

City of Dillingham

House District 37 / Senate District S

~ 3/26/2021 ~

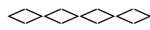
(Day 67)

32nd Alaska State Legislature ~ 1st Session

MARCH 2021 – LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Cliff Stone / City Lobbyist

~ Legislature likely to be in session beyond the Constitutional limit ~



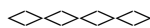
The headlines have said it all: “JUNEAU — A year after COVID-19 forced the Alaska Legislature to conclude the shortest state legislative session ever, lawmakers are now planning to work until the session’s constitutional limit and may seek a special session this summer.”

The Alaska Constitution limits sessions to 121 days, and lawmakers can vote to extend the session for another 10 days. A 90-day limit for legislative sessions was set in 2006 by the voters, but that vote lacks the necessary power over the constitution. A special session to deal with how the state spends more than \$1 billion in federal aid to Alaska becomes a real possibility. The governor could call lawmakers into that special session, or legislators could call their own, but doing so requires a two-thirds vote of the combined 60 members. The advantage of the Legislature calling themselves back is they get to set the agenda.

Timelines for the annual budget are being set as public hearings have been held and are continuing. The coalition in the House envisions a vote on the draft budget on or about April 12th. Of course the Senate has been working on their own plan. As in any typical session, the difference to the budgets will be worked out in a joint conference committee.

Another elephant in the room is the Permanent Fund. The formula for the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) distribution has been the law of the land since 1982, but hasn’t been followed since 2016. The debate each year comes down to how much should be in the annual payout to Alaskans without hurting the earning power of the Permanent Fund itself and the fact that some of those proceeds are now mandated to fund the operating budget of Alaska. There are serious discussions from my sources that we could see a proposal to change the formula itself. In my estimation, it will take a special session to hammer out anything substantial in this regard. Bottom line: We have to find a solution to fix the structural deficit we are facing with our funding since our two savings accounts are gone. The last pot of money is the Earnings Reserve Account (ERA) of the Permanent Fund.

Meanwhile, the House Coalition is hanging tough with Rep. Geran Tarr an Anchorage Democrat joining to give them the 21 votes they need. The minority Republican caucus has 18 members with Rep. Sara Rasmussen, from Anchorage refusing to join either one.



BILLS OF INTEREST

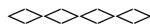
The following bills are highlighted as items of interest for your community. I will follow these more closely as the session proceeds. The House has introduced 144 bills to date and various resolutions. The latest count for the Senate is 110 bills and a variety of resolutions. See “Budget Bills” highlighted later in this report. As in the past, if you see a bill that you want tracked, I will be happy to do so and report accordingly. * Indicates a bill added since my last report.

HB 1 – Audit of CARES Act Funds
HB 4 – COVID-19 related
HB 37 – Income Tax, PF, and ERA
HB 55 – PERS related/Peace officers and Firefighters
HB 56 – Power Cost Equalization (PCE)

HB 73 / SB 53 – PF Advisory Vote
HB 75 / SB 55 – Employer Contributions to PERS
HB 76 – Extending the COVID-19 Disaster Emergency

SR 2 – COVID-19 Emergency Declaration
SB 6 – PERS/TRS Retirement Incentives
SB 37 – PERS/TRS Retirement Plans
SB 56 – Extending the COVID-19 Disaster Emergency
* **SJR 10** – Constitutional Amendment:

Be sure to check out the latest Legislative Updates from the Alaska Municipal League (AML). I try not to repeat any information that is presented there. It is an excellent source of the bills and topic matters that are important to towns and villages all across Alaska. If you haven't registered for Legislative Updates for AML Members meetings, you may be able to [use this link for Zoom](#); or dial in by calling +1 253 215 8782 - Meeting ID: 881 8150 7680 Passcode: 449972.



BUDGET BILLS 2021

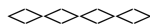
* Indicates bills added since my last report. For a handy reference, below are the budget-type bills that have been introduced so far this year. They will be considered through out this first session. Currently many of these bills are being considered in the respective Finance Committees. Other bills have been assigned to various other committees. The finance subcommittee's work is in full swing. *Please note that HB 93 and its companion SB 74 as drafted by the governor, does not contain any monies for your breakwater or harbor projects. The only avenue to have these projects inserted into the bills for consideration is up to your representatives – Senator Hoffman and Rep. Edgmon.*

- **HB 68 / SB 48 – Supplemental Appropriations (FY21)**
- **HB 69 / SB 49 – FY22 Operating Budget**
- **HB 70 / SB 50 – FY22 Capital Budget with reappropriations and making supplemental appropriations**
- **HB 71 / SB 51 – FY22 Mental Health Budget**
- **HB 84 / SB 68 – FY22 Supplemental, Reappropriations, and Appropriations from the CBR**
- **HB 72 / SB 52 – Appropriation from the ERA for payment of the PFD**
- **HB 37 – Income Tax, PF Earnings Reserves**
- **HB 57 – CBR Sweep Provisions**
- **HB 67 – K-12 Appropriation for Academic Recovery from COVID-19**
- **HB 93 / SB 74 – G.O. Bonds: State Infrastructure Projects**
- **HJR 1 – Constitutional Amendment: Permanent Fund, POMV, and Earnings**
- **HJR 6 / SJR 5 – Constitutional Amendment: Budget Reserve Appropriation Limit**
- **HJR 7 / SJR 6 – Constitutional Amendment: Permanent Fund and PFD's**
- **HJR 8 / SJR 7 – Constitutional Amendment: State Tax Voter Approval**
- **HJR 10 – Constitutional Amendment: Permanent Fund and ERA**

- * **SB 100** – State Income Tax
- * **SB 102** – Amend Compact for a Balanced Budget

Create Your Own Budget for the State of Alaska

Commonwealth North has created an **online tool** that allows Alaskans to modify most aspects of Alaska’s budget, so revenues match up with expenses. As many of you know, Alaska is at a budget crossroads, and difficult decisions must be made to preserve essential services and ensure Alaska remains a vibrant and successful place to live, work and play. While the tool isn’t perfect, I think users will gain a deeper insight into our state budget and get an idea how budget cuts, taxes and investments in state services impact our bottom line. In case the link above doesn’t work: <https://www.akbudget.com/>



COVID-19

Although Alaska’s COVID-19 emergency expired on Feb. 14th, the House Coalition is pushing HB 76 to retroactively restore the state of emergency in Alaska and extend it until September. The governor sent Speaker Stutes a letter citing that he no longer believes a disaster declaration is necessary. The letter said the governor believes he needs legislation for just four things: vaccine distribution, accepting federal aid, permission to deliver healthcare by teleconference, and limited legal immunity for state workers delivering vaccines and treatments.

The Republican-led majority in the Senate is preparing to unveil what they call “disaster declaration lite,” a package of measures intended to address the problems identified by the governor and other state officials. It doesn’t include a broad state of emergency.

Right now, the chief difference between the two approaches is who’s in charge: Under the House strategy, the governor is empowered by the state’s disaster act to take unilateral action. In the Senate approach, the governor would have to request permission from the Legislature to take action beyond a narrow set of powers. State emergency manager Bryan Fisher indicated that they are waiting to see what the Legislature actually does.

Senator Peter Micciche asserted their plan is designed to give public health officials only the powers they have requested, plus a few more that local governments have sought. School districts, for example, would be allowed to spread federal aid across multiple years. Everyone however agrees that with the end of the “disaster declaration” this created problems for USDA’S Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As reported, without the declared disaster, Alaska is no longer eligible for \$8 million a month in federal aid for the program. This on the heels of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture announcing a 15% increase in SNAP benefits through September as part of President Biden’s American Rescue Plan. That could mean more than \$100 per month for a household of four. As stated by many members of the House and Senate, their concern is an overreach of the governor’s authority by giving him these powers with emergency declarations, etc.

On March 8th, interim public health recommendations for fully vaccinated people from COVID-19 were released. This announcement along with others was passed along to the city. At least I hope I’ve kept up with relative information as its been promulgated. The following link will provide updated references for those fully vaccinated. Besides an overview of the situation, it attempts to explore all of the situations that people might find themselves in as they venture out of their “bubbles.”

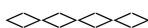
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html#anchor_1615143336158

The following state resources can be helpful for getting the vaccine. Use Alaska's PrepMod website to book online or use the Vaccine Providers List to call the providers in your community directly. For scheduling or information about COVID-19 vaccine in Alaska: www.covidvax.alaska.gov If you need assistance to book your appointment, call Vaccine Scheduling Call Center at 907-646-3322.

A handy reference tool that everyone can access is the state's "Vaccine Updates" signup at the following: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/AKDHSS/signup/16046>

As I posted in the past few months, if you or anybody in the community suspects they've been a target of fraudulent information or requests regarding COVID-19 vaccines, they should **notify the Medicare Information Office at hss.medicare@alaska.gov via email or call 1-800-478-6065 immediately!**

REMEMBER – COVID VACCINES are FREE.

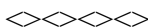


GOVERNOR'S CORNER <http://gov.alaska.gov>

Handy phone numbers for Governor's offices: Anchorage: 907-269-7450 and Juneau: 907-465-3500

Several former legislators have passed away since my last report. Although I knew and worked with most of them, former Speaker of the House Gail Phillips was a good ally and a leader in so many ways. Former Speaker Mike Bradner also stands out. A non-assuming man, he understood the needs of rural Alaska and worked to educate others. I'll miss both of them for their counsel and demeanor.

The governor also made several boards and commissions appointment during the past month. Of note for your area is the Wood-Tikchik State Management Council. Two individuals were reappointed to this body. Bruce Ilutsik of Aleknagik will serve now until June of 2024 as will Delores Larson of Kolignek.

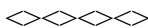


IMPORTANT DATES

March 31st – 2021 PFD Filing Deadline

April 30th – 2021 First Lady's Volunteer Award nominations close

Note: Because of the pandemic, it does not appear that U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan will deliver their yearly remarks before the Legislature to all Alaskans this year.



TESTIFYING

If you are planning to testify on any particular bill or subject matter, check the committee calendar the day of or the day before the scheduled hearing as sometimes a bill is rescheduled or cancelled at the last minute. You should also be able to ascertain if they are even accepting public testimony on any particular day. If you can't attend a hearing at your local LIO you can participate by using the following numbers.

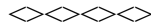
The **toll-free number** can only be used if you have had prior approval to call in from the appropriate committee chair. That number will be distributed upon your request and subsequent approval. **In Juneau the number is: (907) 463-5009.**

Go to: <http://www.akleg.gov/basis/start.asp> for a complete description of a bill that is up in committee. Fiscal notes and other documents that the legislative office has posted in regards to that particular bill should also be available. Type in the appropriate bill/resolution number in the space provided.

Remember – Bills that have already been heard or previous scheduled in committee can come back before that body without prior notification.

Live on the Web [www.360north.org]

Most committee hearings can be seen and heard on Gavel Alaska/360 North on the web or look for Cable Channel-18 in Juneau. You can also access schedules, various programs, and online archives from the website above. *Note: With COVID-19 restrictions, Gavel Alaska may not be broadcasting as normal. You might have to go to the following website: www.alaskalegislature.TV*



WEBSITES OF INTEREST

! COVID-19 ~ Information ! / <https://covid19.alaska.gov>

In Alaska, a COVID-19 Help Line has been set up at **211** or dial: 1-800-478-2221

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Capitol is closed to the public. To reach your legislator, please find Senate contact information [here](#) and House of Representatives contact information [here](#). For the latest COVID-19 information, please visit the [Alaska Department of Health & Social Services](#).

Schools can get more help at: aksmartstart2020@alaska.gov

* U.S. REAL ID Compliant license – deadline extended to **October 1, 2021**.
- <http://doa.alaska.gov/dmv/>

Online Public Notices for Alaska <https://aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/default.aspx>

2021 Alaska Legislature Publications List <http://akleg.gov/publications.php>

2021 1st Session Staff Contacts <http://akleg.gov/docs/pdf/Legislator-Staff-List.pdf>

2021 Legislators by District <http://akleg.gov/docs/pdf/Legislators-by-District.pdf>

2021 House/Senate Committees <http://akleg.gov/docs/pdf/commlist.pdf>

2021 Senate Finance Subcommittee <http://akleg.gov/docs/pdf/SFINSubcmte21.pdf>

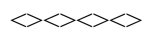
2021 Legislature Photo Sheet <http://akleg.gov/docs/pdf/Legislator-Photo-Sheet.pdf>

Representative Bryce Edgmon: 907-465-4451 // Senator Lyman Hoffman: 907-465-4453

Congressional Delegation websites
<http://murkowski.senate.gov/public> www.sullivan.senate.gov <http://donyoung.house.gov>

| DC Phone Nr | DC Phone Nr | DC Phone Nr |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Murkowski: 202-224-6665 | Sullivan: 202-224-3004 | Young: 202-225-5765 |

| Anchorage Phone Nr | Anchorage Phone Nr | Anchorage Phone Nr |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Murkowski: 907-271-3735 | Sullivan: 907-271-5915 | Young: 907-271-5978 |



~ End Report ~

Enjoy your family and friends while staying safe and strong! ~ Cliff