

Mayor Mark Begich remarks
Anchorage Chamber of Commerce
Noon; Oct. 6, 2003; 4th Avenue Theater

Even though we must contend with this huge budget gap today, the challenge tomorrow is continuing to grow our economy. A key way is continued investment in our infrastructure to encourage development and deliver core services - transportation, public safety, and cultural and recreational improvements.

Our budget provides the means to expand our economy with targeted investments in new economic diversification projects, from expansion of the port to improved recreation facilities.

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At our community's southern border is another opportunity of unprecedented potential. That's taking advantage of Girdwood's natural assets to make it truly a year-round resort of world-class status.

Just north of the current ski and hotel development is an area known as Winner Creek-Glacier Valley. This area, five times the size of the existing Alyeska resort, is considered the best undeveloped ski terrain in North America.

Much of it is beginner and intermediate scale, which is attractive to marginal skiing families like mine. Some of it is on a glacier, so there's potential for year-round skiing.

Preliminary estimates show the area could attract thousands more skiers per winter, with another 320,000 visitors in the summer. This would generate \$74 million a year in gross revenues and create up to new 900 jobs.

Fortunately, most of the land is either in municipal or state hands, ready for development. This week, a couple of the nation's top ski resort experts are here to explore ways to advance the project.

We are working closely with project sponsors and Senator Stevens – who has a warm spot in his heart for Girdwood. We will resolve Girdwood's land use conflicts to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that represents a \$400 million public-private investment.