

2018 CAPITOL CURRENTS

30th Alaska State Legislature ~ 2nd Session

Fifth Edition – 2/12 to 2/18/18

57 days to go

~ Strike one-Kowalke rejected; Strike two-Walker's 2nd pick withdrew; time for a pinch hitter? ~

HIGHLIGHTS

Senate Republicans rejected Kowalke citing concerns with the process for his selection. While acknowledging the Governor is within his rights to turn down the district's list of nominees, Senate Republicans thought the Governor should have gone back to the district's Republicans and asked for more names.

The Governor did not ask for more names after the rejection and instead selected a person from the original list-Tom Braund. Many people were concerned with derogatory comments and views about women he had expressed through social media and public opinion quickly mounted against his nomination. Mr. Braund withdrew his name less than 24 hours after the selection citing personal matters.

The Governor now has ten more days to forward another selection to Senate Republicans. Alaska Republican Party Chairman Tuckerman Babcock forwarded the next name on the district's list of applicants to the Governor for his consideration: Vicki Chaffin Wallner of Palmer.

Wallner had come in fourth during the voting process in the district meeting in mid-January for the original list of nominees. She is the founder of a crime-fighting Facebook group in the Mat-Su Valley, "Stop Valley Thieves." She is a businesswoman and small farm owner.

Sen. Gardner introduced a [Sense of the Senate](#) denouncing Attorney General Jeff Sessions' decision to rescind what is known as the "Cole memo" limiting the conditions of prosecution on state-licensed cannabis businesses.

Rescinding the memo allows U.S. Attorneys to resume prosecutions in states that have legalized marijuana. Alaska is among nine states that have legalized Marijuana for recreational purposes. Twenty-nine states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam allow the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes.

The Cole memo, issued in 2013, directed federal prosecutors and law enforcement to focus their priorities on the prevention of distribution of marijuana to minors, sales to criminal enterprises, gangs, and cartels, use of firearms in the distribution of marijuana, and driving under the influence.

The Senate Majority made a motion to table the Sense of the Senate until March 7.

On a brighter note, children took to the halls this week and distributed handmade Valentines to legislators-reminding them to support early learning education funding.

BUDGET ISSUES

House Budget Subcommittees closeout their work this week. The full Finance committee will receive subcommittee reports on Thursday the 22nd and Friday the 23rd at 1:30pm.

To find meeting days and times click here: [Daily Schedule](#)

The Finance committee will set a schedule to hear from the public on the subcommittee reports; to receive amendments from committee members; and to finalize the operating and mental health budgets for consideration on the Floor after their Friday meeting.

Members of the House Majority have said their goal is to pass a budget draft to the Senate by mid-March.

[HB 321](#) / [SB 168](#), the supplemental appropriation bills are starting to move. Supplemental bills are necessary to make adjustments for unanticipated current year spending-wildfires, ferry breakdowns.

This year, the use of supplemental is receiving a closer look. Governor Walker has asked for approximately \$218 million to cover unbudgeted expenses in FY 2018. \$40 million will come from fees or the federal government. That leaves about \$178 million to come from the state's general fund.

The largest single item in the supplemental is \$93 million for Medicaid. DHSS reports while the average spending per Medicaid recipient is down, more Alaskans have lost their medical insurance and turned to Medicaid. As of Feb. 1st, 198,000 Alaskans are on Medicaid.

Was all or part of this cost anticipated?

How do you find the balance between adequate funding for programs to make it through a year and short-funding-which shows less spending when the budget is passed, but ultimately leads to a supplemental request? What are real unanticipated costs and what are costs that should have been anticipated and included as the budget went through the initial budgeting process?

You can follow the debate, by following the supplemental budget hearings. The first one in the Senate is scheduled for **Monday morning at 9am**.

No holiday observed by the legislature.

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES ISSUES

In response to the passage of SB74 during the 29th legislature, the Division of Behavioral Health has applied for a Section 1115 Waiver to increase the types of services and improve access to existing services for those needing substance use disorder or mental health treatment.

Section 1115 of Title XIX of the Social Security Act allows states to waive traditional Medicaid authorities to achieve improved health outcomes, so long as there is no increased cost to the federal Medicaid budget through implementation of the waiver.

The proposed application focuses on those populations of Alaska residents who are high utilizers of healthcare services, and offers new behavioral health services on a more regional / localized basis in order to improve access and reduce the use of costly emergency services.

The plan is to add targeted behavioral health services and increase access to those services through early intervention, providing a broader array of local, lower cost treatment services in order to improve resident outcomes.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) recently opened the federal public comment period for Alaska's waiver. Follow this link to see the final application and to submit comments: <https://public.medicaid.gov/connect.ti/public.comments/viewQuestionnaire?qid=1895139>

Comments are due March 17, 2018.

[SB 37](#) Pharmacy Bd & Staff; Drug Distribution/Manufacture sponsored by Sen. Giessel passed the Senate last week. The bill allows the Board of Pharmacy to regulate wholesale prescription drug distributors with headquarters both in and out-of-state. Alaska is one of only four states that doesn't require drug distributors to have a state license. The bill is referred to the Finance committee in the House.

Several Board extensions moved from HFIN last week. [HB 302](#) the Board of Professional Counselors, [HB 318](#) the Board of Social Work Examiners, [HB 323](#) the Board of Pharmacy, [HB 274](#) the Board of Psychologists/Psych Assoc., [HB 275](#) the Board of Massage Therapists and [HB 280](#) the Board of Marital & Family Therapy are on their way to a Floor vote.

PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES

Crimes Against Medical Professionals, [HB 312](#), sponsored by Rep. Claman & Rep. Kopp passed the House on third reading Friday. Rep. Millett gave notice of reconsideration.

[HB 214](#) sponsored by Rep. Drummond passed the House. The bill will name a section of the Safe Children's Act after Bree Moore. It's been referred to EDC and JUD in the Senate.

[SCR 17](#) sponsored by Sen. Meyer proclaims April 2018 as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. It's referred to STA.

GOVERNOR'S CORNER

The Governor announced that he has filled three judicial vacancies. He appointed Jude Pate of Sitka to the Sitka Superior Court, Michael Logue of Anchorage to the Anchorage District Court, and Andrew Peterson of Anchorage to the Anchorage Superior Court.

Governor Walker announced that 20 scholarships have been made available for Alaskans to study abroad in China through the Chinese Consulate. Recipients will explore higher education through a variety of academic programs in science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, law, economics, management, education, liberal arts, philosophy, history, and fine arts.

China has a long-standing relationship with the Last Frontier as the state's biggest trade partner. China is also the biggest supporter of Alaska's fishermen. In 2016, the nation bought over \$625 million worth of Alaska seafood, more than any other country. Alaska's fishing industry has a well-established trade relationship with China.

Scholarships from the Chinese Consulate include tuition, accommodation, stipend and medical insurance. The deadline to apply is April 1, 2018. Interested parties can find additional information and applications here: <https://gov.alaska.gov/2018-2019-chinese-scholarship/>

WAYS TO FOLLOW HEARINGS

Check the committee calendar the day of the scheduled hearing as sometimes a bill is rescheduled.

Daily Committee Hearings for 2018 [Meetings](#)

Gavel to Gavel: Most committee hearings can be seen and heard on Gavel Alaska. It is broadcast on both local access TV and on the internet at [360 North Gavel](#)

Streaming Video: [Live Now](#)

Testifying: Legislative Information Office (LIO) Find your LIO here: <http://akleg.gov/lios.php>
In Juneau: See committee hearing list for room numbers

**Call-in: Available with prior approval from the committee chair -
From Anchorage: (907) 563-9085; From Juneau: (907) 586-9085; all others: (844) 586-9085**

HEARINGS OF INTEREST

If you want to share your opinions/concerns about a particular piece of legislation, look for hearings where the committees list public testimony being taken. That's your chance!

Comments are usually time-limited (between 2-3 minutes). Written comments are taken too and can be of any length.

[HB 216](#) sponsored by Rep. Kopp will be heard in HFIN Monday afternoon. The bill sets up a restorative justice account; authorizes the Office of Victim Rights to access the account and make restitution payments to crime victims; authorizes deposits into the account equal to the permanent fund dividend payments that would have been made to certain felons and misdemeanants; prioritizes the list of organizations that may receive funding from the account to support services to victims of crime and for health programs in correctional facilities.

[SB 124](#) Abortion Procedures, Child Surrender, sponsored by Sen. Giessel is scheduled to be heard Monday afternoon at 1:30pm in SHSS. Public testimony will be taken. The sponsor statement can be read here: [Sponsor Statement](#)

[HJR 26](#) proposing a constitutional amendment for redistricting purposes including a new composition of the redistricting board is being heard in HSTA Tuesday at 3:15pm.

SSTA takes up a Senate concurrent resolution and a House bill proposing changes to the Legislature's uniform rules regarding voting this Tuesday at 3:30pm. [SCR 1](#) sponsored by Sen. Gardner and Micciche would require that a member's request to be excused from voting be recorded in the journal and if there is an objection made, the names of the member or members who objected would also be recorded.

[HB 44](#) sponsored by Rep. Grinn lists in statute the situations in which a legislator should abstain from voting and circumstances under which conflicts should be declared.

Both meetings of the Sexual and Other Workplace Harassment subcommittee were cancelled last week. A meeting is set for this Wednesday at 7am.

[HB 339](#) Increase Base Student Allocation sponsored by Rep. Gara will be heard at 8:30am in EDC. The bill would raise the base student allocation by \$100 from \$ 5,930 to \$6,030.

Also, on Wednesday: Lunch and Learn on Broadband and Behavioral Health by the Alaska Primary Care Association sponsored by Rep. Talerico.

The Legislature will meet in joint session 11:00am Thursday to hear from Senator Lisa Murkowski.

HHSS cancelled last week's meeting and has rescheduled [HB 268](#) Opioid Prescription Warnings to this Thursday at 3:00pm.

HSTA will weigh-in on term limits for legislators when it hears [HJR 27](#) which limits consecutive terms of service in the House to four and in the Senate to two on Thursday at 3:15pm.

Following that discussion they move to Rep. Claman's [HB 310](#) the companion to Sen. Gardner's [SB 133](#) Marriage and Minimum Age for Marriage.

LINKS OF INTEREST

[2018 Legislative Contacts](#)

[Toll-free Numbers for Legislators](#)

~ End of Report ~

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