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# It's a great deal, but not for taxpayers

## I Editorials

7-9 minutes

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What sort of business would you start or project would you back if you could get the state of Alaska and federal government to assume all the fiscal risk, cover your payroll and pay a good chunk of the actual costs?

No doubt there are a lot of projects private businessmen and women would be willing to take on if they could get those terms.

But those are the terms for the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority. The public keeps the risk and private business keeps the profit - should there ever be any. And if not, the losses? Those belong to the public, too.

This is a great deal for someone, but not for taxpayers.

Meanwhile, political support for the project seems to have softened significantly among state and federal lawmakers such as Congressman Don Young, U.S. Sen. Mark Begich, and Alaska lawmakers such as Sen. Bert Steadman and Rep. Les Gara. And even Gov. Sean Parnell.

Begich and Young both warn against expecting more federal dollars to fund the project. That's a big change from when Young

was the powerful chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee that approved the initial earmark for the bridge project.

The project also was backed by then-governor Frank Murkowski who sponsored and passed legislation to create the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority in 2003.

Back then, KABATA had an annual budget of about \$500,000 and three full-time staff. But seven years and two governors later, board chair Mike Foster said KABATA will ask for \$1.834 million in state money to pay its 10-person staff from state general funds this year.

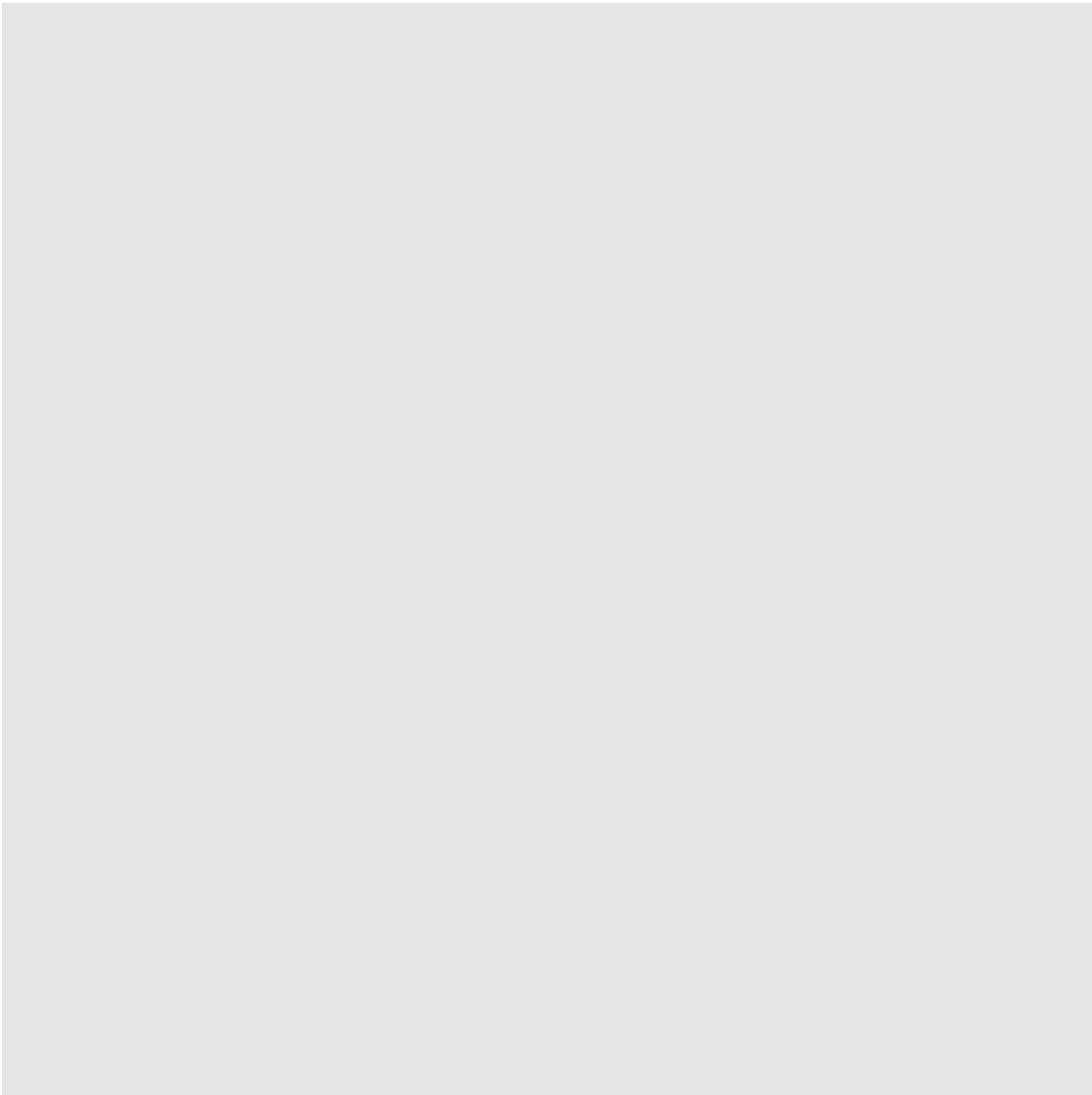
No wonder these folks are so bullish on the project - we pay them each an average of \$200,000 to advance the project whether or not it's a good idea.

The bridge is part of a growing list of public assets in the Point MacKenzie area that we hope will one day repay the millions in public dollars invested there - a ferry, a ferry terminal, a deep water dock, a prison and possibly, some day, the Knik Arm Bridge.

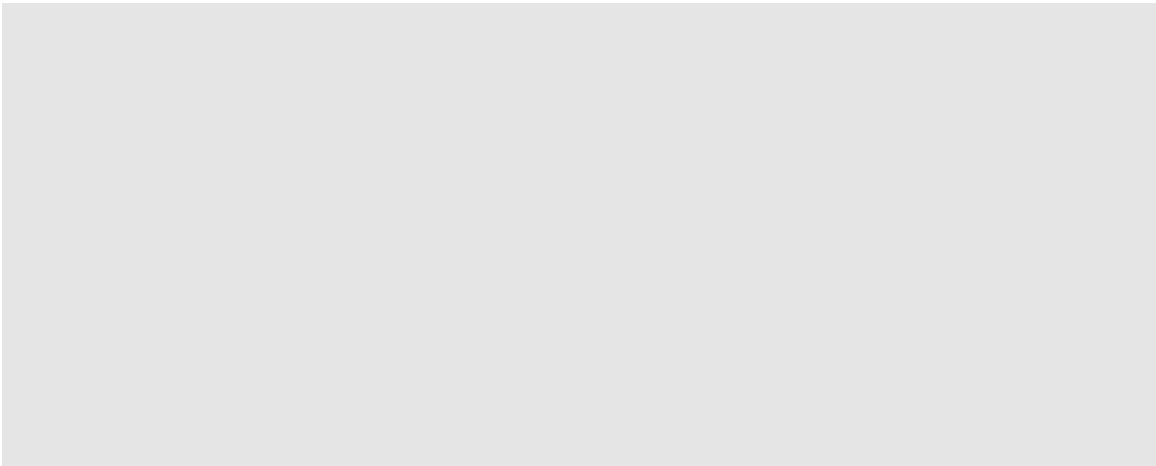
These assets were acquired in an era in Alaska where federal earmarks were accepted and expected. But now these federal "gifts" feel like game show prizes that come with tax bills we can't afford.

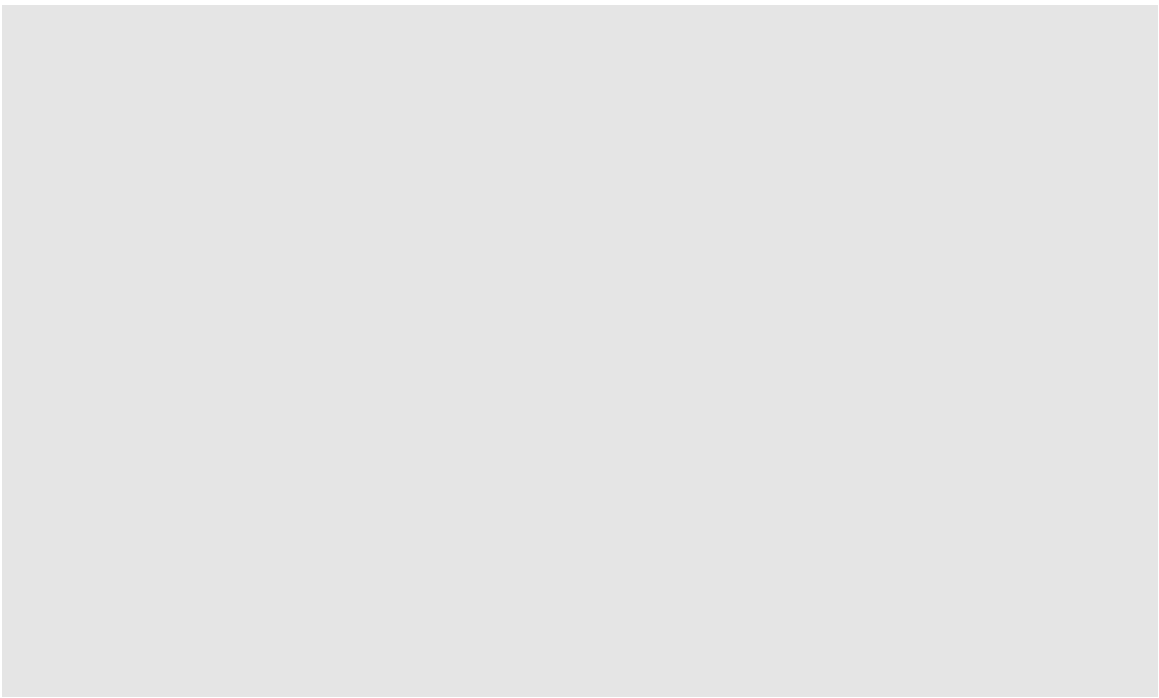
Because we can't afford it, not another cent of public money should be spent on this project until the mission of KABATA is changed to include a cost-benefit clause that states that the project advances only if it is in the best interest of Alaskans.

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