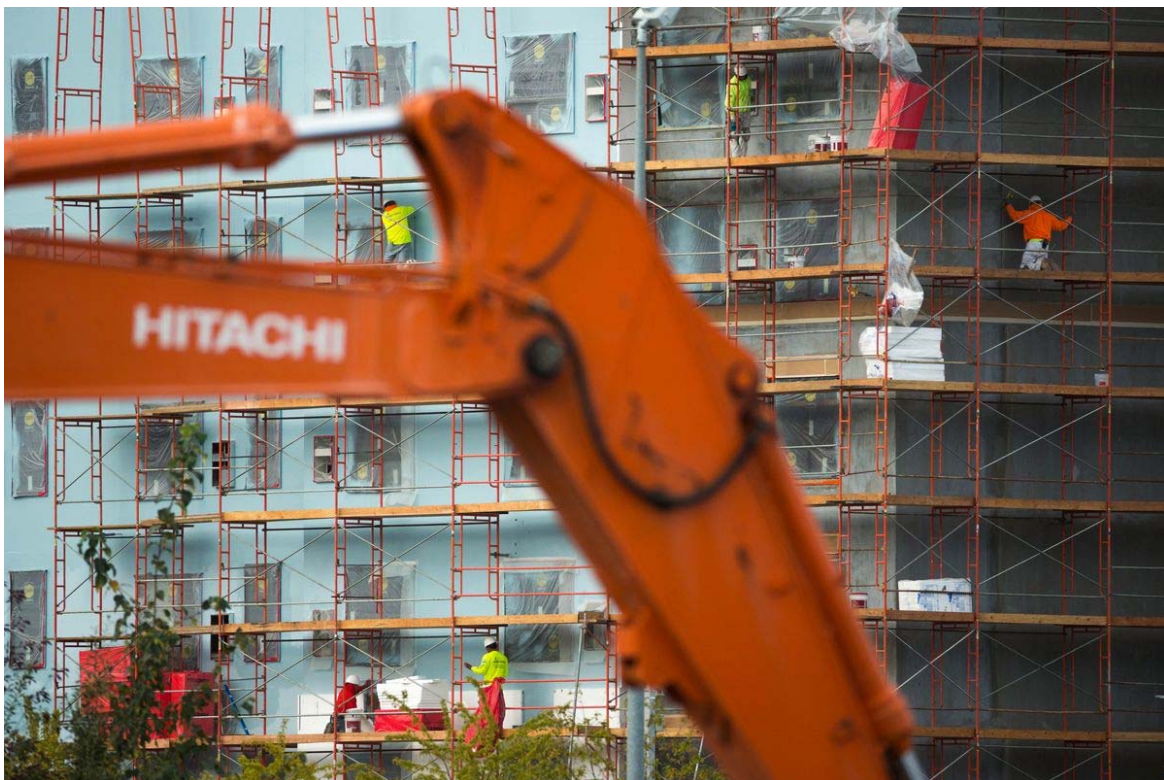


Opinions

Invitation to help chart course of Alaska's economy

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Workers scale scaffolding at a new Hyatt hotel in Midtown Anchorage on Thursday, Sept. 8, 2016. (Loren Holmes / Alaska Dispatch News)

In the many years I've lived and worked across this great state, I've learned that no matter how disparate our interests may seem at first glance, we all share a vision for Alaska that features stability and prosperity, now and for future generations.

The real challenge is how to achieve this common vision, which is why the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development is coordinating an effort to create a

statewide comprehensive economic development strategy—identifying ways for communities to prosper, including a clear path to jobs for the next generation of Alaskans. With a coordinated approach that leverages regional efforts, we'll be better prepared to deal with future disruptions to our economic base.

[As economy loses steam, Alaska's major shippers report imports decline]

Northern Opportunity: Alaska's Economic Strategy is not just for one region, not just for a single industry, and certainly not just for state government. It's for all Alaskans.

Each one of you can be part of moving Alaska forward by sharing your ideas at NorthernOpportunity.com. Your comments will help shape the strategy, which will rely extensively on community and industry input. Alaska's economic strategy will identify opportunities to maximize Alaska's unique advantages while providing the flexibility to adapt to changing national and global economic conditions.

The process we're using is tried and true, both across the United States and regionally across Alaska. For example, successes in Southeast demonstrate how thinking local while planning regional strategies can lead to tangible transformation.

The results speak for themselves: Southeast is a leader in renewable energy—from hydropower in Gustavus and woody biomass in Ketchikan to Juneau's increased use of electric vehicles and Alaskan Brewing Co.'s "beer-powered beer."

Like many Alaska regional development organizations, Southeast Conference created a comprehensive economic development strategy that expands existing local community efforts to guide the whole region. Northern Opportunity will have a similar structure, using a foundation of regional planning efforts to implement a unified approach to economic development for the entire state.

[Three-year forecast finds the bright side in Anchorage's dim economy]

Development of Northern Opportunity is supported by a planning grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, and is being overseen by a strategy committee comprising members from the private and public sectors. We anticipate the strategy will be released for comment in early 2017, and at that time will call on you again, to review the draft and provide feedback.

We all need to think proactively to create economic vitality so every Alaskan in each of our unique communities has opportunities to prosper. Join me in building a better tomorrow for our state and future generations of Alaskans.

Chris Hladick is commissioner of the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development.

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