

Week One Legislative Report
January 8th -14th 2001

1st Regular Session of the 22nd Alaska Legislature

Prepared by Caren Robinson

Introduction

The first session of the 22nd Alaska State Legislature kicked off this week with the swearing in of the 50 House and Senate members elected last fall. Republican and Democratic leaders announced they plan to work cooperatively to solve challenges facing Alaskans. Unfortunately the Senate began the session on a rocky note when Republicans rejected Democratic nominations for committee membership.

Governor Knowles "State of State" Speech Outlines Priorities

1. Put Alaskans to Work

A cornerstone of this initiative is building an Alaska Highway route natural gas pipeline that includes Alaska hire and use of Alaska businesses access to gas by Alaska communities and a fair share of revenues for Alaskans. Knowles also pledged to push for environmentally responsible development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge called for an increase in Alaska' minimum wage currently the lowest on the West Coast and announced a new statewide transportation initiative.

2. Provide Excellence in Education

To continue progress on the Quality Schools Initiative the governor proposed funding for education and early childhood development programs. Knowles reiterated the need for more responsible effective date for the high school graduation exit exam school maintenance especially for rural schools. He also asked for another budget increase for the university of Alaska.

3. Protect Families and Children

The governor proposed a comprehensive public safety and health initiative including funding for new troopers Village Public Safety Officers and rural constables. He also proposed a three-part back to basics public health initiative to combat the diseases--such as TB and hepatitis C. The administration will seek a 23 million budget increase to fight these diseases. To build on the successes of better protecting children he called for additional investments in Smart Start.

4. Preserve the Subsistence Way of Life

Saying lack of action on a rural priority subsistence constitutional amendment widens the urban-rural divide the Governor urged legislators to try one more time to commit all their creativity and good will to another effort. He urged continued investments in rural sanitation.

5. Take the Necessary Steps to Balance the Budget

With Alaska continuing to draw down its savings to fund essential public services the Governor proposed a new long-term budget plan idea. He urged legislators to take action this year while Alaska's savings accounts are full he proposed a new plan to put Alaska on long-term solid financial footing. In his State of the State address delivered this week the governor proposed that if the Constitutional Budget Reserve savings account drops to the bare minimum the state should prudently reserve for emergencies then new revenue measures would be automatically triggered. Without legislative action the reserve could run dry within five years.

House and Senate Democrats Priorities 2001

"Moving Alaska Forward" as their theme for the legislative session. House and Senate Democrats presented their legislative priorities:

EDUCATION

- ?? Support University of Alaska Funding Job Development and Training.
- ?? Strengthen Early Childhood Education.
- ?? Increase Education Funding for K-12
- ?? New Exit Exam Schedule and Review
- ?? Rural and Urban School Construction and Maintenance

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ?? Gas Pipeline
- ?? Statewide Energy Plan
- ?? Power Cost Equalization
- ?? Continue Development Knowledge-based industries
- ?? Transportation and Communication Infrastructure
- ?? Long-range Fiscal Plan

PUBLIC SAFETY AND HEALTH

- ?? Adequate Law Enforcement Including VPSOs and State Troopers
- ?? Criminal Justice Assessment Commission Recommendations
- ?? Comprehensive DWI Plan
- ?? Rural Water and Sanitation
- ?? Protection Alaskan's Right to Privacy
- ?? Family Preservation

SUBSISTENCE

- ?? Regain State Management by allowing a Statewide Vote

House and Senate Republican Priorities 2001 Unsettled

Rep Brian Porter (R-Anchorage) stated he would work closely with members of his caucus to decide legislative priorities and predicted they will include the following:

- ?? Providing the standards and resources necessary to provide young Alaskans with the high-quality education they need to compete in the modern economy.
- ?? Helping government and business co-operate to bring North Slope natural gas to market.
- ?? Reducing the threat of drunken drivers on Alaska's streets.
- ?? Reuniting all Alaskans into a community of mutual respect and common values.
- ?? Crafting a budget ensuring Alaskans receive value for every dollar spent.
- ?? Beginning discussions on a long-term fiscal plan to ensure.
- ?? Alaska continues to prosper in the new century.

New Governors Bills

SB 31 and HB 59 establish mandatory fines for employers whose serious violations of health and safety laws have resulted in an employee fatality

SB 30 and HB 58 increase unemployment insurance benefits and index the benefits to the state's average weekly wage so that future adjustments would be automatic

No bill number Allows extension of Medicaid coverage for treatment of breast and cervical cancer for women who until now have earned too much for regular Medicaid but not enough to buy their own health insurance Will benefit 70 Alaskan women annually.

Senate Bill 19 and House Bill 4 will continue the successful enforcement program begun in 1997 and 1998 as part of Alaska' compliance with federal welfare reform.

SB 25 / HB 52 Allows Alaska to participate in the Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision.

SB 23 / HB 49 Extending the termination date of the Board of Parole five more years until June 30, 2006.

Knowles also introduced an Executive Order Monday to relocate the long-term care ombudsman office to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority in the Department of Revenue to help the office maintain its necessary objectivity in care review.

New House Bills

HB 4 (Rokeberg) Drunk Driving Clearinghouse
HB 5 (Kohring) Tobacco =26 Alcohol ID Checks/Drivers Lic
HB 12 (Kott) Reduce Percentage for DWI
HB 14 (Davies) Subsistence Use of Fish and Game
HB 19 (Berkowitz) Privacy Protection
HB 23 (Cissna) Intensive Family Preservation Services
HB 25 (Hayes) Educational Neglect for CINA proceedings
HB 29 (Croft) Safe Surrender of Babies
HB 30 (Kerttula) Pupil/Teacher Ration in Public Schools
HB 31 (Hayes) Sexual Inducement of a Minor/Pornography
HB 32 (Hayes) Sex Crime and Pornography Forfeitures
HB 33 (Guess) Report Dead Bodies
HB 42 (Green) Privilege to Purchase Alcohol/ID Cards

New Senate Bills

SB 1 (Wilken) Foundation Formula Increase
SB 5 (Elton) Lower Alcohol Limit to 008 for DWI
SB 8 (Elton) Alcoholic Beverage Tax Rate
SB 12 (Ellis) Require Use of Bike Helmet
SB 13 (Ellis) Helmet use on off-road vehicles
SB 15 (Ellis) Insurance Coverage for Contraceptives
SB 22 (Davis) Safe Surrender of Babies

Interesting Note

Senator Bettye Davis (D-Anchorage) was sworn in this week as Alaska' first African-American Senator Davis previously served in the House and on the Anchorage School Board.